

19th Century American Literary Naturalism and the Grotesque

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Abstract

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This dissertation examines the significance of the grotesque to literary naturalism's engagement with the scientific discourse of the late 19th and early 20th century. The grotesque is a set of artistic principles surrounding the representation of bodies and organic matter that focuses on asymmetry, excess, and ambiguity. Naturalism is a literary movement aimed at transcending the limits of traditional realism by exploring sordid or sensationalist topics and the themes of alienation and determinism through the lens of post-Darwinian psychology, biology, sociology, and criminology. Naturalist texts are preoccupied with the types of knowledge that one can access through fiction. By utilizing the grotesque, naturalist writers are able to produce a form of *creatural realism* centered on bodies and sensuous experience; this experiential mode of knowledge is placed in productive tension with the culturally-dominant positivist scientific form of knowledge that provide the backbone of naturalist stories. This 'mixed epistemology' at the heart of literary naturalism reveals political anxieties surrounding the coherence of social space in the midst of an urbanizing, increasingly diverse American landscape. As a response to this 'crisis of legibility,' literary naturalists experiment with two distinct poles of the grotesque—a *negative grotesque* grounded in alienation, abjection, and fear of degeneration, and a *positive*

grotesque that celebrates disorganized mass life. The chapters of this dissertation contextualize texts from Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Charles Chesnutt within this cultural moment. Focusing on the grotesque within literary naturalism illuminates the complex epistemological negotiations taking place within each text and the interrelatedness of naturalism's aesthetics with 19th and early 20th century biopolitics.

Table of Contents

List of Abbreviations / 6

Chapter One: Epistemology of Disorganized Flesh / 7

Chapter Two: The Skeptic: Heteroglossia and Negotiating Epistemological Frameworks in Stephen Crane / 58

Chapter Three: The Apprentice: Disgust, Degeneration, and the Mechanical Grotesque in Frank Norris / 98

Chapter Four: Marginalized Naturalisms: Domestic Entropy and Monarchical Atavism in the Works of Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Charles Chesnutt / 154

Concluding Remarks / 212

Works Cited / 217

List of Abbreviations

Bakhtin, Mikhail

EN – Epic and Novel

PND - A Prehistory of Novelistic Discourse

RW - Rabelais and his World

Chesnutt, Charles

HBC - The House Behind the Cedars

MT - The Marrow of Tradition

Crane, Stephen

DATC - Death and the Child

EIM - An Experiment in Misery

MFCG - When a Man Falls a Crowd Gathers

MG - Maggie: A Girl of the Streets

P - The Black Rider and Other Poems

RBC - The Red Badge of Courage

Foucault, Michel

SMBD - Society Must Be Defended

Gilman, Charlotte Perkins

PCV - Parasitism and Civilized Vice

TYW - The Yellow Wallpaper

Norris, Frank

JT - The Jongleur of Tallebois

M - McTeague

O - The Octopus

VB - Vandover and the Brute

Chapter One: Epistemology of Disorganized Flesh

Introduction and General Definitions

I spent the summers of my teen years down the road from a slaughterhouse. Some of the pigs that go into that slaughterhouse were converted into a pink slurry, given shape with natural gelatin, and sold in cans. The screaming of the pigs on the way from the livestock trucks to the tazers sounds like sheet metal being torn by hydraulic rescue tools. Very occasionally, when the roads are slippery and the winds are high, trucks full of pigs topple over on the highway, and the animals come spilling out onto the plains, where they escape, are recaptured, or get crushed or run over. I think that this exposure to the meat industry— my encounter with how the literal sausage gets made— is partly to blame for my fascination with passages like this one from Frank Norris's *The Octopus* (1901):

In some way, the herd of sheep—Vanamee's herd— had found a breach in the wire fence by the right of way and had wandered out upon the tracks. A band had been crossing just at the moment of the engine's passage. The pathos of it was beyond expression. It was a slaughter, a massacre of innocents. The iron monster had charged full into the midst, merciless, inexorable. To the right and left, all the width of the right of way, the little bodies had been flung; backs were snapped against the fence posts; brains knocked out. Caught in the barbs of the wire, wedged in, the bodies hung suspended. Under foot it was terrible. The black blood, winking in the starlight, seeped down into the clinkers between the ties with a prolonged sucking murmur. (Norris O 50)

This dissertation is about disorganized flesh and why there is so much of it in the pages of literary naturalist texts. The meaning of flesh in these texts plays an important part in the definition of literary naturalism because it says a lot about its relationship to realism and reality.

This chapter argues that naturalism's take on realism— what I call *creatural realism*— is the result of an interaction between scientific and extra-rational experiential styles of knowledge formation. One of naturalism's main approaches to creatural realism is the grotesque, which I break down into the negative and positive grotesque corresponding to two different reactions (alienation and identification) to epistemological anxieties revolving around the body. After contextualizing these reactions within a normative model of social space influenced by Hannah Arendt, I illustrate them with depictions of disorganized flesh from Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906) and Norris's *The Octopus*. Before launching into all of that, I need to supply some general definitions for some key terms: literary naturalism and grotesque.

Naturalism is a contentious grouping, because there is substantial debate about what its definitional attributes are and whether it is even a coherent grouping at all. Donald Pizer (1982) observes that early twentieth century critics of literary naturalism often condemned naturalism for failing to follow its own rules; the argument goes that the theory of naturalism, based on a narrow reading of Zola's "The Experimental Novel" (1893), exceeds the literature. That reading of Zola— barely more than a stereotype— is that naturalism seeks to cut the novel down to a science, discarding style and complex characterization in service to a mechanistic plot that demonstrates a hypothesis about human behavior. This stripped-down version of naturalism is not reflected in the writing of the authors who are usually understood to be naturalists— traditionally: Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Theodor Dreiser, and Jack London.

Pizer's solution to this is to dispel with the reigning prescriptivist conception of naturalism and describe what he actually sees happening in the genre. In particular, he bucks naturalism's reputation for being coldly, dehumanizingly deterministic in its outlook. In "Romantic Individualism in Garland, Norris and Crane" (1958) Pizer argues that the "absorption

of 19th century American ideals” stopped American literary naturalism from surrendering entirely to pessimistic determinism (464). He would later expand on this principle—the tension between a deterministic worldview and an active moral agent—to wage a much broader defense of naturalism, including its European variants. In *The Theory and Practice of American Literary Naturalism* (1993), Pizer insists that naturalism is fundamentally humanist in its ethical orientation, striving to find a place for humanity under disenchanting and dehumanizing conditions: “naturalism at its best and most permanent, maintains a humanistic tradition of literary expression in which a primary goal is the dramatization of the value and uniqueness of man’s felt inner life” (Pizer 36). To explain why Pizer’s defense of naturalism’s humanism is important to the spectacle of disorganized flesh at the beginning of this chapter, I need to dive into another contentious feature of naturalism that comes from Zola’s adoption of a scientific vocabulary: naturalism’s epistemological stance and its alleged claim to scientific verisimilitude.

Numerous authors have focused on the relationship of naturalism to the construction of the concept of reality. In *Form and History in American Literary Naturalism* (1985), June Howard claims that the form of American literary naturalism embodies the ideologies of the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, particularly in regard to its mechanistic plots taking priority over character and the passive spectatorial gaze of the narrator; for Howard, it is not that “naturalism has an ideology or reflects an ideology, but that the form itself is an immanent ideology” (Howard ix). Howard’s concept of embodied ideology builds off of the aesthetic theory of Julia Kristeva—who regards artistic output as a ‘productive’ expression of the subject’s experience in their environment—and the hermeneutical theory of Althusser, for whom interpreting a text entails digging in to find “an essence that is already there and can be transferred intact to the abstraction or the literary text” (Howard 27). In Howard’s understanding,

literary naturalism is the ‘essence’ of a desire for coherence in an increasingly urbanized American landscape, structured according to scientific modes of analytical observation and mechanistic frameworks of causality (Howard 75, 12). Howard’s language plunges into a misty metaphysical space, but the overall thrust of her argument is clear: naturalism is expressive of a need for coherence and legibility on the part of a bourgeois class of readers. The goal of naturalism, in Howard’s eyes, is to make sense of the overwhelming and unfamiliar hubbub of lower-class life. This is essentially what Amy Kaplan says a year earlier in *The Social Construction of American Realism* (1988) when she claims that realism and naturalism alike push a consensus view of reality supported by middle-class tastes. Nearly all critics from the middle twentieth century to the present have acknowledged that the claim to reality waged by the “realists” is constructed. Perhaps, in this era of postmodernist doubt, the perceived naivete of the naturalist project, which allegedly tries to produce empirical fiction, is to blame for its bad reputation. I demonstrate throughout this dissertation that naturalist authors are not naive realists and, through their work, wage a fairly powerful counter to reductive physicalism.

More recent scholarship has tried to broaden the definition of literary naturalism and, in so doing, has reformulated its association with science and reality. Reviving somewhat forgotten genre distinctions, Eric Carl Link (2004) pursues a formal description of literary naturalism that characterizes it as a mixture or midway point between the tradition of the *novel*, which is subject to expectations regarding the realism of its content, and the tradition of the *romance*, which is not (14). According to Link, while science topics have thematic importance to naturalist texts, naturalist texts are not themselves bound to scientific methodology nor a purely positivist ontology. Link draws support from the literary criticism of Frank Norris, who explicitly calls naturalism a “form of romanticism” (Norris “Zola” 169). I wish to push back slightly against

Link's claim that science is only present as a theme in naturalist works; the statements of epistemology found in Norris's literary criticism and fiction suggest an expanded view of reality that includes but is not limited to science. In a letter published in the *Chicago American* in 1901, Norris distinguishes between "Truth" and "Accuracy":

"[L]et us suppose that you have never seen a sheep, and that it devolves upon me to give you an idea of the animal— describe it, in fact. I go out into the fields and select a sheep. In size, build, habits, weight, wool-producing qualities and the like it is precisely like other sheep— but it is black. To you, then I bring this sheep, I call your attention to the characteristics. I falsify nothing, conceal nothing. I present the creature fairly in every detail, in every particular. I am, in a word, accurate. But what is the result? To your notion all sheep are black, which is an untruth... Accuracy is not necessarily Truth, and the novelist who relies upon the accurate presentation of a crisis in life, hoping by this means to create the impression of Truth, is leaning upon a broken reed" (Norris "Weekly Letter" 170)

The above passage expresses a Zola-inspired desire for generalizable principles— in "The Experimental Novel," Zola rejects the idea that writers should be photographers because photographers get caught up in extraneous details, whereas scientists are pattern-seekers. This pattern-seeking behavior is precisely what Howard identifies in naturalism as the 19th century's scientific ideology; from patterns, the world becomes legible, chartable, and routinized. It is possible to misconstrue the creativity involved in hypothesis formation and the rather abstract quality of natural laws as unscientific, but they are only unscientific from a reductive physicalist perspective that assumes laws are natural properties of the universe, as opposed to products of

discourse that correspond in some meaningful way to the physical universe.¹ Norris's statement on Truth and Accuracy reveals a thoughtful, non-reductive perspective on scientific reasoning that is flexible enough to accommodate his romantic impulses. This perspective on Norris's relationship to science actually *strengthens* Link's case that naturalism is a mixture of novelistic realism and romance; the construction of reality is, to Norris, an endeavor that requires human creativity and cognition. Human beings are the pattern-seeking engines that allow us to understand the sheepiness of a sheep.

At the same time, in Norris's hands, these ideas do seem to drift away from mainstream scientific epistemology and take on the properties of a Platonic Ideal. Not being perfectly bound to detail leaves room for stylistic flourishes and interpretation. I contrast Norris's insufficient description of a sheep with the mangled herd of sheep from *The Octopus*. The dead sheep, while they physically exist, also exist in a symbolic register; they are an obvious Christianity-derived symbol for the slaughter of innocents. The sheep's bodies are inseparable, flowing into each other, their effluvia mingling with the earth and making the boundaries between organic and inorganic fuzzy. They are a disturbing admixture of the animal and the mechanical, and their shed blood carries the weight of a sacrifice. These multiple layers of meaning are illustrative of how American literary naturalists approach knowledge. In a naturalist text, there is empirical knowledge of the natural world and, weaving into and around that empirical knowledge, there are irreducible forms of knowledge that radiate from the natural.

The work of two other recent literary critics may help to clear up the epistemological goals of naturalist fiction. In *Women, Compulsion, Modernity* (2004), Jennifer Fleissner broadens the canon of American literary naturalist authors by identifying the interrogation of the role of

¹ An interest in the discourse-dependency of facts is a feature in the work of all of the naturalist authors who are discussed in this dissertation.

the “natural” in human life as a key component to their work (18). In the context of nineteenth century, the category of the natural includes repeating mechanisms or patterns that occur outside of human volition, instincts and involuntary impulses that point to an animal past, and the biological life process (which can, at least in nineteenth-century thought, be broken down into mechanisms) and its constituent organic matter (e.g. stomach acid, blood, feces, breast milk, etc.). As I argue later in this chapter, these are features of human life that fall outside of the ‘soul’ side of a traditional soul/body dichotomy; the preoccupation with them at the fin de siècle comes from 1) a dawning understanding, after Darwin, Wallace, Malthus, and Spencer, that human beings are part of the natural world and 2) the changing shapes and density of communities that caused a hyperawareness of embodiment. The focus on the natural is demonstrative of a desire to make the social world of the 19th century legible, as Howard claims is naturalism’s end goal. Bodies and flesh, being a component of the natural, are open to scientifically informed scrutiny.

At the same time, the category of the natural, and bodies in particular, bespeak of a dimension of existence that falls outside of the abstractifying knowledge systems of positivist science. There is a pervading sense in literary naturalism that one must experience the natural in order to understand it— that experience is a form of knowledge in its own right. This is where the artistic properties of literary naturalist texts become very important; I argue throughout this dissertation that literary naturalist texts use aesthetics to convey extra-rational types of knowledge, especially the experience of first-person encounters with flesh. My efforts in this direction are preceded by Christophe Den Tandt’s *The Urban Sublime in American Literary Naturalism* (1998), which argues that literary naturalist texts use romanticist aesthetics as an expression of dreadful awe at the illegibility of urban space in its totality (7). For Den Tandt,

realism and naturalism “designate not self-contained genres,² but epistemological and rhetorical formations that, I believe, coexist with different degrees of dominance in the works of traditionally classified as either realist or naturalist” (Den Tandt 17). Predominantly realist texts wield a “demystificatory, documentary gaze with a local scope,” focus on “the visible logic of the social world,” and therefore “must accept the limitations of positivistic vision” (Den Tandt 17). Naturalism, in contrast, couples its documentary ambitions with a fascination with “areas beyond the periphery of positivistic discourse” (Den Tandt 17).

Though I embrace the idea that naturalism has mixed epistemological allegiances, I move away from an analysis of the Kantian Sublime and elements of romanticism per se to look at the grotesque, which is an aesthetic that is centered around bodies. Refocusing the analysis of naturalism’s epistemological foundations on the body has a couple of advantages: 1) it better accounts for the importance of the ‘natural’ to naturalism, since the rational and experiential forms of knowledge can both have the body as their object, and 2) it provides a connection back to the humanism that Pizer identified. As I will try to demonstrate, extra-rational epistemology is a part of this humanism. Humanism finds value in the experience of being human, which includes embodiment and the natural. Naturalism’s humanistic realism comes in the form of *creatural realism*, a type of realism that highlights human beings as organic creatures with aging, hungering bodies and natural imperfections. Naturalism’s extra-positivistic approach to representing the truth draws attention to the meat of experience, which, as *creatural realism*, is also the experience of meat.

In deference to Howard and Kaplan’s desire to read literary naturalism as an ideological enterprise, it needs to be acknowledged that naturalism’s *creatural realism* is politically loaded,

² Den Tandt uses “genre” in a different way than Link. For Link, the novel itself is a genre, whereas in Den Tandt “genre” means something closer to tradition, movement, or subgenre

because human experience is wrapped up in the ordering of social space. In *Determined Fictions* (1989), Lee Clark Mitchell claims that literary naturalist texts experiment with and critique the notion of a stable, coherent selfhood; in Mitchell's view, these texts anticipate the 20th century critique of the subject by probing the limits of individual agency and personal identity in a deterministic universe (xii-xiii). Bringing together Mitchell's observations about the incoherence of the self with Howard, Kaplan, and Den Tandt's observations about the incoherence of social space, I argue that naturalist texts tend to depict individual subjectivity as a social problem. Organic matter provides the link between individual subjectivity and social space: the relationship between the self and organic material is the focus of creatural realism, and that relationship is political because— as I explore in this chapter— the body and organic life factor greatly into models of social space that are relevant to the 19th and early 20th centuries. Because of the interdependence of these elements, this dissertation conceives of subjectivity as *political subjectivity*, wherein political coherence or recognizability is bound to identity and agency, and vice versa. Political communities in literary naturalist texts are also communities of bodies. The disorganized flesh that appears so often in these texts are indicative of concerns surrounding the coherence or salience of those communities. Failure to make sense of social space results in a feeling of alienation, which results in a sense of abjection and bodily horror. Alternatively, disorganized flesh can attempt to be recuperated and re-identified with, although this re-identification is usually unstable and incomplete. These two responses are at the core of literary naturalism's creatural realism and correspond to what I later call the *negative* and *positive grotesques*.

To summarize, I argue that the peculiar epistemological positioning of literary naturalism is important to its definition. The components of that position are these:

- 1) Following Fleissner, I claim that naturalism is identifiable by its exploration of the role that non-anthropocentric natural processes play in human social organization and behavior. There is no single definition of nature or the ‘natural,’ but I suggest that it is a constellation of ideas that is heavily associated with embodiment, corporeality, and organic substances that predate and/or are indifferent to human action. Anxiety over the natural often appears in naturalism as atavism, or regression to an imagined primitive state.
- 2) Building off of Den Tandt and Link, I argue that naturalist texts extend scientific and science-adjacent concepts into extra-rational, embodied forms of knowledge through aesthetics. Naturalism’s engagement with positivistic scientific epistemology entails both tracing the limits of knowledge claims and suggesting alternative avenues for knowledge. A major feature of the latter is creatural realism, which is an emotive, suffused form of knowledge reliant on the uniquely immersive and synesthetic potency of literature.
- 3) Modifying the observations made by Mitchell, I assert that naturalist texts use their inquiry into social space and the natural to examine political subjectivity, which hinges on a series of communal and personal psychological processes of recognition and integration.

This dissertation analyzes the models of social life presented by literary naturalist texts with a conceptual vocabulary developed from the history of science, biopolitical theory, and aesthetic theories of the grotesque. I read fiction from Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Charlotte Perkins Gilman, and Charles Chesnutt in the context of anxieties over the significance that social space has to the construction of individual subjectivity and the enactment of individual agency.

Naturalist fiction boasts a unique set of epistemological values and is the site of correspondingly

distinctive collisions of forms. In response to the crisis of legibility described in detail in the preceding sections, naturalism takes up the tools of social science to etch out maps of social interactions, but ultimately it transcends the limits of science and fills in its map with extra-rationalistic styles of knowing. Adjacent to the flaneur's sublimation of stimulus into poetic image, naturalist texts feature literary forms that recall lived experience, allowing the reader to virtually experience the disintegration of social ties as one might firsthand. I find that a common theme in depictions of troubled social spaces is an emphasis on physical embodiment— an embodiment that does not simply entail a dutiful recording of sensory data, but a sense of corporeality that exceeds and threatens the integrity of the individual subject.

Naturalist authors use their toolbox of social science discourse and virtual witnessing techniques to sketch the complex emotional and affective nature of the psychological relationship between human beings and the social systems that they inhabit. I call these relationships “affects,” with the understanding that all affects— envy, disgust, hostility, irritation, enamoration— are dispositional, in the dual sense that they involve both an emotional state and an orientation (a literal position of self to object). The most important affects to this study are alienation and identification. Although the systems themselves are mapped out in naturalist texts with an awareness of the contemporaneous models of social behavior provided by sociologists and biologists, the grotesque is the means by which my list of authors convey a sense of the dispositions that their characters have towards those systems. As such, in these stories, the grotesque both is used to create an immersive description of reality and provides the foundation for the authors' proposals regarding how best to cope with feelings of social atomization.

The grotesque is an aesthetic category. Like form, ‘aesthetic’ is a slippery term, and I want to nail down its usage early. When I refer to an aesthetic, I am not referencing Kantian aesthetics or simply judgements of taste, though both revolve around the experience of art. I prefer to speak of a singular aesthetic (that is, one aesthetic among many) over a singular aesthetics (one unified subject: artistic pleasure or appreciation) because the former evokes the secondary usage of aesthetic: the artistic principles associated with artistic movements or periods (e.g. a surrealist aesthetic). “Aesthetic” is preferable to “style” because it preserves the original connection to mental states. Essentially, in insisting on this usage I am creating a space to talk about the composition of the work of art together with its reception.

I believe that this is consistent with the spirit of several of my secondary sources, particularly those rooted in or influenced by psychoanalysis. Julia Kristeva’s literary theory is anchored in the premise that personal trauma is therapeutically converted into the work of art. In *Black Sun: Depression and Melancholia* (1989), Kristeva extolls the benefits of artistic expression of loss: “melody, rhythm, semantic polyvalency, the so-called poetic form, which decomposes and recomposes signs, is the sole ‘container’ seemingly able to secure an uncertain but adequate hold over the Thing” (339). Arguably, Kristeva’s theory positions the transfer of psychological loss into poetic form as a matter more of semiotics than of affect; ultimately, though, this appears to be a false binary— if affect is dispositional, then it can never be devoid of semantic content. In any event, artistic sublimation or displacement seem to involve a transformation of real psychological states into designed objects— the sculpture, the drawing, the novel—that represent reality.

A second source for my construction of ‘aesthetic’ is affect theory. In *Affecting Fictions* (2007), Jane Thrailkill supports the view that affects can be materialized in a work of art, or

“resonant object”; for instance, Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s “The Yellow Wallpaper” (1892) ‘resonates’ the anxiety of its protagonist in its increasingly flowing, spiraling syntax (27-8, 119). Opposing the validity of the concept of ‘the affective fallacy,’ Thrailkill’s book insists that affective response does not simply appear out of nowhere— it is mobilized or triggered by real properties of the work of art. Though readers may have an affective response independent of the art object, it is possible for parts of the art object’s design to serve as vehicles for affect, predicated on a normative reaction to cues (e.g. we see an animal with simplified features and eyes large in proportion to its head, and we experience ‘cuteness’; we see an animal in disproportion or misalignment, and we experience ‘disgust’). An affect must be mediated by an aesthetic, which are those cues.

To put it more straightforwardly: I understand an aesthetic to be a mode of representation that highlights specific attributes of the object being represented (for example: the neoclassical aesthetic privileges the imagined symmetry and proportionality of its object, the futurist aesthetic the object’s movement, the impressionist aesthetic its ephemerality) and a related set of conceptual commitments (e.g. stoicism, relentless progress, melancholy) that influence the affective reception of the work of art. Another way to think of an aesthetic is as the site of form-becoming-feeling.³ There are many aesthetics, often rising and falling in prominence according to the conditions surrounding artistic production. For example, in *Our Aesthetic Categories* (2012), Sianne Ngai analyzes three undertheorized aesthetics— zany, cute, and interesting— that have become dominant in middle-to-lowbrow media over the course of the past seventy years. To pick just one of Ngai’s categories to explicate according to my definition of an ‘aesthetic’: zaniness involves an emphasis on frenetic energy, incessant activity, and staccato rhythms, its

³ At the time that this was written, I was unaware of Susanne K. Langer’s declaration in *Feeling and Form* (1953) that “Art is the creation of forms symbolic of human feeling,” but in hindsight I can appreciate the partial echo (40).

sensori-emotional effect a hilarity poorly masking an underlying agitation (Ngai 185-7). My own study focuses on the grotesque, bifurcated into the negative and positive grotesque. I think that the grotesque is a prominent aesthetic in literary naturalism for a couple of reasons:

- 1) the *affect*-heavy quality of aesthetics generally, combined with the fleshy ordinariness of the grotesque specifically, allows for a visceral realism that exceeds the limits of representation to which scientific facts and abstract data are bound.
- 2) Definitionally, the grotesque is well-suited as a response to the threat to the legibility of social space (and, relatedly, the integrity of the “golden barrier” and individual subjectivity) that is posed by mass life and a disorganized, limitless corporeality.

In this dissertation, I use two competing accounts of the grotesque to frame a field of intersecting epistemologies— of social space, of selfhood, and of the body. These competing accounts come from Mikhail Bakhtin and Wolfgang Kayser. Together, they comprise the glut of literary naturalism’s creatural realism. I argue that understanding the function of the grotesque in American literary naturalist texts is integral to understanding the epistemological position that informs the texts’ politics.

Definitions Continued: the Two Grotesques

The grotesque is a useful aesthetic category to think of in conjunction with literary naturalism because of its troubled consanguinity with realism, a principle that is important to naturalism’s definition. Realism is a term with many claimants, and the realism of the grotesque— which can sometimes seem to veer into the fantastical with its emphasis on extremity and chimeras— is definitely not realism in its quotidian, contemporary sense. Shun-

Liang Chao (2010) observes that the grotesque decreases in popularity during eras wherein high value is placed on reason, order, and verisimilitude in art, and that it thrives “in the aesthetic climates in which transgressing classical rationalism and order is greatly praised” (24). It is anathema to Horace and Vitruvius, for whom reason means restraint and pronounced structure; the lack of unity or probability in a work of art is indicative of madness (Chao 28).

This binary between reason and imagination remains highly influential in our own culture. For classical aesthetics, imagination must be reined in by proportion and coherence lest it be pure folly. Of course, this does not describe an empirical sort of realism, because proportion and coherence refer to idealized relations between objects, not objects as they are. Mimesis in this sense signifies not a carbon-copying of things as they appear but an imitated and perfected nature, combining observation with mathematical values like symmetry. Erich Auerbach argues in *Mimesis* (1946) that modern realism is totally separate from the classical attempt to represent reality because of the latter’s doctrine of levels of style that prevented ordinary or everyday life from receiving serious artistic treatment (554). The “serious realism” of nineteenth century is prestaged by medieval and Renaissance texts, which did not abide by the classical rules of style because of “the story of Christ, with its ruthless mixture of everyday reality and the highest and most sublime tragedy” (Auerbach 555). Auerbach’s claim deserves a three note response.

First, I confirm that Auerbach’s association of modern realism with the ordinary is in agreement with the consensus understanding of late 19th century literary criticism. Ordinariness is both a quality of substance and of the presentation of that substance. From the angle of substance, the ordinary is typified by earthly or quotidian experiences and concerns conflicts familiar to the readers. One can call William Dean Howells’s *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885) “realistic” because the domestic drama and stature of the protagonist are close to home. In its

manner of presentation, Howells's book is un-ostentatious; his style is one that strives to present the reader with the "simple, honest, and natural grasshopper" over the ideal or heroic grasshopper (Howells 85).

In the second stage of my response to Auerbach's claim, I want to refine his point about the separation of classicism and 19th century realism's aesthetic values. Though the latter does not reflect perfection in the formal sense, it still encourages a cohesive worldview based on a kind of systemization. American realist authors regarded themselves as professionals whose writing process followed the dictates of professionalization that were quickly taking over all intellectual life. Daniel H. Borus (1989) writes that, as opposed to the Romantics, who followed the gospel of Genius and Inspiration, Realists were more methodical, confining themselves in their studies and producing fiction through a compilation of observed phenomena, thus making empirical investigation a key component of their process (73). Stylistically, this expresses itself as unadorned and simplified language. It is revealing that Howells would pair simplicity with honesty and naturalness. I suggest that this is not unlike Foucault's clinician who tries to make language synonymous with reality. It is the conceit that Richard Rorty has in mind when he summarizes Derrida's opinion on philosophers' resentment for writing: "the more 'written' writing is... the worse it must be" (310). The extreme example of this attitude as it appears in philosophy is found in the logical positivists, who endeavored to overcome or at least circumvent linguistic confusion once and for all.

The ordinariness of Christ is a rather different matter. It might seem counterintuitive in a period when religious debates so often take the form of empiricism locking horns with faith, but the earthliness and the physical body of Christ does indeed seem to be a precursor for the virtual realness of realist fiction. I want to push this further, though. If the ordinary in realist fiction

meant a high degree of verisimilitude to common experience (the ordinariness of the *quotidienne*), then works of American literary naturalism focused on the actual life in the ordinary (the ordinariness of mortal bodies). I compare this to Medieval Christian artwork that accentuated tactility and corporeality. A close look at Christian artwork reveals that life had its own unique epistemological framework. The palpable experience of sorrow and suffering was its own kind of truth claim. 19th and 20th century anxieties about mass biological life and the Christ body converge when one considers—as Vibeke Olson does in “Blood, sweat, tears, and milk” (2017)—the role of direct sensory contact with “matter in the form of effluvia” in Medieval devotional art (11). Touching Christ’s bodily fluids offers a sense of presence—the merging of pity and piety— but it is also, from a certain standpoint, horrific.

To explain how this relates to the grotesque, I need to take a step back and settle on a more precise meaning of the term. The meaning of the grotesque tends to come off as a little nebulous. This is because the word “grotesque” was used in divergent ways throughout its history and did not receive major scholarly treatment until the eighteenth century, thus making some designations retroactive. The other reason for its seeming nebulosity is that fact that what it describes is, definitionally, sort of incoherent. In this dissertation, I identify the following features as pertaining to the grotesque:

- 1) Excessive or extreme corporeality, especially as it relates to consumption and excretion
- 2) A disorganized and boundary-less corporeality that violates or calls to question the integrity of the individual body
- 3) Corporeality that blurs the line between the human and non-human, usually drawing attention to 1 and 2.

I compiled this list of definitive features from a number of authoritative texts on the subject. Wolfgang Kayser's (1933) grotesque stresses its illegible multiplicity: "the fusion of spheres, the monstrous nature of ingredients, and the subversion of order and proportion which characterizes them" (Kayser 29). A key example is Hieronymus Bosch's *The Garden of Earthly Delights* (1515), which depicts a panorama of humanity at different spiritual stages— edenic, worldly, and damned. The painting showcases the grotesque's monstrous fusions: the collision of "human and nonhuman elements" in the pig-faced men, bird-faced homunculi, and habit-wearing pigs; the disassembly and disproportion in the tangles of bodies and the giant dismembered scissor-wielding ears on stumpy legs (Kayser 24). For Kayser, Bosch's achievement lies in the image's resistance to interpretation: art critics "seem wrong insofar as they claim to have reduced Bosch's art to one coherent system enable one to regard each part of a composition as the key to an objectively verifiable coherent meaning" (Kayser 34). The grotesque lets chaos reign. However, its disordered vision of the world and its subversion of the natural does not make it pure fantasy. Its effect is uncanny in the sense that it causes the homelike and unhomelike to lay on top of one another: "By viewing our surprise as an agonizing fear of the dissolution of our world, we secretly relate the grotesque to our reality and ascribe to it a modicum of 'truth'" (Kayser 31). The grotesque is only visible through its perverted fidelity to the actual; for the viewer or reader to react to it, it is necessary that there be some distorted resemblance to the categories normally thought to correspond to reality— there must be homeliness in the unhomelike. Kayser claims that this is how our minds register caricature, which is a mimesis of a "distinctly ugly reality and its exaggeration of actually existing proportions" (Kayser 30). If classical mimesis privileged order and perfection, then grotesque aesthetics was its antithesis: a reflection of reality that purposefully skewed it and made it incongruous.

Mikhail Bakhtin's theory of the grotesque also highlights the aesthetic's investment in the disruption of the individual body. However, in contrast to Kayser's negative vision of a discombobulating romantic grotesque, Bakhtin's carnivalesque takes a reparative view of the grotesque's ability to create continuity and fluidity between living matter. Like Olson, Bakhtin sees a means of connectivity in effluvia. In *Rabelais and His World* (1946), Bakhtin writes of urine and dung as "gay matter" that links the body to the earth: "Dung and urine lend a bodily character [otelesnivaiut] to matter, to the world, to the cosmic elements, which become closer, more intimate, more easily grasped [il telesno-poniatnym: lit., more easily understood by the body] for this is the matter [materiia], the elemental force [stikhiia], born from and excreted by... the body itself" (quoted in Mihailovic 161). A work of art that rejoices or luxuriates in the excesses and wastefulness of the body draws out the relativity of life to its environment and to other bodies, making plain the body's mediation between other strata of existence (Mihailovic 162).

In Bakhtin's hands, the grotesque is (much more explicitly than in Kayser) a semiotics of the body. The incoherence engendered by a scrambling of categories is shown to conceal a deeper unity. The sensorial lushness of Bakhtin's conception recalls the medieval portrayals of Christ's body. A 21st century example may elucidate this point. Pascal Laugier's *Martyrs* (2008) is a film that falls under the umbrella of the New French Extremity, an informal movement in 2000s French cinema that, as the name suggests, explored the extremes in representations of violence, gore, and bodily excess. The movie revolves around a philosophical society that abducts and tortures people with the goal of attaining through their captives a Christian-coded transcendental insight through mutilation of the body (*Martyrs*). *Martyrs* draws on the history of martyr passions (including the martyrdom of Christ) to create a gruesome spectacle for a horror

movie audience. By putting this carnal-divine epistemology in a horror film, with the sight of the corrupted and distorted body amped up, Laugier illuminates the native semiotic relationship between this pre-modern style of knowledge and the grotesque.

Some depth can now be added to Chao's observations about the waxing and waning of the popularity of the grotesque according the taste for "rationality" in the *Zeitgeist*. "Rationality" as Chao uses it seems to refer not strictly to rationalism but more broadly to a preference for order, whether that be in the form of ideal ratios between parts or to a systemization and methodization of knowledge. Chao's book describes a cyclical history made up of periods of revolution and counterrevolution. This is a fairly conventional way to look at art and literary history. In regard to the cleavage between American literary realism and naturalism, I propose that, pursuant of a more complete picture of ordinariness than realism could offer, naturalism used the grotesque, in doing so embracing more unabashedly forms of knowledge that went beyond the criteria for rational acceptability in the modern scientific era. Through the grotesque, naturalism pursues the kind of creaturely realism—the realism of creaturely ordinariness—that Auerbach associates with the corporeality of Christ. The ordinariness of the body, and of biological life more generally, is an aspect of reality that Howells's realism keeps tucked away.

In *American Fiction and the Metaphysics of the Grotesque* (1996), synthesizing the criticism of Mikhail Bakhtin and Wolfgang Kayser to distill the essence of the grotesque, Dieter Miendl comes to the conclusion that (following Bakhtin) the grotesque is an expression of deindividualized life—life in its totality, including its "nonrational dimension"—but that that expression is no longer considered life-affirming because it is filtered through concepts that Kayser was commenting on and working within—namely, individuality and subjectivity, which Miendl equates with the rational dimension of life. I think that Miendl is on the right track but

that the epistemes he refers to go under-explained in his work. In order to talk meaningfully about how the grotesque reflects a stance on the relationship between embodiment and subjectivity, one needs a model of social space to contextualize it.

Biopolitics and the Loss of the Common World

In this section, I plot out a model for conceptualizing social space that I argue describes the predominant intellectual milieu of the 19th and early 20th century in regard to subjectivity, knowledge, and the body. The basic assumption that this model makes is that the corporeal body is separate from and perhaps opposed to the mind or soul. This assumption is important for maintaining what paleontologist Stephen Jay Gould calls the imagined “golden barrier” between animal and human, and maintaining with it the assumption that the body threatens the dignity of the soul (Gould). One early propagator of this dichotomy is Aristotle, who in his *Poetics* (c. 335 BCE) elevates humans above other animals on the basis of their capacity for speech:

Nature, as we often say, makes nothing in vain, and man is the only animal whom she has endowed with the gift of speech. And whereas mere voice is but an indication of pleasure or pain, and is therefore found in other animals (for their nature pertains to the perception of pleasure and pain and the intimation of them to one another, and no further), the power of speech is intended to set forth the expedient and inexpedient, and therefore the just and unjust. (quoted in Wolfe 9)

Aristotle uses the polarization of human speech and animal want and need to define politics according to logocentric debates over the just and good. This durable barrier factors heavily into later perceptions of social space, as well as definitions of what constitutes public life—under this type of thinking, the public and private correspond to that soul/body or human/animal

dichotomy. I argue that, because the human/animal or soul/body divide is so central to Western conceptions of social space, definitions of the human get entangled with one of the primary products of social space: political subjectivity, which I define as the binding of individual agency and personal identity to the public recognition of belonging.

This combination of action, identity, and recognition indicates that the construction of social space is rooted in epistemology, and, because social space is defined according to soul and body, the legibility or illegibility of space can be seen as an issue of how observers and recorders of social space react to and represent flesh. In the 19th century, the increasing urbanization of the West and a paradigm shift in the thinking about bodies that was precipitated by Darwinian evolutionary theory stirred up anxieties about social space. These anxieties are characterized by an uneasiness about organic substances (especially waste material) and a strong desire to maintain mastery over one's surroundings by force of knowledge. An example from the then newly minted discipline of political economy may prove enlightening. In 1883, American Henry George complained about the deleterious effects of urbanization on social life in city and country alike:

“[A]s the cities grow, unwholesomely crowding people together till they are packed in tiers, family above family, so are they unwholesomely separated in the country. The tendency everywhere that this process of urban concentration is going on, is to make the life of the country poor and hard, and to rob it of the social stimulus and social gratifications that are so necessary to human beings. The old healthy social life of village and townland is everywhere disappearing” (226).

I identify in George's complaint several motifs common in nineteenth-century thought. There was widespread concern over the “health” of social relations as cities evolved the ways that

people lived with each other: no longer alongside one another in a tidy and evenly developed landscape, but perversely crammed together or perversely isolated. The breakdown of the “townland” model of social interaction presents at once a moral and biological problem. In part, this reflects a real concern about the logistical issues surrounding very concentrated populations, which, in the absence of necessary infrastructure, *does* foment conflict and facilitate the spread of communicable disease. The editorializing begins when these issues are transformed into social characteristics, i.e. when they are treated as *extensions* of the “unwholesome” arrangements of bodies on a map rather than an accidental byproduct. In Jacob Riis’s *How the Other Half Lives* (1890), tenement environments naturally give way to the physical and moral degeneracy of their inhabitants. The stench and foul polluted air of nineteenth century city are depicted in the political cartoons of William Allen Rogers as an outgrowth of the personal preferences of lower-class city-dwellers rather than as a hazard to their health (Kiechle 234). Teddy Roosevelt’s advocacy for a life strenuously lived, with the connection it alleges between physical and moral well-being, condemns urban complacency and associates it with the lifestyles of indolence and turpitude of ‘backwards’ races. These examples indicate a nervousness about new spatial arrangements and new patterns of movement that undeniably impacted the nature of social life.

The desire for epistemological mastery and uneasiness about the organic is more or less the basis of what now gets called ‘biopolitics.’ The terms ‘biopolitics’ and ‘biopower’ were coined by Michel Foucault to describe a special style and application of power that he considers a historical novelty. In his lecture “Society Must Be Defended” (1976), Foucault paints biopolitics as the state answer to the “urban problem,” meaning the sudden increase and concentration of populations in the late modern era: “Biopolitics deals with the population, with the population as a political problem... as a biological problem and as power’s problem”

(Foucault SMBD 66). Biopolitics in Foucault's model entails the bureaucratic administration over life and death. There is a line of continuity between this lecture and his book *Discipline & Punish* (1975), which juxtaposes the medieval and modern relationship of institutional power to the body. *Discipline & Punish* opens with a graphic, blow-by-blow report of the torture and mutilation of the regicide Robert-Francois Damiens, who was sentenced to be drawn and quartered in the public square (3-5). The paradigm of power represented by Damiens's execution is a world away from the modern justice system, which developed after a series of reforms aimed at treating the guilty in a manner more reconcilable with humanism. These reforms shifted the target of justice from bodily ablation, the punishment expelling blame from the flesh in a sacrificial mode a la *Martyrs*, to regulations dedicated to confinement and reduction of recidivism (78). Foucault goes on to propose rather grimly that the new technologies of power that came about during the move from punishment to discipline now permeate throughout all modern bureaucracies, the *société carcérale* being the definitive arrangement not just of prisons but of schools and the medical establishment. *Discipline & Punish* speaks of regimentation and partitioning of political subjects both in terms of classificatory systems—this is something that survives from Foucault's earlier scholarship *The Birth of the Clinic* (1963) and *The Order of Things* (1966)— and in terms of surveillance. In a famous example, Foucault offers Jeremy Bentham's panopticon as a model for considering the subject's relation to systems of power—the possibility of being observed drives the subject to order herself, lest she run afoul of normative social categories and face marginalization or removal from public life (201). Classification itself is equated in Foucault's work with a kind of seeing, whereby the professional gaze of the medical doctor, scientist, or sociologist is taken to be reality itself,

bestowing the jargon of their fields with an almost divine authority equipping them to separate the pure from the disturbed.

Since Foucault, biopolitics has received no shortage of criticism and modification. In the political theory of Giorgio Agamben, for whom sovereignty and biopower are more inextricably interwoven, the apotheosis of modern biopolitical systems is the concentration camp— a much more dramatic example than Foucault, who was interested in quotidian exchanges of power, felt compelled to give. Relatively recently, Agamben and Foucault's models have been attacked for being too Eurocentric, glossing over racialized imperial infrastructure. For thinkers like Achille Mbembe and Alexander Weheliye, the concentration camp is too exceptional, too alien to the regular breakdown and degradation of bodies in a colonialist and neocolonialist framework. In each version, however, there persists the same basic narrative about the effects of modernization on the life of political communities. I find that this core narrative predates Foucault by decades and is consequential to the treatment of corporeality and social space in literary naturalist texts. This should not be very surprising, since the phenomenon that Foucault writes about are acknowledged by Foucault as having gained momentum in the late eighteenth and nineteenth century. The key ideas behind theories of biopower— that specialized, abstractified, science-inflected forms of knowledge dictate the perception and management of bodies— are on display in Henry George and his contemporaries' response to urbanization and the evolution of communities.

I want to interpret the anxieties voiced by George and his ilk through the soul/body-contingent model of social space. To do that, I need to flesh it out more fully. Hannah Arendt's normative model of Public and Private spheres is a useful starting point because it hinges on the 'golden barrier' idea and because her analysis of historical change provides the groundwork for a

discussion of why positivism, professionalization, and scientific modes of knowledge fail to alleviate and even exacerbated social anxiety.

Arendt's topic, though she never states it straightforwardly, is republicanism and its decline. A republic is a conception of society and culture as a collective enterprise. The people of a republic exist within social space for the purposes of building and sustaining a 'common world' made up of common values and lasting cultural products. The enemy of republicanism is fragmentation. Republicanism is at odds with classical liberalism, which advocates for a procedural state that facilitates the actions of individuals. Social space under liberalism is simply the spot where the independent interactions of individual entities take place. While a modern liberal state is not a necessary precondition for the evaporation of a common world, Arendt attributes the common world's absence to features of modernity that ushered in different species of fragmentation.⁴

In her thinking, the opposite of values and culture is the body: lacking a common world, societies turn their energies towards the maintenance of the body; gradually, the people of a republic decline into a form of undifferentiated, biologically-fixated mass life, which for Arendt, a Holocaust survivor, possesses all the horror of a slaughterhouse. (Her narrative of decline, which blames the capitalist mode of production and an anti-social form of individualism for the destruction of true pluralism and a resultant backslide into anonymous cattle-like existence, lends credence to the idea that totalitarianism is liberalism in decay). Arendt's oeuvre shows the clear influence of Edward Gibbon's *Decline and Fall of the Roman Empire* (1776), which attributes

⁴ For a literary touchstone, consider the titular character of Harold Frederic's *The Damnation of Theron Ware* (1896), a public man who experiences an erosion of traditional civic virtues after an encounter with an evolutionist and a beautiful aesthete. At the end, having lost touch with his community, Ware embarks on a political career. Ware's 'damnation' at the hands of Darwinism and decadence is representative of anxieties about social fragmentation in the late 19th century.

the end of the Roman republic to social fragmentation—specifically the loss of a sense of civic values in favor of a decadent obsession with bodily appetites. Ironically, this would become the template for the civilizational decline narratives adopted by 20th century fascists, whose politics Arendt thoroughly excoriates.

Like Gibbon, Arendt’s view of human social organization proceeds from a classic vocabulary. Her political philosophy informed by her interpretation of what political life meant to the Greeks and Romans. In *The Human Condition* (1958), Arendt describes a merging of the Public and Private Realms into a single Social Realm,⁵ which thrusts processes once relegated to the household into the center of the polis (Arendt 37-8). Refining Marx’s criticism of capitalist labor practices, Arendt separates the economic activity of the subject into three categories: *action* and *work*— the traditional activities of the Public Realm, their products lasting and infrastructural— and *labour*, which relates to the “biological processes of the human body,” its output intended for immediate consumption (Arendt 30, 33).

The Human Condition is centered around the pursuit of a ‘common world’ that citizens may occupy; such a ‘world’ is, to Arendt, an ultimate source of meaning that illuminates human existence. The common world of the Public Realm is composed of the relations between citizens that transcend the lower order concerns of biological life. The category of the “citizen,” previous to its democratization, necessitated a distance from so-called lower-tier concerns. This is Arendt’s iteration of the ‘golden barrier’ separating human beings from the rest of the animal kingdom. More plainly stated, this is the idea that human beings are distinct from other animals because they are capable of producing culture.⁶ Arendt’s de facto definition of culture is fairly

⁵ The capitalizations of the first letters in Public, Private, and Social Realm indicate that they are the terms as Arendt uses them. They appear with this formatting in the original text.

⁶ Zoologists have demonstrated that this is an incorrect presumption, and that other animals exhibit behaviors that could be dubbed ‘cultural repertoires’— learned activities that are passed mimetically from one generation of

conventional— as demonstrated by her concepts of *work* and *action*, she maintains that culture is an activity that is performed for its own sake. *Work* is production that exists independent of the “biological cycle”— while *labour* is repetitious, its products swallowed up as soon as it is produced, *work* has a multiplying effect, allowing achievements to build off of one another and creating the durable physical basis for a common world (Arendt 76). Both *work* and *labour* are prerequisites for full involvement in public life, which is only possible through *action* (praxis). Over time, the utilitarianization of craftsmanship and the economization of public life has foreclosed on the possibility of this loftier activity.

The usurpation of the Public by the Social means that citizens become confined in their activity to the rudiments of household management; public space becomes wrapped up in a process of “collective housekeeping” in which the primary activity is the orchestration of biological life (*zoe*), all centered around consumption (Arendt 28). In this elegy for the public life (*bios*) of the ancien regime, one can detect 1) a resentment for twentieth century utopian projects dedicated to the more equitable distribution of resources, 2) an Adorno-esque elitist disdain for the culture industry, and 3) more broadly, a discomfort with sociology and the corresponding ‘Socialization’ of social organization.

In his history of the development of sociology as a distinct discipline, Bruce Mazlish (1989) notes the revulsion inspired by the new positivist mathematical approach to ending human suffering: “As [Alexis] Tocqueville intuited, the very effort... to ameliorate poverty through the application of supposedly scientific means, for example, the utilitarian ‘felicific calculus,’ or the use of statistical research, seemed cold and distant in comparison with the caring and personal charity of the pre-industrial upper class” (Mazlish 121). Mazlish suggests that the

organisms to the next and that go beyond immediate instrumental need (Boesch 4). The melodies of whale songs and the rule-based games of chimpanzees are probably the most high-profile of these non-human cultural activities.

“depersonalizing tendency of social science reform” ran against the paternalistic sentiments of the ruling class left over from the pre-industrial period (122). Previous to the modern welfare state, aid to the needy was delivered on a private altruistic basis, the rhetoric of charity reliant on appeals to sympathy. In the 19th century, the social scientists intruded. The well-intentioned individualism of the bourgeoisie was at odds with the programmatic socialism that had sprung from the positivist sciences.

The major forces at play in Mazlish’s account— individualism and positivism— also play prominent roles in *The Human Condition*. Arendt attributes the rise of the Social Realm to the introspective turn of intellectual life at the hands of the Protestant Reformation and, separately, Rene Descartes’s pervasive doubt. She praises Max Weber for rightfully associating Protestantism with “the new capitalist mentality” of ““innerworldly asceticism,”” going on to draw a connection between such a mentality and the breakdown of a common world: “The greatness of Max Weber’s discovery about the origins of capitalism lay precisely in his demonstration that an enormous, strictly mundane activity is possible without any care for or enjoyment of the world whatever, an activity whose deepest motivation, on the contrary, is worry and care about the self. World alienation, and not self-alienation as Marx thought, has been the hallmark of the modern age” (Arendt 228, 230-1). A soulless outer landscape slouching robotically into mere repetition is the byproduct of the inward turn that makes capitalism possible. Despite the explosion of technological innovation (and the corresponding explosion in population) in the modern era, Arendt sees nothing durable, nothing intended to last.

In addition to its atomizing effect on the people, Christianity placed a high value on life that, along with the Protestant work ethic, it carried over into secular society (Arendt 291). This is one major factor in the materialization of the Social Realm. The other, according to Arendt, is

the Galilean revolution. The invention of the telescope and Galileo's epoch-unsettling discoveries abstracted and depersonalized observation, such that knowledge was no longer strictly connected to the immediate experience of the senses (Arendt 237).

The basic components of this historical narrative are definitely true. For the sociologists of the 19th century, the depersonalization of knowledge meant pursuing social problems through the channels of a formalized, scientifically-sound discipline, breaking away from the novelists' "literary" treatment of those problems (Mazlish 138). The maturation of scientific discourses coincided with an effort to delineate social life according to comprehensive, observation-based theories (the backbone of Henry George's profession).

Arendt's survey of Western civilization matches up with Mazlish's picture of nineteenth century: Christianity bringing the sympathetic attitude and the impulse for charity, positivism the confidence to solve social problems with calculation and whirring bureaucracy. Despite the tensions between introspection and objectivity—the rationalism of Descartes, whose contemplations mostly skirted matters of fact, is not very compatible with the empiricism definitive to scientific positivism—and between individualism and social reformism—the sympathetic Protestant businessman is very different from the clinically-minded policy wonk—Arendt identifies in each of her terms a deeper affinity with "world alienation." What individualism, reformism, positivism, and introspection have in common is the abandonment of *action* and classical citizenship in favor of *labour*, biological necessity, and the life process. The concrete manifestations of this are the development of sociology, criminology, psychology, and Henry George's 'political economy' as discrete disciplines that influenced the regulation of bodies and the functioning of administrative apparatuses like the hospital and the state.

Arendt's broad historiography is useful not because it is unimpeachable but because it synthesizes so many prominent narratives about an urbanizing West. The story she is telling is basically the story of the emergence of biopolitics, which is a particular way of thinking about and managing the presence of bodies in public space. Because she is working from an Aristotelian soul/body dichotomy, she identifies body-centeredness as the cause of world alienation. I contend that, rather than attacking the emergence of the body as a public matter, the criticism should lie in the orientation to embodiment that biopolitical systems engrain into our thought processes. Arendt is the victim of a tautology of sorts: her assumption that the body is intrinsically unwelcome in public space renders it welcome, which confirms her assumption. She then attributes this acknowledgement of bodies and biological life to the breakdown of a common world.

I claim that Arendt's concern with the body creeping into the Public and creating the Social should be read as a) an illustration of the unique pressures that an urbanizing landscape put on the body and b) a grievance with the inadequacy of the scientific and professional response to those pressures. Specifically, in scientific positivism there is a failure to reckon with the phenomena that comprise much of the actual experience of living in a city among other individuals. The "common world" that Arendt describes is just the sort of phenomena that is vulnerable to exclusion, because it is comprised of difficult-to-map associations between people and nebulous concepts like plurality and identity. "The polis," Arendt writes, "is not the city-state in its physical location; it is the organization of the people as it arises out of acting and speaking together, and its true space lies between people living together for this purpose, no matter where they happen to be" (Arendt 177). The relations among citizens are substantive,

such that they can be spoken of as a dimension of existence more consequential than physical space. It is the “reality of the world... guaranteed by the presence of others” (Arendt 178).

In Arendt’s theory, this reality consists of *action*, which enables the self-disclosure of the subject and the articulation of their lifeworld. The clearest and seemingly most important example that Arendt provides is speech and storytelling. Speech is a precondition for plurality (in the sense of a group of people with individual identities, as opposed to the undifferentiated mass of bodies of the animal brood or totalitarian state). Through speech, the human being is able to transform his “otherness” into “uniqueness”: “men distinguish themselves instead of being merely distinct” (156). I want to note two things. Firstly: making oneself distinct through speech is an active process. This means that, whatever original stuff initiated the distinctness between people, enunciation is necessary for that distinctness to become uniqueness. Secondly: in Arendt’s theory, individuality only emerges through participation in a community, by distinguishing oneself from the other members; a ritualized connection to other people is a precondition for identity. This agential, relational identity is political subjectivity.

Arendt wrote *The Human Condition* because, in her estimation, something was disrupting the normal process of common world-building. The breakdown of the “common world”—interpreted as spatial and bodily incoherence and overdetermined by the body—was something that late 19th century thinkers were well-attuned to. As Mazlish indicates, the estrangement of people to their society and to their daily lives was possibly the original cardinal topic in sociology—Durkheim calls it *anomie*, Marx *Entfremdung*. In this dissertation, I want to take an oblique approach to alienation by looking at late 19th century scientific epistemes and the literary engagement with them. In the scientific and literary works that I analyze, social alienation is perceived as epistemological confusion, which writers attempt to resolve by tapping

into scientific discourse.⁷ Additionally, that confusion is processed *emotionally* through the orientation of people to bodies and biological life— in other words: the illegibility of social space is interpreted as a body problem.

This is immediately relevant to the grotesque, which is not only deeply concerned with the epistemology of the body but also, in its Bakhtian (positive) and Kayserian (negative) variants, connects to ritualized communal experience and alienation respectively. For this reason, it is the perfect aesthetic for addressing political subjectivity as this dissertation defines it.

If, as I argue, the crisis of political and spatial legibility was also a crisis of the coherence and incorporation of the body, then how corporeal existence is represented in the grotesque matters. In the next sections, I analyze the body as a source of knowledge and its relationship to community and identity and then relate those ideas to the two wings of the grotesque.

Mass Life

Let us take another glance at *The Garden of Earthly Delights*. Predating Enlightenment liberal values, the painting gives no indication of the sense of the individual. Bosch was active at the tail end of the medieval period, and *The Garden of Earthly Delights* is a religious work of art, so it carries with it that religious sense of collectivized life. Collectivity and interdependence were native to feudal society, with populations broken up into three classes— *oratores*, *bellatores*, and *laboratores*; the duties prescribed to each class lead, theoretically, to harmony in their social ecology (Le Goff 256). Outside of the domain of class, the individual was swallowed up by his family— another separate ecological system (Le Goff 280). The word “ecology” is used here to convey the sense of social interdependence. If the forces of individualism in the

⁷ Alternatively, some writers (e.g. Crane, Chesnutt) take the occasion to problematize this very process of resolution.

modern era broke up this pervading sense of interdependence, leading ironically (in Arendt's telling) to the destruction of true pluralism, it also disrupted the body as a source of communal experience in the overflowing, pre-Reformation, effluvia-filled sense. Some of the Renaissance experiments with creatural realism that Bakhtin looks to (e.g. Rabelais, DaVinci's caricatures) entail a partial secularization of this form of knowledge— in this strain of humanism, the experience of corporeal embodiment is an important phenomenon in and of itself.

In Bahktin's celebration of the communal aspects of the body, there is a partial challenge to Arendt's model of public space. It is possible to build a community out of bodies, though maybe not *only* bodies; the real sin of biopolitics is not the incorporation of the body into public space but the alienation of the social actor from the body— under the medical or sociological gaze, it is treated as foreign and hostile. The common world, as a network of common associations and connections between people, is not made up merely of speech and culture, reductively conceived, but also of ritualistic practices with a bodily component: common feasts common excrement, common suffering.

I believe that it is important to invoke the pre-modern and very-early-modern to denaturalize or make newly strange some resilient modern categories: the individual, the fact, the crowd. Whatever the attitudes were towards masses of people in the Late Middle Ages, by nineteenth century swarms of human bodies were (according to commentators of the time) absent any trace of community or organized assembly. Population centers were regarded with dubiousness and fear. Two features of the writing dedicated to population centers give some indication of the 19th century view of how urban centers negatively affected subjectivity in ways that directly involved the body:

Firstly: cities were disorienting and disruptive to the individual. In “On Some Motifs in Baudelaire” (1939), Walter Benjamin theorizes that the first encounters with urban throngs of activity were met with anxious incomprehension. Flooded with stimuli, overwhelmed by the “amorphous mass” of bodies milling about, pressed together, jostling off of one another, the bourgeois subject⁸ is perpetually in an agitated state (166). This picture of the city resembles one end of Henry George’s unwholesome extremes. Where George was concerned with a poverty of ‘social stimulus’ in the depleted countryside, the concentrated population of the city is overstimulated to the point of numbness. Benjamin suggests a breakdown of social relations from too much contact, too many “shocks and collisions”: “The feeling of being dependent on others, which used to be kept alive by need, is gradually blunted in the smooth functioning of the social mechanism” (175, 174). What Benjamin describes is a kind of emptying-out of the Public Realm, wherein social interactions are replaced by reflexes and defensive reactions to torrents of stimuli acting on the body.

While Benjamin might be accused of historical revisionism or an overly poetical rereading of 19th century documents, American literary naturalism supports his use of a psychological-neurological vocabulary. The late 19th century being the age of professionalization and medicalization, the writers of that time were eager to describe the nervous conditions arise from modern life, manifested as an environmentally conditioned mental passivity and an attending physical degeneration. The illegibility of social space translates physically into the individual’s decline into a corrupted, disorganized biological form; this affects a person’s subjectivity by reducing them to a body and robbing them of the ability to

⁸ Thanks to its over-casual and ahistorical usage in some Marxist activism, the term “bourgeoisie” has lost much of its specificity. Unless otherwise indicated, in this dissertation the term refers not just to the “haves” of an economic system but to the social class that rose to prominence towards the end of the Late Middle Ages and replaced the aristocracy as the culturally-dominant political group.

make willful decisions. Benjamin sees in the flaneur an attempt to produce a heightened and critical distance from the city to acquire epistemological mastery over it; I suggest that the other side of the forces that produce the distant observer are the processes that cause the observer to disintegrate. The clinical distance of the observer and the numbness— to borrow a phrase from Wordsworth, the “savage torpor”⁹— of the alienated city-dweller spring from the same raw materials. This instability between mastery and mindless immersion is a major problematic in literary naturalism.

Secondly: cities created discombobulated masses of people— a disorganized frenzy sometimes called “the crowd.” Understanding and managing the crowd became a point of concern for 19th century social thinkers. The signature example is Gustave Le Bon’s 1895 *The Crowd: A Study of the Popular Mind*. Le Bon believed that the structures of civilizations are determined by the ideas of its people, which are historically-contingent and evolve over time. In *The Crowd*, Le Bon puts forth the notion that his civilization’s current period was one of “transition and anarchy,” “one of those critical moments in which the thought of mankind is undergoing a process of transformation” (Le Bon). The crucial thought formation for nineteenth century was ‘crowd psychology’— the subsumption of the individual into an impulsive, irritable, irrational mob, which also rejected the authority of state actors and legal procedure (Le Bon). An

⁹ In his study of the Anglo-American tradition of the flaneur, *The Spectator and the City in nineteenth-century American Literature* (1991), Dana Brand claims that the figure of the flaneur is tied up in a landscape and a form of crowd behavior unique to the experience of modernity. Brand points out that William Wordsworth gives voice to the anxieties about this landscape and form of behavior in the preface to the second edition of *Lyrical Ballads* (1800) when he (Wordsworth) identifies the “accumulation of men in cities” with a culture of spectacle and a new, passive kind of consciousness that eschews the pursuits of the past that required the full mental engagement of the subject (quoted in Brand 3). The mental life of human beings is “reduced to a ‘savage torpor’” (Brand 4). In Wordsworth, urbanization causes people to lose the cultural distinctions that endow human beings with the dignity separating them from the lower forms of life. The passive form of consciousness is organized around immediate consumption of stimuli, with no time spared for reflection on meaning. With the emphasis on ‘passive’ and ‘active’ ways of interacting with one’s environment, Wordsworth seems to view contemplation of meaning as a way of asserting one’s agency over one’s surroundings.

approximation of this idea appears in Arendt's theory of social space when she describes the masses of a totalitarian state (which requires a Social Realm entirely evacuated of individuality) as mere "bundles of reactions" (Arendt *Origins* 438) Again, the language of disorganized nervous responses rears its head. Here Arendt is probably influenced by the behaviorist school of psychology, which in turn borrows heavily from Darwinian evolution. The idea of a social devolution towards a brutal, atavistic state, dominated by biological necessity, is a feature of social science and political writing of both the late 19th and early 20th century. The tendency to 'biologize' social change (i.e. to describe social phenomena as natural biological processes) makes urbanization seem like a threat to subjectivity (or, at least, the kind of subjectivity that pits the soul against the body). The density of sweating, breathing bodies packed together presents a constant animal reminder, and the nervous agitation associated with so much stimulus leads to a 'savage' state of mind.

The writers and theorists of mass life are still talking about alienation, but it has become body centered. With this as a starting point, there are at least two possible responses to the intrusion of corporeal life into social space. The first is disgust: a response of revulsion to abject organic matter. The relationship of disgust to subjectivity is made clear in Julia Kristeva's theory of abjection.

In *Powers of Horror* (1980), Kristeva describes the abject as that which is expelled from the subject in the process of identity formation; abjection is a "narcissistic crisis" that "appears in order to uphold 'I' within the Other": "There, I am at the border of my condition as a living being. My body extricates itself, as being alive, from that border" (14, 15). Abject substances are a) always organic and b) always threaten the boundaries of the body via contamination, corruption, or defilement. The threat to the internal physical integrity of the body is therefore

perceived, according to Kristeva, as a threat to identity. In her telling, a human being constructs her individuality through the building of a wall between her self-conception and an expansive otherness, which is tinged with death. Though it might seem intuitive, consciousness and self-perception do not necessarily have to be conceived of in this way— the way of the ego. Kristeva is ultimately repeating the political refrain that subjectivity is diametrically opposed to the mortal body.¹⁰

In any event, disgust is *affective*, meaning, as this chapter previously established, that it is not only an emotional response but an expression of a subject's emotional orientation to an object. Disgust as an affect creates space for symbolism that informs the identity of the subject. Disgusting matter disgusts because it threatens the integrity of the subject. What is coded as disgusting varies from culture to culture, dependent upon any given culture's symbolic systems. In the context of the 19th century in the West, foreign organic material encroaches on and destabilizes social space. Public 'animal reminders' stoke a fear of contamination and loss of one's subjectivity through the possibility of their reduction to a mere body. The Kayserian negative grotesque body, as a disorganized body, is simply an amplification of this fear; its disorganization and liminality are an intensified version of the incoherence and illegibility that lies on the other side of the golden barrier.

The other possible response to mass life is an effort to embrace disorganized flesh and treat it as evidence of communal life. This response hinges on the acceptance of and identification with the shared humanity that public corporeality bequeaths. Because it runs

¹⁰ Though disgust is an evolutionary trait exhibited by all sorts of animals that we normally consider to lack human-like sentience, in Kristeva the revulsion to filth is poeticized as a rejection of death itself. Certainly some core disgust responses— involving foods, waste products, creepy crawlies, and tryphobia-triggering patterns— seem like automatic stimulus avoidance mechanisms that do not require an (even unconscious) awareness of death (Olatunji, et al 1243). In fairness to Kristeva, contemporary scientific theories of disgust are not bio-reductionist, and there is room for disgust responses elicited by socio-moral or otherwise psychological configurations (Olatunji, et al 1244).

against the literal gut reaction to organic matter, this identification is unstable. Frequently, communities based on common flesh fails to fully realize itself before sliding back towards abjection. The precarity of the positive recuperation of organic matter is illustrated by the liminality at the heart of the Bakhtinian celebration, which arguably derives some of its pleasure from its flirtation with putrescence and death. The same spirit infuses still life paintings: the fragility of a fruit's ripeness reminds the viewer that what is savored will soon give way to rot. This suggests that the second response to mass life is always partial, incomplete, or doomed to failure, and indeed that is what is confirmed by the texts that dare to entertain it.

To exemplify these two responses to mass life, I am coming back to the shrieking highway pigs of my adolescence to talk about Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle* (1906). *The Jungle* is not a pure, fully-fledged naturalist text— it is first and foremost a protest novel, weighed down at the back end by a lengthy manifesto put in the mouths of some socialist organizer characters— but it engages with concepts that are the meat and potatoes of naturalism. Its journalistic examination of the lower classes, aimed at sussing out the logic of social systems (explicitly: the logic of capitalism), places it well within the territory of naturalism's mechanistic explanations of social processes. Additionally, its focus on the lower classes (it functions as a sort of exposé into the lives of the poor for a middle class audience) leads it towards creatural realism, since the class issues it points to relate directly to the body: the horribly dangerous and polluted living and working conditions, the struggle with hunger and exhaustion, and a certain fetishization of proletarian brawn and proletarian appetites. Because their lives are more precariously lived, lower class characters in the fiction of the late 19th and early 20th century are depicted as being

closer to the wrong side of the golden barrier¹¹ (i.e. closer to ‘nature’). In *The Jungle*, eighteen-year-old Ona lies awake at night, “afraid of the beating of her own heart, fronting the blood-red eyes of the old primeval terror of life” (Sinclair 153). A Schopenhauerian primeval energy flows underneath the surface of a naturalist text, an energy that reveals itself with the right environmental or behavioral trigger. One common trigger is alcohol; Sinclair’s hearty Lithuanian protagonist Jurgis has his primitive force awakened when he drinks: “the wild beast rose up within him and screamed, as it has screamed in the jungle from the dawn of time” (Sinclair 147).

The Jungle is a good introduction to these ideas because the novel’s subject matter makes clear the relationship of those ideas to mass life and the aesthetics of the grotesque. The setting of the meat processing plant perfectly combines the era’s concern with the disintegration of the social fabric with nausea and on-the-nose imagery of disorganized flesh. Though it makes up a relatively small portion of the book, the descriptions of the handling of the meat at the Union Stock Yards have significant allegorical power that cuts to the center of the novel as a whole. Two passages about meat processing are particularly relevant to this dissertation’s exploration of mass life, epistemology, and the relationship between the coherence of the social realm and the construction of political subjectivity. Jurgis’s mother-in-law Elzbieta works in a factory that manufactures sausages:

[T]here was never the least attention paid to what was cut up for sausage; there would come all the way back from Europe old sausage that had been rejected, and that was moldy and white—it would be dosed with borax and glycerine, and dumped into the hoppers, and made over again for home consumption. There

¹¹ While the purpose of highlighting the dehumanization of the lower class (and of recent immigrants and other marginalized peoples) may be to elicit sympathy and call for action, this trope also has the potential to be dehumanizing and Othering in a way that excuses racism.

would be meat that had tumbled out on the floor, in the dirt and sawdust, where the workers had tramped and spit uncounted billions of consumption germs. There would be meat stored in great piles in rooms; and the water from leaky roofs would drip over it, and thousands of rats would race about on it. It was too dark in these storage places to see well, but a man could run his hand over these piles of meat and sweep off handfuls of the dried dung of rats. These rats were nuisances, and the packers would put poisoned bread out for them; they would die, and then rats, bread, and meat would go into the hoppers together... Such were the new surroundings in which Elzbieta was placed, and such was the work she was compelled to do. It was stupefying, brutalizing work; it left her no time to think, no strength for anything. She was part of the machine she tended, and every faculty that was not needed for the machine was doomed to be crushed out of existence. There was only one mercy about the cruel grind—that it gave her the gift of insensibility. Little by little she sank into a torpor—she fell silent. (Sinclair 151-2)

The sausage-making process is an *incarnation* of the stress placed on an observer's power of discernment. The sausage meat is a nightmare of confusion and liminality, turning many cuts of meat into one lake of flesh, blending food with waste, and mixing the organic with the industrial. The sausage piles are a manifestation of the problem of legibility presented by the city at large. It is an interesting case of epistemological anxiety because the lack of differentiation doubles as biological hazard. As strategy of the text, this acts as a disgust response to mass life delivered through negative grotesque imagery.

The passage also encourages Marxist alienation to be read alongside the grotesquery, such that Elzbieta's transformation is an extension of the grotesque meat-mangling process. Elzbieta is stupefied, induced into a savage torpor brought on by repetition and cacophony. Her mental blankness is part of what threatens her subjectivity, for her actions are stripped of volition. In naturalist texts, the numbing of the mind or the damaging of the nervous system is often staged as an actual devolution of the individual into a corrupted or otherwise degenerative state. Sinclair is attuned to the effect of alienating labour on the body. Characters are left in conditions of semi-permanent fatigue: Jurgis's huge sturdy body is left gaunt after a series of accidents and intensive unwholesome labour. The blade-filled working environment threatens the borders of the body—a nasty cut to the hand opens the door for a “deadly contagion” with a disabling effect (Sinclair 12). I read Elzbieta's mental deterioration as her becoming more liminal herself; as her mind evacuates, she becomes both more animal and more mechanical. The fusion of Elzbieta with the machine that she tends converts her into another kind of grotesque body; in later chapters, I develop the concept of the *mechanical grotesque*—a variety of the Kayserian grotesque, it is the aesthetic of a form of deterioration into senseless, automatic processes that renders the subject illegible.

The next passage that I would like to highlight features more slop being mixed together, this time to make canned beef:

It seemed that [Antanas Rudkus] was working in the room where the men prepared the beef for canning, and the beef had lain in vats full of chemicals, and men with great forks speared it out and dumped it into trucks, to be taken to the cooking room. When they had speared out all they could reach, they emptied the vat on the floor, and then with shovels scraped up the balance and dumped it into

the truck. This floor was filthy, and they set Antanas with his mop slopping the 'pickle' into a hole that connected with a sink, where it was caught and used over again forever; and if that were not enough, there was a trap in the pipe, where all the scraps of meat and odds and ends of refuse were caught, and every few days it was the old man's task to clean these out, and shovel their contents into one of the trucks with the rest of the meat. (Sinclair 67)

The new element that this scene adds to descriptions of meat processing is a kind of systematic regurgitation: a symbolic disruption of the boundaries of the body as intake and outtake orifices become fused and alimentary and waste systems (oral/anal, or consumptive/emetic/excretory) are combined.

Sinclair's book is remembered most strongly for having inspired the Federal Meat Inspection Act of 1906, despite the fact that its message centered on workers' rights, anti-corruption, and tenement reform. While Sinclair might have intended to arouse sympathy or righteous indignation, he had only managed to elicit disgust. My framework reveals that the readership's disgust response and the novel's social critique are not as far apart as they seem. borrow from naturalist aesthetics, which use the grotesque as a way of depicting the experience of the disintegration of the subject in broken social space. From an Arendtian perspective, the transition from the traditional slaughterhouse manned by the aproned butcher before a wooden platter to the concrete abattoir, which is indistinguishable on the outside from any other factory, is evidence of the decline of the "common world" and the changing role of the human body to social space.

As it did with many other traditional occupations, the Industrial Revolution depersonalized the meat industry, alienating the meat cutter from the carcasses he carved.

An Arendtian model of the meat industry is not necessarily an agrarian one, wherein people slice the throats of family steer; it is only important that the work that goes into meat processing preserves the authentic cultural value of the craft and the product. It is this authenticity that renders social space intelligible as the ‘common world’ by allowing the butcher to identify their actions with a shared sense of cultural meaning.¹² Butchering was once an artisanal process that demanded a wealth of specialized technical skills. Over the course of about one hundred years, the demands of urban life converted it from a vertically integrated craft into a technology of the assembly line (if one wants to be cute about it, a disassembly line). Railways and refrigeration enabled animals to be killed and shipped hundreds of miles to their final destination (Swatland 82). Machine saws multiplied the number of livestock that could be prepared in a single facility and removed much of the artistry from the butcher’s craft (Swatland 83). In short, the butchering process was degraded into endless anonymous labour that eliminated the necessity of the fully formed citizen.

In *The Jungle*, the alienation of the laborer in the meat industry takes on a visceral component— rejection of the labour manifests itself as disgust and abjection. This is the affect and experiential quality of the text. The combination of fragmented or alienated subjectivity and horrified disgusted in the presence of disorganized flesh are the primary ingredients of the negative, Kayserian grotesque seen in literary naturalism.

Sinclair’s book also contains some examples of the recuperative, positive grotesque. With all the attention put on bad sausage, it gets forgotten that *The Jungle* begins with a wedding banquet. Feast scenes provide a great occasion to put a positive Bakhtinian corpulence on

¹² As a reminder of the vocabulary that is important to this normative model of society-building: acts that contribute to cultural infrastructure are *work*, whereas acts that lead only to immediate and non-reflective consumption are *labour*. I consider traditional artisanal processes to constitute *work* in this sense.

display. It is not just that the wedding is a show of abundance; Sinclair's narrator stresses the culturo-historical significance of the feast as a ritual, which is called by its Lithuanian name: *veselija*. The Lithuanian characters of *The Jungle* "cannot give up the *veselija*" because it is a connection to a common bucolic past (Sinclair 13). Sinclair has a tendency to exoticize his Baltic cast, portraying them as runaways from quasi-mythical forest villages in Eastern Europe.¹³ Their status as outsiders from beyond urban American society (literally from another place and figuratively from another time) establishes them as a source for an alternative styles of social interaction and communal bonding. The power of the *veselija* is in its ability to conjure a timeless metaphysical Eastern Europe: "Chicago and its saloons and its slums fade away; there are green meadows and sunlit rivers, mighty forests and snow-clad hills" (7). However ethereal it might seem, this conjuration is drawn from the living, sweating mass of bodies at the wedding. In the midst of the bodies, two figures stick out as especially evocative of the sort of Rabelaisian euphoria that Bakhtin had in mind: "Among [the crowd] are Jokubas Szedvilas and his wife Lucija, who together keep the delicatessen store, and consume nearly as much as they sell; they are too fat to dance, but they stand in the middle of the floor, holding each other fast in their arms, rocking slowly from side to side and grinning seraphically, a picture of toothless and perspiring ecstasy" (Sinclair 10). These emblems of corpulent abundance link flesh to the common world brewed from the *veselije*: the passage associates their bulk and their bodily effluvia with religious language (seraphim, ecstasy), and they run a traditional meat-monger

¹³ This exoticization is on full display, for example, whenever Sinclair discusses the Lithuanian language. Guessing as to why a Home, Sweet Home sign isn't translated into Lithuanian, the narrator proposes: "Perhaps the translator found it a difficult matter to be sentimental in a language in which a sob is known as a 'gukcziojimas' and a smile as a 'nuszypsojimas'" (Sinclair 49). This little editorial aside— why, by the way, does not give a completely accurate translation— is leaning on an English speaker's aesthetic sense. The smorgasbord of sibilants and unfamiliar roots in Urdic languages is being used here to underscore the idea that Lithuanians are hardier, earthier people. This contributes to the sense by the author that they are somehow anachronous, belonging to a different time and place.

operation, which makes them symbols of consumption, yes, but consumption of a more wholesome variety than the kind facilitated by Packingtown.

I compare the veselija to moments in Norris's *The Octopus* that offer a more tender treatment of mass life. The glimmer of spirituality present in the description of the rancher Vanamee's mangled sheep is much more positive in the moments before the locomotive slaughter. Before their evisceration, they are already depicted as an undifferentiated mound of organic matter: "It was no longer an aggregate of individuals. It was a mass— a compact, solid, slowly moving mass, huge, without form, like a thick-pressed growth of mushrooms, spreading out in all directions over the earth" (Norris 31) The rhizomatic description of the sheep reverberates strongly with the pathos of an Whitmanesque transcendentalism, with mammalian bodies taking the place of the uncut hair of graves. Vanamee identifies so strongly and positively with this form of mass life that he claims to have eco-psychic powers: "We don't understand these things yet. There are times when, if I close my eyes and dig my fists into my temples, I can hold the entire herd for perhaps a minute" (33). This holistic, interactionist view of selfhood opposes the kind of isolating individualism that Arendt rails against and posits the existence of a connective primeval energy. Later, Vanamee finds a similar pleasure in a crowd of working men eating their lunch: "one heard the incessant sounds of mastication, and saw the uninterrupted movement of great jaws... But in all this scene Vanamee saw nothing repulsive. Presley would have abhorred it— this feeding of the People, this gorging of the human animal, eager for its meat. Vanamee, simple, uncomplicated, living so close to nature and the rudimentary life, understood its significance" (132). Moments like these, which emphasize human being's creatural qualities, promote a positive account of the natural through an imagined past—

comparable to Sinclair's timeless Lithuania: "back again to the starting point of civilisation, coarse, vital, real, and sane" (Norris O 133).

The Importance of American Literary Naturalism

A lot of recent literary criticism and political theory is occupied with the challenge to recuperate things that are threatening or unpleasant or oppressive. One prominent version of the challenge comes from Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *Touching Feeling* (2002), in which Sedgwick asks that scholars and activists move beyond paranoid readings of culture and adopt a more positive, recuperative mode (143-4). In *The Limits of Critique* (2015), Rita Felski observes that scholars posture themselves as though they were a detective decoding hidden messages buried in the text (or, more negatively, a diagnostician sifting through a text for symptoms of a pathology). This process, Felski goes on to claim, distracts from other possible ways of viewing a text, including the immersive mode in which many works of fiction were originally intended to be enjoyed (14-6).

On the political front, activists and philosophers are writing about strategies for reclaiming their bodies from biopolitical systems that exploit or harm them. Adrienne Maree Brown's *Pleasure Activism* (2019) proposes an array of ways to make 'feeling good' part of social justice— an approach that is perhaps indebted to the emphasis on *jouissance* within Hélène Cixous's feminist theory and the queer theory of Lee Edelman and Leo Bersani. More germane to this dissertation, Judith Butler asks in *Notes Towards a Performance Theory of Assembly* (2015) how bodies might eke out a place within social space that is affirmative of identity and belonging. Martha C. Nussbaum, from whose work on disgust and abjection this

dissertation borrows, argues forcefully in *The Monarchy of Fear* (2018) for a politics based on the affect of hope and the renewal of humanism through art (221).

I am struck by the extent to which these efforts map onto the naturalists' experiments with the grotesque. In the fiction of the 1890s and early 20th century, there is this same propensity to wrangle with the paranoid and recuperative visions of the world— more exactly: the paranoid and recuperative visions of nature and the mortal body. We have seen how Sinclair and Norris slide between the two: tangles of bodies and masses of flesh, first read positively, become corrupted and horrible. This precarity is a major quality of literary naturalism's engagement with the grotesque: there is an essential instability to the positive version of the grotesque that always render it momentary, partial, or incomplete. The struggle is familiar not only from the efforts of contemporary scholars but from existentialist philosophy. The creatural realism of literary naturalism is vital and worth examining because it is a spot where the negotiations between competing epistemological frameworks encounter very intimate problems of selfhood.

Far from being an arbitrarily-chosen cultural artifact, American literary naturalism is an important object of study because it is a point of convergence for modern and premodern modes of knowledge and articulates, in all of its variations, strong stances on the loss, recovery, or preservation of political subjectivity in the advent of a perceived intensified focus on the body and biological life within social space. The chapters that follow are case studies into the ways that the grotesque is utilized by the practitioners of American literary naturalism, with two related focal points:

- 1) experimentation with scientific discourse and literary techniques to synthesize original models of knowledge that define naturalism's peculiar take on realism. The authors

whose work this dissertation explores all worked in some capacity as journalists and, more importantly to their status as naturalists, engaged through their stories, essays, sketches, and novels with the professional discourses of their time (e.g. sociology, psychology), which were heavily influenced by Darwinian and Lamarckian theories of evolution and preoccupied with biology and the body. Naturalism's use of the grotesque is a means to incorporate insights from the sciences in a more immersive and creaturely real way that felt more authentic and truer to its readers than abstract statistics could.

- 2) the incorporation of the category of the natural into the self-image of the subject. I argue that the two varieties of the grotesque—the negative grotesque of the abject Other or the positive grotesque of fleshy wholeness—correspond to two ways of viewing the relationship between corporeality and subjectivity. The varieties of the grotesque indicate one of two orientations of the self towards the environment that highlight the struggle to reconcile selfhood with corporeality. The positive grotesque achieves identification between self and body, conquering alienation by replacing the soul/body dualism with a more fluid paradigm of self. The negative grotesque does not fully resolve the conflict—when applied to the self, it expresses a loss of coherence; when projected onto the Other, it reasserts individuality and the coherence of the self by disidentifying with and disassociating from the body.

Chapter Two details how Stephen Crane's short stories, novellas, and sketches negotiate between two epistemological modes—the scientific gaze and immersive realism. With a combination of Crane's impressionistic innovations and the self-conscious trading of sociological "type" with literary trope, the texts encourage skepticism about the category of the fact and suggest the importance of incorporating lived experience into models of the social world

if both the world and the self are to remain legible. The importance of affect and aesthetics to Crane's texts can be seen as a comment on the need for a sense of belonging that sociology alone does not satisfy. Crane's experiments with the grotesque entail scenes of ritualized symbolic unification among bodies— hungry proletarian bodies sleeping together and bodies at war— but the precarity of such unification is underlined by the fleetingness of its effect on the characters and the haunting possibility of a decline into a more negatively-coded grotesque. Ultimately, Crane's doubt always wins out.

Chapter Three examines how Frank Norris's grotesque is integral to his interpretation the medical image of the body, sticking mainly to *McTeague* (1899) and *Vandover and the Brute* (1914). Norris participates in what I call the *mechanical grotesque*, slightly previewed in this chapter by Elzbieta's nervous exhaustion, in which a literal degeneration and devolution to a more primitive state takes place in response to unnatural behavior patterns, diminishing the subject's agency and compromising the integrity of their body. Norris's grotesque allows theories of social Darwinism and Lombrosian criminology to be understood experientially: alienation and anomie becomes mixed up with the disgust response. Through its study of degenerative atavism— a reduction to a more primitive state that is negatively coded— the texts reveal the possibility of an 'unnatural natural' that justifies the subject's feeling of abjection.

Finally, Chapter Four discusses literary naturalist texts penned by authors from marginalized social groups. Because the outgroups of the 19th century were often associated with the natural in a denigrating fashion and made to feel the brunt of racist and sexist pseudo-scientific beliefs about their bodies, the experiences of the marginalized are incredibly important to literary naturalism, which is centrally concerned with the category of the natural, the experience of embodiment, and the role of bodies in social space. First, I argue that reading

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" as a naturalist grotesque reveals the connection between it and her eugenics-tinged essays of the 20th century. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's work critiques the impossible place of women in the domestic domain by portraying it as a grotesque 'unnatural natural' liminal space that has a degenerative effect on women that is similar to the degeneration seen in Norris.

Secondly, I analyze Charles Chesnutt's subversion of the racial grotesque and related popular tropes about race. Challenging the hegemonic desire for an all-encompassing gaze, Chesnutt infuses his work with heteroglossia and epistemological pluralism. The illegibility of black perspectives and performances to white audiences is used to the benefit of black characters in their efforts to reassert agency. Acutely conscious of the constructedness of history and sociological narratives, Chesnutt turns degeneration theory and the negative grotesque on its head by redefining undemocratic, non-egalitarian, aristocratic social structures as primitive. By adopting and adapting a Frank Norris-style narrative of decline and casting social inequalities as the major source of atavism and grotesquery, Chesnutt successfully creates an alternative way of viewing historical and evolutionary progress that justifies his political agenda.

God fashioned the ship of the world carefully.
With the infinite skill of an all-master
Made He the hull and the sails,
Held He the rudder
Ready for adjustment
Erect stood He, scanning His work proudly.
Then—at fateful time—a wrong called,
And God turned, heeding.
Lo, the ship, at this opportunity, slipped slyly,
Making cunning noiseless travel down the ways.
So that, forever rudderless, it went upon the seas
Going on ridiculous voyages,
Making quaint progress,
Turning as with serious purpose
Before stupid winds.
And there were many in the sky
Who laughed at this thing.

—Stephen Crane, from *The Black Riders and Other Lines* (1895)

Chapter Two:
The Skeptic:
Heteroglossia and Negotiating Epistemological Frameworks in Stephen Crane

Introduction

In the pages that follow, I explore the epistemological tug-of-war inside literary naturalism via the fiction of Stephen Crane. First, I describe in the conflict between two competing epistemological modes— the Celestial Eye (or scientific gaze) and a suffused, immersive realism— and explain how Crane continually moves back and forth between them. After analyzing the heteroglossia of Crane’s fiction, which points to a) an awareness of the constructedness and discourse-dependency of the real world and b) the social function of discursive frames, I explain the intellectual justification for the combination of sociological and literary knowledge that literary naturalism attempts to create, which I argue outlines strategies for reclaiming agency and acquiring self-knowledge through extra-rational experiential means.

To this end, I offer a description of the impact of suffused realism on subjectivity by exploring the idea of the positive grotesque through concepts about space and self taken from Henri Lefebvre.

In Chapter One, I claimed that urbanization and explosions in population created for the upper class the impression of a crisis of intelligibility and a pressing need to restore order to the social milieu through methodological observation. Crane's oeuvre engages with the bourgeois nineteenth-century crisis of intelligibility in two ways: 1) many of his stories provide a criticism of the function of social systems that are dependent on the legibility of individual subjects, and 2) those stories are descriptive projects aimed at legibility that nonetheless confess a skepticism about the extent to which positivistic description can lead to understanding. This chapter focuses on the latter (the former is taken up in Chapter Four alongside interpretations of Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Charles Chesnutt).

I argue that Crane's fiction imitates and parodies nineteenth-century forms of fact-finding genres—the sociological study and the newspaper article—to demonstrate a) the dependency of empiricist fact-finding missions on literary conventions and b) the real consequences of fictions for social behavior. "Maggie: A Girl of the Streets" (1895) is a quasi-sociological study of its chosen social issues, interrogating class and the politics of respectability. I read "Maggie" and several of Crane's other urban sketches as laying bare the instability of the sociological image of society and the necessity of literary techniques in the making of reality—both in the sense of representing the actual universe in all of its variety and in the sense of fictions determining social outcomes by structuring perception and (through that perception) the architecture or grammar of social possibilities.

An argument implicit in Crane's literary makeover of sociological and journalistic tropes is that extra-rational styles of knowing need to be used if one is to understand how social systems work. His stories hash out the tensions between an aerial-perspective sociological gaze and phenomenological experience. The negotiations between these two views lead to an epistemology comparable to the one driving the Freudian case study, which combines the professional-grade diagnostic rigor with a poetical handling of personal mental life and individual history. In "An Experiment in Misery" (1894) and "Death and the Child" (1897) Crane's prose strongly departs from quotidian realism in an effort to represent the phenomenological nature of the relationship between the individual and his environment. This has consequences for the politics of the text in terms of affective geography. In the final phase of this chapter, I relate Crane's hybrid epistemology to Henri Lefebvre's concepts of conceived space (*le conçu*) and lived space (*le vécu*), which helps elucidate Crane's position on countering alienation and retaining identity in dehumanizing circumstances.

The Celestial Eye and its Rivals

Fritz Lang's *M* (1931) depicts the manhunt for a child murderer. The authorities first resort to techniques arising from new organizational technologies and a modernistic bureaucratic ethos. The aerial cartographical view of Berlin represents their attempts to systematize their search. Their methods rest on a positivist epistemological framework that assumes that all is discoverable through enough rigor. Through the aerial map, an imagined Celestial Eye¹⁴ scans

¹⁴ I plucked the Celestial Eye from Michel de Certeau's *The Practice of Everyday Life* (1980). De Certeau discusses the habit of Medieval and Renaissance painters to produce bird's eye view representations of cities before the technical capacity for such perspectives existed: "This fiction already made the medieval spectator into a celestial eye" (92). De Certeau reminds us that such fictions, far from being relegated to the past, are a common, perhaps hegemonically dominant way of seeing: "The 1370 foot Tower that serves as a proud for Manhattan continues to construct the fiction that creates readers, makes the complexity of the city readable, and immobilizes its opaque mobility in a transparent text" (92). In this description, an extra-human perspective seems necessary for city space to

over the city as a detached and objective observer (0:18:56). The child killer is only apprehended once more local and less objective knowledge repertoires are utilized. The coordination of efforts between police and streetwise criminals heightens the search, but the breakthrough occurs when a blind vagrant recognizes the tune that the killer whistles as he stalks his victims (0:59:16). The contrast between the epistemological frameworks of the police— exhaustive, panoptical, but distant in view— and the vagrant— literally unseeing, but with access to a local knowledge base that is impossible to acquire abstractly— parallels the conflict between scientific and literary forms of knowledge that I examine in this chapter. *M* is an especially poignant introduction to this conflict because its content closely resembles the subject matter of Stephen Crane's urban tales.

Parallel to the spatial mapping of the city are the different approaches to mapping the body that developed from the early sixteenth to the late nineteenth-century. Early realistic anatomical drawings— illustrations of the body that were interested in capturing the body in its earthly ordinariness— are characterized by poetical flourishes suggestive of the interwovenness of scientific understanding and Christian conceptions of embodiment and corporeal knowledge. Juan Valverde de Amusco's depictions of human anatomy in *Anatomio del cuerpo humano* (1560) are extremely visceral and macabre: a vivisectionist standing over a cadaver has his own rib cage pulled back, revealing a common humanity with his object of study; a flayed man holds up and ogles his own skin, a dagger in his other hand. Almost two centuries later, working alongside a surgeon, anatomist painter Jacques Fabien Gautier d'Agoty created plates for a popular audience that were informed by similar creaturely real sensibilities. D'Agoty's "Flayed Angel" from *Myologie complete en couleur et grandeur naturelle* (1746) blurs the line between

be readable. It imposes an illusion of stillness and immobility over what is, at ground-level, a circus of activity and difficult-to-process stimuli.

scientific observation and expressionistic interpretation. The pulled-back latissimus dorsi sticks out mythically to one side like a salmon filet wing. The harsh color contrasts were directly inspired by Bosch's Christian panel paintings; they then, in turn, influenced Vincent Van Gogh (Rifkin, et al 56).

These renderings of the body stand in stark contrast to the illustrations prepared by Henry Vandyke Carter for Henry Gray's *Gray's Anatomy* (1856), which are the epitome of modern clinical representation: the body parts are usually isolated from the whole, presented in intricate but unemotive and lifeless detail, the images constantly interrupted by labels. The clear differences in the illustrators' philosophies of representation of bodies demonstrates a transformation of the sciences in the 19th century towards the still-dominant positivist objectivity, which complements the desire for mastery and standardization of the 'textbook generation' of scientific professionals. The technical precision of these illustrations is superior, but something is lost in the process of objectification. Analogous to the Berlin police's inability to acquire the detailed street smart knowledge of the blind pauper in *M*, a sterile and clinically-minded understanding of the body misses out on the extra-rational varieties of knowledge that are part of the experience of embodiment and that Amusco and d'Agaty both tried to convey.

In these examples different modes of knowing the world compete with one another for primacy, whether the object of study is social space or the physical body. Stuck between the literariness of literature and the discourse of the sciences, literary naturalist texts fight to work through this conflict. Competing modes of knowledge define their approach to representation. A good introduction to the dialectics of epistemology found in literary naturalism is *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895) by sultan of ambiguity Stephen Crane. Nearly every moment of *The Red Badge of Courage* is a jambalaya of misinformation, partial information, and uncertainty. To

start with: the plot itself revolves around its main character's disillusionment. A consequence of his practical experience with warfare is that Henry must disabuse himself of romance in favor of the ordinary. Ordinarity in this text is the boredom and monotony of the soldiering life that penetrates into the form of the text itself when Henry recalls his mother's words of farewell. Instead of romantic swooning, his mother sticks to socks and jam and the importance of reading the Bible, which is the first of Henry's disappointments: "He had, of course, been impatient under the ordeal of this speech. It had not been quite what he expected, and he had borne it with an air of irritation" (Crane RBC 179). Here Crane interrupts his own narrative with a long, rather dull monologue about routine self-maintenance, which is the stuff of real life. The hyperbole of "ordeal" only places further emphasis on the quotidian quality of the mother's speech. The irony is also typical of the narrator's commentary on Henry's life events. The mother's intrusion into Henry's fantasy and Henry's annoyance is among the first indications from the text that we, the reader, should know better than him. Henry's imaginings of a "Greeklike struggle" are undercut by the plodding and confused nature of actual warfare—endless marching and preparations that most of the time lead to nothing and nowhere, "an irritating prolongation" that parallels his irritation with his mother's un-dramatic goodbye, followed by bursts of incomprehensible violence (Crane RBC 180). The narrator emphasizes the epic bits of Henry's war vocabulary for the purposes of immediately contradicting it and revealing it to be delusion.

Much of the rest of the story is devoted to networks of misinformation on the ground level and the chaos of war. The troops are swept up in "the noise of rumors" (Crane RBC 173). Hearsay and arguments about battle plans consume all conversation. Henry himself is the victim of this: "He was swelled with a tale he had heard from a reliable friend, who had heard it from a truthful cavalryman, who had heard it from his trustworthy brother, one of the orderlies at

division headquarters” (Crane RBC 173). The heightened language of the mythic, epic conflict is itself shown to be a result of rumor, as when veteran soldiers assure Henry of the reality of “tremendous bodies of fierce soldiery who were sweeping along like the Huns” (Crane RBC 180). The reliance of the young men on a chain of dubious intel shows the limitations of ground-level knowledge.

This, along with Henry’s fantasies, come together to form the themes of uncertainty and a frustrated search for the truth. It also explains the appeal of the Celestial view and of the sense of cohesion that only a distant, ironic-tongued narrator can provide. The story makes plain that knowledge is desirable— knowledge of oneself, knowledge of the generals’ plans, knowledge of the scope of the war—yet the possibility of basing knowledge claims on anything like an objective and comprehensive survey of facts appears hopelessly out of reach. The knowingness of the mother and the condescension of the narrator assert the importance of a ‘realistic view’ of the world, while the story itself is an expression of a longing gone unfulfilled; it is not just that Henry lacks the experience to understand the events taking place around him, it is that a view that would make sense of the entire battle is fundamentally inaccessible to him. The novel therefore outlines the problems of subject-based epistemology without guaranteeing an objectivist alternative. I suggest that it actually casts doubt on a purely top-down method of mapping, because war is a human-centered phenomenon and understanding it requires a careful qualitative description of that ground-level perspectival experience, which is exactly what *The Red Badge of Courage* is.

Ambiguity and uncertainty appear as more than just misinformation and myth. The text is a close and prolonged observation of the effect of cognitive distortion on perception, which then itself becomes part of the reality being perceived. Affect plays a large role in the construction of

Henry's reality. The information and misinformation that he receives pre-enlistment from "the newspapers, the gossip of the village, his own picturings" is processed emotionally; his decision to enlist is motivated by the "uncheckable" arousal of his passions (Crane RBC 176). This is among the first signs that a subject's internal orientation to information has causal importance and is deserving of our attention. Once in the army, boredom and irritation are dominant affects that, again, help the text define the 'ordinariness' of war while also describing its effect on the psychology of the soldier. The boredom and slowness cause Henry to disassociate slightly; he "sinks" into a "vast blue demonstration" in which his agency is surrendered to mass life, "carried along by a mob" (Crane RBC 180, 195). Gradually the boredom and incomprehension morphs into a meditative fugue— all around him is a "mystic gloom" that affects the substance of his observation and reinforces the atmosphere of sluggishness (187).

The effect of affect on perception is further suggested by a distortion of forms. For one, the "mystic gloom" is less likely a physical fog than it is the blurriness and light sensitivity of impressionism, which is suggested elsewhere through a super-real emphasis on color. The ethereality and vagueness of light and color connotes optical perception and the limitations of the naked human eye (versus the constructed and extreme meticulous detail of the aerial map). Disproportion and surreal physics are more concrete examples of this same tendency towards perceptual distortion. At one point, Henry regards an officer from afar: "In the eastern sky there was a yellow patch like a rug laid for the feet of the coming sun; and against it, black and patternlike, loomed the gigantic figure of the colonel on a gigantic horse" (186). This moment combines the intense hyperfocus on color and light with a fusion of foreground and background (the colonel is integrated to the light as a pattern, suggestive of a two-dimensional, daguerreotype-like image) as well as an exaggeration of the colonel and his horse's proportions.

Skewed proportions are also hinted at (again in the context of darkness-light contrasts) in the elongated shadows “that moved like monsters” (more on monstrosity later) (186).

These tricks of the light and the fallibility of the eye, while they undermine Henry’s authority as an observer from a scientific perspective, are real parts of the battlefield milieu. Akin to the pre-*Gray’s Anatomy* anatomical drawings, they track intensities of phenomenological experience rather than pure clinical detail. Not bound to rationality, the wandering mind on the battlefield makes surreal and imaginative associations. This includes moments of uncanniness like Henry’s first encounter with a corpse: “The wind raised the tawny beard. It moved as if a hand were stroking it” (196). In processing the sight, Henry attributes an unnatural animacy to the body that recalls the elsewhere quotidian act of a man fussing with his beard, allowing the corpse to occupy a liminal space between the dead and the living. The dissolution of the self into a “vast blue demonstration,” is another similarly surreal way of perceiving reality, hitting its fever pitch when the mob of life transforms into a centipedal monster “wending with many feet” (Crane RBC 187). At other times, symbolism comes to the surface of description, as when, following Jim Conklin’s death, the light in the sky is endowed with religious significance: “The red sun was pasted in the sky like a fierce wafer” (235). The imagery of spiritual cannibalism indicates a Christ-infused approach to corporeality that is also on display in pre-modern and early modern anatomical illustrations. The impressionistic, uncanny, the monstrous, and the Christlike all on extra-rational modes of experience that the narrator incorporates into his descriptive project.

This is a pivotal contradiction of the text in regards to epistemology: in constantly challenging the stability and reliability of knowledge claims inside the text, the text invites scrutiny of its own form, itself based in artful construction and manipulation. It finds value in the

very aspects of perception that sow confusion and perpetuate illegibility. It itself is heteroglossic and poetical and impressionistic in its relaying of reality, encouraging absorption into the text and setting it apart from cold, quantifiable, positivistic knowledge.

My analysis of *The Red Badge of Courage* is the argument of this chapter in miniature. Now that the Celestial Eye and its rival modes of knowledge have been introduced, I want to slow down and unpack the importance of these terms to Crane's engagement with 1) the professional fact-based discourses of the late 19th century and 2) extra-rational experience, especially that which corresponds to the grotesque.

God and the Ship: Part 1

In a nameless poem from Stephen Crane's *The Black Riders and Other Lines* (1895), God and other nameless heavenly creatures watch from on high as a ship—the arc of humanity—moves here and there. Its travels are amusing to the divine observers, because the ship's crew lacks the panoramic vision of the gods and, as such, their movements seem erratic and pointless. This is the condescension that the Celestial Eye has for the actors at ground level. The poem's narrator derides the ship for its “quaint progress” and its pretensions: it turns “with serious purpose/Before stupid winds” (Crane P 8).

Although the tonal register that Crane adopts here is archaic and quasi Biblical, the same approach in his texts of a more socio-scientific and journalistic bent. The poem marvels at God's mastery and “infinite skill”—this more closely resembles the language used to describe professional competency than the usual rhetoric about holy omniscience (Crane P 8). Professionalization, then, is an imitation of this divine vantage. Crane's penchant for ironic detachment suggests that the educated class occupies more the role of the derisive and amused

God than the steady-handed leader. Like *The Red Badge of Courage*'s deflation of Henry's imagined Greeklike struggle, *The Black Riders* mocks epic form and scale. The ship in Crane's poem is not Odysseus's boat bounced around in a storm by fate and dictated by Poseidon; it is moved by myopia and caprice. In this reading, it is necessary for people to try, however haplessly, to learn how to take care of themselves.

The fact that Biblical mythological prose carries over into his realistic historical studies is itself significant. Crane's poem laments God's loss of interest in directing human affairs. In the vacuum where God's mastery should be blooms Crane's epistemological doubt; in place of a unified vision of reality, there is the heteroglossia of the gossiping soldiers and a profusion of discourses that must be interrogated and picked apart to get at the truth. The next section delves into Crane's management of 'factual discourses,' which suggest to the reader that the prosthetic Celestial Eye crafted by positivistic and empirically oriented professions like journalism and sociology does not provide the objectivity and certainty that it promises. The effect is a foregrounding of the constructedness of reality through negotiable discourses, ultimately pointing to the insufficiency of clinical attempts to describe social behaviors.

Social Type and Language-Dependency in Fact-Making

In his urban fiction, Crane interrogates designations and determinations of social 'type'—a sociological concept contemporary to Crane's writing. By approaching 'type' as a novelist—i.e. as a trafficker of literary forms, not just scientific ones—Crane shows off the epistemological tensions within literary naturalism, expressing a desire for the clarity and reliability of positivistic forms of knowledge while exposing, in the form of the text itself, its limitations.

Positivism is a strong influence on the development of sociology as a discipline; from Auguste Comte came the idea that “factual regularities” that would allow researchers to make statements of general laws about society (Morrison 24). Comte’s thinking was immediately inspired by early-nineteenth-century scientists in the fields of embryology and physiology, including Jean-Baptiste Lamarck, whose pre-Darwinian theories of evolution relied on predictable bio-environmental mechanisms (Mazlish 22). It would be tempting to reduce social ‘type’ to this kind of rigid taxonomic outlook, the folly of men who sought, as Anthony Giddens put it, “a science of society which would reproduce in the study of human social life, the same kind of sensational illumination and explanatory power yielded up by the sciences of nature” (quoted in Holmwood & Stewart 11).

If we accept that sociologists tried to give scientific form to social questions, it remains to be proven that nineteenth-century sociologists were ever quite so uncritically positivistic as Giddens claims. Any generalization one way or the other would be intellectually hasty and not entirely pertinent to this project. Instead of going down that rabbit hole, I will hold my attention to social ‘type,’ of which Max Weber is the most prominent promoter in his usage of ‘ideal types.’ Max Weber represents a middle ground between two extreme sociological outlooks—one outlook committed to absolute and metaphysically ever-present laws, the other resigned to chaotic relativism and idiosyncrasy. Weber’s ‘ideal types’ were never understood to exist anywhere in pure form. Instead, they are abstractions drawn from concrete behaviors intended for heuristic use in the assessment of reality (Holmwood & Stewart 72). He is conscious of their status as useful fictions, with no assertion of “general validity” (quoted in Holmwood & Stewart 73). The eye of Weber’s sociologist would seem to be a slightly different beast than the eye of Michel Foucault’s clinical “pure Gaze”; for the early Foucault, the role of classificatory

procedures is to bring language as close to reality and reality as close to language as possible to give the impression of “a speaking eye” (*Birth of the Clinic* 114). Weber’s methods of classification are clearly more pragmatic and less prescriptive, signaling a basic awareness of the limits of his field.

Nonetheless, social ‘type’ is treated in nineteenth century as though it held the promise of enormous explanatory power. This is demonstrated by its importance to the arguments of photojournalist Jacob Riis’s landmark *How the Other Half Lives* (1890), an example of what Gerd Hurm (1991) calls “urban semiotics” that relies heavily on prepackaged social types to guide the reader through the various neighborhoods of New York’s Lower East Side (69). Riis’s portrait of “Jewtown” is an especially flagrant and poorly-aged example of this diagnostic tool. In introducing the district, Riis writes: “No need of asking here where we are. The jargon of the street, the signs of the sidewalk, the manner and dress of the people, their unmistakable physiognomy, betray their race at every step” (Riis 87). The intention here is to establish a journalistic sense of scene in which he might later embed his conclusions about the sources of suffering and malignant behaviors. The effect is that of ‘virtual witnessing,’ a means of collecting extraneous details to offer the prospective middle-class audience a coherent picture of the social milieu that Riis will analyze. As an ethnographer-sociologist, Riis alleges a reciprocal relationship between the “disease,” “low intellectual status,” and “penury and poverty” experienced by residents of Jewtown (Riis 90). This combination of immersive literary tactics with scientific hypothesis encapsulates a set of values of which the literary naturalists of the 1890s and early 1900s would have been very cognizant.

Stephen Crane’s problematization of distant and immediate perspective is caught up in these values and techniques. The significance of ‘type’ to Crane’s work is janus-faced. It is

possible to find, as Howard Horwitz (1998) does, that Crane is tapping into the paradigm of sociology in a way that is imitative of actual sociological procedures. ‘Type’ is, for Horwitz, the grand scaffolding that quelled middle class anxiety and prevented social organization from seeming “unintelligible” (608). To explain why this is reductive, it will be necessary to confront the other face of the janus bust and talk about ‘type’ in terms of stock character and cliché.

In *The Virtues of the Vicious: Jacob Riis, Stephen Crane, and the Spectacle of the Slum* (1997), Keith Gandal credits Stephen Crane with being the first author of slum fiction to incorporate ethnography and aesthetics holistically, versus earlier authors whose experiments with ethnography and anthropology took a backseat to muckraking and polemics (e.g. Riis) or the creation of picturesque scenes (e.g. William Dean Howells) (40). Nonetheless, Gandal maintains that Crane is still taking up a pre-existing tradition, one with already-defined characters and story arcs (41). A contemporary reviewer of “Maggie” remarks: “Most of the characters are old acquaintances in the world of fiction and we all know about—or, at least, certain novelists have pretended to tell us all about the life of the mean streets of a great city. In ordinary hands the tale of Maggie would be ‘twice told’” (Monteiro 82). Crane’s goal is not so much to reinvent the wheel as it is to correct and perfect these arcs so that they conform better to reality, an artistic principle voiced in Crane’s own reflections, as when he writes to a female confidant: “we are most successful in art when we approach the nearest to nature and truth” (quoted in Holton 35). Such statements have lent to the impression that the attention to detail, verisimilitude, and accurate representations of dialect in Crane’s fiction was heavily influenced by the epistemological values of journalism (Robertson 181). John Dudley (2004) is skeptical of this narrative, arguing that Crane’s journalism is informed by his fiction, not the other way around (61-3). I will avoid this chicken-and-egg dilemma. John Fagg offers useful insight when

he notes in *On the Cusp: Stephen Crane, George Bellows, and Modernism* (2009) that Crane is constantly shifting between registers: from “reportage” to immersion, from “framed-in microdescriptions” to “moments of intensified, impressionistic prose-poetry” (93). If the question is whether Crane is a novelist or journalist first, the answer seems to be that he is not completely comfortable in either role. Relatedly, if Crane links aesthetic value to truth value, then we should also explore 1) the extent to which Crane teases out the fictionality of truth and truth claims, and 2) the extent to which ‘truth’ and ‘realism’ for Crane are not confined to the category of the fact.

This will not be a foray into absolute relativism. Crane’s texts do not support such a discussion. He *does*, however, riff on the manufactured quality of ‘type’ distinctions. While Crane is committed to realistic renderings of the city, those renderings occur in the context of a pre-established genre of slum writing, as the contemporary review indicates. I agree with Gandal that Crane’s urban stories function as modifications or corrections to the genre: “It is as if Crane is saying to his colleagues, yes, you got the basic plot elements, the basic action correct, but you completely misunderstand how it comes about; you do not understand just how distinctive this action is; you do not want to understand; let me show you” (50).

Working backwards from the same observations about tenement life as other middle-class authors, Crane tries to clarify the specific mechanisms that lead to social and personal degradation. This is in keeping with Horwitz’s claims about Crane’s quasi-scientific journalistic ambitions. However, the meaning of Crane’s distillation of social mechanisms changes if one considers it as an interplay between typological thinking and literary schemas. “Maggie” encourages a confusion of categories— are these social types to be analyzed, or clichés to be

played with? I propose that a look at the narrator will enhance our understanding of this confusion without necessarily resolving it.

There is some reason to believe that the narration of “Maggie” is imitative of a sociological gaze. If the characters are stuck at ground level, at least *we* do not have to be. The incisive ‘specialized consciousness’ of the narrator allows the reader a Celestial vantage. This is underscored by the differences of dialect used by the narrator and the characters. The narrator uses a heightened standard English, while the voices of the characters are presented as mutated by their regional accents. “They’ll get you” becomes “Dey’ll git yehs!” (Crane MG 31). These differences mark the levels of epistemological authority of both speakers: the narrator speaks the language of the educated and astute observer, the people of the Bowery the language of provincial locals. Use of regional dialect is an authenticating technique, intended to produce sociological realness through the recording of actual speech practices. To retain professional legitimacy and the special epistemological privilege of the empirical observer, however, it is necessary to maintain some height over the ‘native’ speakers.

This is just one way that the reader registers the distance between their manner of seeing and the perspectives of the characters. One also notices the narrator’s tendency to produce analogies between past and present— a strategy common to early anthropology and sociological accounts of ‘primitive’ societies. Indigenous studies scholars have rightly complained about the habit of anthropologists to treat non-European cultures as anachronisms, as though the people belonging to those cultures were trapped in amber, their existence signifying not their present but our past. The narrator of “Maggie” exhibits a similar mindset towards people who live in the slums. It is worth noting that, even if Crane strived to make his characters as realistic as possible, and even if he spent a lot of time in the Bowery because he found the neighborhood more

colorful than his own, he was still a tourist, and this touristic idealization of the locals gets caught up in appeals to anachronism. This is why the narrator describes a spat between two little boys as “fighting in the modes of four thousand years ago” (Crane MG 34). In the people of the Bowery the narrator identifies a continuity between the present and our ancient past.

“Maggie’s” narrator does not rely solely on what we might think of as a traditional primitivist vocabulary, though. Much more frequently in his description of the great brawl at the beginning of the story, the analogies that he draws between his characters and the past are references to the medieval tales of knights errant or chansons de geste. The punching, kicking, and rock-throwing of the young boys is hyperbolized as the “fury of battle”; shouts become “valiant roars”; anger becomes “triumphant savagery” (Crane MG 32). Here, the vocabulary evocative of a primeval past— *roar*, *savagery*, *fury*—is met by the palaver of tales of conquest, patrician glory, and chivalric virtue— *valiance*, *triumph*, *battle*.

I consider this the meeting place between the narrator’s designation as a scientific observer and his designation as a dealer in literary tropes. The ambiguity of the nature of the past that is being evoked frustrates any attempt to assign meaning to the distance that the narrator fosters. The narrator’s irony could be the condescension of the clinician towards his objects of study, or it could be a sort of urbane self-awareness about the enterprise of fiction-writing, or—if we put Crane in the same camp as Benjamin’s Baudelaire— we could understand it as a point in-between, wherein the artist, assuming some of the pretensions of the clinician, uses his poetic proclivities to produce a sketch of city life that passes as a photographic likeness.

I think that, of those three options, the third option is the closest to the truth, but there is also a fourth option—that moments in “Maggie” such as the fight scene offer commentary on the inseparability of narrative and behaviorism. I mean this in two senses.

First: the analogies to the past are deflationary and mocking towards the dwellers of the Bowery. The argument could be that holding heroic pretensions about oneself is dangerously delusional. This is definitely the case in *The Red Badge of Courage*, for Henry must replace his storybook notions of warfare with real experiences of battle. From this perspective, false beliefs grounded in folk storytelling are mechanisms motivating social behavior. This has implications for the kind of knowledge that literary naturalists can lay claim to gathering. If works of literary naturalism are oriented against fantasy, they still regard fantasies and other abstract concepts as *real*, not in that they correspond to any preexisting physical object, but in the sense that they both 1) exist and 2) motivate action in the manner of performative utterances. This attention to things that are real but not actual makes Crane's handling of determinism much more sophisticated than the less charitable interpretations of literary naturalism and sociological 'type.' The modal flux of reality precipitated by human mental constructions is the enemy of mechanical determinism. Human beings are not parts in a clock. Clock parts don't behave differently if you tell them that they aren't gears after all, but are instead vampires or knights. While not a fantasy in the sense of a false or misleading narrative, 'respectability' is an abstract concept that, despite having no metaphysical reality, is *real* in its effects towards social actors' dispositions towards objects. The message of "Maggie" is that the destitution and death of fallen women is not the upshot of an evil engendered from moral lapse— there is very little talk of morality in the story at all— but of the ostracization resultant from the community's respectability politics.

Secondly: the narrator's use of literary references encourages an awareness of the theatricality of journalistic style. In other words, it shows the reader that there is no *hors-texte*. If readers can roll their eyes at the naive beliefs of the characters, then the narrator's own reliance on clichés and literary devices should inspire further skepticism about the objectivity of the

Celestial Eye. At this late date, it probably does not need saying that objectivity is a point on the horizon, not an actually practicable way of seeing. As Markus Gabriel (2015) notes, this applies to physical classifications as well as material objects; being experientially grounded, classifications are “a long way from being independent of the human subject” (98). There are some mental operations that do not require sense data, but the categories that one employs in the process of reasoning are created by generalizing experience. Crane even pokes fun at the empirical basis of general beliefs when he describes the development of Jimmy’s philosophy: “He had certainly seen everything, and with each curl of his lip he declared that it amounted to nothing” (MG 49). Of course, Jimmy has *not* seen everything, so his nihilism comes across as immature and performative, but it is also not exactly delusional. If his nihilism is a kind of posturing, it is still grounded in observations of the slum, such that it helps him adapt to his bleak environment. Similarly, the overt literary referentiality of Crane’s style foregrounds the fictionality of his experiment in ‘type’ without necessarily robbing it of utility or practical truth-value. These complexities come to a head in moments like this, when Jimmy is contemplating his social status: “He and his order were kings, to a certain extent, over the men of untarnished clothes, because the latter dreaded, perhaps, to be either killed or laughed at” (MG 44). There is another analogy to monarchy and premodernity. In this instance, the irony of calling a street tough a king is mitigated by the fact that it is a pretty good description of actual social relations that are not capturable by modern discourse on class. Further, it is unclear whether the analogy originates from the narrator *per se* or from the narrator focalizing on Jimmy’s perspective.

The above exploration of Crane's fictionalized ethnography demonstrates the knottiness of 19th century fact-fiction discourse, a predecessor to the literary nonfiction of the 1960s and 1970s. Crane's experiments in blending sociology-style observations about social 'types' with

literary troping encourages in the reader an acute awareness of the constructedness and narrative-dependency of sociological ‘facts.’ While Crane is invested in the idea of producing truthful fiction, the correspondence between writing and truth is not representational in a simplistic way, where a concrete reality takes precedent over the representation. However critical Crane may be of delusion and contrived narratives, the real impact of those narratives on the events of his stories suggests the view that discourse is partly constitutive of reality, not merely mimetic.

By treating ideas not only as real but as catalysts for behavior, Crane’s narrative-based approach to conceiving of reality acknowledges the existence of a subject-centered mode of knowledge even as he officially endorses the notion of a theoretical Celestial objective viewpoint. Consequential to the epistemological framework of literary naturalism, Crane’s engagement with ‘real ideas’ extends to affect. In what remains of this chapter, I examine how Crane uses the grotesque to capture the realities of subjective experience.

God and the Ship: Part 2

A premise of this dissertation is that the concern over legibility found in professional arenas is felt in 19th century America's spatial-political culture more widely. Fittingly, the tensions between different modes of knowledge are reflected not just in the relationship between narrator and subject but in the character's journeys themselves. At this point, it may be helpful to consider the existential layer of the epistemological conundrum described in Crane’s Biblical poem. The ship of humanity is on its own. It struggles to steer itself through confounding waters. Its trajectory, once governed by divine intelligence, is pushed around by the stupid forces of nature. The epistemological limits of mankind are coupled here with a sense of purposelessness.

This coupling means that in Crane's work epistemological problems are often also problems of subjectivity.

For example: in "Maggie: A Girl of the Streets," agency is directly connected to the ability to read skillfully one's surroundings. Parallel to the middle-class desire to make the Bowery neighborhood legible through journalism, Maggie's survival is contingent on her knowledge of crowds and her ability to steer herself smartly through the city. After her decline into a 'woman of the streets,' she is plunged into a crowd that she sifts through and tries to render intelligible: "She furtively scanned the faces in the rushing stream of pedestrians" (MG 87). The "rushing stream" evokes a sense of deep immersion into first-person experience. Instead of acquiring a Celestial view, through which she might appreciate a scenic picturesqueness or the awesome whirring of a million gears, it remains necessary for her to navigate the city at the level of her own body. This does not stop her from cultivating a heightened perspective altogether, however. Later, as Maggie tumbles through the milling crowd, she discovers "that if she walked with such apparent aimlessness, some men looked at her with calculating eyes. She quickened her step, frightened. As a protection, she adopted a demeanor of intentness as if going somewhere" (MG 93). Here Maggie gains an awareness of her observers and the impact of her performance on their behavior. This is a relatively sophisticated epiphany that enables her to direct her personal affect in a purposeful manner, even if the purpose is the illusion of purposefulness. In this example, Crane places value on crafting one's disposition while foreclosing on the possibility of real self-determined action.

Maggie's efforts at psychological transformation signal a recurrent theme in Crane's writing: the struggle to assert control over one's circumstances through a change of disposition, which is expressed as a change of perspective. In *The Red Badge of Courage*, Henry's

experience in battle permits him imagined access to a heightened Celestial awareness of the world's inner workings: "He emerged from his struggles, with a large sympathy for the machinery of the universe. With his new eyes, he could see that the secret and open blows which were being dealt about the world with such heavenly lavishness were in truth blessings" (Crane RBC 319). To speak of an understanding of the universe's "machinery" implies an acceptance of the mechanical processes of life without release from them.

It is doubtful that Henry's Celestial outlook is genuine—the text heavily implies that such fancies are useful fictions that, like bravery, enable people to operate optimally in difficult circumstances. Compounding this, the multiple layers of uncertainty and incompleteness make it possible for the characters to come to mistaken conclusions from their perceptions. This is a major problematic within "Maggie." Donald Pizer (1990) finds that the characters in "Maggie" are all caught up in "prisons of self-delusion" corresponding more often than not to some popular literary narrative: "Maggie believes that Pete is a chivalrous knight who will rescue her from poverty and the oppression of her home; Pete believes that he is a formidable lover and that he has behaved well toward Maggie; Jimmie believes that his family honor requires defense; and Mary Johnson believes that she has been a Christian parent to Maggie" (224). I have shown that this theme extends into the posturing of the narrator, who must himself negotiate between different discourses to make sense of the Bowery. These discourses—literary and scientific—mediate all observations. Fluency in these discourses is key to mastery and to exerting some semblance of agency, at least at the level of self-definition. The grotesque pops up when the legibility of self or surroundings are threatened. It marks weak points within the system of established discourses.

The most important kind of legibility to Stephen Crane is the legibility of the self, which Crane binds both rhetorically and aesthetically to an intersubjective model of selfhood. Self-knowledge requires not just accurate situational awareness but affect-driven self-actualization. The importance of self-actualization to Crane's work and the means by which it is achieved disturbs the positivistic model of the 'fact' from a new direction: it is not just that facts are constructed and contingent on narrative tropes; they must be supplemented by aesthetic extra-rational modes of understanding that exist outside of the 'fact' as a modern category of knowledge.

The fusion of the Divine gaze and the skillful professional gaze in Crane's *God* poem speaks, if subtly, to a yearning for a religious mode of knowledge, one that I argued in the last chapter entailed a deep corporeal awareness. A simulacrum of this type of knowledge is accomplished in literature through virtual witnessing techniques in general and—in Crane's work specifically—an immersive, non-rational approach to intersubjective knowledge.

"When a Man Falls a Crowd Gathers" is a sketch of a New York street scene penned by Crane and published by the *New York Press* on December 2, 1894. Like his other urban sketches, this one is written in a journalistic truth-telling vein, with a familiar focus on exotic urban populations (this time: Italians) and scrutiny of specifically urban social behaviors. The short text details a crowd's reaction to a man's epileptic fit.

On the one hand, the subject matter is, superficially, quite modern. The main effect of it is to capture the sense of being within a crush of bodies—the type of atomized mass life that so concerned Le Bon: the body is "like a bit of debris sunk in [a] human ocean" (Crane MFCG 203). The rabble of men pack together around the epileptic Italian, "crowded savagely like starving men fighting for bread" (Crane MFCG 202). We sense the familiar anxiety about the

psychology of crowds, primitive and alienated from one another. The scene is also suggestive of Wordsworth's savage torpor of the city and Benjamin's neurotic city-walker, if one considers the late 19th century connotations of epilepsy: degeneration and overstimulation.¹⁵ The sense of the sketch's facticity is supported by its place of publication but also by its style, which is action-oriented and linear in the manner of much newspaper writing; nearly every sentence is devoted to a specific action, and the text is heavily populated by "thens," "meanwhile," and "at lasts"—words and phrases indicating sequence. The effect is a powerful sense that this sketch is a documentation of an actual incident, where cause and effect matter greatly. It resembles journalism at its most empirical. This supports the reading of the sketch's content as a behaviorist description of the habits of crowds.

At the same time, the dominance of this mode is countered by other features of the text, namely its approach to corporeality. Here another dimension of the epileptic fit is important. Crane pauses momentarily to reflect on the spasms of the Italian's body: he writhes in "a singular contortion. It was as if an invisible hand had reached up from the earth and seized him by the hair. He seemed dragged slowly, piteously backward, while his body stiffened convulsively, his hands clenched, and his arms swung rigidly upward. Through his pallid, half-closed lids one could see the steel-colored, assassin-like gleam of his eye, that shone with a mystic light as a corpse might glare at those live ones who seemed about to trample it under foot" (Crane MFCCG 202). The poetic flourishes of this passage, which stand in contrast to the more conventional reportage of the rest of the sketch, draw on the imagery of religious ecstasy and possession. The emphasis on the body as a site of extra-human, mystic passions and the intimation of communion with the dead through the living body are markers of a Christian epistemology of embodiment

¹⁵ These themes receive a fuller treatment in Chapter Three.

that sees physical substance as a legitimate form of knowledge. This take on corporeality indicates that Crane's fact-finding and documentation is influenced by pre-modern modes of knowing. We are presented with a modern situation— bodies crammed together— that channels the pre-modern— the body as a vessel for pieta-like suffering. The "human ocean" of the modern city now comes across as corporeal effluvium. This dual sensibility greatly impacts Crane's epistemological loyalties, especially as they relate to subjectivity. In this light, the vision of God in Crane's poem is reformulated, moving from all-seeing eye to deep-seeing eye.

With deep-seeing in mind, in the next section I explore the significance of the "positive grotesque" to literary naturalism. The positive grotesque highlights the existential dimension of Crane's immersive realism and establishes the stakes of literary naturalist epistemology for the production of subjectivity. The positive grotesque combats the alienating reductionism of scientific/bureaucratic modes of knowledge by affirming extra-rational, symbolic linkages between bodies and encouraging identification with corporeal matter as a means of achieving a more active and self-actualized style of perception.

Crane's Grotesqueries

While "Maggie" questions the authority of the objective observer's gaze by emphasizing the performative nature of social type, drawing parallels between 'natural' behavior and theatrical action, "An Experiment in Misery" tries to deepen that gaze by offering an embodied experience of 'type,' the flaneur-like wanderer at the center of the sketch feeling first a sense of the grotesque at the tangled chimeric limbs of his fellow travelers and then sublimating it into a feeling of solidarity. In "Individual and Crowd in Stephen Crane's New York" (2016), Peter J. Bellis describes two separate strategies that Crane utilizes to depict the urban crowd. In his

novels, which follow a linear progression focusing on one character, the city appears as an impediment to individual agency. His sketches, on the other hand, follow a spatial rather than temporal logic, thus allowing city space to be a ‘lived space’ of communal interaction. This intensified look at spatiality allows Crane to dive even deeper into the epistemological problems built into the naturalist project: reconciling scientific-style fact with immersive styles of knowing.

To complement the already-established binary between the Celestial Eye and immersive experience, I want to introduce Henri Lefebvre’s description of the triple axes of space. Lefebvre’s thought can help to clarify the role of immersive experience in producing the subject, which I argue is central to the function of the grotesque. In *The Production of Space* (1974), Lefebvre divides space into three aspects: the conceived space (*le conçu*) of cartographers and professionals, the perceived space (*le perçu*) of everyday interactions, and the lived space (*le vécu*) experienced by the fully human subject (*l’homme totale*) (Shields 281). Being highly theoretical, *le conçu* is the space that Michel de Certeau (1980) characterizes as Celestial mapping and that I have claimed is the imagined perspective of nineteenth century sociologist. Since nineteenth-century sociologists like Weber were not completely naive, they understood that *le conçu* would always be an approximation of the social world as-it-actually-existed. I argue, along with de Certeau (in different words), that *le perçu* arises in part out of the structuralization of experience imposed by *le conçu*. De Certeau uses the term “tactic” to describe an idiosyncrasy that is articulated by a subject within a particular set of structural conditions (61). For example, the African American work song is fashioned out of the stifling structure and rhythm of plantation labor and messages appropriated from the Christian gospel. The musical number “Gee, Officer Krupke” from Leonard Bernstein and Stephen Sondheim's

West Side Story (1957) points to something similar in the Polish-American street hoods' playful mirroring of sociological rhetoric on criminality and urban poverty; like the vagrants in the soup line in "Maggie," the kids in *West Side Story* are aware that they are being observed and, though they are unable to use this knowledge to free themselves of their poverty, they can still 'work the system,' which includes co-opting the language of sociology to their advantage (Bernstein & Sondheim). De Certeau highlights the ways in which hegemonic modes of seeing or thinking about the world are deviated from in the process of ordinary, everyday living.

What de Certeau's tactic is missing is the distinction between *le perçu* and *le vécu*. Though it does differ from the perspective of the sociologist, and though it may be an untapped source of knowledge, everyday life is not necessarily always a source of self-actualization. It is possible for there to be a phenomenological experience of living in the city that is basically passive. One can smell the odor of the garbage cans without turning that odor into agency. The subject must be able to act on the knowledge that they acquire through experience. As I have already argued, this action can be a change in disposition, a way of seeing, as when Maggie learns how to see the crowd. To complicate things further: it is also possible for experience to be acted-upon without meeting the threshold for poiesis. Does Maggie's way of seeing make her "fully human?" It is hard to say that it does. Her change in disposition still seems more reactive than creative, and it cannot be said with confidence that she achieves the degree of self-actualization implied in *le vécu*.

To comprehend *le vécu*, one must know what Lefebvre thinks about alienation and disalienation. By moving from the problem of the exploitation of labor to the regimentation of space, Lefebvre is able to extend Marx's theory of alienation to include (in Japhy Wilson's [2013] words) a "*human or spiritual* alienation within everyday life—the evisceration of

symbolic significance and creative autonomy from the realm of lived experience” (366). In Lefebvre’s mind, *le concu* is responsible for this evisceration; the imposition of the abstractifying spatialization mechanisms endemic to the bureaucratic society— e.g. linear time, homogenous and compartmentalized consumer space— serve to rob the lifeworld of its poetry, which to Lefebvre means taking from phenomenological experience a dimension of symbolic associations between objects. “Symbol” has a specialized meaning in Lefebvre’s writing. Like Arendt, he looks back at ancient Greek civilization, and his interest is also in community. Instead of speech, which is individualizing (albeit in constant reference to the wider community), Lefebvre focuses on rituals and festivals held by rural communities. In this context, ‘symbolism’ is paying one’s share “to participate in the magic action” of the event (Lefebvre 204). Rituals and festivals, Lefebvre claims, were not separate from ordinary life; they were simply “more intense”: “Man, still immersed in an immediate natural life, lived, mimed, sang, danced his relation with nature and the cosmic order as his elementary and confused thoughts ‘represented’ it” (Lefebvre 207).

In this formulation, the poetry of life is not only immersive but communal and participatory. Immersion is already a familiar topic from this dissertation’s discussion of different styles of knowing, but it should be noted that here it implies not just saturation of the senses but a fulfilling “cosmic” connection to the universe, including capital-N “Nature” (Lefebvre 205). Lefebvre ties to recreate this level of immersion in “Moments” of extra-rationalistic reverie that defamiliarize the familiar— Charlie Chaplin forgetting how to use a sidewalk or the delirious imagery of *Un Chien Andalou* (1925) turned everyday objects back into symbols, returning them briefly to the mysterious, cosmic domain, the “imaginary infinite” (Lefebvre 110, 117). In *The Critique of Everyday Life* (1947), Lefebvre opines that the demagicking and rationalization of the universe has made immersive experience scarce:

[S]ocial life has improved, but has changed its structure in the process; from being on a horizontal level, so to speak, on the level of natural life and the ‘world’, it has become pyramidal, with chiefs, kings, a State, ideas, abstractions, at its apex. Symbols have become more and more abstract; in its own way, like money, but on the political level, the State is also in a sense a realized abstraction, endowed with effective power which is ever more real. (Lefebvre 209)

Lefebvre’s appraisal of history indicates a progression towards greater and greater abstraction, both in epistemological categories and in mechanisms of power. *Le concu* co-evolves with increasingly bureaucratized arrangements of space and time that encourage routine and discourage immersion and self-reflectiveness. Both stand in the way of becoming *l’homme total*. Here I identify in Lefebvre some affinity with Arendt’s history of the Social realm. Both Lefebvre and Arendt view the abstraction of knowledge away from first-person perception as an important factor in the development of modern social organization, which for Arendt is based around the management of biological life and for Lefebvre is based around sites of production and consumption that mute lived experience, replacing it with soul-crushing banality (Shields 283). In Arendt, the depletion of a common world results in “world alienation” and the dissolution of the individual. In Lefebvre, *le vecu* is only visible to those who can plug into a heightened extra-rationalistic symbolic domain. This plugging-in is achieved during “Moments” of revelation and self-presence (Shields 283). Lefebvre’s embrace of surrealism and Dada art as a source of these Moments stresses that aesthetics are more than epiphenomenological— in other words, they are not just reflective of reality but can generate new meanings (Lefebvre 110).

Where de Certeau is content with locating sources of hope and creativity within the confines of institutional structures, Lefebvre is a revolutionary, believing creative freedom to be

totally at odds with those structures (Wilson 373). To be de-alienated is to be able to achieve one's full creative development—to “dwell poetically” so that one's habitation of space “is in some sense his creative work” (quoted in Wilson 372). Lefebvre's theory of space acknowledges a symbolic dimension that goes underdeveloped by de Certeau. Though Certeauan tactics may subvert the ends of higher order organizing strategies— i.e. playing a part to receive bread, or turning the gaze back on the crowd to survive—that is not always the same thing as restoring creative life (in the way, for example, that Freud's case studies restore life to the story of the psychiatric patient). On the other hand, Lefebvre is a little hasty in assuming that *le concu* is merely an obstruction to creativity. Analyzing Crane's use of the grotesque will illustrate how organizing structures can help engender rather than impede substantial dealienating aesthetic experiences.

In “An Experiment in Misery,” a young tramp meanders through the streets of New York City. Though at first he is the recipient of hostile stares, he eventually enters a district where the crowd was dressed the same as he, which makes him feel as though he were “at last in his own country” (Crane EIM 78). Soon he comes upon a saloon with a flophouse behind it. This is where Crane's impressionistic description of the sights and sounds of the city street are warped into the grotesque. The doors to the saloon are rendered as an enormous bodily orifice consuming the saloon's patrons: “The swing doors, snapping to and fro like ravenous lips, made gratified smacks as the saloon gorged itself with plump men, eating with astounding and endless appetite, smiling in some indescribable manner as the men came from all directions like sacrifices to a heathenish superstition... the young man allowed himself to be swallowed” (Crane 79). This description qualifies as grotesque for two reasons: 1) the extreme corporeality of the imagery, captured in the language of lip-smacking and engorgement, and 2) the violation of

barriers between organic and inorganic. The liminality of the portal, which hangs somewhere between flesh and building, is reinforced by the indescribability of its expression. Bodily presence is intensified once we enter the “country” of the destitute because within this universal destitution is an incessant animal-reminder, a place where the wall of separation between civilized humanity and the body is porous. We do not encounter a singular body, however, but a system of flesh centered around the process of consumption by the building’s orifice. Deindividuated bodies—bodies that are tangled into one another, flesh eaten by more flesh—intimate the interconnectedness of urban life.

The effect is at least a little menacing, seeming to reflect the sense of illegibility that Wordsworth’s urban spectator experiences upon entering into the swirling commotion of the city. It is also an affront to a conception of politics that would hold the individual’s mind above the body. The saloon is exactly the sort of space that one would expect in a public domain that has become overrun by biological life.

This is one side of the grotesque, but—as I established in Chapter One—the grotesque has a dual nature. The young tramp’s experience in front of the saloon and inside the flophouse is a moment of giant creativity made possible by the very irrationality and incongruity that makes it menacing. Crane is mapping lived space—*le vecu*—in which the sense of the grotesque is the “creative work” of living. I clarify that, in spite of Lefebvre’s insistence that the *le vecu* is incompatible with *le concu*, the organizing logic of the city (i.e. its regulation of place that makes rich and poor districts) produces the conditions for the grotesque.

In this way, the aesthetic grotesque is not antithetical to perceived space so much as it is its estranged byproduct. This view avoids the unnecessary essentialism of the one that separates ‘authentic experience’ (e.g. immersion into the lifeworld) from a life experience compromised by

its constructedness (e.g. ignoring the lifeworld and treating the organizing matrices of society as the ultimate reality), because any authentic experience is predicated partly upon the reality of those constructions. This is a key difference between naturalist epistemology and the epistemology of other later critics of modernity. Essentially, the urban grotesques described by Crane put pressure on us to read Lefebvre differently; where Lefebvre was concerned with the numbing, machine-like, soul-sucking banality of modern life, Crane finds fresh horrors in the urban that resist this regularity. Instead of simply making us all robots in cubicles, modern social systems produce pockets of the carnivalesque and horrible. By refusing to separate the natural from the modern, by insisting instead that urban social space is a great host for primitive life, naturalism creates the possibility of continuity between social construction and the primitive.¹⁶

Despite his shortcomings, Lefebvre is a valuable resource for considering city space because he gives us a vocabulary for considering the extra-rational, which is the very type of experience that literary naturalism tries to excavate from the social realm. The grotesque is naturalism's principal tool for creating a suffused, immersive realism that is in line with its understanding of the natural world. As a source of immersion and creativity, the grotesque creates a symbolic association between bodies. By this I mean that it creates new bonds of meaning for physical objects that do not correspond to any material/physical bonds (e.g. magnetism, chemical bonds, causality, gravitational pull). The imagined cosmic interconnectedness of Lefebvre's pre-modern ritual participant is an example of this kind of bonding. Arendt's common world, forged out of public enunciations of individuality to the group, is another, less mystical (but no less non-material) example.

¹⁶ This is a consequential idea for later chapters, which explore the influence on literary naturalism of post-Darwinist theories of social development. Degeneration theory, which conceptualizes a return to a negatively-coded natural, imagines how social organization feeds into primitivization and atavism.

I claim that both the ancient ritual and the enunciation of individuality is phenomenological in the sense that they both require the self to maintain a particular kind of emotional or affective orientation towards external objects: to identify with or disidentify with (i.e. be alienated from) them. Lefebvre's strategy for re-identifying with one's surroundings in a rationalized, bureaucratized social world is immersive, and immersion into the lifeworld involves receiving the universe in an untheorized fashion—from a perspective not limited by *le concu*, from which the subject feels distant. Though immersion demands that reality be untheorized, Lefebvre's work—with its investment in irrational symbolic associations—suggests that it need not be mindless. Immersion via symbolic attachment still needs to be directed by a subject that feels certain ways about what he or she experiences.

“An Experiment in Misery” illustrates how these symbolic associations operate. In the flophouse, the youth sees the sleeping men as a jumble of body parts with no single owner: “And all through the room could be seen the tawny hues of naked flesh, limbs thrust into the darkness, projecting beyond the cots; upreared knees, arms hanging long and thin over the cot edges. For the most part they were statuesque, carven, dead. With the curious lockers standing all about the tombstones, there was a strange effect of a graveyard where bodies were merely flung” (Crane EIM 84). Reminiscent of Bosch's hell imagery, this first description of the sleeping bodies evokes the same horror as the insatiable maw of the saloon. Directly following this, however, the mood changes as the youth begins to see the “fantastic nightmare gestures” of the disembodied limbs and the “guttural cries, grunts, oaths” in the dark as expressing a communal bond: “they were an utterance of the meaning of the room and its occupants. It was to him the protest of the wretch who feels the touch of the imperturbable granite wheels, and who then cries with an impersonal eloquence, with a strength not from him, giving voice to the wail of a whole section,

with a strength not from him, giving voice to the wail of a whole section, a class, a people” (Crane EIM 84). The original horrific response to the grotesque is transformed into an occasion for solidarity. This is a shift in disposition that makes the dual nature of the grotesque transparent—the text moves fluidly from an unpleasant picture of discontinuity to a deeper symbolic connection to a totalized flesh.

My observation could be oversold easily. The quality of the tramp’s grotesque experience is extra-rational, and it is immersive in its transcendence of the theoretical forms of *le concu*, but it does not detach itself altogether from any system of organization. The tramp’s sense of identification with the mass of bodies goes “weaving into the young man’s brain, and mingling with his views of the vast and somber shadows that, like mighty black fingers, curled around the naked bodies, made the young man so that he did not sleep, but lay carving the biographies for these men from his meager experience” (Crane EIM 84). The fusion of bodies in the initial moment of solidarity— when all of the organs and limbs offer up a Gestalt sense of being— is a catalyst for the young man to reorganize the bodies according to his intellect until, through their biographizing, they regain their individuality. Crane’s naturalism uses moments of irrationality and incoherence as a phase on a journey towards restabilization.

In American literary naturalism, the grotesque is used both to represent and resolve alienation in a fully-embodied picture of social space. The grotesque appears in Crane as swarms of discontinuous pieces of life, and it requires psychological effort to find the connective tissue. The connective tissue are the abstract forces that bequeath a totalizing interconnectivity to all life. To achieve disalienation, it is necessary to identify symbolically with this totality, and this means robbing the forces of their abstractness.

I am describing a procedure parallel to Julia Kristeva's theory of art as sublimation. In Kristeva's theory, the loss of the infant's perception of continuity with her environment creates an internalized sense of incomprehensible otherness that exists outside of language (338). Artistic creation relieves the pressure of this otherness because poetic language, being extra-rational, can come close to articulating the leftovers of prelinguistic experience: "melody, rhythm, semantic polyvalency, the so-called poetic form, which decomposes and recomposes signs, is the sole 'container' seemingly able to secure an uncertain but adequate hold over the Thing" (Kristeva 339).

While Kristeva and I share an appreciation of the parts of life not capturable by rationalist forms of knowledge, my claims are not so language-centered as Kristeva's, and they do not require one to accept a Freudian theory of childhood cognitive development. In place of a traumatic separation of individual consciousness from one's environment in infancy, I propose a form of loss (perceived as discontinuity) that hinges on the breakdown of social identification, which is a disposition towards one's social sphere than enables one to experience symbolic connections to it. *Le vecu*, this 'poetic' register of existence, is not present in situations where these symbolic bonds are suppressed. The grotesque is a poetic effort to represent and sublimate a sense of discontinuity associated with the absolute depletion of communal bonds.

Contradictions and Some Implications for Sociology

Crane is committed artistically to producing 'truthful' stories, and this has usually been interpreted as a commitment to a correspondence to an external empirical reality. For example, his vivid sketch of the slums in "An Experiment and Misery" was based on his own investigation that sent him wandering through the city disguised as a bum. I began this chapter by

distinguishing between scientific empiricism and the immersive realism of the novel. Part of my argument is that naturalist novels intensify this immersive realism by paying special attention to bodies and the experience of embodiment. Crane uses grotesque aesthetics to give the virtual effect of an encounter with carnality.

Crane insists on tying the symbolic register of his characters' experiences to scripts that are familiar to them. In keeping with the theme of uncertainty, his characters can be wrong. While the young tramp in "An Experiment in Misery" is not admonished for his feeling of solidarity, the same cannot be said for the protagonist of "Death and the Child."

In that story, a Greco-American journalist's confrontation with witnesses undifferentiated mass of villagers and animals fleeing from the Greco-Turkish war galvanizes the feelings of national belonging of a young journalist. The fleeing mob is depicted as an amorphous mass— a "horde," a "great calm thing" whose discontinuous parts move together as though in a liquid state (Crane DATC 101). There is species confusion; distinctions between human and animal are moot: "man tumbling over beast, beast over man" (Crane DATC 101). His reaction to this sight inflames his sense of symbolic connectivity to his surroundings, which, in keeping with an intersubjective model of identity, seems to validate him: "Eager, passionate, profoundly moved, his first words while facing the procession of fugitives had been an active definition of his own dimension, his personal relation to men, geography, life. Throughout he had preserved the fiery dignity of a tragedian" (Crane 103). The journalist's response would seem to confirm the idea that the grotesque can be employed as a means for the subject to reconcile his identity with corporeality. However, that idea is swiftly undermined when the journalist is converted into a bloody pulp— "a creature that had been flung to and fro" gasping fishlike on the grass— that does not appear as unambiguously human to a passing child (Crane 121). Having been fully

absorbed into the grotesquerie of the war, the apparently positive self-validating effects of the journalist's initial encounter seem to be lost.

“Death and the Child” is dense with the important contradictions that carry over into Crane's other work. In addition to showcasing the duality of the grotesque, the story tempers its romanticist confirmation of agency with the skeptical distance of the ironist. Harold Kaplan (1981) contends that violence in Crane's stories functions as a self-affirming ritual: “[Crane] traces the growth of a neoprimitive, stoic religion of nature in his characters” (198). We will see in Chapter Three more atavisms that connect male characters in naturalist texts with a robust primitivist self-image. For now, I want to reframe Kaplan's observation with the grotesque and Lefebvre's comments on ritual symbolism. The ritualized violence of warfare allows the subject to identify with the ‘primordial forces of nature’ not unlike the symbolic connections to the universe that Lefebvre attributes to premodern humans. The form that these ‘primordial forces’ take in “Death and the Child” is the grotesque: a deindividualized carnality that upsets the pretensions of civilized society. In “Death and the Child” and “An Experiment in Misery” alike, the threat of disorganized biological life is mitigated by symbolic connectivity that manifests rationally as group solidarity: class solidarity in “An Experiment in Misery,” nationalism in “Death and the Child.” These identifications are fragile. The negative grotesque is always ready to reemerge. Crane's famous propensity towards ironic deflation does not allow the reader to accept uncritically his characters' psychological projections.

The other set of contradictions that “Death and the Child” showcases pertain to a doubling of vision. Like “Maggie,” “Death and the Child” has competing macro and micro perspectives, the Celestial Eye pitted against the eye of the person directly in the fray. In the latter story, a single named character takes on both perspectives, achieving a distant panoramic

view of the conflict before diving into it. Peza has an elevated perspective— a conceit of his profession. His vantage enables him to see the mass in the context of deterministic forces indifferent to human life. The movement of the panicked crowd of life becomes abstract and oddly inanimate to him, “merely the expressions of so many boulders rolling down the hill” (Crane DATC 102). The process of war itself begins to feel automatic and mechanical. Gunshots sound “in regular measures like the beating of a colossal clock—a clock that was counting the seconds in the lives of the stars, and men had time to die between the ticks” (Crane 103).

This description of the indifferent clockwork of the universe brings us the closest one can get in Crane to Emile Zola’s conception of mechanism. In “The Experimental Novel” (1880), Zola claims that through close scrutiny of reality the naturalist author can identify positivist general truths about the mechanisms that govern social interaction. This is obviously linked to nineteenth-century sociological frameworks that were used to make general claims about what makes societies tick. I have already argued that sociology is situated halfway inside and halfway outside the abstract domain of positivistic laws, and that many nineteenth-century socialists were quite modest in their claims about the reliability or verisimilitude of their theoretical models (in the next chapter, I will get into the work of a few social thinkers who were far less modest than Weber, but for now I want to put them in brackets).

The question, then, is, given these misgivings, *why* it would seem like a good idea to try to come up with mechanistic frameworks at all. The easiest answer is that social scientists were simply trying to incorporate an ever-more dominant scientific modes of reasoning into their thinking about truth. Even Zola’s manifesto suggests an insecurity about the status of the novelist as truth-teller in a science-dominated culture.

The more interesting answer (which is not mutually exclusive with the first) is that sociology became attractive as a way of thinking through social problems at a point in time when community connections were already seeming to break down and social interactions were already becoming depersonalized and alienating. Bruce Mazlish advocates for this explanation in *A New Science: The Breakdown of Connections and the Birth of Sociology* (1989). Mazlish finds that, in addition to positivist intellectual pressures that pushed the examination of social relations away from literary forms, sociology arose partly as a way of addressing what seemed like a disruption of communal ties following the emergence of the atomistic worldview of individualism; Mazlish reasons that this also helps to explain why sociology is so often associated with leftism: “Sociology is not socialism; but it is animated by the same impulses that are seen to lead to the other” (137). While socialism aims to reestablish communal bonds through new property relations and increased codependence through collectivism, nineteenth-century sociology tried to figure out how it was possible that society was still able to run despite the absence of communal bonds. The result is theories that mechanize and abstractify, which can only reinforce the widespread sense of alienation.

Mazlish’s binarization of literary and sociological approaches to social issues relies on Dickens and Harriet Beecher Stowe as his main representatives of ‘literature.’ He does not mention American naturalist novels, though in many ways they reflect the problem that he describes. Even Crane’s work— with its deep doubts about what it is possible to know— leans towards systems thinking. His experiments in combining social ‘type’ and the sociological gaze with the meatiness of immersive experience do not reach any resolution. If Mazlish is correct and the subject’s alienation from community sparked an effort to understand how social systems can operate without these bonds and in the process they theorized an abstraction of social processes,

Crane's fiction paints a picture of what it is like to live in the presence of the frightful power of these abstract forces and seeks pathways towards the re-identification and de-alienation of the subject. In short, Crane points out the mistake of many sociologists who attempt to come to terms with an alienating social world: they try to intellectualize alienation, cutting it off from the domain of lived experience and thus cutting themselves off from an important facet of social existence.

By drawing from the grotesque, Crane's fiction rediscovers the embodied knowledge that the professionals of the late 19th century tried to cut away like gristle. His fiction allows the epileptic to flirt with the mystical, the soldier to melt into a centipedal homunculus, and the indigent to acquaint himself with the eternal through the common warmth of sleeping human bodies. A celebration of the corporeality of human beings' beating hearts, it is also a strong counterproposal to the steely bureaucratic gaze, intimating a more well-rounded picture of reality than can be captured through bare facts. His texts use the positive grotesque to reintegrate the relationships and bonding that disintegrate under the cold light of the clinical eye. However, ever the skeptic, Crane cannot seem to allow the 'positive' qualities of that grotesquery to appear too stable.

Chapter Three:
The Apprentice:
Disgust, Degeneration, and the Mechanical Grotesque in Frank Norris

Introduction

In “The Frontier Gone at Last” (1902), a spirited diatribe against national chauvinism published in *World’s Work* magazine, Frank Norris poses this lofty rhetorical question: “Will it not go on, this epic of civilization, this destiny of the races, until at last and at the ultimate end of all, we who now arrogantly boast ourselves as Americans, supreme in conquest, whether of battle-ship or of bridge-building, may realize that the true patriotism is the brotherhood of man and know that the whole world is our nation and simple humanity our countrymen?” (1189-90). This broad embrace of all humanity is a little shocking coming from Norris. He gave some indication of his capacity for humanistic universalism in the character Vanamee, who celebrates the collective corporeality of workers eating together and believes himself capable of accessing the collective mind of the herd. Perhaps the humanity that Norris encountered while he was in Cuba reporting on the Spanish American war had moved him; in an article that he wrote for the *Atlantic Monthly*, “*Comida: An Experience in Famine*” (1899), Norris meditates on the meaning of the word to the war’s refugees: “It means ‘food’; not breakfast, dinner, or supper, not food in dishes and served by a waiter in the hotel, not a polite knife-and-fork affair in any sense of the word. *Comida* is downright nourishment, sordid, vulgar nutriment, of the kind that fills empty stomachs after a three days’ abstinence” (277). It is the vulgarity of this barest form of life—*zoe*, or animal life— that seems to attract Norris in this later few years of his career. The common humanity of the Cuban refugees and Vanamee’s miners and railway workers is asserted by their hunger. This celebration of embodiment— especially the vulgar features of embodiment— is at the heart of the positive grotesque.

However, we do not get to see much Bakhtinian revelry in Norris's writing. Norris's career was cut short by his death in October 1902, and Norris's better angels do not win out in his novels and sketches of the 1890s. Norris's positive view of a united humanity in 1902 is contrasted by the racialized pessimism of his sketch "Among Cliff Dwellers," which was published in the *San Francisco Wave* in 1897. The younger Norris draws a correlation between the dilapidation of the city and the race-blending of its inhabitants: "The houses are as indeterminate as the inhabitants. But while the Cliff Dwellers themselves are busily at the work of race forming, new and vigorous, the buildings are rapidly going to wrack—plaster is crumbling, brick walls disintegrating, wooden rails, worn to a rose-wood polish, trembling and reeling drunkenly over the steep slopes" (100). Norris finds these new non-Anglo Saxons utterly incomprehensible for having violated set racial categories, and as the coherence of those categories dissolve, so too does the structure of the city itself. The sketch expresses a fascination with the apparent unknowability of these racial Others—the unknowability is so integral to this view of the city that, for about a quarter of the piece, journalistic empiricism takes a backseat to Norris's own racial imagination as Norris indulges in an extended physiognomic overview of a person that he had never seen firsthand:

I have heard of—may I yet live to see him!—a man who washes glasses in a Portuguese wine shop on the other side of the hill, whose father was a Negro and whose mother a Chinese slave girl. As I say, I have not yet set eyes on this particular Cliff Dweller. I can form no guess as to what his appearance should be. Can you? Imagine the Mongolian and African types merged into one. He should have the flat nose, and yet the almond eye; the thick lip, and yet the high cheek bone; but how as to his hair? Should it be short and crinkly, or long and straight,

or merely wavy? But the ideas of the man, his bias, his prejudices, his conception of things, his thoughts—what a jumble, what an amorphous formless mist! (CD 99)

Though by 1902 Norris speculates that “simple humanity” will be the basis for international solidarity, the article from 1897 suggests that the writer is overwhelmed by phenotypic difference. The crude racial grotesquery of Norris’s imagined disordered hodge podge of Asian and African features highlights the essential illegibility (from an Anglo Saxon perspective) of the diversifying United States population. Although the tone of “Cliff Dwellers” is largely one of amusement, the underlying anxiety of an illegible social space with implications for the legibility of the body (and vice versa) is characteristic of much of Norris’s work in the 1890s.

This chapter focuses on those adolescent works, which came before the noble epiphanies very shortly preceding his death. This dissertation is about the epistemology of embodiment in naturalism, and in order to understand that position we need to unpack the relationship between the negative grotesque and degeneration theory. Setting aside the worldliness of the article’s conclusions, the title of “Frontier Gone at Last” hints at the major problem that Norris confronts in his work: the uneasy status of nature in a corrupted, denatured world. This uneasiness is at the center of Norris’s aesthetic sensibility. His anxious interpretation of disorganized flesh and the construction of an ‘unnatural natural’ results in alienation being the dominant affect; this alienation, grounded in embodiment, is expressed as horror and disgust.

Like Crane, Norris’s art pursues an extra-rational mode of knowledge. The body itself is an instrument for knowing the world. The profoundly negative quality of Norris’s disgust-driven grotesque is evidence of the interaction between scientific discourse (particularly the medical image of the body) and declinist civilizational narratives. In Chapter One, I used Arendt’s

lamentation of the decline of the republican social space to establish the mood of the fin de siècle and explain how the epistemology of flesh related to political subjectivity. The declinism that pervades Norris's rendering of grotesque bodies is rooted in another political lamentation: Émile Zola's Rougon-Macquart series, which analyses the disintegration of France's social fabric under the Second French Empire. In his preface to *La Curée* (1872), the second in the series, Zola states his goals for writing about that period in France's history: "I wanted to show the premature exhaustion of a race which has lived too quickly and ends in the man-woman of rotten societies, the furious speculation of an epoch embodied in an unscrupulous temperament, the nervous breakdown of a woman whose circle of luxury and shame increases tenfold native appetites. And, with these three social monstrosities, I have tried to write a work of art and science which should at the same time be one of the strangest chapters in our social history" (Zola *The Kill* 3). This passage identifies the oft-used elements of Norris's negative, science-mediated grotesque: 1) exhaustion from excessive stimulation and consumption, with a consequent weakening of the physical body, especially the nerves; and 2) the corruption of natural predilections, leading towards a backwards, devolved condition. Norris takes Zola's naturalism out of France, but he inherits his gloom about the end of republican social space and the backsliding of society into a perverse, atavistic state.

When I look at Norris, I am reminded of the overeager twenty-something-year-old white men of my own time— young men who are quick to become disciples of attractive personalities and strong proponents of big theories. Norris's chief infatuations were with Zola, on whose account he adopted the naturalist label, and Darwin-inflected social thinkers like Herbert Spencer and Cesare Lombroso. I want to explore how these influences shape Norris's version of literary naturalist epistemology, which in turn affects his interpretation of political subjectivity. This

chapter is a tour of the bodies in Frank Norris's novels of decline, *Vandover and the Brute* (1914) and *McTeague* (1899), which were written contemporaneously in the mid-1890s.

Vandover's degenerative grotesque is important to the topic of political subjectivity because the bodies in these books unify two types of deterioration— biological and social. The decline in these stories is inextricably linked to a disruption of the 'golden barrier.' Norris's texts suggest that the dissolution of the divide between body and soul (through the realization that animacy is the result of a set of concrete physical mechanisms called the neurological system) have consequences for agency. Norris's reportage of the experience of mechanized embodiment helps the reader make sense of the effect of the golden barrier's dissolution on the subject. In *Vandover* and *McTeague*, the body becomes awful, disgusting, and threatening as willful control is usurped by involuntary impulse.

The golden barrier's collapse— an unavoidable biological reality— is not necessarily a bad thing, but it becomes threatening (i.e. agency and subjectivity more generally is threatened) when unhealthy habits— which, a la Riis, can themselves be the consequence of exposure to a hazardous social environment— trigger atrophy and devolution, resulting in the 'unnatural natural': the condition of being perversely (rather than robustly) animalistic. The perversely animalistic bodies of Norris's writings are grotesque: malformed, disordered, and/or existing in a chimeric, liminal state between categories (human/beast/machine). Norris's biological materialist explanation of social decline produces a rather insidious political paradigm. The political ramifications of the illegibility of the grotesque body are the refusal to recognize an individual as belonging to the political community, denying her the right to ethical consideration.

This type of policing and surveillance of bodies is a crucial concept to the study of biopolitics, but, though biopolitics is a piece of my subject matter, the instruments of discipline

and punishment are somewhat beyond the scope of this dissertation. Instead, I see an opportunity to explore how literary naturalism's experiments with epistemology via the grotesque deepen our understanding of political subjectivity by incorporating affect into its mapping of social space and the body.

Affect is extremely important here, because the primary affect of Norris's decline stories—disgust—is an axis connecting the naturalist epistemology of the body and political subjectivity. The politics of disgust are, phrased differently, the politics of rejection of a biological hazard. The hybrid epistemology that naturalism champions facilitates the politics of disgust, because its experiential framework for knowledge of the body and knowledge of social space is subject-oriented, such that disgust, which is also always subject-oriented, can also be articulated in the language of the crisis of legibility ('x is illegible, therefore I must cast it out').

Moving forward with this ambitious agenda, I first explain the impact of mechanistic thinking to Norris's approach to the grotesque and its implications for the ideas of agency and alienation. From here, I examine how analogies to life cycles of parasites frame the relationship between agency, action, and social decline in degeneration theory and provide examples of it at work in Norris's texts. To complete my analysis of Norris's version of biological decline, I move on to a discussion of atavism, which in Norris appears a latent potential for regression into a primitive state that is triggered by behavior and/or environment. Finally, I discuss the affective dimension of the negative grotesque—alienation, interpreted as disgust—and its importance to rendering the themes of atavism and decline within literary naturalism's mixed experiential-scientific epistemological framework.

The Mechanical Grotesque

Zola was Norris's hero, and a brief look at some of the former's fiction makes their mutual sympathies and predilections very plain. Zola's 1890 *La Bête Humaine*, an installment of the Rougon-MacQuart series, contains many themes and a great deal of imagery that would be right at home in the Norrisverse. I can start with the train. Much like Norris's *The Octopus* (1901), *La Bête Humaine* is set in the context of a behemoth industrial network. The plot of the book revolves around a railway line that goes between Paris and La Havre; it is one embodiment of the titular 'beast.' From the standpoint of an onlooker watching the train pass, Zola captures the railway's magnitude:

“A ce moment, le train passait, dans sa violence d'orage, comme s'il eût tout balayé devant lui. La maison en trembla, enveloppée d'un coup de vent. Ce train-là, qui allait au Havre, était très chargé, car il y avait une fête pour le lendemain dimanche, le lancement d'un navire. Malgré la vitesse, par les vitres éclairées des portières, on avait eu la vision des compartiments pleins, les files de têtes rangées, serrées, chacune avec son profil. Elles se succédaient, disparaissaient. Que de monde! encore la foule, la foule sans fin, au milieu du roulement des wagons, du sifflement des machines, du tintement du télégraphe, de la sonnerie des cloches! C'était comme un grand corps, un être géant couché en travers de la terre, la tête à Paris, les vertèbres tout le long de la ligne, les membres s'élargissant avec les embranchements, les pieds et les mains au Havre et dans les autres villes d'arrivée. Et ça passait, ça passait, mécanique, triomphal, allant à l'avenir avec une rectitude mécanique, dans l'ignorance volontaire de ce qu'il restait de l'homme, aux deux bords, caché et toujours vivace, l'éternelle passion et l'éternel crime” [At that moment, the train passed, in its violent storm, as if it had swept everything

before him. The house trembled, wrapped in a gust of wind. This train, which went to Le Havre, was very busy, because there was a party for the next day Sunday, the launch of a ship. In spite of the speed, by the lighted windows of the doors, one could see the full compartments, the rows of heads arranged, tight, each with its profile. They succeeded each other, disappeared. How many people! Again the crowd, the endless crowd, in the midst of the rolling of the wagons, the whistling of the machines, the tinkling of the telegraph, the ringing of the bells! It was like a great body, a giant being lying across the earth, its head in Paris, the vertebrae all along the line, the limbs widening with branches, feet and hands in Le Havre and in other cities of arrival. And it passed, it passed, mechanical, triumphal, going in the future with a mechanical rectitude, in willful ignorance of what was left of the man, on both sides, hidden and always alive, the eternal passion and the eternal crime.] (Zola)

Zola's awestruck assessment of the line puts us in familiar territory. The passage demonstrates a clear fascination with crowds, which alongside the machinery form a sort of Leviathan. It is a different engagement with mass life than the sheep slaughtered by the train engine, but it is grotesque all the same, in the manner that a Giuseppe Arcimboldo portrait is grotesque: a conglomeration of separate pieces that, although forming a greater whole, is left in a liminal state, stuck between categories.

The oversized human-mechanical body of the railway is a nexus where Zola's mechanistic thinking meets the image of the body. Mechanistic thinking pervades naturalism. The social mechanisms that the texts allegedly demonstrate are the most prominent example, but, since so much of the corpus of literary naturalism is absorbed in the corpora of human beings,

the mechanistic view of the body is an important feature in its own right. It shows the influence of scientific positivism and 19th century medical discourse; the mission of the naturalist text is to complement the medical image of the body with an immersive, experiential understanding of embodiment. The problem is that the mechanistic view of the body is also an anxious one. Nobody wants to think of themselves as a machine; it is a kind of violation of the ‘golden barrier’ to suggest that we can be broken down into discrete physical processes. The anxiety sprung from thinking of the body as a machine, reducible to a collection of impulses (remember, for example, the alienated robot-like body of Teta Elzbieta on the assembly line in *The Jungle*) is important for a few reasons: 1) as was already mentioned, it supports a more complex epistemology of the body than positivism can afford; 2) the terribleness of the experience of the mechanistic body allows for the existence of an ‘unnatural natural’ in the form of negative atavism; and 3) it is a political anxiety, since the atomised body— the body that is merely a bundle of nerves, vulnerable to degeneration— is an example of mass life (i.e. disorganized flesh) and such grotesque bodies are regarded as a biological threat.

The primary example of a mechanized body in *La Bête Humaine* is Lantier, a train engineer who is apparently genetically predisposed to be a rapist and murderer and whose only relief from his antisocial impulses is his operation of his train car. In Lantier, we have two forms of mechanism: the involuntary impulse to rape and kill and the symbolic integration with the literal machine. A similar figure to Lantier appears in Frank Norris’s *Vandover and the Brute* (1914)— Vandover’s losing battle with his inner *bête* is depicted as a process of actual neurological degeneration. Elsewhere, Norris seems fascinated with the coordination of neurological impulses necessary to keep a body moving. In an early short story, “The Jongleur of Taillebois” (1891), Norris’s narrator gives a graphic description of a corpse’s post-mortem

spasms as a killer struggles to bury it: “The whole form twisted itself over upon its back, the cloak was drawn from the mouth, and... from behind the black lips and clenched teeth there burst a dreadful cry” (Norris JT 16). Like the seizures of Crane’s epileptic, the random nerve impulses of a dead body take on extra meaning; the movements of the corpse are unnerving and uncanny specifically because they are a form of involuntary animation, mingling together body (corpus) and soul (animus). The horror of the twitching body stems from a disruption of categories, which makes it a problem of legibility— an epistemological problem centered on an unreadable body.

In the spirit of Leonard Cassuto’s characterization of the grotesque as a liminal state between animate and inanimate (his examples include the undeadness of Dracula, the objectified hanging corpse of the lynched slave, and a frog liquified from the inside by a waterbug), I propose a new term: the *mechanical grotesque* (Cassuto 2). Where Cassuto is concerned with the dissolving of divisions between sentient beings (usually humans) and objects, the mechanical grotesque refers to the dissolving of divisions between organic, vitalistic (i.e. self-driving) life and mechanistic processes. The mechanical grotesque is part of the negative grotesque, oriented towards abject horror or disgust. It is a close relative to the uncanny, but what differentiates the mechanical grotesque from, say, the uncanny dimension of an automated sex doll is the former’s pronounced corporeality; one is repelled by the uncanny robot because its smoothness or rigidity seems insufficiently organic, but one is repulsed by the mechanical grotesque precisely because its inorganic properties draw attention to its fleshiness.

My interest in this mode of representation first arose after watching the stop-frame animated shorts of Czech filmmaker Jan Švankmajer. Švankmajer’s *Food* (1992) consists of three vignettes corresponding to the three meals of the day. In the first vignette, “Breakfast,” a

balding man enters a shabby two-occupant dining area littered with leftovers and discarded utensils and sits at a table opposite another man, who stays completely still and wears a set of 'Instructions' around his neck. Following those instructions, the balding man operates the other like a vending machine, eats the meal produced from the other man's stomach, and (upon the meal's completion) gyrates, squeaks, and whirs, his neck bobbing and shoulders rotating as he transforms into a vending machine for use by the next diner. The film's use of pixilation—the stop motion capturing of live actors, such that their movements are unnaturally jerky and staccato—fused with bizarre sequences of claymation—e.g. clay replicas of the actor's heads have twelve inch cow tongues pulled from their mouths, where coins are deposited—contribute to a sense of the mechanical grotesque. The mechanization and objectification of the diners makes their meal seem obscene—the same sausage and bread roll reconstructed and regurgitated ad nauseam. In this scene of ultimate austerity, the mess of napkins, crumbs, and Styrofoam cups is a parody of decadence. Rather than suppress the body, Švankmajer fashions wince-inducing moments (the aforementioned tongue, the gushy squishing of an eyeball like key panel) that assert the centrality of the flesh to the dehumanization process.

I find "Breakfast" to be an apt place to begin because it is such a visceral illustration of the term that I am offering up and because it proceeds from a view of human behavior that it has in common with some strains of psychology and sociology of the 1880s and 1890s. The hardline materialist ideology proscribed by the state limited Soviet psychology and sociology to reductive materialist explanations; the psyche is more-or-less voided, its place taken up by the functions of the nervous system, and human behavior is accounted for through a combination of simple stimulus-and-response relationships and laws of historical development (Joravsky 457). Select bits of Soviet cinema like *Food* (and, in the last chapter, *The Battleship Potemkin*) are artifacts

usefully compared to late 19th century literary naturalism because they can both be seen as responding to similar intellectual milieus and themes of nervous response, conditioning, mechanistic determinism, and embodiment and disgust. Additionally, though Potemkin, Food, and Frank Norris's *Vandover and the Brute* occupy different ideological positions, the narrative treatment of their themes means that clinical, mechanical ideas are represented quite viscerally.

Mechanicalness is a major feature of Frank Norris's presentation of human beings. His characters are extremely predisposed to mindless repetition. Throughout his oeuvre, characters repeat canned phrases. In *McTeague*, after making a deal with a new landlord, Mac dumbly rattles off "that's business, you know, that's business, you know" when unable to say anything else (Norris M 206). After discovering the dead body of Maria Macapa, Heise can only repeat "He's done her for sure" over and over, well after the phrase would mean anything (318). In *Vandover and the Brute*, Geary explains the cause behind a shattering glass: "'It was the heat from your fingers and the glass was cold, you know,' he said again and again" (39). In *The Octopus*, Annixter, when challenged, invariably remarks "'Yes, well, in some ways it is, and then it other ways it isn't'" (Norris O 29). And so on. The tendency for repetition also extends to the characters' musical repertoires. Dilettante musicians Mac and Van repeatedly play the same three musical airs several times in one sitting in a loop.

These repetitions are markers of the depthlessness of character that Lee Clark Mitchell identifies in *Determined Fictions* (1989). Mitchell postulates that a naturalistic character's flatness, together with their inability to alter the trajectory of the plot, calls to question the meaning of individual subjectivity by constructing a model of the social world where agency does not play a major role in determining the outcomes of events. According to Mitchell, the philosophical mission of literary naturalism is to expose the logic of mechanical determinism as

it plays out in human affairs in order to “compel a larger reconsideration of the assumptions we hold about the coherent self” (xii). I wish to expand on Mitchell’s observations about literary naturalism’s stance on selfhood by bringing attention to the partial continuities between literary naturalism and 19th century psychological theories of nervous response. Despite the near universality of ‘determinism’ as a key word in scholarship on literary naturalism, the relationship of determinism, mechanism, and mechanical repetition to the medical image of the body has gone under-theorized. By looking at theories of instinct, habit, and environmental conditioning, I reveal that Frank Norris’s commentary about human behavior is actually saying something about the body in its reciprocal interactions with a physiologically-grounded mind. In the previous chapter, I looked at the potential for a recuperative reading of the grotesque: a form of positive identification within some of Crane’s characters’ immersion into the collective flesh. A different kind of immersion emerges in Norris— an immersion that feels like entrapment, the feeling of quicksand enclosing the ego. This is the horror of the deteriorating mechanized body. When one’s body is made to feel mechanical and one’s actions feel like automatic impulses, one may fail to identify with it. Alienation from one’s body coincides with a perceived loss of agency (alienation from action). The mechanical grotesque highlights these feelings by creating a picture of flesh that is malformed or disordered on account of its heightened mechanicalness

The anxiety of mechanical repetition and the involuntary, compulsive responses of a living organism lends itself to the mechanical grotesque. There is at least one very pronounced and uncontroversial example of the mechanical grotesque in Norris’s body of work: Trina’s death scene in *McTeague*, in which her death rattle is described as “a rapid series of hiccoughs that sounded like a piece of clockwork running down” (378). The mechanization of Trina’s movements (the jerky motions of Svankmajer’s actors seem analogous) make mortality— an

organic process if there ever was one— all the more horrible. Though this is the standout example because it directly references a piece of machinery, I want to argue that the grotesque fusion of flesh with mechanism also occurs in Norris's fictions more subtly in the texts' descriptions of nervous agitation, reflexes, and stimulus and response. The reduction of characters to bundles of nerves anticipates Arendt's atomized masses of bodies acting out of bare biological impulse. Ultimately, I expose the connections between nervous responses in Norris's fiction to the literal degeneration of the body. The stories I look at here use the theme of mechanism and its deterioration to convey a horror over the subject's inescapable attachment to their biological form.

The temperament of the mechanically grotesque subject shares some traits with the Benjaminian or Wordsworthian city-dweller: both are in an incessant state of agitation, on pins and needles, either in anxious anticipation of the next onslaught of shocks or else gradually benumbed. The signature study of this type within Norris's oeuvre is the eponymous character of *Vandover and the Brute*. Vandover's sensitivity is at the center of both his heightened receptiveness to beauty and his weakness for all stimuli (Norris VB 52). From his adolescence onward, much of his time is occupied absorbing the sights and sounds of the city, ultimately resulting in a condition of oversaturation that leaves him first in search of newer and greater stimulus— feeling that he must at all times be amused— and then literally physically numbed through a neurological disorder resembling tertiary syphilis (Norris VB 65). Norris's use of the trope of the sensitive youth wandering through the city is inflected with the intellectual trends of the 1890s. He transforms this romanticist preoccupation with the city's effect on the subject into a kind of psychological case study with a physicalist vocabulary.

The last decade of the 19th century saw a surge of publications of books on the mind that were grounded in science without being too technical for the average reader to digest (Flugel 126). Precursors to contemporary pop psychology, the books—written by the likes of John Dewey and William James— ensured that the literate public was familiar with the conceptual foundations of psychology as a discipline. Though the writers of this period vary in their conclusions about the nature of the psyche, they are all grounded in differing degrees to a “biological outlook” that treats mental activity, if not always in an absolutely reductively materialist fashion, then at least with an eye on Darwin and the life process as it is conceived of in scientific discourse (Flugel 130). For example, James’s functionalist theory of consciousness casts all psychical features in terms of purposiveness, or the self-directed goal-oriented behavior definitive of all living organisms (Notterman 38). The conceptualization of the thoughts and actions of human beings as extensions of this internal drive proceeds from the Darwinian view that psychical features are adaptive traits resultant from the process of evolution.

A theory that is so activity-oriented (rather than structure-oriented)¹⁷ leads to a lot of attention paid to instinct and habit. Though he is strongly associated with a non-reductive pragmatist view of truth and an experience-driven model of the psyche, James was also a proponent of the theory of instincts, describing in *The Principles of Psychology* (1890) a number of necessary biological impulses that motivate behavior. (J.C. Flugel [1964] credits James with starting the trend of producing long descriptive “catalogues” of instincts [130]). A functionalist reading of instinct complicates our understanding of agency; instincts are part and parcel of animacy— they are the ‘goal direction’ in goal-directed behavior— and therefore they represent the core of self-driving, autonomous organism, but they are (according to James) impulses, and

¹⁷ To put it another way: physiological rather than physical.

therefore involuntary, making the autonomous seem a bit like automatons. It is true that impulses can supposedly be suppressed— higher-order volitions can override the instinctual hardware— but the belief in the ability to make choices is at the very least *strained* by a view of life that essentializes the evolutionary algorithm, and nothing about the instinct theory of motivation demands that one concede the existence of higher-order volitions at all.

Habit places a different constraint on free will. According to James, habit is a testament to the plasticity of living organisms and an important counterpart to instinct; while instincts are innate impulses, habits are those that get molded into individual organisms through experiences. As an adaptive characteristic, it makes behaviors more efficient by simplifying “the movements required to achieve a given result,” which “makes them more accurate and diminishes fatigue” (James quoted in Blanco 274). The habit’s streamlining of behavior means a decrease in the amount of conscious attention that goes into the execution of that behavior. Hypothetically, the combination of habit and instinct could eradicate free will (though this is contradicted by our own qualitative experiences), or at least muck up the definition so much that it is no longer meaningful. Beginning around the 1910s, the behaviorist school of psychology (led in the United States by J.B. Watson, infamous now for his ‘Little Albert’ experiments) took the logic of habit to this extreme, or so Howard E. Gruber bemoans in “Darwin on Psychology and Its Relation to Evolutionary Thought” (1980): “Darwin’s argument for the evolutionary continuity of human and animal mentality was steadily transformed into the antimentalism of behavioristic psychology.... J.B. Watson endeavored to ‘re-establish Darwin’s desired continuity without hypothesizing mind anywhere’” (148). This appraisal of behaviorism is a bit overly-bitter and suffers somewhat from overstatement, but it rightly notes the school’s abandonment of a mind that is independent from compulsion.

Functionalism and other evolution-inflected theories of cognition from the late nineteenth-century are precursors to the behaviorists in their understanding of human minds as contiguous with animal ones and the emphasis placed on adaptation. Though James was a major popularizer of theories of instinct and habit in his time, the late 19th century figure more likely now to be associated with those terms is Ivan Pavlov, whose experiments starting in the early 1890s involving the salivary glands of bell-conditioned canines has provided a durable and easily-graspable image of conditioning and behaviorism for entry-level psychology students. Pavlov's research evokes a picture of the mind as one of clear, reflexive, causal associations. In the Anglosphere, Pavlov is preceded in this view by James Mill, who proposed that thought consisted mostly of trains of connected successive (though occasionally synchronous) ideas; these "mental mechanics" were later rejected by Mill's son, John Stuart Mill, who claimed the existence of non-reflexive associations between thoughts that gave the impression of connectedness (Notterman 61-3). The elder Mill is in turn preceded by several centuries by Rene Descartes's claims in *Discourse on Method* (1637) that animals are automata. Though Descartes believed that human beings were distinct from animals because the former possessed a soul, David Wootton suggests that "a systematic materialism" that conceptualizes human life as machine life is "a logical development" of the mechanistic thinking applied to animals (439). It took a few centuries—once the continuity between animal and human life was popularly entertained, if not outright accepted—for this development to be completed.

James and Pavlov represent two approaches to the psyche that are deeply influenced by Darwinian evolution and a positivistic science that strives to find predictable patterns or mechanisms in mental activity and human behavior. Importantly, the theories of this period (Pavlov's notwithstanding) also refine or criticize earlier mechanistic accounts of life. For

example, James's radical empiricism is opposed to the earlier linear associationism found in James Mill— James (1904) concludes that the connections between thoughts are as real and as teeming with irreducible qualitative stuff with the thoughts themselves— and the force of instinct and habit is countered in James's thinking by the value of fluid and irreducible individual experience (186-8). This sort of nuance gets lost easily upon transmission, and for this reason it is unsurprising that the clearer-cut Pavlovian model and choice bits of William James's functionalism would become dominant in the next century, while James's radical empiricism would find its descendants sequestered in philosophy departments among the phenomenologists and vitalists. Meanwhile, popular culture leached off the most gripping or easily-translated aspects of psychological thought, much in the same way that the IQ test started popping up in magazines with a general readership.

An exaggerated or vulgarized version of the instinct/habit model appears throughout the literary naturalist canon, particularly, as I will argue, in the fictions of Frank Norris. Literary Naturalism's commitment to a deterministic worldview is just about an as-exhaustively-written-about subject as any in this subfield of literary criticism. It is central to Donald Pizer's essays about humanism and agency that in some ways inaugurate the modern conversation about naturalism. I find Lee Clark Mitchell's *Determined Fictions* to be a good leaping off point for a discussion about determinism and 19th century psychology because he frames that determinism in terms of mechanism and compulsion, which is compatible with the theories of instinct, habit, and conditioning already introduced. "Because they always choose to act as their strongest desires dictate," Mitchell writes, "[the] choices [of naturalistic characters] always seem predictable and outside their control.... Naturalism illustrates the principle that the compulsion to act in a predictable fashion undermines our assumption of human agency" (7). In Mitchell's

outlook, the contradictions between choice and compulsion evacuate the concepts of agency, while the limited perspective of the individual evacuates the concept of coherent selfhood. To demonstrate these points, Mitchell looks to Norris's Vandover, whose impulsive actions are rationalized post-facto to give the appearance of agency, suggesting that agency is "simply a social fiction, as arbitrary and invidious as any other" (77). Selfhood, Mitchell asserts, is similarly belatedly-constructed, as evidenced by the first pages of the novel, wherein the weakness of Vandover's early recollections cast doubt on the ability to piece together his character: "What he at first imagined to be the story of his life, on closer inspection turned out to be but a few disconnected incidents that his memory had preserved of their importance" (Norris VB 3). According to Mitchell, this wavering is an admission that Vandover's image of a coherent selfhood "stands at odds with his daily experience, so much so that he cannot help but acknowledge it in the novel's opening words" (83). These are departures from the conventions of realist fiction, whose action typically centers on the resolution of psychological turmoil precipitated by one ethical dilemma or another (for example, Huck Finn's crisis of conscience concerning Jim's status as property) (Mitchell xvi). Through the undermining of these conventions, the emphasis is instead placed on the fragility of the already-mentioned concepts, making naturalism a clear precursor to postmodernism.

From my perspective, this incompleteness of agency and identity that Mitchell describes is most suggestive of a brand of literary folk psychology that treats the psyche as composed of 1) the force of instinct and 2) the reflexes of bundles of nerves. I agree with Mitchell that the form of the literary naturalist text has consequences for what it is able to achieve thematically. Situated somewhere between (as I argued in the last chapter) Mazlish's 'sociological' and 'literary' exploration of social problems, each 'experimental novel' proposes and tests out a

theoretical model of the social system. The conceit of the novel (at least according to Ian Watt) is that an impression of internal workings of the mind is necessary to give the effect of realism. In a literary naturalist text, traditional psychological realism (which is perhaps to say psychological complexity) takes a backseat to a representation of the mind that serves the text's explication of the social system. This does not mean that the characters of a naturalist text are two-dimensional, merely pawns in a larger demonstration that privileges breadth over depth; rather, the limits placed on agency and identity allow a different kind of experiential realism to rise to the surface.

Mitchell is correct that *Vandover and the Brute* forecloses on the possibility of the psychological transformation typical of the realist novel. The course of events is written so as to seem inevitable, the prose full of post-factum asides about this or that occurrence being another step closer to Vandover's ultimate degradation, delivered in the form of small check-ins on the size and dominance of the young man's inner brute (11). Norris did not invent dramatic irony, but these moments are so regular that one never loses sight of the inevitable destruction of the artist and the unleashing of the brute, and the overall trajectory of the plot at times seems more important than any particular detail. Towards the backend, the book gains some immediacy; the final fourth of the story is a playing-out of the process that transpired throughout the first three-fourths, and the feeling of immediacy is due to the fact that the narrative has finally seemed to catch up with itself... and due to the physical nature of the consequences of Vandover's life path. Though the first part of *Vandover and the Brute* teems with sensual pleasures, the texture of lived experience is only felt in its most intense and direct form with the description of Vandover's illness. I claim that the experience of Vandover's illness is the key to understanding the book's message about agency, which it presents as contingent on social and biological legibility. Vandover's mechanically grotesque metamorphosis is a concrete example of how, in

Norris's fiction, alienation from the body is bound up in wider narratives of social decline, such that social structure and biological structure seem partly interdependent.

While the determinism of the plot disallows traditional psychological realism, that same determinism provides for a yet more immersive creatureal realism. Because it is embedded in a narrative of social decline, this creatureal realism can be used to articulate the relationship between a negative hyperawareness of the body and the transformation of social space during this era of rapid urbanization. *Vandover* demonstrates how 'golden barrier' anxieties become entangled with fears of social legibility and the disintegration of political subjectivity. The city is a source of biological threat: disease-ridden and filled with animalistic characters and genetic anomalies, it presents a risk of contamination to middle class people like Vandover. When the body is exposed to the city, it becomes itself the site of incoherence and disorder. The mechanical grotesquery of the neuro-degenerating syphilitic pseudo-lycanthrope is an example of this incoherence. And if it has a biopolitical cause ('unhealthy' social structures that breed biological anomalies), the degeneration has a political consequence: the incoherence of the malfunctioning mechanical body proves to be compromising of agency and threatening to the internal integrity of the subject.

As an 'experimental novel,' *Vandover and the Brute* attempts to work out the causes of the titular character's degradation. In constructing an explanation, the narrator relies on a combination of Jacob Riis-like environmentalism and appeals to inherent vice. One of several major environmental factors contributing to Vandover's degeneracy is his unadulterated exposure to the city, which he submerges himself in as a young man: "He listened with all his ears to everything that was said and went about through the great city with eyes open only to its foulness" (Norris VB 11). The city has the same toxic effect on Vandover as it does on Riis's

Italians and Jews, whose moral fiber is supposedly eroded by the squalor in which they live. Use of the word “foulness” casts vice as a literal contaminant, an extension of the polluted air and horse droppings on the street that in the 1890s were acknowledged as persistent urban hazards and would have been in the forefront of the minds of Norris’s middle-class readership (Kiechle 100). In *Time, Desire and Horror* (1991), Alain Corbin writes that, by the beginning of nineteenth century, the densification of living space brought pollution, air quality, and biological risk to the forefront of the rhetoric of urbanization in the West: “The terror inspired by putrid diseases and the miasmas which propagated them... encouraged this olfactory vigilance which was always on the lookout for threatening putrefaction” (147). By the 1890s, miasma theory had been overtaken by germ theory, but the preoccupation with pollution persisted. Melanie Kiechle (2017) suggests that over time the rhetoric surrounding the pollution and public cleanliness debate focused more and more on the problem of individual merit or predilection, so that bad air and foulness was treated less as a risk to the health of urban dwellers (although it was also that) than as a consequence of their preferences (234). Riis, as we saw in Chapter Two, would take issue with this causal claim, arguing that the living conditions inform habits, which then reinforce those conditions. In any event, the popular preoccupation with urban pollution and the transformation of the risk of physical contamination into a contamination of personality by the city makes Vandover’s “progress of ruin and pollution” an issue of biology, psychology, and social standing alike (Norris VB 66).

The link between contamination anxiety and the city finds its perfect expression in syphilis. It has apparently gone unnoticed by critics writing about Norris that the symptoms of syphilitic infection resemble the mental state of the overloaded city-dweller. The epileptic episodes that overtake Vandover seem like a permutation of the nervous condition of the

sensitive artist (which, indeed, is how Vandover is characterized repeatedly) rattled by constant shocks to the system. After his initial attack, Vandover is described as being in a state of exhaustion, “his brain in a whirl, his frame worn out as if from long physical exertion... a shock and a recoil of all his nerves” (Norris VB 242). The language of nervous exhaustion, to be taken up later by Benjamin in his Freud-influenced reading of Baudelaire, reflects a medical culture moving away from teleological explanations of psychic disorder to reductionist ones based on the physiology of nerve impulses (Lazar 244). The insensate numbness or “savage torpor” of Wordsworth’s urbanite is literalized in the numbness that spreads from the back of Vandover’s skull and prevents sustained attention on any object (notably books). The medicalization of these features of urban experience creates a mechanism-based explanation of mental atrophy, about which Norris’s narrator is happy to expound:

It was the punishment that he had brought upon himself, some fearful nervous disease, the result of his long indulgence of vice, his vile submission to the brute that was to destroy his reason; some collapse of all his faculties, beginning first with that which was highest, most sensitive—his art—spreading onward and downward till he should have reached the last stages of idiocy.... It was the vast fearful engine riding him down beneath its myriad spinning wheels. (Norris VB 243)

This explanation contains two machines: the engine of the deterioration process—given a strictly mechanistic view of cause and effect, fate is its own machine— and Vandover himself, succumbing to an illness that affects fine motor control and renders him permanently unproductive.

I bring up unproductivity because Vandover's inability to perform his craft is yet another link between biological and social decline. In "Naturalism's Handiwork: Labor, Class, and Space in *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco*" (2014), Kiara Kharpertian observes that hands are often used in literary naturalism metonymically to refer to an entire person (150). The stress placed on manual dexterity, Kharpertian claims, is part of the "American machine-body complex" theorized by Mark Seltzer in *Bodies and Machines* (1992) that imagines the body as continuous with the machinery that it manipulates (Seltzer quoted in Kharpertian 152). Vandover's syphilis is therefore an ailment of the nerves—conceived of as basically mechanical in its responses to stimuli—that affects the most delicate and machine-like part of the body. In Chapter One, I dissected Elzbieta's fusion with the assembly line in *The Jungle*, which rendered her blankly mechanical and robbed her of her agency. Vandover's process of becoming a machine presents yet another negative effect. The loss of fine motor control and dulling of the mind shows that, in addition to the agency issue, the other problem with being a machine is the propensity for machines to wear down. As always, the obliteration of Vandover's dexterity also points to social decline. Norris's investment in the culture of professionalism and his disdain for grunt work (versus the detail-oriented work of the artist or tradesman) resembles the Arendtian work/labour divide that is integral to her view of a collapsing Public Realm.

In the next section, I elaborate on the theme of dulling, wearing down, falling apart within Norris's use of the grotesque. Norris's mechanical way of thinking about the body extends to a mechanized conception of evolution and devolution. By tying agency, action, and movement to the condition of body, Norris is able to conceptualize uselessness, failure, and inaction as a catalyst for biological degeneration. If a mechanical view of the physical universe is

the foundation of Norris's representation of the body, then degeneration theory is its narrative thrust.

Degeneration Theory

Norris's mechanical grotesque is very well-suited to capturing the visceral horror of unwinding like a broken clock. These moments of bodily liminality in Frank Norris's fiction personalize the wider social anxieties about mass life, which in said fiction hinges the medical image of the body. Treating the medical image of the body as the stuff of a supernatural horror story¹⁸ is consistent with Norris's generally negative use of the grotesque. Norris uses the negative grotesque more often not because mass life is inherently evil or bad— Vanamee's positive appraisal of collective embodiment in *The Octopus* shows that this is not the case— but because modernity has corrupted the body in some crucial way. Reminiscent of Henry George's criticism of the health of urban communities, in Norris's work it is apparent that something about the structure of the social realm has caused certain bodies to turn against nature and go sour. Hannah Arendt, in her explanation of the conditions that transform a People into an atomized mob, makes a similar argument: the metaphorical body politic degenerates, breaks apart, and becomes (in its most deteriorated state: the concentration camp) a "bundle of reactions" because the structure of the different realms of society have crumbled (Arendt *Origins* 438). From Arendt's perspective, the crumbling is attributable to the types of activity that take place in those realms: *work* and *action* being traded out for mere *labour*. Norris's social theory is sensitive to

¹⁸ Incidentally, *Vandover and the Brute* somewhat resembles the 1988 horror movie *Vampire's Kiss*, dir. Robert Bierman. In the former, venereal disease causes a young artist to take on the symptoms of lycanthropy. In the latter, a literary agent hallucinates the symptoms of vampirism, also after a risky sexual encounter. The emphasis in both is the degeneration of the main character's mental state after an initial infection, which shoves them from a comfortable upper-middle-class lifestyle to total destitution.

differences between different types of activities, but he treats these distinctions as an issue of movement itself, the assumption being that movement is intrinsically connected to progressive evolution. The absence of movement has the opposite effect: deevolution, an unnatural reversion of natural processes.

The ‘inherent traits’ that are important to Norris’s understanding of human behavior are malleability/passiveness and the inner brute. These are things that play a large role in the trajectory of Vandover’s life, and they also factor heavily into *McTeague*, which was written in nearly the same time frame as *Vandover and the Brute* but saw publication over a decade earlier. Both also relate directly to the themes of biological degeneration and devolution, which I argue factor prominently into Norris’s use of the grotesque.

In the fin de siècle, the concepts of degeneracy and degeneration rose to prominence in scientific and cultural venues alike. These concepts rely on the understanding that evolution is generally progressive— that there is a narrative thrust towards the modifications incurred through natural processes. For Herbert Spencer, evolution takes a Hegelian path towards increasing complexity and increasing diversification of life (Hofstadter 23). Degeneration is a violation of this natural trajectory. This opinion that a natural process can be made unnatural and lead to unnatural physical states is the seed of eugenics’ moral condemnation of the modern world. British zoologist Edwin Ray Lankester writes in *Degeneration: A Chapter in Darwinism* (1880) that degeneration is gradual change through which an organism “becomes adapted to less varied and less complex conditions of life” (314). In Lankester’s thinking, adaptation to one’s surroundings reduces one to a “lower condition” if it means being fitted “to less complex action and reaction” (Lankester 314). This evaluation of evolution suggests a hierarchy of development

arranged around the concept of animacy, which for Lankester is measured according to the intricacy of the actions performed in stimulus-and-response loops.

From this hierarchy, one might glean the importance of manual dexterity for Norris. In *McTeague*, the titular character's decline is precipitated by the loss of his ability to practice dentistry, a profession requiring great dexterity. Upon losing his connection to dentistry, he becomes more and more bestial, his days dominated by the search for creature comforts. No longer able to support himself, his laziness and his appetites compound to produce an atavistic viciousness centered around the mouth: a biting mouth that cannibalizes his wife and an insatiably hungry mouth that gets him lost in an unsustainable streak of spending. Trina, likewise, is deprived of her ability to perform dexterous work by gangrene infection caused by a combination of an environmental pollutant (the paint that she uses to coat her figurines) and her husband's nibbling. The new deformity of her hands requires Trina to take on menial labor of a less productive sort that, the text implies, her lowered state is better suited for: "One can hold a scrubbing-brush with two good fingers and the stumps of two others even if both joints of the thumb are gone" (Norris M 352). *McTeague* couples the loss of dexterity with the cultivation of purposeless and excessive carnal pleasures. The bodies of both Mac and Trina become accustomed to the form of instantly-exhausted gratification. In Algonquian folklore, a wendigo is a spirit-possessed human whose voracious cannibalistic hunger is never satiated because its monstrous body never ceases to grow. *McTeague* offers two personifications of greed similarly focused on taboo enjoyment, unfulfilling consumption, and taboo enjoyment: McTeague falls into a vicious circle of appetite and slovenly violence; Trina's body atrophies and becomes sallow and anemic through the force of her "avarice," her flesh cleaving "tight to her small skeleton"— so ghoulishly disfigured, she withdraws the fortune that she had invested (thus

making it an 'idle' fortune that no longer produces new income) and rolls her naked body around in a bed of gold coins (Norris M 335, 344, 360-1). The transformations of Mac and Trina are but one illustration of Norris's tendency to condemn styles of survival and animal life that run afoul of his Anglo-Saxon Protestant ethos of professionalization, strenuous exertion, production.

Vandover and the Brute also concerns a character's decline from skilled productivity to corporeal breakdown and defilement. Vandover's progressing syphilis infection is dramatized as a degeneration of his psyche from artistic competency to idiocy. The atrophy of Vandover's 'art' is exhibited first in the loss of fine motor control, which the text connects directly to an all-over damage to his nerves: "Grotesque and meaningless shapes, the mocking caricatures of those he saw in his fancy, grew under his charcoal, while slowly, slowly, a queer, numb feeling came in his head, like a rising fog" (Norris 225). If urban life addled and then benumbed the nerves with excessive stimuli and contaminating substances, and if the 19th century Darwinian-influenced schools of psychology viewed transformations of the nervous system as evolutionary modification, then the city appears as a catalyst for degeneration. In Lankester, it is not so much the oversaturation of stimuli that incurs degeneration as it is a lack of activity, or more specifically an environment that does not demand vigorous, complex activity from the organisms that inhabit it. The state of complexity of a living thing is lowered when the environment no longer rewards complexity. In Norris, oversaturation is connected to apathy and passivity, which— combined with the polluting substances of the city— are responsible for the deterioration of his talents.

Norris's ideas about decline, combined with the literary naturalist experiential mode of epistemology, yields an interesting contribution to our understanding of the intersection of bodies and social space. His fictions, being experiments designed to shed light on social truths,

are fictive manifestations of his theories of social decline and, just as importantly, statements on what it takes to read and interpret social space. In anticipation of the Arendtian model of social decline wherein the loss of civic values is tied to a public fixation with biological life, Norris's texts demonstrate that the experience of embodiment is an essential to knowledge of social decline; the biologization of social life becomes immersively-felt, such that experience appears critical to understanding. Norris's creatural realism fleshes out degeneration theory, thereby complementing an abstract scientific discourse with an extra-rational embodied form of knowledge.

Atavism and Analogy

Degeneration theorists conceive of biological evolution as a forward-moving mechanism. Degeneration theory hinges on narrative, which in turn hinges on analogy to imagined previous states of history.¹⁹ In Norris, to become a brute is to time travel. A character's inner brute is not just raw or uncultivated but anachronistic. The language surrounding descriptions of the inner brute has an unmistakable temporal dimension. In *McTeague*, Mac is, like Vandover, subject to the impulses of his "evil instincts" that, as a unit, constitute his inner brute (Norris M 30). The instincts are traces of earlier stages of evolution that rise to the surface in response to certain

¹⁹ In *The Age of Analogy* (2016), Devin Griffiths argues that analogical thought experiments— in the form of "historical" comparisons between human-directed artificial selection and billions of years of proposed unguided evolution— are the main strategy that Charles Darwin uses to develop the theory of evolution in his *On the Origin of Species* (1859) and *The Descent of Man* (1871) (212-3). Though Darwin's theories were later verified through their ability to inform accurate predictions about the fossil record, their initial development relied on the construction an imagined version of organisms' previous states based observations of similar present-day states, a comparative method that Griffiths claims was relatively new and in fact appeared prominently in fiction, springing from the historical romances of Sir Walter Scott, who relied on analogies between former and present social structures and technologies to create a sense of interconnectedness between past and present (Griffiths 86). Where Griffiths sees in Scott a great access point for understanding the development of historicism and the "historical imagination," I see texts of American literary naturalism as a reflection of the value placed on analogy as a method of science-writing in the nineteenth and early twentieth (87).

stimuli. A supine Trina, knocked out by ether, stirs the “the animal in the man” (Norris M 30). Hard liquor “awakened” in McTeague “an ape-like agility” (Norris M 373). While on the run from bounty-hunters, McTeague’s inner brute that “slept so close to the surface” becomes irresistible as the dentist’s fight-or-flight response kicks in (Norris M 427). Instinct—which I have established was in popular consciousness in the 1890s and used to refer to involuntary impulses in a stimulus/response system— is suggested here to be an expression of latent animality. The scientific analogy, used to link contemporary and historical processes, is here exploited to such a degree that the lower drives of human beings are seen as evidence of a deep continuity with the past.

The persistence of the past in the present is underscored by landscape cues that appear after McTeague’s descent into pure animal struggle. The unwelcoming geography of the California mountains and desert is treated as an atavistic organism in its own right. The arid plains of Placer County are described as “a vast, unconquered brute of the Pliocene epoch, savage, sullen, and magnificently indifferent to man” (Norris M 379-80). The rock possesses its own latent primordial animacy, a “tremendous immeasurable Life... suggestive of primeval forces held in reserve” (Norris M 379). The suggestion is that the past, with its ancient forces and ‘laws,’ has never really been left behind. This, the text implies, is the only appropriate for McTeague (and his rival, Marcus) in the last stages of regression.

In drawing comparisons between human and non-human life, Norris is selective. The accent is on forms of life that are isolated, narrowly self-interested, and lacking in higher-level dexterity (if occasionally demonstrating bodily coordination, the absence of an intelligent human sensitivity leaves them, on the whole, clumsy, unwieldy, or insensate). Norris opts for the parasite, the lesser ape, or the canine (a pseudo-werewolf in *Vandover*, the recurring symbol of

two warring dogs in *McTeague*) (Norris M 61). He favors these organisms while neglecting others such as ants or bees— who, with their incredible productivity, would better demonstrate the moral law of Nature that rewards activity and, with their cooperation, would seem to demonstrate an alternative to endless competition between individuals. Norris's texts show a bias for a model of intraspecies interaction based on the latter; we are all, evidently, lone creatures in an indifferent world. *Vandover and the Brute* indicates that our prehistoric impulses lead us towards myopic self-interest. The narrator records Vandover's sense of ethics during a shipwreck: "Every soul on board might drown, so only he should be saved. It was the primitive animal instinct, the blind adherence to the first great law, an impulse that in this first moment of excitement could not be resisted" (Norris VB 128-9). The artist is later ashamed that his ethical stance could be fully determined by a knee-jerk reaction, but his reaction is not unique. The passengers and crew on Vandover's lifeboat reject the pleading of a drowning man, who himself shows no consideration for how his desperate floundering might doom the rest of them: "It was the animal in them all that had come to the surface in an instant, the primal instinct of the brute striving for its life and for the life of its young" (Norris VB 140). The struggle for survival is a zero-sum game, and the instincts of human beings compel them to respond to situations accordingly.

This observation leads me to consider an apparent paradox. The 'first great law' of nature would seem to reward the regression of the organism, which is elsewhere attributed to a violation of the narrative thrust of evolution towards progress. Though Norris combines moral and natural law, the 'violation' of natural law seems itself to be the consequence of natural processes. Rather than view this contradiction as a flaw in the texts, I would like to consider how such theoretical inconsistencies are resolved with the category of the 'unnatural natural.'

In literary naturalism, this forward motion is fueled by Schopenhaurian life force. This force is complicated because, while it can spur progress, it can also drag one back into the primordial ooze. This duality is touched at in the train scene from *La Bête Humaine*: “Et ça passait, ça passait, mécanique, triomphal, allant à l'avenir avec une rectitude mécanique, dans l'ignorance volontaire de ce qu'il restait de l'homme, aux deux bords, caché et toujours vivace, l'éternelle passion et l'éternel crime” [And it passed, it passed, mechanical, triumphal, going in the future with a mechanical rectitude, in willful ignorance of what was left of the man, on both sides, hidden and always alive, the eternal passion and the eternal crime.] (Zola). The train is being used as a metaphor for the primordial spirit that propels humankind forward, while also serving as a reminder of its ancient animal origins. The source of all human passion—the literal engine of industry—is also the source of its brutality. Zola's train is not unlike Walter Benjamin's angel of history, uncontrollably and violently surging forward. The final scene of *La Bête Humaine* depicts that same train, now full of soldiers, careening towards the beginning of the disastrous Franco-Prussian War; its engineer, Lantier, has been decapitated by the train's wheels: “Qu'importaient les victimes que la machine écrasait en chemin! N'allait-elle pas quand même à l'avenir, insoucieuse du sang répandu? Sans conducteur, au milieu des ténèbres, en bête aveugle et sourde qu'on aurait lâchée parmi la mort, elle roulait, elle roulait, chargée de cette chair à canon, de ces soldats, déjà hébétés de fatigue, et ivres, qui chantaient” [What did it matter to the victims that the machine crushed on the way! Was she not going anyway in the future, careless of spilled blood? Without a driver, in the midst of darkness, like a blind and deaf beast one would have let loose among death, it rolled, it rolled, loaded with this cannon-flesh, with those soldiers, already dazed with fatigue, and drunk, who were singing] (Zola).

While Zola might be content to let the irony of the beastliness of human ‘progress’ speak for itself, it presents an unsettling contradiction for the progressively-minded degeneration theorist. What concerns Norris is not a blind stampede into the future but cultural stagnation; he is, after all, coming to terms with having reached the limits of the North American Frontier. The problem of the ambiguous influence of the primeval life force is manifest in Norris’s sketch “Brute” (1897), which he later incorporated into *McTeague*. In this variation, the eponymous big man trudges home after a day surrounded by humungous machinery:

“He had been working all day in a squalid neighborhood by the gas works and coal yards, surrounded by lifting cranes, pile drivers, dredging machines, engines of colossal, brutal strength, where all about him were immense blocks of granite, tons of pig iron; everything had been enormous, crude, had been huge in weight, tremendous in power, gigantic in size... By long association with such things he had become like them, huge, hard, brutal, strung with a crude, blind strength, stupid, unreasoning. He was on his way home now, his immense hands dangling half-open at his sides; his head empty of thought. He only desired to be fed and to sleep” (Norris “Brute” 80-1).

The brute takes on characteristics of his surroundings: an awesome industrial setting that, like Placer County and Zola’s railway, suggests prehistory with its magnitude and lack of refinement. The fossil fuel extraction equipment— symbols of modernity— are warped into a relic of an ancient period of great powerful forces; in the effort to advance industry, their influence deforms the worker, making him an oversized hulk dominated by the desire for creature comforts. Like the unstoppable force of the train, the unbearable power of the construction vehicles stands for

two kinds of nature: the nature of movement, action, and production; and the nature of the mentally-numbed, devolved man-beast.

This duality is what necessitates the category of the ‘unnatural natural,’ signifying a thing that is at once of nature and against it. For degeneration theorists, the life cycle of parasitic organisms is the perfect illustration of this category. Most people are at least passingly familiar with the propaganda tactic of comparing an unfavored social group to parasites, but the depth of this analogy within degeneration theory really deserves our close attention. In the context of this dissertation, the parasite-human analogy is significant because its rationale— the assertion of a causal relationship between an unwholesome inactive lifestyle to neurological and physiological regression into a disorderly anachronistic state— is the ‘scientific’ basis for the negative grotesque in Norris’s work.

In *The Gothic Body* (1996), Kelly Hurley notes that degeneration theory tends to be Lamarckian rather than faithfully Darwinian in its view of the effects of individual behavior on organic structure (67). Lamarckian evolution, which insists that behavior can alter the deep biological structure of an organism and that can pass on acquired traits to their offspring, creates a space for moralizing in the discourse on evolution. There is a general tendency among degeneration theorists to equate civilizational development, personal finance, and natural biological changes that occur within parasitic organisms. For instance, Lankester’s discussion of parasitism from *Degeneration* excoriates the idle rich, the Roman Empire, and arthropods alike:

Any new set of conditions occurring to an animal which render its food and safety very easily attained, seem to lead as a rule to Degeneration; just as an active healthy man sometimes degenerates when he becomes suddenly possessed of a fortune; or as Rome degenerated when possessed of the riches of the ancient

world. The habit of parasitism clearly acts upon animal organisation in this way. Let the parasitic life once be secured, and away go legs, jaws, eyes, and ears; the active, highly-gifted crab, insect, or annelid may become a mere sac, absorbing nourishment and laying eggs. (Lankester 314)

The common element among this list of very different things is the corruptive influence of excess and abundance. The enemy is apathy. Many nineteenth-century proponents of the concept of degeneration subscribe to a ‘use it or lose it’ theory of biological change, inspiring in them a small obsession with parasitic organisms whose larval stages are more ‘complex’ than their adult ones. In *Natural Law in the Spiritual World* (1883), for example, biologist and evangelist Henry Drummond uses moral language to explain the ‘devolution’ of the *Sacculina* from a tick-like creature to a limbless parasite fused to the genitals of a crab:

The hereditary taint of parasitism is in the blood, and it proceeds to adapt itself to the pauper habits of its race... The *Sacculina* sets out in search of a suitable host, and in an evil hour, by that fate which is always ready to accommodate the transgressor, is thrown into the company of the Hermit-crab... It was first a disregard of evolution, and second, which is practically the same thing, an evasion of the great law of work. And the revenge of Nature was therefore necessary.

(quoted in Morton 93)

The first thing that one might notice is the anthropomorphization of the *Sacculina* through the use of labels related to human economics— activity becomes “work” in a literal sense, and sucking the blood of another creature is deemed an illegitimate means of survival: a “pauper habit” demonstrating its lowliness and unworthiness. Though metaphors of parasitism abound in economic critiques of all stripes, this appears to be reverse— parasitism is here compared to

economics, not the other way around— and it needs to be stressed that what Drummond proposes here is not metaphorical. The laws of evolution and a 19th century capitalist work ethic become synonymous. The second thing to note about this passage is that binding evolution to work makes Drummond’s concept of evolution linear and directional; progressive evolution is that which enhances the work activity of the organism, while regression is a retreat into “pauper habits” of slovenliness and apathy. The third detail from Drummond’s excoriation of the *Sacculina* that I think is worthy of special attention is the word “habit,” which is used differently here than in James or the other scientists so-far discussed. In Drummond, the process of evolution (or devolution) is enacted through recurrent behaviors that are at once racial (and thus inherited) and individual (and thus must be performed by the individual to achieve the Lamarckian outcome). The ambiguity of this attribution of behavior— equivalent to the Judeo-Christian concept of sin, which is supposedly both an action and something latent within human beings— allows for the biological maturation of the *sacculina* to be put in a moral framework as punishment for a violation of natural law: an ‘unnatural natural’ phenomenon.

In *Vandover and the Brute*, Vandover’s deterioration very closely resembles the maturation process of the parasite, suggesting real biological consequences for the habits that he develops *and* innate psychological features that make him extraordinarily adaptive yet very passive. Over and over, Norris’s narrator tells the readers that Vandover has accommodated himself to some change in his environment. Having moved to Boston to attend Harvard, Vandover is extremely malleable: “There was little of the stubborn or unyielding about Vandover, his personality was not strong, his nature pliable and he rearranged himself to suit his new environment at Harvard very rapidly” (Norris VB 17). Early on, Vandover’s “yielding disposition” had evolved into a set of bad habits that prevent him from suppressing his inner

brute: “it would be hard, it would be disagreeable to resist, and Vandover had not accustomed himself to the performance of hard, disagreeable duties” (19, 29). These habits of avoiding work and seeking out easy sensual satisfaction produce in him a general attitude of indolence that keeps him from seriously cultivating the higher ‘artistic’ side of his nature: “it bored him to work very hard, and when he did not enjoy his work he stopped it at once.... That certain little weakness of Vandover’s character, his self-indulgence, had brought him to such a point that he thought he had to be amused. If his painting amused him, very good; if not, he found something else that would” (65). Throughout, Norris’s narrator’s tone is a little mocking as Vandover descends into creature comforts. “Vandover was self-indulgent,” he reports: “he loved these sensuous pleasures, he loved to eat good things, he loved to be warm, he loved to sleep. He hated to be bored and worried— he liked to have a good time” (32). In accordance with Lankester’s description of degeneration, Vandover finds himself in a station in life that does not demand exertion, bringing out the worst bits of his nature and causing an actual change in his organic structure, pushing him to a lowered state that has him first unable to concentrate and then crawling around on all fours like a wolf. His atrophy is akin to nature’s vengeance on Drummond’s sacculina; the parasite’s unnatural nature and unwholesome adaptability disincentivize work and ultimately transform him into a lesser being.

Mass Life, All Nerves

Measuring degeneration with activity— and not just any activity, but with patterns of behavior that are responsive to one’s environment— puts the weight of evolution (progressive and regressive alike) on the nerves. Nerves show up everywhere in 19th century thought. Stimulus-response systems were important (albeit in divergent ways) to scientists like Pavlov

and psychologists like William James, who were themselves responding to and refining a bank of mechanistic accounts of life stretching back to the 17th century, and who— following Darwin— were considered human mental activity to be continuous with animal life for the first time. I have suggested that, in addition to this intellectual line of descent, the material changes in living arrangements— namely: urbanization— contributed to the popularity of nerve-based theories of behavior and physical structure.²⁰ Around the time stimulus/response became the name of the game, everyone seemed to be getting very neurotic. In the neurotic’s account of the city, the bourgeois individual’s anxieties about the legibility of social space were based on the limitations of their powers of perception and of the epistemological modes to which they had access.

This tour through Norris’s naturalism is intended to demonstrate that problems with the nerves— be they hyperactive or in a state of entropy — directly implicate the body. The disintegration of the discrete self into a bundle of disconnected impulses is a form of disorganized flesh. Vandover indicates that, beyond a certain degree of dis-integration, the neurotic subject surrenders his agency. Additionally, it must be remembered that, for subscribers to degeneration theory, the nervous conditions associated with city life take on a species-level importance. At stake are the definitions of humanity— including a possible gradient of humanness— that determines a society’s ethical obligations to its members. Finally, the interdependence of biological and civilizational deterioration translates every trace of neural

²⁰ These concerns preceded the discourse on neuroticism and the nervous system. Wordsworth does not need a matured science of psychology to identify a connection between one’s environment and one’s state of mind in his criticism of urban cacophony. By the 1830s, medical practitioners who attributed diseases of the body to mental unrest had begun to cite the city as a contributing factor, as Charles Turner Thackrah does in *The Effects of Arts, Trades and Professions, and of Civic States and Habits of Living* (1831): “Of the courses of disease, anxiety of mind is one of the most frequent and important. When we walk the streets of large commercial towns, we can scarcely fail to remark the hurried gait and care-worn features of the well-dressed passengers” (Thackrah 292). By the 1890s, the science of the mind had advanced sufficiently that the physical structure of the brain was being considered in its own right, which also meant an intensification of the assumed relationship between cognition and behavior and disease.

pathology into a social sickness and every trace of social dysfunction into a health risk. Both internally and externally, the body in a trajectory of neurological decline corrodes the integrity of the political subject.

In this nest of neuroticism, I return to moon-faced Peter Lorre and his portrayal of Hans Beckert, the deviant in Fritz Lang's *M*. with an irresistible compulsion to kill. Beckert and Zola's Lantier are the same type of animal, driven by an involuntary impulse: a deeply-rooted sickness in Beckert, an inner beast for Lantier. What is the value of dedicating entire works of art to these men? I claim that the answer goes beyond morbid curiosity or prurient interest. Their crimes fascinate because their aberrations are a problem for the regular social order— their fellows do not know how to manage involuntary actions in our legal system because ideas like guilt and accountability dwindle in the absence of agency— but also because their lack of agency is a tad familiar. That eternal Schopenhauerian force that explains atavism instructs us that inside every individual is an animal will ready to be exercised. While some of Norris's work features a positive version of atavism (e.g. the noble and robust Anglo Saxon in his adventure stories, which are outside of the purview of this chapter), his decline narratives excel at depicting the negative variety; the atavism in *McTeague* and (especially) *Vandover* is made vividly real through the experience of horrified disgust at the self being taken over by mechanicalness and the mind succumbing to the devolved animal state of the body.

Norris's nerve-heavy representation of bodies is consistent with contemporary physiological theories that justify his narrative view of evolution, producing clear indicators of progress and decline. In turn, the atavistic tendencies of the human animal provide a causal explanation for the disorganization and incoherence of the new urban bodies that Norris gawks at. They also provide a seemingly scientific materialist explanation for alienation, ascribing the

perceived loss of agency in the industrializing, urbanizing era to biology. Instead of reading naturalist characters as lacking interiority, we should drop our expectations for interiority that are derived from the traditional psychological realism of the Howellsian realist novel and consider the possibility that this is what interiority looks like in a hard-deterministic universe.

I have argued that a prominent feature of naturalism's mixed epistemology is the experiential mode of knowledge. To miss the psychological element of Norris's naturalism is to overlook this mode, maybe due to a reliance on an overly rationalistic vision of the psyche that reduces cognition to trains of thought and a small repertoire of emotions. Creatural realism offers more holistic and expansive outlook on what counts as meaningful experience; in that sense, creatural realism is the interior of the mind spread across the body.

An intensified focus on experience adds importance to the aesthetic forms that a text relies on. The grotesque is an obvious tool for managing Norris's chosen themes of decline, degeneration, and atavism in a way that is attentive to experience. The 'unnatural natural' at the heart of atavism produces bulbous excesses and out of proportion bodies. Even the scholarly writing on degeneration theory teems with intimations of grotesquery: Lankester's tenuous analogy between annelids, Rome, and the putridly wealthy has all of the ingredients necessary for a negative grotesque: excess leads not to hearty girth (as it might in its Bakhtinian variant) but weakness and fragmentation.

As I established in Chapter One, aesthetics involve some conveyance or suggestion of affect, and in Norris's naturalism, rendering the experience of confronting disorganized, deteriorating, and regressive flesh requires detailed attention to alienation that is rooted in one's response to organic matter. The next section explores the primary affect of the negative grotesque: disgust, a visceral urge for avoidance triggered by abject biological substances. Quite

the opposite of the symbolic reidentification that is the hallmark of the positive grotesque, the disgust that accompanies the negative grotesque signals symbolic rejection, a feeling of alienation that is channeled through the alimentary canal. In the work of Norris, wherein disgust is extremely heightened, I read this as an expression of angst over the shattered barrier between mind and meat and the depleted subjectivity of the degenerate individual.

Disgust and the Body

In “The Mouth Trap: Orality and the Rabelaisian Grotesque in Norris’s *McTeague*” (2014), Michael D’Alessandro claims that Norris’s “grotesque realism” makes the mouth and nourishment both recurring motifs and axes around which the plot of *McTeague* revolve (3). D’Alessandro alleges that Norris was likely passably familiar with medieval texts that made “corporeal exaggeration and monstrosity” a primary quality of their representations of embodiment and borrowed from that tradition of representation in his own work (5). Though these are astute observations, D’Alessandro fails to develop a persuasive unified explanation for Norris’s interest in grotesque orality. On the one hand, D’Alessandro says, eating is presented as a “fanatical yet essential activity” that signifies abundance and a folk celebration of the body (in the manner of the Bakhtinian grotesque) (1). On the other hand, the significance of the act of eating changes as *McTeague*’s fortunes change: “After losing his job and his food supply, an animalistic, even vampiric *McTeague* emerges” (D’Alessandro 1). This is not the body becoming less grotesque; rather, it is a metamorphosis of what the grotesque signals about the body. The meaning of the excess changes as Mac’s oral activity undergoes a “reversion”: from feasting on a wedding banquet to chomping on his wife’s fingertips (D’Alessandro 2).

Mac's atrophy into greater and greater bestialness and "vampirism" parallels Vandover's own parasitic turn, but he also started out as an atavistic figure, an ethnic misfit of the sort that Norris wrote about in "Among Cliff Dwellers." I remain unpersuaded that the early scenes of consumption and corporeality are as positive as D'Alessandro would like them to be for the simple reason that McTeague is introduced from the outset as a malformed character.

Physiologically, Mac displays a number of atavistic traits: broad, dull features; hulky, oversized body parts; and an ape-like frame that alternates between clumsiness and animal agility. His body conforms to the criminologist Cesare Lombroso's description of the degenerate, deviant subject, whose physiognomy allegedly reveals a genetic proclivity for immoral behavior and foretells his degradation (Howard 86). Lombroso suggests that deviancy is not merely genetic weakness but an actual return to an earlier state in human evolution. He writes in *Criminal Man* (1880): "[T]he most horrendous and inhuman crimes have a biological, *atavistic* origin in those animalistic instincts that, although smoothed over by education, the family, and fear of punishment, resurface instantly under given circumstances" (91, emphasis added). This quote supports Norris's version of degeneration theory: in certain human beings there is a latent potentiality for barbarism and regression that requires some environmental trigger. Norris and Lombroso also share a common interest in the human form. Lombroso was in the business of making analogies between human beings and their primeval past based entirely on *aesthetic judgements*, measuring human beings against normative standards of proportion and delicacy that placed them on a scale of more or less fully human. Norris's moments of bodily revolt—the body contorting or deforming itself in the mechanical grotesque or else dripping with perverse appetites and nauseating excess—are moments when the aesthetic mode of the text dictates the

style of mimesis (distortive, disruptive) and the text's politics (bio-centric, organized around the policing of bodily difference).

A crudely formed figure with gargantuan features and an Irish alcoholic heritage, McTeague's body is immediately suspect and primed for full degeneration into 'vampirism' and criminality. In this light, one might see the banquet-hall grotesque of the early chapters, where McTeague indulges in all sorts of animal pleasures, as a pre-staging of his later abominable behaviors. The appetite— so Gina M Rossetti argues in "Out of the Gene Pool: Primitivism and Ethnicity in Frank Norris' 'McTeague'" (2004)— is by its very nature an expression of Mac's atavistic tendencies: "The 'brute' is not only an unreasoning man, but his understanding of the world, Norris explains, is grounded in his appetites. When stumbling across a white violet, for instance, the 'brute' looks at it without any comprehension until he puts it in his mouth, grinds it with his teeth, and then consumes it because, after all, 'it was the only way he knew'" (55). Here, exploration with the mouth appears as the opposite of exploration with the (masterful) eyes and the (dexterous) hands, so to be orally fixated is to lower oneself to the position of brutishness and animality. There is therefore no purely pleasant appetite in Norris— all orality draws attention to the grotesquely corpulent bodies of the consumers, which is anathema to a system of social values that is profoundly uncomfortable with, disgusted by, and embarrassed of flesh.

Hannah Arendt's criticism of the Social Realm is based on the understanding that the reorientation of social life towards unproductive practices— especially those pertaining to the human body— prevents true plurality and, in extreme instances, results in total atomization of the masses. Conceptualizing social organization as principally an administration over biological life and conceptualizing the activities of the subject as being based around satisfying the needs of the body (as in Arendt's *labour*, which entails immediate consumption) creates the field of

political economy and with it the threat that individuals will dissolve into abstract pools of biological impulses. The mechanical grotesque is an expression of anxiety over the assault on the dignity of the subject whose bio-mechanical processes have been essentialized. Surrounding the mouth and orality, the grotesque (in the context of Norris and Crane's fiction) bespeaks an uneasiness about humans being regarded as consumption engines— a specific element of the wider discomfort around being defined by the body.

Consumption in Norris's naturalism is associated with accumulation and waste. Vandover's conspicuous consumption— in the literal sense of imbibing huge quantities of food and alcohol and in the sense of endlessly 'consuming' stimuli and his bottomless need for arousal— stops him from being productive, attaining his career goals, and settling into a bourgeois lifestyle with his fiancée. In *McTeague*, the theme of consumption is more overt still. In "One Man's Junk: Material and Social Waste in Frank Norris's *McTeague*" (2009), Michael J. Duvall proposes that the novel-romance's preponderance of junk, knick knacks, and table scraps is a commentary on a "newly forming culture of consumption... in which disposability and replacement trump usability and in which the home, a traditional locus of consumption, becomes, as well, the locus of wasting and the agent of an ever-swelling heap of urban garbage" (133). Registering the already-mentioned metonymy of hands, Duvall goes so far as to interpret the abandonment of dexterous work in favor of unproductive prurient pleasures— and in particular the ingestion of fingers [Trina's] by a mouth [Mac's]— as symbolic of a movement in the U.S. Public Realm from "production to consumption at the end of nineteenth century" (134).

The theme of consumption lends itself to the aesthetics of the grotesque due to the importance within the grotesque of corporeal excess, especially as it relates to orality. In the paradigm to which the Arendtian public-private distinction belongs, the mouth is a source for

anxiety because eating is so integral to the biological life process—therefore it hints at the indignity of animal existence— and because the mouth itself is a place where the boundary of the individual body is regularly penetrated— therefore it threatens the bodily integrity and internal cohesion of the subject. Excess and excessiveness bring these anxieties into focus because they have a distorting effect on the form of the body (body parts become oversized, incongruous, and incompatible with classical ideals of ratio, symmetry, beauty) and a corrupting effect on the process of consumption, moving it from function to dysfunction. In the period of Flemish painting after Hieronymus Bosch, *vanitas stilleven* (still lifes) depicted the precarity and ephemerality of biological life; ripe fruit on the verge of putrefaction and freshly-butchered red meat quietly remind the viewer of the next moment, where ripeness and freshness swells into rottenness and decomposition. Unsatisfied with merely the suggestion of rot, the grotesque’s use of excess takes the viewer over that barrier, so that ripeness and rottenness are intermingled. This is not an inherently negative quality— fermented wine possesses this duality without being horrible or disgusting, and a Bakhtinian grotesque might utilize the admixture of the ripe and the rotten to celebrate abundance and portly pleasure. However, in a Kayserian negative grotesque, the line between the edible and inedible is a threatening one, and excessive consumption signals spoilage and indigestibility.

Grotesque aesthetics evince epistemological values that go outside of scientific rationalism by highlighting the importance of direct sensory contact with bodily matter. As I suggested in Chapter One, similar values are identifiable in medieval devotional art, which relish the effluvia of Christ’s body. In Chapter Two, I argued that tangles of body parts in Crane’s fiction had a similar purpose to pre-modern rituals in that they established a symbolic connectivity among bodies. Now, in examining a Kayserian negative grotesque, I look to a

heavily ritualized demarcation of self and Other (i.e. abjection) through a repulsion of all external organic compounds. This is a way of transcending conceived space, but it maintains a hostile orientation to the body, and for that reason it reinforces modern biopolitical technologies of power devoted to projecting all of the discomforting aspects of embodiment onto social out-groups. Faced with potential world alienation,²¹ the executor of the negative grotesque hyperfixates on contamination

The primary emotio-sensori expression of abjection is disgust. Disgust has several properties that I would like to discuss. First, it acts to protect the purity of the subject's conception of selfhood. Noting that disgust is generated as a reaction to "the prospect that a problematic substance may be incorporated into the self," Martha C. Nussbaum (2004) observes that the things that trigger this avoidance response problematize identity: "Its core idea is the belief that if we take in the animalness of animal secretions we will ourselves be reduced to the status of animals. Similarly, if we absorb or are mingled with the decaying, we will ourselves be mortal and decaying" (88-9). To elaborate on Mitchell's claims about subjectivity in literary naturalism, I point to a *Catch-22* in naturalism's treatment of disgust. Disgust signals a perceived threat to selfhood, but it is also discomforting to be reduced to loosely-integrated bundles of involuntary reactions, and disgust is such an involuntary reaction; in other words, as a response against the threat of a perverted biology, it itself asserts the reality of one's position as a biological organism. It is in this way that Vandover's feelings of disgust, though they are an indication that his system is rejecting noxious material, contribute to his overall dehumanization and to the sense of the mechanical grotesque that his case inspires.

²¹As a reminder: this is the disintegration of a common world and the consequent collapsing of subjectivity brought on by a myriad of historical shifts outlined in Chapter One.

Disgust is an “aesthetic emotion” (McGinn 5). I lift this phrasing from Colin McGinn’s *The Meaning of Disgust* (2011), wherein he claims that, while fear is concerned with prudence and hatred with morality, disgust is based on aesthetics: “Disgust is an aesthetic emotion in that its primary focus is the *appearance* of its object, not what that object can do or has done in the way of harm” (6, emphasis in original). In Chapter One, I defined an aesthetic as “a mode of representation that highlights specific attributes of the object being represented... and a related set of conceptual commitments... that influence the affective reception of the work of art.” McGinn’s and my definitions are in agreement that aesthetics involves the sensorial attributes of an object. The difference between our definitions is that mine clarifies that aesthetics always imply an orientation of self to object— aesthetics always trigger an affective response, so while the phrase “aesthetic emotion” is sensible (not all emotions implicate aesthetics, after all), the phrase “emotional aesthetic” would be redundant or unclear.

McGinn seems open to the idea that aesthetics can involve a multi-sensorial experience. Though McGinn uses the word “appearance” in his description of the object of disgust— which would seem to imply visuals— he means only to articulate a conceptual difference between *appearance* with *essence* in certain contexts. One can misapprehend the danger posed by an object and therefore be mistakenly fearful, and therefore one can be wrong about the essence of the situation, but one cannot really misapprehend how disgusting something is because it is disgusting exactly to the extent that it disgusts; with disgust, appearance and essence are indistinguishable (McGinn 44). At heart, the aesthetic experience that disgust entails is relational. McGinn indicates this when he remarks that “proximity” and “contact” are the main focus of disgust: “we seek to avoid *being close* to what disgusts us.... Our aversion is primarily to the invasion of the disgusting object into our consciousness, mediated by the body” (10,

emphasis added). This affirms my point about aesthetics being affective (that is, having some sort of personal emotional orientation to the object), and it adds a spatial component to McGinn's list of sensorial triggers for disgust. Nevertheless, I find that it does not totally capture how disgust is a fully-embodied emotion. After all, the climax of disgust— a swimming of the head, a deep retch from the pit of the stomach, the involuntary tensing and recoiling of muscles— overwhelm the whole body, in a violent and automatic reflex: a mechanical evacuation. With this aspect of disgust in mind, it seems fitting that the nerve-jostled Vandover should also be overcome by fits of nausea. Nerve deterioration and disgust are connected conceptually by the idea of the involuntary reaction: Vandover encounters abject matter, and his gorge rises (Norris VB 23).

The themes in political-economy and the philosophy of social space that I mapped out in Chapter One can be put to use here. Urban population density and a capitalist framework for human activity ignite public health anxieties that I contend are blended into a) the Benjamin-esque depiction of the urban consciousness as a nervous engine and b) the anxieties surrounding the integrity of the image of selfhood. Proximity contributes to the spread of communicable diseases. A more densely-packed living area means that the accumulation of waste encroaches more on one's consciousness. The overloading of the senses is associated with this kind of close contact, and a disgust response is triggered because the unwanted extra stimulation is often organic: the foul air and the cacophonous noise are extensions of bodies squeezed together and milling about. The constant swarming of bodies demands that greater attention be paid to the corporeality of strangers. This view of populations is alienating because in it groups of people are masses of eaters, sleepers, fighters, and excreters instead of a community connected through a common civic world. If one follows Arendt, who argues that plurality is the product of a public

articulation of individual idiocracy, it appears that the dissolution of community also entails the dissolution of the individual, who, as in *Le Bon*, is simply subsumed by the disorganized mob.

This could go a long way towards explaining Vandover's disgust reaction while on the ship on his trip back to mainland California after an extended convalescence. Sleeping in the steerage deck surrounded by other people—largely immigrants—Vandover reacts in aversion to the presence of unfamiliar bodies crammed together all around him: “The air was foul with the stench of bilge, the reek of the untrimmed lamps, the exhalation of so many breaths, and the close, stale smell of warm bedding” (Norris VB 125). It is the bad air that first gets to Vandover, and this discomfort with other bodies faintly foreshadows his later sense of horror at the spectacle of people milling about desperately as the ship sinks (Norris VB 129). The extreme circumstances have merely brought to the surface (literally) the hideous nature of the crowd, which “revolted” Vandover (Norris VB 132). Unlike the majority of Crane's crowds, which are disturbing more because of their amoral appetite for spectacle than for their fleshiness,²² the crowd on the deck of the *Mazlatan* is characterized more by their corporeality, their primal push for survival, and the impotence of their eyes, either “vague and distended, looking slowly about” and looking at nothing in particular— an echo of Vandover's mother's expression of “idiocy” (Vandover VB 134). This crowd, representative of a degenerate, atavistic state of humanity—humanity at its most mewling and self-interested—triggers Vandover's disgust response. His revulsion reaches its peak when a Jewish passenger is denied a space on an already-crowded lifeboat and Vandover vomits over the side (Norris VB 140). Numbness follows the disgust. The crowd—himself included now—is “benumbed with their recent terrible exposure” (Norris VB 146). The appearance of both disgust and nerve-rattled ataxia as steps in the processing of

²² To be sure: this type of crowd exists in *Vandover*, too. Curiously, in both *Vandover* and Crane's “The Monster” ghastly festive crowds form to watch housefires.

shipwreck trauma again underline the image of the nervous mechanistic body in densely populated social spaces. From the beginning of the anecdote, the bodies in the crowd are threatening; pushed into extreme circumstances, the crowd is revealed to be a bundle of reactions and therefore disruptive to the concept of discrete individuals. The shipwreck is an example of a state of emergency in which social norms are lifted, a sense of communal obligation is effectively dissolved, and what remains is an atomized mob incapable of self-actualization.

Finally, I contend that disgust— an ‘aesthetic emotion’ with a physical mechanical counterpart aimed at the preservation of the conception of selfhood— operates *symbolically as a technology*²³ of ritual avoidance. This is close to what Kristeva says of abjection— the abject substance is that which is violently expelled in the process of ego formation, and repulsion is a policing of the boundary between self and Other. Of interest to this exploration of the relationship between grotesque aesthetics, disgust, and biopolitics is abjection’s status as an extra-rational but psycho-sociologically-real force. To approach this topic with a less arcane vocabulary, I will borrow from Mary Douglas’s *Purity and Danger* (1966), an anthropological study on ritual cleansing and defilement that Kristeva cites in passing. Douglas’s book is useful because it conceives of cultural practices surrounding cleansing and pollution as *ritualistic*. Rituals have two features that are important to this dissertation: 1) rituals are not *practical*, i.e. not reducible to pragmatic concerns over hygiene or actual risk of disease; and 2) rituals are *communal*, i.e. produced and perpetuated through interdependent systems. The former feature doubles down on the Lefebvrian view of ritual as an extra-rational, extra-empirical style of knowing the world that helps us account better for the role of affect in the generation of social systems. The latter makes a theory of ritual abjection more pertinent to biopolitics than a

²³ Here, I use ‘technology’ in the Foucauldian sense of a technology of the self: essentially, this is a strategy that the individual uses to adapt, police, or maintain identity.

purebred psychoanalytic model, which—though it acknowledges the role of social interaction in the construction of the ego or the Lacanian symbolic—is still somewhat too absorbed in the individual psyche.

At the onset of this dissertation, I argued that literary naturalist texts created models of social space and that these models, though they took from scientific discourse, were form-dependent. To understand Norris's model of biopolitics, it was first necessary to figure out how the aesthetics of his texts played into the normative affective responses that they seem to prescribe. In Norris's work, the theme of embodiment, seen through the lens of late 19th century science and pseudoscience, is made tangible by grotesque aesthetics, which gives a simulacrum of an embodied experience within the network of taboos and social anxieties surrounding the body. A negative grotesque simulates the symbolic register of meaning in abjection through forms of disproportion and liminality that orient the subject away from the organic in fear of the disintegration of selfhood. Under this set of aesthetic values, feasts become scenes of carnage and spoilage, as in *McTeague* and Trina's wedding reception: "crumbs of bread, potato parings, nut-shells, and bits of cake littered the table; coffee and ice-cream stains and spots of congealed gravy marked the position of each plate. It was a devastation, a pillage; the table presented the appearance of an abandoned battlefield" (Norris 173). The hyperbole is probably meant to be humorous, but it also creates a sort of grotesque textual still life that is evocative of death and depletion, the organic equivalent of the detritus found in Zerkow's dusty junk shop. The formal aspects of the passage—the stretch of the indexical function with long lists of detail and belabored description and the incongruous analogy to warfare—contribute to the distortion of the elements of the scene such that they appear threatening and realer-than-real in their carnality.

A highlighting of disproportion, lengthy detailed description, and analogy play heavily into other moments of grotesquery. Also in *McTeague*, the comparison of a mining drill to a dentist's drill is suggestive of absurd oral disproportion, the geo-carnality further underscored by the primordial nature of the landscape (Norris 387). Among many scenes of consumption, a crowning moment is when McTeague, mid-mastication, pushes his already-gigantic features into further extremity: "McTeague's cheeks were distended, his eyes wide, his huge, salient jaw moved with a machine-like regularity" (Norris M 70). Norris comes very near to Svankmajer's *Breakfast*, concretizing the link between an awareness of the organic nature of the body and a view of the body as a machine.

The tone of *Vandover* is darker overall, but it covers much of the same ground as *McTeague*. An encyclopedic attention to detail combined with an often melodramatic tone intensifies the book's body horror. The graphic depiction of the transformation of the diseased, polluted, atrophying body emphasize Van's liminality—he is part animal, part machine, scarcely human. Preoccupation with the negative aspects of embodiment—twitching nerves, rolling stomachs, sour breath—render an image of a disordered, entropic world ruled by the caprices of corrupted flesh. At the very end of the novel, Van completes his decline into grotesquery when he—now performing menial tasks for change—lies prostrate underneath a sink amid accumulated filth:

The sink pipes were so close above him that he was obliged to crouch lower and lower; at length he lay flat upon his stomach. Prone in the filth under the sink, in the sour water, the grease, the refuse, he groped about with his hand searching for the something gray that the burnisher's wife had seen. He found it and drew it out. It was an old hambone covered with a greenish fuzz.... Vandover crawled back, half the way under the sink

again, this time bringing out a rusty pan half full of some kind of congealed gravy that exhaled a choking, acrid odour; next it was an old stocking, and then an ink bottle, a broken rat-trap, a battered teapot lacking a nozzle, a piece of rubber hose, an old comb choked with a great handful of hair, a torn overshoe, newspapers, and a great quantity of other debris that had accumulated there during the occupancy of the previous tenant.

(Norris VB 351).

The items in this long catalogue of waste— all either organic matter or domestic objects made impotent— bring to the fore the excess and spoilages of the life process associated with the Private Realm and Vandover’s absolute suffusion with a corrupted biological existence.

In the universe of *Vandover and the Brute*, all biological processes are perverted and inverted. Sex is the cardinal example, because it loses its reproductive potential and is the most significant source of pollution in the book. Looking beyond the actual syphilitic degeneration at the crux of the story, a perceptive reader notices that most of Vandover’s disgust responses are aimed at women.²⁴ At Harvard, Vandover loses his virginity to a girl who fills him with a mixture of “violent disgust” and an “unreasoned instinct” to procreate (24). In the aftermath of the shipwreck, Van is “stirred to disgust” by “the sight of the half-clad women, dirty, sodden, unkempt” (Norris VB 143). What is being portrayed here is a conflict between Van’s lizard brain and his romantic ideals (or, to keep the psychoanalytic jargon going, between id and superego). I posit that women are such a dense site for disgust in *Vandover* (and in *McTeague*, though I will save the discussion of women in that novel for the next chapter) because they are rather narrowly regarded as instruments for pleasure and reproduction. This being the case, they are ripe catalysts

²⁴ This is to say nothing of the fact that, by impregnating a neighborhood girl oyster bar, Vandover loses access to his pathway to domesticity with his fiancée, and that this extra-domestic reproductive effort is ironized by the death of the girl and her unborn child.

for disgust according to the Life-Process Theory of disgust, which— following from the understanding that disgust concerns the organic— poses that it centers particularly on “the *machinery* that makes them possible—the digestive and reproductive systems” (McGinn 78, emphasis added). This is the horrible, irresolvable contradiction that fuels Norris’s use of the mechanical grotesque and the negative grotesque more generally: Norris’s model of social interaction is implicitly founded on some version of social space that assumes the existence of the ‘golden barrier,’ in which animal appetites are an affront to the dignity of the subject, who is supposed to exist separate from their biology; because this barrier is continually disrupted by the basic animality of human beings, signs of biological life are read as a source of contamination and take on horrifying characteristics in the imagination: the body loses proportion, foodstuffs go bad, the breath of life stinks up the air, and women turn abject and infectious.

The pervasiveness of disgust, far from being an insignificant (if troubling) quirk of Norris’s writing, is an outcome of literary naturalism’s experiments in mixed epistemology. Several important insights about epistemology can be drawn from this overview of disgust as an affect operating within the negative grotesque:

- 1) In the midst of a perceived crisis of legibility, the text’s highlighting of the experiential qualities of social problems shows that the texts are tapping into ways of knowing the world that are beyond what a reductive fact-based model of the world can offer. The extra-rational, ritualistic aspect of disgust indicates the necessity of a deep, affect-laden understanding of social space that goes beyond the blank abstractions of sociology.
- 2) Combining aesthetic and scientific strategies for representing reality, Norris’s use of a negative grotesque is a demonstration of the capital-T Truth value of the

degeneration theory that drives the plots of the decline stories. In other words, these pet theories are legitimized by acting the ideas out as a creaturely-real, fleshed-out experience. Degeneration is not merely something that can be observed but something that can be felt.

- 3) Access to this Truth does not quell the anxiety over identity or the legibility of social space. As an expression of alienation, the negative grotesque is evidence of literary naturalism's failure to resolve the tensions brought on by the dissolution of the 'golden barrier.' A heightened sense of disgust is a property of neuroticism, not the solution to it. Norris's Angel of History, thrust back helplessly by an atavistic wind, can only gag.

Given the enormous scale of the ideas that Norris was working with— encompassing both the civilizational and the biological fortunes of humankind— it is unsurprising that these conflicts lack resolution. The irresolution somewhat validates Den Tandt's observations about literary naturalism's appreciation for the Sublime; in the company of gigantic social and evolutionary forces, one cannot help but adopt a Gothic feeling of terror at the incomprehensibility of it all. The goal of focusing on the grotesque, rather than discounting the Sublime, is to show how this anxiety about knowing reaches back towards and inside the body. Norris's use of the negative grotesque interprets the terror of the unknown as a kind of nausea.

There is an inherent danger in an epistemology of social space that hits you in the stomach. When tracking these ideas, it is important not to lose sight of their concrete political impact on real people. Norris's "Cliff Dwellers" had real-life counterparts, and there were real victims of the rhetoric of degeneration theory, most of whose stories went unlauded and unpublished. Well-meaning gestures of solidarity from eager minds like Crane and Norris do

not compensate for the fact that the Afro-Asian American that so fascinated Norris never got to relay his own experience— an experience so unimaginable that it appears to Norris as a formless mist. This was harmful to them and a disservice to our understanding of history. The next chapter will try to rectify this slightly by bringing in two authors from marginalized groups into the conversation about literary naturalism and the grotesque.

Chapter Four
Marginalized Naturalisms:
Domestic Entropy and Monarchical Atavism in the Works of Charlotte Perkins Gilman
and Charles Chesnutt

Introduction

So far, given its conceptual difficulty, the legibility of social space might seem like a rather arcane concern. Since subjectivity is so bound up in ideas of self-actualization and identity, one might assume that it is a problem that resides in an upper tier of Maslow's hierarchy of needs. The stakes of legibility seem more urgent when they are looked at from the perspective of a non-dominant social group.

In a dissertation about the grotesque, it is important to address the writing of authors from non-dominant social positions precisely because they are going to have a different relationship to embodiment than canonical white male authors. It is in reading naturalist texts penned by women and writers of color that the epistemology of the body becomes the most unmistakably political. For people who have had no choice but to have their bodies define their interactions with the public, naturalism's toolbox can serve unique purposes. Conversely, by widening the canon of American literary naturalism to include more women and writers of color, we have access to a fuller understanding of the intellectual currents of the late 19th century and a fuller understanding of what the aesthetic and epistemological commitments of literary naturalism entail.

Because people in marginalized social positions are uniquely impacted by bourgeois anxieties about social legibility and the dissolution of the 'golden barrier,' in this chapter I take a slightly different approach to the topic of social space by using language and concepts taken more directly from the study of biopolitics. To aid my continued discussion of the mind/body

divide, I take the term *bare life* from Giorgio Agamben's *Homo Sacer* (1995). *Bare life* denotes purely biological life (*zoe*), but more than that it denotes the absence of higher forms of life (*bios*)— a reduction from a civilized state to the carnal mechanics of the life process. Agamben's theory separates the dignity and soul of the human being— her status as an entity deserving of ethical consideration, including the whole gamut of human rights— from her pumping heart. In Agamben, sovereign power has the authority to suspend the soul, to cut the political subject down to *bare life*, and— having therefore set them outside of protective umbrage of their rights— to destroy the body or allow it to die (17).

By applying Agamben's term to the crisis of legibility, I show the stakes of the mind/body distinction in normative models of social space: if a person is socially illegible because of some aspect of their embodiment, they may fail to be incorporated into a political community, and this exclusion means that violence against them needs no justification. Rather than looking, as Agamben does, at political power in terms of sovereignty (a topic that is quite complicated and would only serve to distract), I focus on a feature of *bare life* that is more diffuse and decentralized and more immediately relevant to epistemology: the recognition of belonging.

Within the study of social space, the question of public belonging has received a great deal of critical attention. Although theories related to public belonging are very diverse, the general thrust of recent criticism is exemplified by Judith Butler's *Towards a Performative Theory of Assembly* (2018), which argues that the geopolitical myth of the "People" is produced through exclusion (4). Feeding from Foucauldian notions of biopower, the idea is that rights are conferred to those who satisfy normative standards of belonging and denied to those who transgress them. Butler argues that individual must perform their identities in a way that is

widely legible. Contra Arendt's assertion that a common worldview is necessary for the articulation of individuality, in a Butlerian social landscape a common worldview rests on the potential for violence. In a social system where recognition is such an important trait, we can see the possibility of violence in Arendt's normative model of Public and Private spheres, which assumes a separation of soul and body: if some human beings are considered to be essentially embodied, essentially carnal, then their soul can be obscured. This is definitely the case in some of Frank Norris's writing; the negative grotesque could not exist without the anxiety that one's body could overtake one's soul. The positive grotesque works in the exact opposite direction, offering a reparative reading of the body that rejects its alleged antagonism with the soul.

This chapter re-examines the concepts at the center of this study of literary naturalism through two writers from two marginalized groups. Stephen Crane and (to a lesser extent) Frank Norris are used as foils to accentuate the distinctive contributions of Charlotte Perkins Gilman and Charles Chesnutt. The purpose of this chapter, however, is not simply to show what white male naturalism lacks, nor is it to sequester these marginalized naturalisms in a special corner that reinforces their marginalization. On the contrary, my analysis of Gilman and Chesnutt further illuminates features of American literary naturalism that are already part of the discussion, namely naturalism's engagement with scientific epistemology and the category of the 'natural.'

At the end of Chapter One, I drew a parallel between the negative and positive grotesque and paranoid and reparative reading in literary criticism. In Chapter Two, I discussed naturalism's negotiations between the abstract scientific knowledge of *le concu* and the extra-rational experiential knowledge of *le vecu*. Elaborating on this, I draw another parallel between literary naturalism and hermeneutical practices: deep reading versus deconstruction and

immersion versus skepticism. Immersion and skepticism are both features of American literary naturalism's engagement with the discourses of the sciences. Immersion is the stuff of creatureal realism—it values the experience of embodiment and taps into extra-rational form of knowledge that supplements the materialist worldview of the science; this incorporation of embodiment allows us to understand affect (our affects of interest: alienation and identification) as components of social organization. The skeptical element of literary naturalism is that which is critical and deconstructive of *le concu*; the narratives and typological categories that go into the modeling of social space are played with, sometimes pointing to their own constructedness.

Though not mutually exclusive or binary, these different dimensions are reflected in literary naturalism's utilization of the grotesque with different intensities. In Charlotte Perkins Gilman, the focus is a suffocating immersiveness. The negative grotesque that permeates "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) is an affect-based means of explaining the mechanisms of social control that Gilman viscerally refuses. Supporting naturalism's holistic approach to knowledge, "The Yellow Wallpaper" is very in-tune with the idea that aesthetic forms are productive of a type of bodily knowledge that opposes reductively rationalistic scientific knowledge.

Charles Chesnutt leans more towards the side of skepticism. More important to his work than a careful reproduction of embodied experience is an awareness of the discourse-dependency of social realities and the narratives that dictate how bodies are managed in space through systemic racism. Chesnutt's racial double consciousness and his well-defined political agenda result in a use of heteroglossia aimed pointedly at comprehensive social transformation. For him, the grotesque is not particularly vivid; instead, grotesque representations of primitive or liminal bodies are used as a rhetorical strategy.

Both Gilman and Chesnutt approach the issue of political subjectivity through their use of the grotesque. In both cases, the goal is reworking concepts and narratives that are prevalent in 19th- and early 20th century social science discourse to describe the social circumstances that contribute to the disenfranchisement of their selected demographic. Gilman's concern is the loss of agency (resembling Norris's mechanical grotesque) brought on by the 'unnatural natural' primitive space of the domestic realm, which triggers a de-evolutionary process and renders the body of the idle, unproductive woman abject. Later essays by Gilman on the subjects of immigration and ethnicity reveal that this way of thinking about bodies is pervasive in Gilman's work. The neurotic woman is forced into a condition of *bare life* by her surroundings; the disorganized fleshiness of the wallpaper is connected to the essentially asocial nature of the biological life process inside of which the degenerative, dehumanized person is sequestered.

A brief revisiting of Crane's "Maggie: A Girl of the Streets" exposes the radicalism of Gilman's narrative: while "Maggie" offers a sympathetically-rendered class-conscious example of the process through which a deviant woman is reduced to *bare life* within normatively-conceived social space, *bare life* is a possibility that *all* women must confront in Gilman's world. Maggie's failed performance of social belonging in Crane's novella is, in "The Yellow Wallpaper" the inevitable failure of the project of domesticity that leaves women regressed and atavistic. For Gilman, *bare life* is the condition of womanhood resulting from the contemporary gender relations that are founded on women's sequestration in the domestic realm—a systematic exclusion from the common world that goes against nature and fosters unnatural, neurotic, illegible forms of life. Fear of illegible mass life permeates Gilman's writing; by reading "The Yellow Wallpaper" as a naturalist short story with grotesque elements, I identify the anxiety over

mass-life and disorganized flesh as the thru-line between the politics of her later essays and the formal experimental flourishes of her revolutionary story.

On his part, Chesnutt subverts the heretofore assumed relationship between subjectivity and legibility by positively linking the liminality (from a white perspective) of African American bodies and performances with black agency and self-emancipation. Chesnutt recuperates aspects of grotesque racial caricatures by positing that their unreadability by white people is a source of power. Secondly, Chesnutt appropriates degeneration theory and the concept of atavism for his own purposes. In his hands, physical degeneration and grotesquery are the result of backwards social structures (i.e. racial hierarchy, which, in a twist on the Southerner's admiration for Sir Walter Raleigh, is said to resemble medieval feudalism). Monarchical atavism— Chesnutt's version of the narrative of civilizational decline— allows him to assert his progressive racial politics as the natural next step on the social evolutionary chain.

Charlotte Perkins Gilman: Suffused Realism, Affecting Fictions

Charlotte Perkins Gilman's fictions are caught up in debates over what counts as reality. She was a reformer first and foremost, and her literary output is a conduit for that reformism. Her defense of "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892) focused on her political agenda and neglected to bring up its innovative and experimental style. Conrad Schumaker (1991) suggests that, after her nearly twenty year hiatus from fiction, Gilman returned with the aim of writing "purposeful fiction" that would serve as a tool of "practical reform" and for which any artistic panache would be secondary (82). It was her passion for politics that motivated her to pursue clarity and unmisunderstandability. This might smack of a positivist theory of language, and certainly Gilman is friendly to scientific realism, at least insofar as she utilizes eugenics and degeneration theory to support her political arguments.

In other ways, however, her work opposes the dominant epistemological assumptions of the period. Recent feminist critique of scientific epistemology target how standards of objectivity and the making of facts are affected by the standpoint of the person imagining what is objective. These arguments are by now pretty familiar: traditionally, the arbiters of objectivity have undervalued or outright ignored the experiences of women; a phallogocentric view of nature regards women as deviations from the norm; a phallogocentric scientific gaze casts women as objects of scrutiny rather than active social agents with important contributions to make to sociological and psychological understanding. In several places in her oeuvre, Gilman anticipates these critiques. *Herland* (1915), Gilman's utopian novel, has a lot of fun lampooning the arrogance of the rugged male explorers who seek to use their masculine rationality and heightened sense of their own intellectual objectivity to master a civilization of Amazonians. Their failure is played up for laughs as they are infantilized and forced to integrate into a matriarchal order. The same male pretensions at objectivity appear in "The Yellow Wallpaper" wherever the voice of the narrator's husband John slips in. John, a psychiatrist, dismisses the narrator's observations that stem from her emotional and affective life: "he scoffs openly at any talk of things not to be felt and seen and put down in figures" (Gilman TYW 3). The culprit here is the abstractification of knowledge, which insists on disembodiment and depersonalizing information while discarding other facets of experience. A mixture of husband and doctor, "Dear John" represents the condescending paternalism of psychiatric care for women, which dismissed their interior life (Gilman TYW 10).

To an extent, Gilman reinforces these dominant beliefs about rationality and female weakness. In her eyes, womankind is underdeveloped, their constitutions enfeebled by their environment. As I will illustrate in the sections that follow, Gilman engages with the modern

scientific episteme, melding insights grokked from sociology and biology to legitimize her advocacy for women's independence.

However, this playful incorporation and subversion of dominant discourses is only half of the story. Like Stephen Crane and Frank Norris, Gilman is aware of the shortcomings of distant, clinical understanding, and in at least one major work experiments with ways of presenting reality in fuller, fleshier form. In *Women, Compulsion, Modernity* (2004), Jennifer Fleissner argues for a definition of literary naturalism that focuses on its interrogation of the category of the natural. As fictive experiments, literary naturalism explores the implications of a sociological and psychological naturalism: "'nature' newly fashioned into an 'ism,' a category to be reconceived as part of *social life*" (Fleissner 6). By "'nature,'" Fleissner means 1) "abstract 'forces'" and natural laws associated with post-Darwinian scientific naturalism and 2) "the plebeian details of sex and embodiment," which relates to the concept of ordinariness—a corporeal, creatural, excremental, seeping ordinariness—that distinguishes literary naturalism from literary realism (Fleissner 6).

Gilman's contribution to this exploration of the ordinary is an immersive realism that includes a psycho-sensualist attention to physical space, synesthesia, and descriptions of an intense affective relationships of subjects to objects. In *Affecting Fictions* (2007), Jane F. Thrailkill writes brilliantly about how affect may be ingrained into the form of a text. Using "The Yellow Wallpaper" as an example, she claims that the story replicates an actual sensation of nervous, neurotic dread—the story's "agitating antiaesthetic"²⁵ tries to "at once vivify and make coherent [the narrator's] perceptual experience" (Thrailkill 145). My project looks to how Gilman's use of grotesque aesthetics conveys an anxious Kayserian relationship of the subject to

²⁵ "Antiaesthetic" is a confusing term. Thrailkill is referring to an aesthetic category that is not 'aesthetic' in the Classical sense of well-proportioned, symmetrical beauty.

her surroundings. The corporeal realism of “The Yellow Wallpaper” is a ‘vivification’ and ‘making-coherent’ of abject and incoherent organic matter. These aesthetic features put in full creatural detail Gilman’s political stances, and in that light the full influence of degeneration theory and liberal individualism on Gilman’s work can be identified.

Although she borrows avidly from scientific frameworks and theories, Charlotte Perkins Gilman extends them. Because rationality at that moment in history was assumed to be gendered—rational man instructing his fanciful wife to be reasonable—the experiential quality of Gilman’s fiction is especially pointed and gives her work special epistemological and political urgency. On the side of epistemology: Gilman’s experiment with creatural realism exposes a hitherto unrecognized space for knowledge production: domestic space. On the side of politics: the intensity and incomprehensibility of corporeal matter in “The Yellow Wallpaper” indicates a vulnerability to *bare life* and abjection that is central to her woman’s experience of embodiment. The extra-rational, hallucinatory world of the wallpaper depicts an embodied consciousness’s experience inside domestic space. By exploring the grotesque in Charlotte Perkins Gilman’s work, the following sections unpack the complex role of domestic space in the politics of embodiment and the allocation of political recognition. Unpacking this topic will also shed new light on the incorporation of women into the social models of other naturalist authors.

Domesticity: Grotesques, Movement, and Degeneration

In Gilman’s work I find ample tools to unpack the unsimple meanings of domestic space. If we can accept by this point that one of literary naturalism’s goals is to reveal the rules/laws/mechanisms that determine social outcomes, and if we can continue to entertain the idea postulated in this dissertation that anxieties around the legibility of selfhood and community

are centered on the social significance of private and public realms and the different kinds of activities associated with each, then it should come as no surprise that naturalist authors would try to figure out what domesticity does for and to social systems. But the domestic is a big category, and the meanings conferred to it are unstable, even contradictory.

In one of its greater contradictions, the domestic appears to act as a zone between the natural and unnatural. Jennifer Fleissner suggests that in late 19th texts the domestic is presented as a special enclave of primitivism, where animal existence survives into modernity (75). However, this internal wilderness is an inadequate replacement for the real deal. Fleissner acknowledges the prominence of the 'escape into nature' trope in the literature of that period, in which the domestic would seem to be diametrically opposed to the unvarnished possibility of the frontier (7). The tensions between these two pictures of the domestic can be resolved if one views the opposite of the frontier not as a constraining, civilizing force but as unnatural nature. From this schema, there emerges a naturalism committed to asserting or reclaiming a nostalgic rugged masculinity against feminizing, regressive savagery. There is critical precedent for this formulation. James R. Giles (1969) has observed in Jack London and Frank Norris's fictions a splitting of their use atavism into two types: a destructive atavism associated with the city and a benevolent, beneficial atavism associated with frontier life (15). I would also add that this sort of split makes perfect sense in the context of last chapter's revelations about evidently 'unnatural' degenerative natural processes. The question remains *why* the domestic would be associated with regression, since it is a space closed off from the flash and bang of the city, and since a properly-ordered domestic life is a prerequisite for recognition of belonging in public life. Gilman's takes on the body and its activity supply us with some clues.

Activity is a key theme in “The Yellow Wallpaper.” The story is explicitly a polemic against neurologist S. Weir Mitchell’s ‘rest cure’ for nervous illnesses. While Mitchell’s approach to treating female patients comes across as paternalistic and infantilizing, it should not be overlooked that a prescription of rest would seem like common sense in an age where overstimulation was apparently a preoccupying concern. The problem is that passivity does not quiet the nerves— in fact, as Vandover’s degeneration illustrates, overstimulation, passivity, and neurotic dysfunction often go hand in hand. It is even tempting to say that the clinical message “The Yellow Wallpaper” is that hyperactive nerves will conjure up new sources of agitation more or less irrespective of the environment, but this is not exactly right, because the titular wallpaper is, if not as monstrous as the narrator would have the reader believe, still far from placid and neutral. I want to argue that Gilman’s selection of an ornate repeating wallpaper pattern as a locus for fixation is not arbitrary— it could not have been, as the narrator’s husband imagines, any old object in the nursery/bedroom. While it is probably the case that an already-nervous person will seek out stimuli to perpetuate her nervousness, the *form* of the wallpaper (and the form that the *text* “The Yellow Wallpaper” takes) suggests that it is the subject’s orientation to stimuli that matters. The story’s intermingling of grotesque aesthetics with the theme of activity— unproductive, purposeless, repetitive activity in particular— reveals that affect and action are interdependent and co-created, such that queered activity co-occurs with alienation, disassociation, and a fragmentary, circular lived experience while, in contrast, the vigorous productive work that Gilman promotes in her explanatory notes to “The Yellow Wallpaper” co-occurs with self-actualization. The excesses and aimless flows of the wallpaper are coextensive with the unproductive regressive movement of the nervous patient in her state of

agitation. In what follows, I unpack the significance of Gilman's description of the wallpaper and how it connects conceptually to the style of movement exhibited by the narrator.

The wallpaper possesses several characteristics of the grotesque. The narrative describes it as excessive to the point of disproportion: it is an "arabesque" and a "'debased Romanesque' with delirium tremens" (Gilman 9). The word choice here conveys a pattern that in its extravagance flirts with instability. The exotic, out-of-control design that seems to actually violate "the principle of design" itself evokes the original grotto-esque grotesque of the decorative art rediscovered in caves in nineteenth century— this is the sense of the "grotesque" that Gilman appears to use when she calls the pattern "the interminable grotesque [that] seems to form around a common center and rush off in headlong plunges of equal distraction" (10). Few places in the naturalist canon is the principle of disproportion and asymmetry so distilled. The narrator's lamentation that "this thing was not arranged on any laws of radiation, or alternation, or repetition, or symmetry, or anything else that I ever heard of," read alongside Shun-Liang Chao's observation that the grotesque rises in popularity at cultural moments when symmetry and order are at an ebb, discloses the defensiveness of bourgeois attitudes and discomfort with ambiguous or insufficiently-disciplined spaces (Gilman 9). The narrator is responding in distress to an aesthetic that is disruptive of her own deeply-held aesthetic sensibilities— her 'principle of design' that make for an orderly space for a body to occupy— which support a highly structured and conventionalized way of viewing the world. The "plunges of equal distraction" prevent focus and mastery: the pattern cannot be read because the eye can never get a hold of it, and the pattern itself appears never to stand still, shaking with the DTs. To further develop the connection between Chao and Gilman: the wallpaper is presented not as an emblem of the times but as an anachronism invading the living space of characters with symmetrical ideals. The use of words

like “Romanesque,” “arabesque,” and “grotesque” (as grotto-esque) signal that the pattern really belongs to past cultural moments.

The ungraspability of the wallpaper is exacerbated by its confusing, palimpsestic quality. The narrator comments on the layers and sublayers buried under, around, and between the main design: “The wallpaper has a kind of sub-pattern in a different shade, a particularly irritating one, for you can only see it in certain lights, and not clearly then” (8). This passage doubles down on the unreliability of vision. The sub pattern resists discernment by the eye. The wallpaper presents something akin to a topographical challenge, in which the dominance of the gaze is refused by the object. While Gilman’s engagement with the theme of vision and knowledge lacks the disciplinary specificity of Stephen Crane’s taking-up of the sociological gaze, it is motivated by the same general impulse: a skepticism and unease about what can be seen and interpreted in full.

The flickering visibility and the undecidability of the wallpaper’s patterns and counterpatterns augment the grotesque liminality of its various branches. As a reminder: liminality in the grotesque is the threshold between the organic and inorganic. Two features of the wallpaper evoke the organic: its near-animacy and its perceived fleshiness. The narrator remarks that she had never seen “so much expression in an inanimate thing before” (7). An expressive inanimacy is a curious concept, verging on contradiction; expression ordinarily connotes the communication of mood or affect through an intentional manipulation of its features, and its use here foreshadows the wallpaper’s later, fuller animatedness: the aforementioned optical illusion makes it seem as though portions of the wallpaper are appearing and disappearing, and eventually both the sub pattern and the main pattern begin to move on

their own—the sub pattern transforming into a creeping woman, the main pattern twisting and pulsating.

On strangulation and pulsation: maybe the most definitive grotesque feature of the wallpaper is its resemblance to organic corporeality— a corporeality characterized by its asymmetry, its violation of conservative conventional principles of design, its excesses, and its undecidability. The narrator sees heads in the midst of the print: “They get through, and then the pattern strangles them off and turns them upside down, and makes their eyes white!” (15). The pattern’s threatening senselessness and incongruity is transferred to the body parts. They become contorted and warped, their strangled expressions intimating the same sense of the creaturely real as Da Vinci’s grimacing, knobby grotesque sketches—the disproportion and flirtation with death works as a reminder of the real fleshiness of the bodies and the potential for decay. The wallpaper heads are literally disoriented, turned upside down. As her madness progresses, the “strangled heads and bulbous eyes and waddling fungus growths just shriek with derision!” (18). The pairing of humanoid body parts with fungus is intriguing. A fungus is not a well-organized organism. Its growth is more or less random. It is the epitome of formless biology, rhizomatic and flowing. This fusion of human flesh with fungal matter is a powerful transgression of boundaries. Its confusion of categories, as well as its disorganization, put it in line with both a Bakhtinian and Kayserian grotesque.

Is the wallpaper a recuperative, positive grotesque or a negative one that doubles down on alienation from the alien and asks us to retract in fear? If it was not clear that the reader is intended to find the narrator unhealthily obsessive and delusional, then there could be a case for the former. The pattern is an unending expanse—the narrator comments on its “everlastingness” (Gilman 7). The unendingness of the wallpaper makes its unreadability seem less like a problem

of fragmentation and disorder than evidence of an irreducible deeper unity of matter. In the Bakhtinian grotesque, one luxuriates in this boundarylessness. For all of her initial reticence, the narrator does identify with and achieve solidarity in the other creeping women that she hallucinates, mistaking herself for a shadow woman who has emerged from the wall: “I wonder if they all come out of the wallpaper as I did?” (18). The Bakhtinian interpretation would go like this: in this loss of distance between herself and the objects of her perception, her personality is merged with the multiplicity of the wallpaper. In her insanity, she becomes one with infinity, engaged in a communion with borderless life.

That is not at all the message of “The Yellow Wallpaper,” though, and not simply because the creeping woman is thought to be *escaping* from the wallpaper, not willingly subsuming herself. I classify its grotesque aesthetics as negative for two major reasons. First, the image of corporeality that it conjures up emphasizes contamination and pollution. It may well be that all forms of the grotesque contain death reminders, but not all death reminders come couched in anxiety— it is possible, for example, to celebrate over-ripeness and coprological effluvia. A text’s position on fecund fleshiness can sometimes be gleaned by looking at the discourses it taps into in its representation of the organic. Gilman’s narrator very directly links the color of the wallpaper with disease and decay: “It is the strangest yellow, that wallpaper! It makes me think of all the yellow things I ever saw—not beautiful ones like buttercups, but old, foul, bad yellow things” (14). On both sides of the dichotomy, the organic is evoked: first the delicate life of the buttercup, then the sallow and rotten. The inclusion of “old” invites the reader to imagine a degeneration into foulness across time.

Another moment in the text that is relevant to the theme of foulness has a strange partial resemblance to a scene in Bram Stoker’s *Dracula* (1897), where a nurse attending to a bedridden

Lucy opens the windows above her head to let out the stale, pungent air of the garlic-filled room and inadvertently allows the nosferatu to crawl in (151). Stoker was commenting on the transition from miasma theory to germ theory-based medical treatment, painting the nurse as foolish for holding on to old conceptions about what the convalescent needs most: fresh air, as opposed to the antimicrobial garlic. Despite the gradual move in the medical establishment towards an antiseptic-based approach to disease prevention, the symbolism of miasma and a public concern over bad air persisted, particularly in cities, where air quality was genuinely poor, and even *Dracula* has no shortage of miasmas, vapors, and stinking crypts (Willis 311). We should therefore not be too hard on Gilman when observing that “The Yellow Wallpaper,” contains some imagery associated with miasma theory and bourgeois ‘bad air’ rhetoric. The passage with the rough counterpart in *Dracula* is also about a woman shut up in a room, the nasty air that accumulates, and the efficacy of opening windows. Commenting on a sickly smell emanating from the wallpaper, the narrator laments: “Now we have had a week of fog and whether the windows are open or not, the smell is here” (Gilman 14). I find this to be indicative of a fear of contamination, and contamination by the organic in particular, since the narrator describes the odor as a “yellow smell,” recalling yellow’s earlier-remarked-upon connotation of organic foulness (Gilman 14). My interpretation of the unpleasant smell as indicative of contamination anxiety is further substantiated by the extra-olfactory ways that the yellow transmits itself: the narrator reports that the color rubs off and stains the people who come close to it, and soon there are smudges of it all over the furniture and the occupants of the house (13). The foul yellowness spreads through proximity, much like a fungal growth, a bit of fuzz on an old hambone, or an infectious disease.

The text's preoccupation with contamination is important to my evaluation of its use of the grotesque because it means that the excessive, ambiguous, boundaryless corporeality is considered abject matter. The subject is oriented against the organic and is repelled or repulsed by it.

The second reason to classify Gilman's grotesque as negative is its philosophy of movement and activity, which is somewhat related to Norris's. Both thematically and formally, "The Yellow Wallpaper" is dominated by repetition. Faced with a pattern with no resolution, the protagonist gets stuck in an obsessive loop of thought that by the end of the story manifests itself physically by her crawling in a circuit around the perimeter of the room. In the spiraling of her obsession, she contorts herself, transforming into one of the hunchback creeping women that she imagines to be on the property with her. The form of the text mirrors this mangling: words and phrases begin to recur more and more, from the repeated refrains of yellowness to a climax where the words "creep" and "creeping" are absolutely smattered across the page as the paragraphs become shorter and choppier, indicating speed— an increasingly frantic pace— but also a psyche for whom obsession has obliterated the possibility of thoughtful musing, thought having been reduced to the barest components of its obsession. This is movement, but it falls outside of the normative view of movement to which Gilman subscribes. In Chapter Three, I described how two types of movement become intertwined in the philosophizing of the degeneration theorist: movement in the physical sense— usually privileging fine motor control over less sophisticated types of animacy— and the metaphorical progressive movement of history, which is integrated into the language of the evolutionary chain and in part naturalizes the logic that values cultures on a scale from *primitive* to *advanced*. I see a similar bonding of physical movement with biological regression in "The Yellow Wallpaper." "Creeping" is an

action that the body performs that then turns around and disfigures the body, making it twisted and asymmetrical. From here, one can also begin to see why the wallpaper, as a repeated pattern, also resembles a polluted, menacing organic matter: the everlastingness of the wallpaper pattern is atavistic, set outside of time, and therefore also twisted and asymmetrical and primed for associations with the abject body.

Using the above insights, it is easier to explain why the domestic would be associated with regression. For full elucidation, I dip briefly into queer theory. In *Time Binds: Queer Temporalities, Queer Histories* (2010) Elizabeth Freeman builds on Jack Halberstam's concept of "straight time," the historical narrative that only admits what is culturally legible and that relegates nonnormative bodies and their relations into a static, prehistoric position (Freeman 159). Innovatively, Freeman looks at the effect of a "social group's cultivated bodily dispositions" on their place in time, and vice versa, such that "historically specific regimes of asymmetrical power" can be converted "into seemingly ordinary bodily tempos and routines" (160). Among other examples, she looks to the transformation of the 19th century worker's demand for an eight-hour day from an expression of proletarian resistance into a biological imperative and also to the naturalization of masculine and feminine performances stemming from "repetitions sedimenting over time" (Freeman 161). Moving life is progressive because the body can always point forward to its regenerative potential (future profits, future products, or future offspring).

Gilman's writing about movement suggests that the sequestration of the woman to the domestic realm is unnatural and thereby violates the tenets of straight time. Her preferred alternative to the 'rest cure' is vigorous exertion—a cousin to the strenuous life championed by Teddy Roosevelt. In her commentary on "The Yellow Wallpaper," Gilman reflects on how she

freed herself from the nervous trouble that inspired the story: “I cast the noted specialist’s advice to the winds and went to work again—*work, the normal life* of every human being” (20, emphasis added). Gilman identifies work—and a particular kind of productive work, at that— as the natural healthy activity of the high-functioning normative subject. Domestic, female-coded labour is not read as productive work but as the prerequisite actions that must be taken before the real work—the public work— can begin. In a later essay— “Parasitism and Civilized Vice” (1931)— Gilman is explicit in her claim that the economic arrangement between men and women is socially constructed and detrimental to the mental and moral development of women. Echoing the degenerationists of the late 19th century, she connects immoral behavior with dysfunction and violation of natural purpose: “The essential quality of our human vice is in its abnormality, its utter misuse of function, making sex union an economic process” (Gilman PCV 270).

Lest this point be too subtle, Gilman draws an analogy between women (especially weak-willed, submissive, morally-dubious immigrant women) and the degenerate parasite. Her choice of exemplary parasite is humorous and deliberately inflammatory: the male “Sea Devil” (i.e. angler fish), which fuses to the side of the much larger female of the species and, reliant on the latter for its sustenance, loses its mouth, brain, and eyes (Gilman 265). The inversion of the male-female ‘economic’ relationship is a powerful and playful counterargument to a male chauvinist appeal to nature, one that also reinforces the degenerationist belief that inactivity is punished by loss of limb and regression to a simpler form. In the context of Gilman’s views on parasites and passivity, we can see why the inactive female body would begin to degenerate into a lowly creeping thing in “The Yellow Wallpaper.”

Though there is a racial and hereditary element to Gilman's musings on normative and nonnormative movement, I do not want to give the impression that she thinks that the arrested development of the female person is primarily physiological. When she writes about activity, she is writing about a type of activity she calls work, which according to her is what brings individuals into a common world. Realizing the highly social and cooperative nature of human development, Gilman says that our evolution has hinged on the "material" and "mental," and in particular the kind of group bonding that allows material and mental resources to accumulate across time. This sounds a lot like Arendt's description of a Public Realm forged out of *work*, which produces infrastructure, and *action*, which is the communal process through which individual citizens self-enunciate and create true pluralism.

Having been excluded from the Public, Gilman's women are left outside of time: "Women have remained for the most part separate individuals, associated mainly with the family group, which is pre-human in its origin" ("Parasitism" 269). The domestic realm is atavistic because it is deliberately set aside and excluded from the processes that enable development and self-actualization as a subject. It is a regressive, threatening form of the primitive because of its challenge to the 'natural' exertions of work and because, in isolation, the subject cannot articulate herself into being. "The Yellow Wallpaper" mirrors this: flesh becomes unnatural, disorganized, pollutive flesh, and attempts to gather meaning from one's surroundings only amount to empty, exhausted repetitions and an illegibility of subjectivity that allows the subject to fuse with a boundaryless organic web like a male angler fish that has forgotten it was once its own entity.

Domesticity: The Problem

To fully examine the complicated role that domesticity and the private realm play in embodiment and its social function, it is necessary to look at the reasons why an enclave of the primitive would be tolerated. For Arendt, the Private Realm is traditionally the arena of ‘unproductive labour’ and the life process. One of the horrors of the modern world, in Arendt’s eyes, is the economization of public engagement— the invention of the Social Realm is predicated on pushing *economics* (from the Greek οἶκος, referring to the household) outside of the boundaries of the Private. Arendt’s model of the originary polis suggests that the satisfaction of domestic labour was a precondition for involvement in a common world. Capitalism— along with a secularization of Christian principles concerning the value of life— collapses the distinction between Public and Private activities and disrupts this model. Arendt’s account ignores the power of civic rituals (see Lefebvre) and precludes the possibility of a common world forged out of corporeal embodiment, not in spite of it (Bakhtin); or perhaps it is more that the inward-turn of the individual under individualism precludes the possibility of extra-rational connections between bodies. In any case: in Arendt’s vision, relentless individuation and fragmentation creates isolated bodies and body parts in an undifferentiated mass. This way of thinking about the reorganization of society around liberal capitalism could help to explain nineteenth-century anxieties about bodies in public spaces, with the caveat that this not a history book and more important here than the resemblance of these conceptions of social interaction to an actual concrete historical reality are how the ideas themselves find form in naturalist texts and other contemporaneous documents.

But what if Arendt misses something about the semiotics of the Private Realm? In answer to my own nagging suspicion that this is the case, I will examine the contradictions within the concept of domestic space a) as an important foundation and precondition for public engagement

and b) as a place that exists just outside of civilization and leaves women, as Gilman sees it, in a pre-human state. Through this, I wish to expound further on why bodies matter in naturalist models of social interaction and why the grotesque is so useful to the American naturalists in their cultural moment. In so doing, I contrast the relationship between legibility and *bare life* exemplified in Stephen Crane's "Maggie: A Girl of the Streets" with Gilman's more expansive, more extreme, and more reactionary view of biopolitics, which centers on the degenerative effect that male-female relations and domestic space have on the body.

Domesticity: Public Womanhood and Bare Life

In the study of popular sovereignty, who counts as part of 'the people' is a serious concern, because under a secular democratic model of human rights national belonging is the criteria one must meet for her rights to be secured. Hannah Arendt described this problem in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1951) in a section with the heading "The Perplexities of the Rights of Man." For Arendt, the nation-state is organized such that rights are conferred to "the people" rather than the individual, making inclusion into that body politic necessary to receive the benefits of a liberal government: "the moment human beings lacked their own government and had to fall back upon their minimum rights, no authority was left to protect them and no institution was willing to guarantee them" ("Perplexities" 83). (Note here that Arendt is able to forward this view without contradicting her claims about the dissolution of community. Though pluralized, "the people" of the body politic does not necessitate a community of individuals with a common lifeworld, merely the facsimile of one achieved through legal fictions.)

Internationalists have tried to devise solutions to this problem— most notably through the formation of the UN Human Rights Council, the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, and the

levying of sanctions against human rights abusers. The trouble both with Arendt's framing of the issue and with the international response can be summarized in the truism that legal equality is not actual equality. By extending the scope of analysis to include the extralegal disciplinary mechanisms that inform the national belonging or exclusion, one may get a better picture of the forms of organization that animate biopower. In describing these mechanisms and relating them back to American literary naturalism's experiments in representing social space, I borrow insights about legible personhood and the spatialization of rights from Judith Butler's *Notes Towards a Theory of Performative Assembly* and Lauren Berlant & Michael Warner's "Sex in Public" (2002).

Butler's book is about protests specifically, but her claims are rooted in more general claims about public space and embodiment. She argues that popular demonstrations are attempts to establish who "the people" are. The demonstrations that Butler favors are ones that try to broaden that category. Acknowledging that the concept of "the people" is always partial—that is, always drawing a line of demarcation that excludes some human beings—Butler feels that political activism should be an ongoing struggle towards the admittedly impossible goal of full inclusion (4).

Though sometimes an exclusion from the body politic may appear to be the outcome of the natural state of things, Butler insists that exclusions actually occur based on the logic of that society's politics of recognition (5). Recognition is not just an issue of legal status, although it may be that also. Butler's understanding of how political power is wielded comes directly from Foucault; she concurs with the latter's observation that "the management of life and death" is enacted "in ways that no longer require a sovereign" (11-2). The first hoop that one must jump through to be recognized as belonging to "the people" is a legible in-group identity. For Butler,

identity is performative, meaning that the subject must enact their identity through the reiteration of certain acts (gestures, manners of speech, expressions of relation to other people) signifying that identity. To secure one's status as a protected member of society, that performance must be legible to the masses. As an illustration of how access to human rights is determined by the legibility of their identity, Butler looks to people "who do not live their genders in intelligible ways" and consequently face a "heightened risk for harassment, pathologization, and violence" (34).

I relate Butler's concern with the potential exposure of the illegible person to bodily-threatening conditions to *bare life*. In the absence of political recognition— in the absence of the acknowledgement of belonging— the individual is treated as a mere body. Butler's biopolitical model shares Arendt's and Agamben's sense of political life (*bios*) as a shield from the biological (*zoe*), but Butler does not think of the deprivation of *bios* as a return to a pre-political body. Instead, the politicized body is an object of special scrutiny— something dangerous that must be contained or excised, through medical diagnosis and quarantine or through destruction. I think that these ideas should impact our reception of Arendt's history of the depletion of the Public Realm and its usurpation by the Social Realm. Though increased public administration over biological life may be a historical fact, Arendt does not acknowledge that anxieties about the place of the body in society are themselves an important facet of the system that she derides. In other words, she seems unaware that members of the ingroup must be in perpetual denial of the existence of their biological life, projecting that burden onto members of the outgroup. This idea is familiar from Kristeva's theory of abjection, wherein abject substances are parts of the body that the self has refused. The logic is similar from a political front: for the image of "the people" to be maintained, all traces of the biological must be cast out.

My reading of “Sex in Public” suggests that the deferral of biological life to the outskirts is spatialized in both an imagined and literal sense. I will delve into the imagined first. Berlant and Warner propose that social belonging is based on a constellation of activities that make up a culture of “national heterosexuality” (2601). The vast majority of activities that are a part of this culture are not sexual. In fact, they work to obscure the sex at the center of the reproductive process by associating reproduction with a set of bourgeois lifestyle choices: “paying taxes, being disgusted, philandering, bequeathing, celebrating a holiday, investing for the future, teaching... carrying wallet photos, buying economy size, being nepotistic, running for president, divorcing, or owning anything ‘His’ and ‘Hers’” (2606). These activities work to constitute a zone of intimacy that is a prerequisite for participation in public communities. As opposed to the classical distinction between private and public realms, where the private was merely the space of necessary labor that needed to be completed before public action, in Berlant and Warner people become public citizens through their private activities. This is consistent with Arendt’s theory of the Social Realm. The result of the economization of the Public Realm (i.e. Public Housekeeping) is that individuals are treated as “members of the public sphere of private society” (Berlant & Warner 2609). Suddenly, one’s so-called “pre-political humanity” becomes the basis for participation in politics (Berlant & Warner 2604). Instead of simply being ‘gotten over with’ (in the way that one must eat dinner, poop, and bathe before attending a town hall), the “pre-political” must be acted out through the performance of a particular sexual identity (to be acknowledged as worthy of recognition as a member of “the people,” one must have a *respectable* private life).

There is evidence of this kind of mapping of political life in nineteenth century. In *Psychopathia Sexualis* (1886), Richard von Krafft-Ebing offers up a condensed version of the

philosophy guiding public and private displays of human sexuality. “Sexual life,” Krafft-Ebing claims, is double-edged. It is the backbone of all social relations, upon which a man discloses “his powers of activity, of acquiring property, of establishing a home, of awakening altruistic sentiments towards a person of the opposite sex, and towards his own issue as well as towards the whole human race” (248). Krafft-Ebing’s defense of sex is really a displacement of it. As in Berlant and Warner’s theory, sex is made tolerable through reference to not inherently sexual facets of one’s lifestyle. It is understood as socially necessary, but only indirectly. This is something that Krafft-Ebing establishes when he castigates two separate ‘degenerate’ groups for their approach to sexuality and public space: the “savage races” (various groups of polynesians) who supposedly have no inhibitions and engage in sexual intercourse openly, and ‘Islamists’ who, in barring women from public life entirely, relegate her to a role entirely comprised of “sensual gratification” (248, 251).

By assuming the social equality of the sexes, Krafft-Ebling might be credited with a kind of progressivism; however, the equal status is made possible by a mandatory modesty that excises sex from public space. We therefore have a philosophy that predicates participation in public upon normative private relations while actively obscuring or suppressing the nature of those relations. This is one way in which one can arrive at a biopolitics that tries to hide the body.

A byproduct of this system is a permanent underclass, the members of a “bottom-feeding culture apparently inadequate to intimacy” (Berlant & Warner 2607). Against the sense of *bare life* as the body that exists before politics, in this system *bare life* emerges from the politics of the personal. Berlant and Warner claim that this distinction between acceptable (belonging) and unacceptable (unbelonging) individuals is codified through designations of space. Their main

example is the zoning ordinances intended to shut out LGBT culture and sexual reminders from the suburbs. I find that de facto prostitution districts are a still more instructive example, because they arise out of social practices rather than law.

The geography of sex work violates the norms of the Krafft-Ebling model of public and private space by thrusting sexuality and the body into plain view. Prostitution removes sex from its (social) reproductive function, leaving only pure *jouissance*. In most American cities in nineteenth century, prostitution was treated as a subset of “vagrancy” (Woolston 25). Their moral impasses were extensions of their itinerancy, an absence of a pre-political self to ground their subjectivity. From the 1880s on, the social problem that prostitution presented was treated as a public health crisis as well. First and foremost, this meant thinking of prostitutes as spreaders of disease, deviants that threatened the stability of the home by exposing ‘good women’ and children to the risk of infection through the husband (Woolston 179). It also meant pathologizing the body of the sexually active woman in other ways. *Psychopathia Sexualis* indicates that female hypersexuality is a psycho-physical disorder treatable through therapy or surgical intervention (FGM). Sexual promiscuity was also thought of as indicator of “feeble-mindedness” and thus used as justification for involuntary sterilization starting around 1900 (Cohen 26). This is how bald sexuality becomes associated with the deformed or diseased body.

Because of this association, to perform the wrong type of womanhood is, in a sense, to be equated with the abject— something that must be refused. This goes beyond any specific legal or medical trouble into a more general overall vulnerability. Marilyn Wood Hill (1993) records an 1833 law allowing a New York City prostitute “as [a type of] vagrant” to be “brought before the court on complaint of any person... with no preliminary proof or warrant of arrest being

required” (117-8). This suggests a rather panoptical distribution of power, wherein any decent citizen is a potential informer on the faulty performance of a bad actor.

A more extreme example that brings us even further from the juridical system is the semi-sanctioned murder of prostitutes. Due to their outgroup status, prostitutes remain attractive victims for killers (Hugill 26). The notorious nineteenth-century example of this is the murder spree of Jack the Ripper. When the Ripper transitioned into murdering non-prostitute women, West Yorkshire’s Constable Jim Hobson published this statement: “He has made it clear that he hates prostitutes. Many people do. We, as a police force, will continue to arrest prostitutes... But the Ripper is now killing innocent girls. That indicates your mental state and that you are in urgent need of medical attention. You have made your point. Give yourself up before another innocent woman dies” (quoted in Spector 125). Hobson implies that there are *correct* and *incorrect* victims of murder, even connecting the Ripper’s rampage with the goals of criminal justice. The Ripper seems to be acting on a bonafide social imperative: clean the streets.

Stephen Crane, a real-life defender of women accused of prostitution, condemns the institutions that reduce ‘deviant’ women to *bare life*. In “Maggie,” Maggie Johnson’s murder is *not* presented as just desserts, and readers do not see Maggie as grotesque. Her social decline does not correspond to physical degeneration. Her vices do not make her ugly or foul. Crane neglects to give any physical description of her near the end of her life, even though his early praise of her physiognomy— “None of the dirt of Rum Alley seemed to be in her veins”— would foreshadow such a downfall (Crane MG 47). The worst that Crane does to Maggie is take away her name; she goes from “Maggie” to “a forlorn woman” and then “the girl” (Crane MG 87, 96). Instead of expounding on the details of Maggie’s destitution, the narrator only depersonalizes his description. This accomplishes a couple of things: 1) it signals Maggie’s loss

of status/legibility and 2) by making her anonymous, it creates the impression of a social statistic, a bloodless abstraction.

These are things that happen *to* Maggie. They are not the consequences of moral failing. As I hinted at early on in this chapter, Maggie suffers from a negative evaluation of her respectability, not internal corruption. In Crane's work, the legibility of one's performance of their social 'type' greatly determines the extent to which they are exposed to biological risk. This is certainly the case for Maggie, who dies after having failed in her performance of respectable feminine identity. Jordan L. Von Cannon (2015) observes that the Bowery neighborhood was "a liminal space between the city's respectable neighborhoods and its lower classes' obscurity" (43). Maggie participates in activities imitative of a middle-class lifestyle but fails to be legitimized by them because they come off as cheap or inauthentic: theater-going in the Bowery is a degraded, cartoonish replica of high society; Maggie's effort at emulating high fashion is too enthusiastic; Maggie's heterosocial coupling with Pete is too overtly sexual (Von Cannon 47). Implicit in Maggie's repudiation by her community is a critique of her failure to pull off a lifestyle that, when executed correctly, is rewarded.

Crane is playing with common social narratives again. The progressive journalism of that period eschewed the perception of the prostitute as a vagrant or disseminator of disease in favor of a set of more sympathetic sociological and journalistic archetypes that cast the prostitute as a victim of desperate circumstances or "white slavery" (Soderlund 5). The 'liberal' account of the prostitute as the unfortunate subject of objectification and exploitation fits in nicely with the philosophy that one's fate is dictated by forces beyond one's control, so it is not a surprise that Crane would use it.

Crane's stories are diagnostic in that they describe the biopolitical systems that are of concern to his characters, which he bases on social 'types.' Still, this is something that sociologists do without resorting to fiction, so it behooves the analyst of his stories to ask what justification there is to offer these descriptions in a literary fashion, to effectively ask "what can fiction provide that the fact cannot?" My conclusion is that to fully comprehend the impact of biopolitical systems, one must take measure of their experiential aspects, since senses of belonging, identification, alienation, fragmentation, and anxiety are experienced extra-rationally. One of the ways that Crane conveys these experiences is through the grotesque. Though in "Maggie" the titular character is not a source of the grotesque, the city is. Shortly before Maggie's death, the narrator describes a foreboding cityscape that shuts itself off from Maggie: "The shutters of the tall buildings were closed like grim lips" (Crane MG 96). I note that the language used here is quite a lot like the description of the saloon in "An Experiment in Misery." Buildings again sprout oral passageways, though Maggie is refused rather than taken in.

The use of the grotesque in "Maggie" is a mere shadow of the grotesque detailed in "An Experiment in Misery" and "Death and the Child." It is the earliest of Crane's published works that I discuss and so it might be considered a fledgling attempt at themes that he would examine more deeply later on. Its underdevelopment in "Maggie" might also be explained by considering how rarely the reader enters the headspace of Maggie compared to the young tramp or Peza. Despite Crane's apparent sympathy for outcasts, when writing about women or people of color his language becomes more external, retracting a little, seeming more (though not entirely) like the detached observer of the sociological gaze. This could be an unconscious bias or defect of imagination, and it could also be demonstrative of a more general problem with depicting the grotesque from the perspective of a member of an outgroup.

Domesticity: Recognition and Failure

The intense psychological drama of “The Yellow Wallpaper” is proof enough that Charlotte Perkins Gilman does not struggle to convey the inner life of her female characters. There are other substantial differences, too. Her presentation of the grotesque lacks the ambiguity of Crane’s, which alternates more fluidly between the horrible and the revelatory. Gilman’s grotesque is wholly negative, much more in line with Norris’s grotesque of degeneration and atrophy. Most crucially to my project, Gilman neither sympathizes with nor focuses on the public outcasts and the ‘fallen women’ to whom Crane is drawn, and consequently her work is less properly about the failings of the Social Realm. She even seems complicit in its logic at times in “Parasitism and Civilized Vice.” In that essay, sexual immorality is the consequence of a parasitic passivity and results in various types of biological contamination and degeneration: “syphilis” and its heritability is lamented alongside the ‘problem’ of men “going native” and “marrying women of frankly lower race” (Gilman “Parasitism” 273).

Though Gilman unquestionably makes several racist and classist statements in her essay, and this would seem to reinforce the standing social order, her complaints arise from beliefs about gender relations that are antagonistic to that social order, and it is this aspect of her work that I find singular and important to the discussion of naturalism and the body. Gilman’s contribution to the conversation about embodiment resides in her willingness to critique the domestic as an intrinsically defective assemblage that, by extension, affects the woman in public. She claims that relations between men and women have become essentially transactional, in which, in exchange for financial security, women forego public life (*bios*) and provide a

reproductive, life-giving (*zoe*) function that is not counted— by her or by men— as work. The resultant languor of women has given rise to their parasitism. Gilman laments that, under these conditions, it is inevitable that a woman will cease “to use the constructive capacities of her race and [get] her living through the sex relation, legal or illegal” (PCV 276). Her complaint doubles down on the purported link between inaction and racial degeneration and affixes the degeneration of the married woman to that of the prostitute.

Beyond her casual use of degeneration theory, one other aspect of Gilman’s theory of domestic womanhood would not sit well with present-day feminist scholars: her uncritical devaluation of traditionally feminine labour. Marxist Feminist Silvia Federici (2004), for example, would prefer to frame domestic work as acts of “primitive accumulation” that make male-dominated capitalism possible (12). Though Federici and Gilman agree on the subjugation involved in relegating women to the private realm, and though there seems to be agreement about how one realm enables the action of the other, it is exploitation, and not lassitude and degeneration, that is the central trait of domestic activity in Federici’s theory. The surface of the problem is Gilman’s refusal to see anything associated with biological necessity as productive— a refusal later validated by Arendt’s version of the Realms of the polis— but this masks a deeper issue with Gilman’s thinking: to serve the body, to nurture children or one’s spouse, or to maintain the cleanliness of the nest are not themselves biological acts, and yet Gilman’s essays and fictions indicate that all actions performed in domestic settings are extensions of the body.

Whatever 21st century minds might make of her prejudices, they are the key to understanding the socio-political logic behind the aesthetic commitments she expresses in her representation of the domestic. Associating domestic activity with biological activities undermines the domestic sphere’s power to obscure one’s biological existence and provide a

means of political recognition. Gilman's Anglo-Saxon domestic woman is therefore a liminal figure—secured by status from the racial contaminants and biological hazards of urban living, but tragically attached to an internal source of contamination: the biological cycle of the household. This discomfort with having a body and attending to bodies results in a disidentification with it and *ainsi* a tendency to picture domestic objects as abject and grotesque.

This is why descriptions of domestic activities in “The Yellow Wallpaper” center around failure and dysfunction. The narrator is unable to perform her roles as wife or mother. She frets that she is unable to fulfill her side of the marriage contract: “I meant to be such a help to John, such a real rest and comfort, and here I am a comparative burden already” (Gilman TYW 6). The narrator believes that her purpose is to provide for physical and mental well-being of her husband; the work of nurturing—of giving rest and comfort—is the silent labor of the homemaker that, due to her nervousness, she cannot execute. Her nervousness is itself an embarrassment, a violation of the image of wife as a calming and naturally soothing presence, and she makes an effort to suppress this dimension of her being: “I take pains to control myself—before him, at least, and that makes me very tired” (Gilman TYW 4). These frequent nagging asides about her struggle to satisfy an image of pacific wifeliness underscore the unnaturalness of her performance and indicate that her nervousness may be the consequence of a vicious cycle: the more she tries to suppress her agitation, the more agitated and depleted she becomes. The association of nervousness with exhaustion also signals failure: hers is not the agitated state of the manic creator, whose compulsions are linked to his virtuosity; in Gilman, the excessive and repetitive self-stimulation of the stir-crazy mind can only lead to loss and disintegration.

The narrator's lack of any maternal instinct is also associated with nervousness. Though she admits to loving the baby, she strenuously asserts that she "*cannot* be with him, it makes me so nervous" (Gilman TYW 6). The emphasis on "cannot" reveals the degree of her aversion as well as a feeling of surprise at the unnaturalness of her experience: the narrator is concerned that she is not moved by the filial imperative that she expects of herself, yet it is not so much the aversion that strikes her as unnatural as the mother-child relationship itself, because that relationship— and not anything internal— is the source of her agitation.

Mothering and spousal care are, in the narrator's eyes, incompletable tasks. The language that she uses to talk about them— the language of exhaustion, nervousness, and fatigue— carries over into her descriptions of her interpretation of the wallpaper in the nursery. Tracing and making sense of the wallpaper is an extension of her domestic duties: tied to the physical setting of the household itself (her prison is kind of the ultimate hybrid domestic space: both nursery and marriage bed), the wallpaper is a source of stimulation that exacerbates her nervousness. She "exhaust[s]" herself attempting to find a linear order and logical arrangement to the pattern (Gilman TYW 10). The inscrutability of the pattern— its unnatural anti-linearity and violation of constructive design — causes another failure. The narrator's conflict with the wallpaper makes explicit her overarching problem with her surroundings: she is put in a situation where her only means of occupying herself are tasks that go against her nature. A nineteenth-century doctor would be inclined to pathologize her dysfunction and attribute her failures as a wife and mother to her deep-seated nervousness. The text itself suggests exactly the opposite: there is a strong indication that the environment is the source of pathology, not an inherent feminine weakness.

I have already delineated the connection between unnaturalness and passivity, in which the passive organism tends towards regression. I want to argue now that the failures that cause

the protagonist's nervous degeneration and eventual absorption into the abject are bound conceptually to inaction. This should be somewhat uncontroversial, since it is the stated thesis of the story: in her addendum “Why I Wrote ‘The Yellow Wallpaper’” (1909), Gilman doubles down on her repudiation of the rest cure, characterizing it as an unnatural obstruction to “work, the normal life of every human being” (20). Her later social criticism also supports this view on action and inaction. In “Parasitism and Civilized Vice,” she observed that a foetus could reasonably be called an “endoparasite.” Such a willfully provocative description of a foetus in an essay condemning the sex relation between men and women very viscerally reinforces the connection that the essay makes between domestic duties, passivity, and degeneration. From its beginnings, the essay intimates, motherhood necessitates a close encounter with an inactive regressive form of life. Finally, my argument is supported by the usage of repetition in the building of “The Yellow Wallpaper”’s grotesque aesthetics. Repetition, both in the pattern itself and in the escalatingly swirling form of the diary entries, shows the reader movement that is not true movement— that is, not directed, linear, productive movement. The ending itself points to an unending cycle. The narrator is caught in a loop of creeping, inconsiderate of all obstacles, her husband included. “I had to creep over him every time!” she exclaims, and, though she must have halted to write down these reflections, it is not apparent why or how she could stop (Gilman TYW 19).

These examples suggest a reading of domestic nervousness as futile energy tending towards atrophy. Because domesticity is a form of arrested development, all domestic acts are depicted as automatic failures. This goes a ways towards unpacking the complications of the domestic in its function as a hub for political recognition. The domestic is a space for non-normative movement— movement that is not acknowledged as work and that exists outside of

civilization in some eternal primitive past and that is limited to biological consumption and acts directed towards the body. For those committed to the normative concept of movement, the domestic—however necessary it might be to maintain the separation of the private and public in other theories—is necessarily a place of failure and degeneration and therefore a site of anxiety.

This new and detailed exploration of the multiple meanings of domesticity illuminates other instances of domestic degeneration within other naturalist texts. In particular, it helps to make sense of how Frank Norris sometimes uses women. In *McTeague*, a dysfunctional domestic sphere precipitates the degeneration of Mac and his wife alike. Trina is especially vulnerable to degeneration (and to external violence) because she does not perform wifeliness: failing to nurture Mac, driven by an excessive interest in economic matters, she molts, losing her loveliness and becoming first monstrous and then monstrously machinelike. Her primitive, licentious avarice is the gateway to a negative atavism signaled by the deformed body, illicit sexual impulses, brutal grunt work, and death. Unlike “The Yellow Wallpaper,” *McTeague* showcases a private realm that is not exactly *automatically* dysfunctional, rather one in which there is a potential for regression and atavism if things fall out of sorts, such that we might say that the dysfunction is *inherent* without being automatic: the regression process requires a trigger for the latent unnatural primitivism to surface. Gilman’s view that the economic pact between men and women is the trigger for the dysfunction finds a sort of twisted reflection in the plot of *McTeague*. The plot punishes Trina for desiring economic self-sufficiency and a source of wealth independent from her husband. The untenability of this financial situation is presaged in the text by the marriage of Maria Macapa and Zerkow. Like the German immigrant Trina and the Irish Mac, Maria and Zerkow are ethnic misfits whose domestic arrangement quickly crumbles. If, following my reading of Berlant and Warner, the symbolism of reproduction is a good

representation of domestic success, then the mooncalf that the couple conceives suggests that they are incapable of belonging and assimilation into the public. Though genetic failure would seem to seal their fate— Maria and Zerkow are, like Mac, grotesquely exaggerated caricatures of ethnic minorities, and Norris's Lombrosian theory of physiognomy demands that their child would be an abortion— their final failure is grounded in financial conflict. The twin madness of Zerkow and Maria is centered on a mythic golden dinner set. When Maria cannot deliver the plates to her husband, he murders her and runs off to drown in a river (Norris 320).

After interpreting Charlotte Perkins Gilman's texts, we are in a better position to see how the doings of Trina, Mac, Maria, and Zerkow speak to the liminality of the private realm— it is simultaneously a place in which so much of the idea of personhood is invested and fertile ground for the unpersonlike. The domestic vision proffered by the photographs of young children announcing 'I'm Grandma!' and 'I'm Grandpa'— the vision held together by furnishings and a streamlined domestic routine of an up-and-coming little family— is the thinnest veneer over primitive, vicious, unforgiving embodiment (Norris 157). *McTeague's* failed marriages demonstrate, perhaps unintentionally, the difficulty of women trying to survive in domestic space on their own terms. They demonstrate, certainly, their constant nearness to *bare life*. The men of the book must trek out to literal wastelands to be killed; it is comparatively easy to kill a woman.

In these texts, women are at a heightened danger of being reduced to *bare life* for their failure to perform, which makes the fact of their corporeal embodiment and their relationship to the grotesque that much more urgent. Charlotte Perkins Gilman's grotesque is reactionary; it does not provide the positive outlook on embodiment that Judith Butler craves. As I have argued, the 'negativity' or 'positivity' of the grotesque is determined by the orientation of the subject to their body and the body's actions. The horror of the *mechanical grotesque* discussed in the last

chapter comes largely from the disassociation of the self from one's flesh and the crudity of the nervous system. By bringing queer theory and biopolitics into the mix, we can talk about this relationship of self to body in terms of gender performance and failure. From Gilman's perspective, any domestic performance is already a failure because domestic space is negatively atavistic, part of the 'unnatural natural.' In her writing, the failure to be recognized is made synonymous with an actual organic discombobulation. Gilman's engagement with the legibility problem is a nexus where biopolitics and the epistemological foundations of the grotesque meet.

Charles Chesnutt: Realism, Heteroglossia, and Satire

Like Gilman, Charles Chesnutt decenters the impressions of white men by presenting subaltern perspectives. His commitment to realistic depictions of a more diverse set of characters is also part of what qualifies him as a naturalist, because the multiplication of possible perspectives is aimed at achieving a more complete understanding of 19th century social space.

In this section, I want to talk about Chesnutt's multiplication of perspectives in terms of parody and heteroglossia. Grouping these terms together is useful because it allows one to consider more completely the different weight and level of credulity granted to different voices in a polyvocal text. In *Parody* (1988), Joseph Dane explains how Bakhtin's theory of heteroglossia applies to satire: "Conflict is not between forms of thought and forms of expression but rather between the forms of expression themselves. One of these forms of expression is privileged—it is an 'official' language, which the 'unofficial' language of parody opposes" (8). Conflict between forms of expression creates the skeptical distance that allows the reader 1) to treat the target of the parody with levity and 2) to deconstruct and criticize it.

For Bakhtin, such levity is serious business. He praises a kind of laughter that he associates with the humanist tradition of the Late Medieval Period and Renaissance and that entails a deflation of pretension and celebration of boundless corporeality. Far from a simple diversion, humanist laughter is one of the “essential forms of the truth” (Bakhtin RW 66). This is truth accessed in an emotional register through bodily experience, which in Chapter One I claimed was comparable with the extra-rational experience of Christ’s presence—the divine effluvium works towards the same style of knowledge as Bakhtin’s comic abject matter.

Renaissance laughter, Bakhtin argues, was supplanted in the eighteenth century by “cold humor, irony, [and] sarcasm” (Bakhtin RW 38). In contrast to “joyful and triumphant hilarity,” artists cultivated a style of the comic that was mean-spirited, serrated, and projective—that is, one laughed at *others* rather than the common ribald ridiculousness of all flesh (Bakhtin 38). Though all parody involves distance, in Bakhtin’s preferred form it is more liberatory than it is scathing—a donning of masques rather than a clinical dissection in an operating theater. The evolution of laughter coincides with a change in the meaning of the grotesque. Bakhtin’s positive grotesque is traded out for what he calls the “Romantic grotesque”—the Kayserian or negative grotesque, which interprets corporeality and abject matter as the stuff of terror.

The domestic has contrary meanings, and so too does the grotesque. Throughout this dissertation, I have described the competing meanings of the grotesque as experienced by the subject, who either identifies with the grotesque and joins a community of flesh or is alienated or repulsed by her self-abjection and reacts in fear of the dissolution of her individual subjectivity. Up until this chapter, I have talked about the grotesque mostly in terms of embodiment and experience, not in terms of performance. Since—as the preceding sections on Charlotte Perkins Gilman and women in naturalism attest—performance and failure are so important to political

recognition, it stands to reason that we should devote a bit more attention to how the grotesque can be *performed* on top of being *embodied*. This is a somewhat subtle distinction, as there is some obvious overlap between the two. This overlap has been hinted at already in this dissertation's look at degeneration theory, where there is a linkage between activity and form. Now, I turn to a more conventional example of performance: theatricalized race in the form of minstrelsy.

In doing so, I highlight a feature of text-production undergirding all of my previous examples of the grotesque in literary naturalism: the competition among discourses for primacy. In "Epic and Novel" (1941), Bakhtin declares that experience, knowledge, and practice took the place in the novel that memory and tradition held in the epic form, and that therefore epistemology was the new literary form's "dominant discipline" (EP 15). If this is the case, then the heteroglossia of the novel is a hashing-out of different claims at knowledge; in Bakhtin's mind, this is a dialectical process in which the language of the text continually "develop[s] and renew[s] itself" (Bakhtin PND 49). In Stephen Crane, we have seen a great wariness about the reliability of any one voice, trending towards an impressionistic literary experience that understands the importance of storytelling and self-narrativization in the production of knowledge. In Frank Norris, the language and logic of 19th century science is fused to a vitalistic, cosmic, extra-rational register of truth through the exploration of the body. In Gilman, the clash of voices, perspectives, and discursive frames generates a new useful way to understand dominant epistemes— a major tune sung in a minor key.

Charles Chesnutt also sings in a minor key but is much less inclined to accept the mainstream politics of embodiment that Gilman embraces. Through the use of parodied, subverted racist rhetoric and race-based perspectivism, Chesnutt's fiction captures the

proliferation of meanings of grotesque bodies and transforms into a model outlining in severe detail the biopolitical structures of his era. Reality in his texts is both embodied and complicated by multiple scripts over-determining the bodies in question. As Gilman did with women and the domestic, Chesnutt's attention to grotesque racial performances in the form of catwalks and caricature illuminate Crane and Norris's treatments of race and grotesque theater in their work.

Race: Spectatorship and Grotesque Performances

There are plenty of examples of racial spectacles from the nineteenth and early twentieth centuries for which the grotesque is an essential aesthetic category. There is one type of spectacle that is both under-discussed and extremely in-line with this dissertation's exposition of the grotesque: the black-based feeding race. Itai Vardi (2010) outlines the racial element of these public events, in which participants would gorge themselves with aliments as quickly as possible: "Immersed in the pie or watermelon, his facial features now distorted by the foodstuff, the black contestant appeared as both a repulsing and amusingly attracting sight. This confusion of boundaries between food and body aided in solidifying his position as an essentially different, deviant corporeality in the eyes of the white gaze, something akin to what Halloran (2004), following Kristeva (1982), calls the 'gustatory abject'" (379). Vardi's analysis of competitive eating brings attention to the liminal status of the participants, noting the frequency with which, in contemporaneous newspaper articles recounting the contests, they were compared to machines and animals, sometimes even taking on foodlike qualities themselves and committing self-cannibalism (376). These strategies of dehumanization clearly evoke several features of the grotesque that I have already covered: excess consumption, orality, food taboos, and a condition of inbetweenness wherein the mechanical, the organic, and the human become intertwined.

There is also an aspect of duality to the eating contest that is familiar to the grotesque, with its positive and negative channels. Vardi argues that feeding races were occasions of radical freedom—in which Americans eager to distinguish themselves from effete Europeans cast aside table manners in the name of transgressive indulgence—yet were also a way of reinforcing the social otherness of the eaters. It exposes the complicated meanings that such race-based spectacles can hold: they can be carnivalesque suspensions of normal social categories and, simultaneously, reifications of them.

The feeding race also underscores the animal reminder anxieties surrounding corporeal embodiment. White spectators, fearing a reduction to animalistic appetites and competitive struggle, found solace in projecting that animality onto African Americans (Vardi 375). This supports what I have written about the body and the limits of political recognition: the corporeality of normative social actors is basically deferred, and this deferral of their body grants them full belonging in the Public. Deviant subjects, on the other hand, become bodies first and foremost, their social identities centered entirely around their *zoe*. They are at once a scapegoat for the anxieties of others and also, as abject matter, a source of anxiety due to their social illegibility. The revelation to be taken from this is that any system of social organization based on the regulation of biological life recalls the Kayserian grotesque, weaponizing the aesthetic for political ends.

Aesthetics are used to justify forms of social organization or are even built into them; the responsibility of a socially-consciousness novelist, especially one interested in both social organization and epistemology, is to manipulate a dominant aesthetic and in the process transform, reform, or comment on it. I want to return to Stephen Crane, giving a sympathetic yet

critical interpretation of his short story “The Monster” (1898) as an imperfect attempt to use the grotesque to construct a creaturely-realistic depiction of race relations in the United States.

Much of the critical conversation about “The Monster” is centered around the deftness or deafness of Crane’s understanding of the politics of race. The trend of the last twenty years or so has been to defend “The Monster” against accusations of universalizing the tragedy of Henry’s forced expulsion from the community of Whilomville— which saps the energy from any intended racial commentary— by placing the story in the context of miscegenation anxieties, white terrorism against black bodies, and the semi-formal administrative ‘problem’ of controlling the flow of the black population. In “Disabling Fictions: Race, History, and Ideology in Crane’s ‘The Monster’” (1998), Price McMurray argues that the story can be read as a remark on the perceived protectorate status of the white upper-class for a supposedly infantilized black population and on the complexities of white philanthropy. McMurray pays special attention to the pseudo-Darwinist objections that such philanthropy is “unintentional cruelty,” quoting William Benjamin Smith’s 1905 screed *The Color Line*: “There are diseases whose evolutionary function is to weed out the weak and so preserve the strong” (54). The medicalization of racial inequality is made literal in “The Monster,” wherein the philanthropist is an actual physician acting as a custodian for a black man’s damaged body. Outside of the fire near the beginning, the drama of the story mostly comes from the mixed response to Dr. Trescott’s efforts to save and secure a place for his seriously maimed former employee. Shortly after the accident, the Judge reprimands the doctor: ““He will be your creation, you understand. He is purely your creation. Nature has very evidently given him up. He is dead. You are restoring him to life. You are making him, and he will be a monster, and with no mind”” (Crane M 32). The argument that

Trescott's intervention goes against nature very closely resembles Smith's social Darwinist position.

At this point, we are more than familiar with attempts to meld social policy with post-Darwinian science or pseudo-science. Based on Norris and Gilman, one expects a pairing of physical degeneration and disease with deterioration of activity, and Henry's disability *does* seem in keeping with that: alongside his physical disfigurement, he appears no longer able to be a productive member of his community, no longer able to perform the tasks that he always had. Post-accident, Henry continues to act out the habits of his former life. When he visits his sweetheart and performs courtly gestures, the family can only see "a monster making a low and sweeping bow" (Crane M 52). When, while being beamed at by a group of white children, the delirious Henry begins to sing a religious song, the children regard him as one might an incomprehensible supernatural object: "They turned, and were transfixed by the solemnity and mystery of the indefinable gestures" (Crane M 64). Both of these scenes show Henry performing acts that relate to a lifestyle with high cultural capital (ritualized romantic love and Christian worship, respectively). This failure of performance contributes to the liminality that marks him as grotesque. The text in these spots indicates that a violation of categories has occurred: something that is not easily-discernible as human is behaving as humans do.

Henry's liminality is an example of the negative grotesque. He does not fit into the classifications erected to afford certainty and coherence to social space, and—as opposed to the jumbled limbs of the indigent in "An Experiment in Misery"—his body is not used as a vehicle for poetic connection with a fleshy wholeness. Still, Henry does not elicit disgust in the manner of a fuzzy hambone. Like "Maggie," which tries to locate a social explanation for the downfall of a young woman, "The Monster" is a story about the social processes that go into the creation of a

monster. Monstrosity is an interpersonal phenomenon; it is a spectacle that requires an audience for its production. Henry's performance fails because he is unable to convince others that these acts belong to the body performing them; he is made monstrous by his audience's inability to read his behavior. Henry's expulsion from social sphere results from the failure of that performance, which leaves him illegible.

I argue that this speaks to the nineteenth and early twentieth century fear of the mob. In this period, the disorganized masses were host to anxieties about corporeality. Arendt feared its atomizing force: the tendency of masses of people to lose their individuality and become bundles of reactions. Le Bon feared a devolution to barbarism and the primitive, which is also a way of rebecoming-animal. Crane's approach to the mob is no less wary. Like Arendt, he is interested in public bonds; where in Arendt the subject articulates her individuality and belonging in the context of a common world, in Crane the subject is invited or disinvited to participate in public space by the gaze of others. Arendt's concern—that biological life dominates in the absence of a common world—is actually a regular feature in social systems based on belonging, because at any point an individual can be refused entry into the common world by the crowd and thereby be defined by their corporeal existence. Crane's thematic focus on the political power that crowds wield in the act of recognition is, in a way, an inversion of the grotesque spectacle exemplified by the black-based feeding race, because it shifts attention away from the grotesque body of the exiled and back towards the audience of his spectacle.

"The Monster" features Crane's most lengthy indictment of the mentality of crowds. What was a disdain for the "happy cows" of the Bowery has worked itself by 1898 into a blanket condemnation of the mob's irrationality. Johnathan Tadashi Naito (2006) associates the preponderance of crowds in "The Monster" with urbanization and a specifically urban hunger for

spectacle. He describes the nightlife in the park before the fire as a scene of democratized social interaction where class barriers are broken down and people take in the sights and exchange gossip (Naito 44). I object to this characterization because Crane makes it clear that the gathering is not all that social, “save that group regarded group with interest, but mainly in silence” (Crane M 11). The crowd is not to be mistaken for a community; it is rather an amoeba with a thousand eyes, whose main activity is witnessing and policing the behavior of its parts. Ultimately, we are enjoined to view the people as an undifferentiated mass: “the throng swarmed, with a gentle murmur of dresses switching the turf, and with a steady hum of voices” (Crane M 13). Crane’s refusal of the “social aspect” of the swarm of activity that he describes makes it seem overwhelming (Crane M 11). It does not quite satisfy this dissertation’s definition of the grotesque because there is no evocation of corporeal life, but it does call attention to the sort of boundarylessness of masses of people that Crane elsewhere (i.e. “Death and the Child,” “An Experiment in Misery,” etc.) uses as an occasion for the grotesque. Additionally, the festive atmosphere maintained by the crowd after they relocate to the scene of the fire is sufficiently incongruent with the horrible prospects of that fire that it could be called grotesque.

The horizontalization of sight in the crowd suggests Foucauldian surveillance, which is then used to evaluate the performances of others and assign worth according to those performances. The novella creates a parallel between the crowd at scheduled festivities and the spectatorship of populations in more informal or ad hoc contexts. The “throng” moves from the park to the scene of the fire with little change in attitude, as though all sights are open to a similar style of consumption. Gazes follow Henry throughout the entirety of the story. We are granted little access to his interiority, being asked instead to consider how others gauge Henry’s performance of the ‘young gentleman’ social ‘type.’ I have argued earlier in this chapter

that *bare life* can be conceived of as the absolute depletion of communal political bonds. In “Maggie” and “The Monster,” policing-through-sight gets in the way of this bonding by treating the indecipherable as anathema. Any social system that agonizes over illegibility and suppresses bodily reminders of our corporeality is going to wind up with the abject as its unpleasant remainder. This seems to be the conclusion that Crane leads us towards in his stories about socially marginalized figures.

The general absence of Henry’s interiority reveals a deep problem with the story’s treatment of race: a reluctance or inability to represent the perspectives of people in the cultural subaltern. It is an experiment in the foundations of grotesque racial performance that does not really consider how it psychologically affects those who are made to feel grotesque. Adding to this is the fact that the story is populated with cartoonish and grotesque racial caricatures who actually prove to be the most frightened and intolerant of Henry’s difference, in contrast to the socially-conscious and upstanding white family who dutifully looks after Henry’s interests. The most extreme instance of this follows Henry’s mock act of courtship. His ex-fiancée’s family wig out, her mother—an enormously overweight woman—vaulting over a fence and landing on her backside (Crane M 53). The emphasis on excessive corporeality and the incongruity of the fat body and athletic action are both features of the grotesque, and the family’s hysteria feeds into the racist trope of African Americans being overgrown children who require white supervision and patronage. If Crane had intended to explore the social components of racial prejudice, the presence of so many superstitious, quavering, and prejudicial black characters sends a mixed message.

Neglecting the actual perspectives of African Americans is also a missed opportunity from an epistemological perspective, because the subaltern subjects’ ways of knowing the world

are distinct from the dominant episteme. Grotesque racial spectacles demonstrate this point, because they are often host to veiled and doubled meanings created by those who, being in a situation of duress, find quiet means of subversion and rebellion. In *To Wake the Nations* (1993), Eric Sundquist describes the potential for parodic rebellion in racial spectacles. In this passage, he considers the duality of the cakewalk: “It could easily be made to correspond to the stereotype of black buffoonery, whether danced by whites in blackface or by blacks, themselves likely to be masked in exaggerated blackface as well. Yet it is also the case that the cakewalk occupied a liminal territory with a significant potential for resistance, a psychological and cultural space in which the racist appropriation of black life in offensive mannerisms gave way to an African American reversal of stereotype” (277). The contradictions of racial performance that Sundquist observes mirror the contradictions presented by grotesque bodies. The first part of Sundquist’s comment falls in line with the dehumanizing, destructive, atomizing grotesque of the feeding contest and the liminality of Leonard Cassuto’s black bodies. The second part, however, describes a potent, weaponizable liminality pertaining to the suspension of normal social categories; this is similar to Bakhtin’s concept of the carnivalesque, which he associates with the revitalizing power of the grotesque in folk culture. Disorder, disorganization, and confusion are generative of new possible social meanings.

In his fiction, Chesnutt appears to be drawn to such a state of uncertainty as a means of resistance. Far from reinforcing the stereotypes of ‘black buffoonery’ that further alienate the black political subject, he uses the trappings of grotesque racial performances to seize political ground. Sometimes he does this through the subversion of expectations. For example, in “The Passing of Grandison” (1899), the white characters are taken in by a superficial interpretation of an apparently buffoonish slave who resists his own emancipation, only to have it revealed to

them that Grandison's performance was part of a larger conspiracy to allow his whole family to escape. The ambiguity of Grandison's performance is reflected formally by the story's heteroglossia. Grandison exploits the narrative frames taken for granted by members of the Owens family. When Grandison returns to the plantation so that he can liberate the rest of his family, the colonel misreads his actions by framing it within a romantic plantation narrative, the happy serfdom of which recalls historical romances by Walter Scott: "Why, it's as good as one of Scott's novels! Mr. Simms or some other one of our Southern authors ought to write it up" (Chesnutt 203). This is at least one of three frames present in the story, the other two being Dick Owens's self-interested, virtue-signaling abolitionism that reads Grandison as a foolish, childlike character, and Grandison's own frame, disclosed at the end, which casts his feigned foolishness as the actions of a trickster manipulating the prejudices of those around him for his own benefit. Grandison's minstrel-like performance challenges the ideal of objectivity because its legibility is highly dependent on perspective. The story suggests that 'critical distance' is not necessarily the best way to get to know someone, because certain sequences of behavior can only be read correctly with position-specific foreknowledge. Chesnutt's fiction not only gives us a very concentrated version of the epistemological concerns with which literary naturalism is preoccupied, but offers a very mature example of how the liminality associated with grotesque can be profitably used to take on those concerns. Where for some authors (Norris and Gilman especially) the grotesque promises only incoherence and the disintegration of stable meanings, for Chesnutt it is a tool to establish the epistemological authority of minority speakers.

This kind of grotesque featured in "The Passing of Grandison" lacks the explicit viscosity paradigmatic of the aesthetic category. Though he fits the archetype of the racialized grotesque character, Grandison is evacuated of anything that signals degeneration,

discombobulation, or visceral disgust. There is a simple enough reason for this: Grandison is meant to be humanized, not dehumanized. Still, to strengthen my case, and to make sure that this section's engagement with the grotesque is consistent with all of the previous sections, I will turn to some instances of the grotesque that are more explicitly about bodies and embodiment but showcase the same strategies of parodic subversion and interest in epistemological control.

To start, I note that the most physically grotesque characters in Chesnutt's fiction are the ones who bump up against whiteness. This is another inversion: here whiteness is the contaminating element. In *The Marrow of Tradition*, Jerry, the servant of one of the masterminds behind the race riot that concludes the book, disfigures himself in an attempt to appear whiter. Shocked by his corrupted visage, the General exclaims: "Your black face is splotted with brown and yellow patches, and your hair shines as though you had fallen head-foremost into a firkin of butter" (Chesnutt MT 194). He admonishes him further: "I can see the signs of decay in your face, and your hair will all fall out in a week or two at the latest,— mark my words!" (Chesnutt MT 194). Jerry has assumed a grotesque physical form: like the eating contestants, his appearance is irregular and oddly foodlike, bringing into relief his tenuous ties to humanity. Though the General sees evidence only of a comically foolish black man (Jerry is more than willing to acquiesce to this judgment), and though, in his eyes, the grotesqueness of Jerry's transformation appears to be a feature of the liminality inherent to his race, the novel invites us to find a different significance. Jerry is an unsympathetic character, complicit in the social structures that perpetuate black oppression. His perspective is not representative of many other African Americans, who resent the rule of whiteness without aspiring to conform to it. In this context, Jerry's physical 'decay' is an external expression of the arrested development of his psyche.

The scene also seems like a partial repudiation of Chesnut's own borrowing from white standards of beauty in earlier works. Sundquist observes that *The House Beyond the Cedars* (1900) is typical of tragic mulatto fiction in its centralization of its heroine European-style beauty (399). Particularly revealing is this passage, where the narrator uses the language of dominant Western artistic principles to explain Warwick's longing for Rena: "There had come to him from some source, down the stream of time, a rill of the Greek sense of proportion, of fitness, of beauty, which is indeed but proportion embodied, the perfect adaptation of means to ends" (Chesnut HBC 44). The language of Greek ideals takes on added importance when it is considered in the context of the grotesque, which is the antithesis of classical symmetry and proportion. The difficult relationship of ambiguously-raced characters to whiteness is likewise on display in "The Wife of His Youth" (1898), wherein the dark-skinned, balding, prunelike mammie caricature is contrasted with the biracial Mr. Ryder's demure and light-skinned love interest (Chesnut *Stories* 110-2).

The presence of an older generation of outrageous and stereotypical characters in Chesnut's writing suggests deeply conflicting feelings about beauty and embodiment. The bizarrely-bodied represent a legacy of race-based struggle that must be reckoned with by members of Chesnut's own generation and social caste. Jerry's degeneration-through-assimilation is one possible resolution of this line of thought. An atavistic, degenerating physicality is directly connected to a performance of subservience and passive cooperation that is left over from the actual past.

The other grotesque character in *The Marrow of Tradition* with a strong connection to whiteness is Tom Delamere. John Dudley notes in *A Man's Game: Masculinity and the Anti-Aesthetics of American Literary Naturalism* (2004) that the narrator's description of Tom is a

pointed subversion of race-based degeneration rhetoric articulated as feminization—the feminine being associated with passivity and thus vulnerable to hereditary backslide, as this dissertation’s section on Charlotte Perkins Gilman illustrates (138). Pushing against a “fear-driven negation of black manhood,” as Dudley puts it, Chesnutt places Tom—who embodies “the trope of the effete, dissipated artist”—at the forefront of the racial spectacle of the cakewalk (138, 146). Tom’s body is heavily-scrutinized by the narrator at his introduction into the story: his features, “feline rather than feminine... subtly negated the idea of manliness” (Chesnutt MT 53). Striking physical descriptions of male characters in naturalist texts tend to occur when embodiment is a critical aspect of their character—to understand McTeague’s essential animality, for example, one must be acquainted early with his size and beefiness—and, in good physiognomic fashion, Tom’s build signals his internal moral deficiencies. Tom meets the criteria for grotesqueness on a few counts. First, like Vandover, Tom’s behavioral excesses—drinking, gambling, et al—are linked to physical regression. Secondly, the description of Tom as “feline” ought to be read in the context of popular 19th century feminizing racial caricatures—more often Chinese than African American—that showcase deviant bodies that are catlike animal-human hybrids (Chen 106). While *The Marrow of Tradition* does not touch at Sino-American relations, I suggest that it repurposes elements of this Orientalizing discourse to establish whiteness as a potential category of racial otherness. This decentering of whiteness positions Chesnutt to criticize the biopolitical frameworks installed to enforce white social dominance.

These corporeal politics are important for interpreting *Marrow*’s use of racial spectacle. Tom’s degenerate whiteness reframes the spectacle of the cakewalk. Tom performs the text’s example of a minstrel act; impersonating a dignified servant named Sandy, his ridiculous over-

the-top performance gets the latter man ostracized from his community and, later, accused of murder when Tom dons the costume again to plunder Mrs. Ochiltree's house. Along with the fact that the cakewalk is presented as a pageant put on mostly for the sake of white onlookers (Northern tourists), the incongruence of Tom's blackface performance with the actual composure of the African American man that he tries to mirror strongly indicates that grotesque racial spectacles are constructed by and for the benefit of white people. White people seem to be the primary audience and perpetrators of racial grotesqueries to which blackness is conceptually attached but to which no black person is much involved. This amounts to a denaturalization of the primitiveness and corporeal baseness of African Americans that is taken for granted in events like the watermelon-eating contest. Liminality and grotesque racial performance, rather than being a feature inherent to people of African ancestry, are bound up in and perpetuated by whiteness. That Tom Delamere is himself a degenerate character would seem to reinforce the idea that racial grotesqueries are imposed by white subjects onto black ones. That his minstrelsy bleeds over into his violent crimes draws a link between the racial spectacle as entertainment and the race-based paranoia that plays into systems of violence; it is redolent of the hideous merger of racialized entertainment and systemic violence involved in public lynching.

Race: Monarchical Atavism and the Power of Narrative

The examples from the previous section reveal how Chesnut undermines the racial myths that justify the subjugation of black people. The propaganda published through the *Morning Chronicle* by the conspirators behind the race riot relies heavily on dehumanizing racial caricatures to promote a white supremacist agenda: "Negro citizenship was a grotesque farce— Sambo and Dinah raised from the kitchen to the cabinet were a spectacle to make the gods

laugh” (93). For the “Dinah and Sambo” narratives to be compelling, one must accept a one-dimensional picture of racial performance—the sort of buffoonery on display in the black characters in Crane’s “The Monster.” Chesnutt repeatedly neutralizes this weapon in his work, first by showing in stories like “The Passing of Grandison” that naïve racial performance can be more calculated than imagined from a Southern white perspective, then in *Marrow* a) indicating that these performances are constructed to protect white egos and b) coopting degenerationist rhetoric and grotesque imagery to suggest that whiteness is the source of aberration.

The latter has a historiographical dimension that I wish to explore further using the concept of *monarchical atavism*. This is a term that I discovered in Henry W. Fisher’s memoir *Abroad with Mark Twain and Eugene Fields* (1922), in which Twain is credited as saying in regard to the enthusiastic militarism of the German people: “they have eighteen or twenty centuries of monarchical atavism in their blood” (42). The concept of a governing system being a regressive environmental influence, together with the language of hereditary taint, makes *monarchical atavism* a fascinating turn of phrase to someone studying the literary naturalists’ relationship to scientific discourse. As I explained in Chapter Three, atavism involves an analogy between a current and (imagined or real) past state, in which the state is associated (often negatively) with the carnal or animalistic. Describing systems of government or social orders as atavistic is a valuable tool for progressively-minded writers. Twain’s send-up of historical novels, *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur’s Court* (1889), is an interesting application of *monarchical atavism* as a lens for commenting on conservative or backward-looking social organization. A criticism of Walter Scott’s vision of medieval Europe (which, as Chesnutt’s “Grandison” suggests, was popular at the time in the South as justification for the American racial caste system), *Yankee* describes 11th century Europeans with the language normally used

by 19th century Europeans to describe the indigenous people of the New World and Africa, who were commonly thought of as anachronisms (Twain 281). Twain uses the idea of primitivism to discredit the nostalgic daydreams of the American heirs to Walter Scott—members of what Dudley calls “the aristocratic tradition celebrated in fiction by Thomas Nelson Page, Thomas Dixon, and others”—by pointing out the ‘savagery’ of undemocratic systems (Dudley 143). The question of whether one should read Twain’s use of primitivism as genuinely disparaging to indigenous people or ironic and critical is beyond the scope of this dissertation. In this study, *Yankee* serves only as an introduction to what *monarchical atavism* might mean as a way of writing about systems of social organization.

I argue that Charles Chesnutt regularly adopts this mode when talking about social structures in the American South. Like Twain, Chesnutt was aware of the romantic parallelization of the Southern caste system with an imagined chivalric past. The courtship at the center of *The House Behind the Cedars* begins with a jousting competition— an elaborate chivalric cosplay described in a prose style that imitates chivalric romances (cite.) In *Marrow*, Carteret is described as believing “in the divine right of white men and gentlemen, as his ancestors had believed in and died for the divine right of kings” (Chesnutt 64). Where white Southerners might have exploited this parallelization to justify racial hierarchy, Chesnutt subverts the trope by casting it as a sign of primitive, atavistic tendencies.

Beyond showing that strategic manipulation of the white landowners’ feudal imagination can be a secret pathway towards greater agency (as is the case in “Grandison”), Chesnutt reinterprets the parallel as a quasi-evolutionary analogy. One way that he does this that has already been mentioned is his use of the trope of the physically-diminished artist, which is essentially a Gothic trope. The body of the Gothic aristocrat expresses a negatively-coded,

degenerative atavism. It is typified by many of the features of the parasite: the passivity cultivated by old money lets the body languish and become anemic; excessive isolation and inactivity creates weakened bloodlines and malformed princes. *Marrow* provides such an evolutionary/deevolutionary timeline when explaining the causes of the waifish Tom Delamere's poor character and dainty physiognomy through the eyes of the class-conscious white character Ellis: "To Ellis, unbiased by ancestral traditions, biased perhaps by jealousy, Tom Delamere was a type of the degenerate aristocrat. If, as he had often heard, it took three or four generations to make a gentleman, and as many more to complete the curve and return to the base from which it started, Tom Delamere belonged somewhere on the downward slant, with large possibilities of further decline" (Chesnutt MT 104). The continuum of ascension and descension applies a temporal frame typical of degeneration theory. Delamere is not the first time we have encountered an atavistic pseudo-aristocrat artist—Vandover, whose yielding personality and overly-sensual lifestyle eat away at him, certainly applies. It is notable, however, that in *Marrow* atavism is used in reference to macropolitical structures (e.g. the class structure causing gradual regression to a brutal state), as opposed to being a latent tendency in individuals (e.g. the ever-present primordial brute coming out and saying hello). This is definitive of *monarchical atavism*.

The other major way in which *monarchical atavism* shines through in Chesnutt's writing is direct discussion of civilizational narratives. Where Twain's inventive Yankee protagonist harps on in an Enlightenment-inspired, politically-modernist fashion about progress and human ingenuity and its role in societal advancement, Chesnutt's narrator in *Marrow* delivers an alternative account of the history of cultural development that reframes the concept of tradition to the benefit of his ancestors:

The race which at the last shall inherit the earth—the residuary legatee of civilization—will be the race which remains longest upon it. The negro was here before the Anglo-Saxon was evolved, and his thick lips and heavy-lidded eyes looked out from the inscrutable face of the Sphinx across the sands of Egypt while yet the ancestors of those who now oppress him were living in caves, practicing human sacrifice, and painting themselves with woad—and the negro is here yet. (Chesnutt MT 83)

This passage promotes a positive atavism for African lineages, comparable to Norris's noble Anglo Saxon, while primitivizing and brute-alizing Europe. Chesnutt rejects the way that 'primitivism' is wielded against his people and places it on the shoulders of his oppressors. In so doing, he reinforces the negative variety of atavism but redirects it in service of his own political goals.

Chesnutt embraces narrative as a tool for political transformation because legal equality on its own is ineffective. The official justification of segregated train cars demonstrates the inadequacy of formal equality alone; the conductor boasts to Miller that the segregation of train cars is strictly impartial—it is an ingenious solution to racial tensions because it “applies to both races alike” (Chesnutt MT 78). The de facto inequality of 'separate but equal' systems is of course now almost universally uncontested, though defensive appeals to formal legal equality are still sometimes made in response to protests of race-based injustice. *Marrow* also indicates that appeals to logic are likewise insufficient for dismantling racially-biased systems. After being forced out of the company of his companions and into the Negro car, Miller occupies himself by calculating “what it would cost the Southern railroads to haul a whole car for every colored passenger. It was expensive, to say the least; it would be cheaper, and quite as considerate of their feelings, to make the negroes walk” (Chesnutt MT 79). This moment exists in the text to

disabuse liberal-minded readers of the notion that systemic racism can be ‘debunked.’ Though it may try to don a veneer of scientific legitimacy, racist thinking is arrived at not rationally but narratively and emotionally. The *raison d’être* of Chesnutt’s naturalism is to produce compelling counternarratives that do not *debunk or persuade* but instead *subvert and replace*.

Chesnutt’s work demonstrates an awareness that, in practice, knowledge cannot be neutral or objective and that, in making claims about social space, discourses must be sculpted and directed. Often, the content and quality of social space comes down to the intangible, informal stuff of social belonging. American literary naturalism as a whole is heavily invested in describing the embodied experience of selfhood, taking the corporeal as a special mode of knowledge that explains connection or alienation in a deeply felt, extra-rational way that is outside the limits of positivistic knowledge. Where Crane might be preoccupied with communal belonging in a quasi-celebratory nature and Norris and Gilman are stuck in an attitude of disgusted repulsion, Chesnutt’s fiction is focused on practices of race-based exclusion, and his engagement with the grotesque is colored by this. He is conscious of what it is like to be on the wrong side of social othering— to be, in the words of Miller after his ejection from the whites only train car, “branded and tagged and set apart from the rest of mankind upon the public highways, like an unclean thing” (80). Chesnutt’s awareness of the power of the abject and the grotesque to dehumanize leads him to treat the grotesque as a feature of discourse to be played with rather than a way of achieving a stronger reality effect.

Concluding Remarks

The goal of this conclusion is not to rehash what has already been said but to point to its usefulness and application: to highlight significant contributions to the study of American literature offered by my methodological approach and subject matter. In its methodology, my dissertation recenters affect and aesthetics without neglecting the political dimensions of the literary texts. While an attempt to find a balance between heuristics and the concerns surrounding historicism and cultural studies is not in itself trailblazing, I believe that my method of fusing the two via the concepts of embodiment, social space, and political subjectivity is somewhat original. Additionally, thinking about aesthetic and political problems jointly and expressly as problems of epistemology is itself noteworthy. In terms of subject matter: though other scholars have pointed out the romantic, humanistic, and extra-scientific features of literary naturalism, presenting naturalism as bound to competing epistemological frameworks—the scientific and the affective/experiential— provides a new way of reading the primary texts’ commentaries on social mechanisms, social structure, and social belonging.

A main tenet of my project is the idea that the way people process the mapping of social space is in large part aesthetic and that those aesthetics shape and are shaped by dominant epistemes and cultural narratives. The geopolitical culture of late 19th century America is highly impacted by the emergence of professionalized scientific disciplines as a primary mode of intellectual legitimacy. The crucial themes here are legibility, coherence, and a desire to master one’s environment, and a major concern of the intellectuals of the time was how to manage subjectivity within that milieu— to determine, in short, how one achieves a coherent personal-political identity: how people relate to public and private spaces in their self-conception, and on that basis, who is excluded from or included by the public and therefore granted or denied

subjectivity. Literary naturalist texts are not only documents of the attitudes of 19th century American thinkers; they are experiments in competing modes of knowledge that engage critically with these dominant epistemes and cultural narratives, especially as they pertain to aspects of embodiment and bodily life.

Embodiment is important to naturalism because, following the Aristotelian ‘golden barrier’ model of sociality, how people self-conceptualize and relate themselves to public and private realms is predicated on their relationship to bodies and embodiment. In the works of fiction that I discuss, the meanings of bodies in social space have two sources: 1) a dominant biological view of bodies informed by evolutionary theory and structured by the systematic positivist approach to acquiring knowledge and 2) an immersive, experiential, affect-centered understanding of bodies with roots in pre-modernity. In their engagement with the grotesque, literary naturalist texts are variously a) expressions of anxiety surrounding illegibility and incoherence of abject bodies and mass life and b) incomplete paths to quelling those anxieties and resolving the contradictions between different epistemological frameworks (scientific knowledge versus the type of extra-rational experiential knowledge that literature can access).

Considering literary naturalism in the light of these concepts leaves one with a group of texts that is heteroglossic, playful, weird, diverse in its ideological commitments, and resistant to tidy resolutions to the topics that it explores. At the very least, my approach to literary naturalism has opened up fresh avenues for research and discussion by treating it as a serious stylistically conscious literary enterprise with distinct aesthetic values and a distinct conceptual lexicon.

More broadly, it is my hope that this dissertation will serve as an argument for the continued relevance of literary naturalism to American culture. In one sense, the components that make up naturalism have experienced a waning influence: ‘professionalization’ means something

different to our current crop of writers. Most contemporary fiction writers come out of MFA programs; many, though certainly not all, adopt the in-house style of college writers' workshops: a type of quotidian realism that has more in common with William Howells and Henry James than with Frank Norris and Stephen Crane. Based on this, Chesnutt's racially conscious, semi-ironically-appropriated version of naturalism seems to be the version to have won out. His fiction is the one that feels the most contemporary. It is not hard to imagine social realist novel like his being featured in the New York Times Book Review. (On this note: perhaps, when literary morticians describe the demise of naturalism as an intellectual current, they are overlooking its endurance as a force within African American letters, from Richard Wright to Colson Whitehead.)

Additionally, the prestige of the scientific concepts that naturalism engages with has lessened in literary circles even as the sciences continue to exert enormous pressure on academic disciplines. The concept of biological determinism has suffered especially, partly because speculative areas of physics like quantum mechanics have surpassed determinism, and partly because biological determinism is strongly associated with race realism and bigotry. Their loss of prestige, however, does not equal absence. Both biological determinism and a passion for the aesthetics of the negative grotesque persist in literature and thought favored by the alt right and reactionary conservatives. Without drawing an equivalency between them, three prominent examples come to mind: in an echo of Lankester, psychologist and self-help guru Jordan Peterson sometimes draws atavism-redolent analogies between human motivation and the behavior of lobsters; the characters of Michel Houellebecq novels are dominated by animal impulses towards sex and violence; Jean Raspail's influential far right 'cult classic' *Camp of the Saints* (1973) is teeming with images of threatening, animalistic, illegible mass life in the form of

refugees waiting to enter Europe. Even if all other traces of the legacy of naturalism had vanished, it would be worth studying it solely to understand better the intertwining of psuedo-science and the negative grotesque as a form of the aestheticization of politics.

However, I do not think that this is the only corner of the Earth where the themes relevant to naturalism survive. Declinism and Arendtian-style lamentations about the disintegration of republican social space have seen a big upswing since 2016, extending well beyond apocalypse-minded fringe figures and entering the political mainstream. In *America: The Farewell Tour* (2018) — a polemic against the excesses and “moral rot” that allegedly led to the ascension of Donald Trump— journalist and TV political commentary Chris Hedges lambasts a degenerative capitalistic elite: “They believed that this orgy of blood and gold would never end, and they still believe it. They do not understand that the dark ethic of ceaseless capitalist and imperialist expansion is dooming the exploiters as well as the exploited. But even as we stand on the cusp of extinction we lack the intelligence and imagination to break free from our evolutionary past” (21, 43). Hedges’s cynical references to atavism and decay demonstrates the renewed ease with which 21st century people are returning to the same well of concepts that interested the naturalists. The disorientation caused by the disruption of business-as-usual liberal democracy in the West could be interpreted as a new crisis of legibility in a new period of momentous transition. By drawing this analogy between the 1890s and the present, I am arguing for the urgency of revisiting American literary naturalism using the terms that I develop in this dissertation.

Finally, I want to assert that there has been no better time to examine creatural realism and the experiential quality of embodiment. There is ample substance for further research into the grotesque and other representations of embodiment in literary naturalism from the

perspective of disability studies— with its Montaigne-like awareness of physicality— and queer theory, with its extant fascination with bodily boundaries, liminal states, and jouissance. Lest I be misunderstood: this is not a call to label disabled or queer bodies as ‘grotesque.’ Instead, I am suggesting that a) the negative and positive grotesque might be useful conceptual tools for analysis, critique, and (in the case of the positive grotesque) reparative readings, and b) American naturalist texts have a lot to offer to the researcher interested in disability studies and queer theory because of their keen attention to embodiment and its experimentation with medical and sociological discourses.

First and foremost, this dissertation has been aimed at better understanding American literary naturalism— to separate the reality of literary naturalism from the stereotype and to expose the incredible complexity of its engagement with positivistic scientific discourse and with the politics, experience, and aesthetics of embodiment. Having accomplished this, we can use the example of literary naturalism to reflect on our own practices of knowledge-formation, narrative-building, and ethical decision-making. The mixed epistemology of literary naturalism may help us to appreciate the limitations of an abstract scientific vision of the world; such a vision is accurate without being truthful, because it leaves out the symbolic resonances and bodily sensations that are a huge part of our social realities. Tracking the confluence of scientific discourse and feelings like disgust, terror, or Bakhtinian joy gives us a greater appreciation of how narratives about society are built and employed: the rationale is only part of the story (and perhaps the weakest part). If it ultimately falls short of illuminating a surefire path out of alienation, literary naturalism’s exploration of the intricacies of agency, embodiment, and political recognition remain relevant to our own conversations about subjectivity and otherness.

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