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Prying, Peeping, Peering: The Voyeuristic Gaze in Late-Nineteenth-Century American Literary

Naturalism

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Abstract

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This dissertation seeks to redefine late-nineteenth-century American literary naturalism as a movement that is continually negotiating the tension between speculative fantasy and scientific objectivity, a tension that both reveals and is revealed by naturalism's voyeuristic gaze. This interdisciplinary project brings together novels and paintings to examine the ways that this voyeurism was dramatized and enacted by the literature and art of this period, as well as served as a method for critiquing the preeminent role that vision played in constructing knowledge in the nineteenth century. Foregrounding the scopophilia of the late nineteenth century and its representation in novels such as Stephen Crane's *Maggie*, Frank Norris's *McTeague*, Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, and Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth*, as well as paintings by Thomas Eakins and Ashcan School artists, makes manifest naturalism's complex portrayals of asymmetrical visual authority, including unequal configurations of class hierarchies and challenges to traditional representations of sexuality and gender. These works become sites through which we can read the fantasies of class, of masculinity, and of sexuality that were integral to the experience of the nineteenth century but have often been obscured by claims of formal realism. Naturalism's attempts to create a detached spectator reveal the impossibility of

realist objectivity, and this failure engenders the radical subjectivity found in twentieth-century modernism. Although naturalism attempts objectivity through its subjectivity, modernism reveals the impossibility of this project even while celebrating this failure. In this way a full appreciation of literary naturalism's voyeuristic gaze reveals the tensions inherent to the movement itself while simultaneously illuminating the influential legacy of naturalism in twentieth-century modernism.

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Introduction

In John Sloan's 1910 etching *Night Windows* (fig. 1), three windows of a lower-class apartment building glow against the half-darkness of the urban night. The composition of the picture draws one's eye initially to a window in which stands a tantalizing woman wearing only a negligee, pulling back her hair, readying herself for bed (or more). An image of sexuality illuminated against the gray stove pipes and drying laundry, the woman in her nightgown poses in the lower-third of the frame, her window luring the eye towards it, irresistibly. To the right sits another window adjacent to the woman's—perhaps even part of the same apartment—which has its shade drawn, but just visible appear to be the legs of someone resting on a bed. Nothing is necessarily inappropriate about the scene—just a woman preparing for bed and a mostly-closed shade—and yet the difficult to decipher arrangement is suggestive of more. Only after focusing on the young woman does the eye drift left and slightly up, glimpsing a stout mother hanging laundry on a clothesline as a child watches. Exhibiting none of the sensuality of the woman in the nightgown, the mother appears as a stark contrast, a classic representative of the lower classes who are so often depicted as enmeshed in a never-ending cycle of unglamorous work and responsibility.

The final detail of the etching emerges above this window, overlooking all of the action in the alley: a man on the roof, a dark outline craning his head to see into the apartments below. Compared with the luminosity of the window scenes, the man's dark shape stands out like a photographic negative, a black hole in the upper left of the frame that shifts the narrative weight of the picture and transforms the man into the etching's pivotal image.¹ As the viewer's eye traces the angle of his head and the path of his vision, the likely destination of his gaze becomes

¹ According to a January 30, 1911 journal entry Sloan even considered calling his etching "'Man on the roof' (looking at girl dressing)" (*John Sloan's New York Scene* 502).

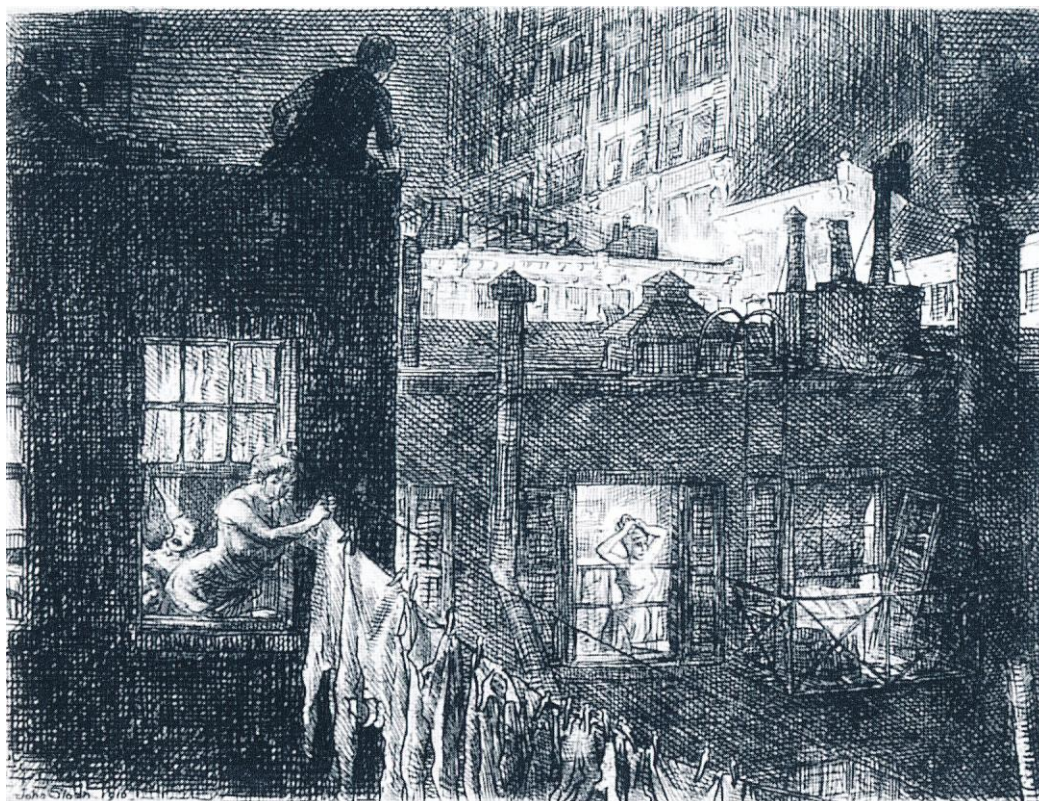


Figure 1. John Sloan, *Night Windows*, 1910.

evident: the woman in the nightgown. Whether he ascended to this perch for the express purpose of looking through this particular woman's window or if his is an equal opportunity gaze, the man is clearly a kind of voyeur, intent on passively peering into the concealed lives of his neighbors to satisfy his own curiosity and pleasure.

However, one final participant completes *Night Windows*: the viewer of the image. The work realizes the fantasies of the urban viewers Sloan envisions, viewers whom he imagines desire to see into those physical or psychological forbidden spaces. Just like the man on the roof, viewers watch the poor, unsuspecting denizens of the alley go about their nightly rituals, although when they look into the young woman's apartment, their gaze seems somewhat justified because they simply follow the man's line of vision. And yet his presence as an

obviously deviant figure also makes manifest the issue of voyeurism, highlighting the viewers' complicity in the scene, as they not just witness a dramatization of voyeurism but enact it, as well. The whole picture is presented with an eye to eliciting the interest of the viewer, of the voyeur: to view this etching is in fact to become a voyeur.

People have, it seems relatively safe to assert, always taken a certain pleasure in looking, but while the act of voyeurism dates back to at least the biblical Book of Daniel's story of Susanna and the Elders, the term "voyeur" did not have its first usage until 1900, just ten years before Sloan etched his picture.² In this initial decade of the twentieth century, Sigmund Freud also first analyzed the pathology of voyeurism, defining scopophilia as, in part, a disorder in which looking supplanted the "normal sexual aim" (251). The concept of voyeurism was taking on a new urgency and significance at the turn of the century, becoming a subject of cultural interest in a diverse range of works, from psychoanalytic studies to realist paintings. The confluence of certain historical conditions at least partly explains voyeurism's particular turn-of-the-century manifestations, especially in the United States. Increasing urbanization and internal national migrations toward new industrial centers brought vast numbers of strangers to single locations. Crowded streets and densely populated apartment buildings created both a curiosity and an anonymity that fostered a new type of looking: one might look through the neighbor's window easier than learning her name. The city was in part responsible for altering the very rituals of spectatorship, with new phenomenon such as the department store shop window creating, according to one critic, an "urban culture of looking" (Zurier 4) that changed the nature of vision and visuality. Simultaneous technological advancements in photography allowed for this new looking to be realized in more distant and theoretically objective ways, seemingly

² The first use of the term "voyeur" was in H. Blanchamp's 1900 translation of Charles Féré's *The Evolution and Dissolution of the Sexual Instinct*: "the houses of ill-fame have a *clientèle* of 'voyeurs' of both sexes" (*Oxford English Dictionary*).

fulfilling a century-long quest for dispassionate neutrality that dominated throughout Western culture, especially in the sciences. The arts as well would make use of the idea of an objective gaze, with both the visual arts and literature striving for greater realism. As a consequence, the image of a new type of detached spectator emerged, one that could anonymously gaze into shop windows and apartment windows alike with the impression of objectivity. And yet the perversity of this voyeuristic gaze simultaneously undermines this detached position, because despite its distance and passivity this gaze projects the voyeur imaginatively into these private scenes, allowing the man on the roof to fantasize about being the man on the bed, alone in the room with a beautiful woman instead of alone on the rooftop.

I have begun with this extended analysis of Sloan's etching because it encapsulates the scopophilia of the late nineteenth century and its representations in the arts, with its portrayal of asymmetrical visual authority, of unequal configurations of class hierarchies, of challenges to traditional representations of sexuality and gender, and of the unstable divisions between public and private space. *Night Windows* stands out as a notable depiction of voyeurism and the voyeuristic nature of art from this period, but it is by no means an isolated example. Although this drawing represents Sloan's voyeuristic gaze at its most obvious, a strain of voyeurism is present throughout much of his work as well as the work of his fellow Ashcan School painters, a turn-of-the-century group of artists that included Sloan and who are most famous for their style of realist painting that focused on the urban lower classes. Many of these painters' works exhibit a scopophilia similar to that found in Sloan's etching, as their paintings capture the fascination emerging at the end of the nineteenth century with the secret lives of the anonymous city dwellers transpiring behind the closed doors of every adjacent apartment.

However, far from being limited to the Ashcan School paintings, the artistic dramatization and enactment of voyeurism appears likewise in literature from this period. Indeed, Sloan's etching provides a visual and clearly observable example of the same scopophilic characteristics that can be found embedded in the work of an aesthetically and philosophically allied group of writers from the same period: the literary naturalists. Both the Ashcan School and the naturalists primarily focused on the urban dispossessed—usually women and almost always part of the lower classes—and they did so in supposedly “realistic” ways, which meant variously a stylistic approach that favored unadorned facts and descriptions over romantic flourishes, a rapid journalistic and theoretically objective aesthetic, and/or the focus on the somehow “realer” lives and experiences of the poor. However, Sloan's picture provides a useful frame for recognizing the intertwined relationship between voyeurism and naturalism in art and literature, as it reveals the ways in which this detached, privileged viewpoint directs its gaze towards invariably seamy and often sexualized spectacles. Instead of presenting a detached objectivity—the oft-cited aim of realist art produced by groups such as the Ashcan School and the literary naturalists—these works are beset by perverse fantasies about the private lives concealed by half-closed curtains.

My dissertation interrogates this voyeuristic gaze of naturalism, and in the process redefines American literary naturalism as a movement that is continually negotiating the tension between speculative fantasy and scientific objectivity. Critical attempts to define naturalism overlook the significance of the voyeuristic nature of these texts which, when it is brought to the foreground, reconfigures how we characterize and define literature and art from the turn of the century. If we take into account how naturalist authors in particular depict the “real” from the perspective of their voyeuristic impulses, then it becomes clear not just that these authors failed

to accurately depict reality, but that they failed—if it can even be called a failure—because they looked as voyeurs look, with an eye to pleasure and to fantasy, not to objectivity. Reading these texts as voyeuristic allows us to better understand the ways in which they manipulate the “real” of their intended subjects—the urban poor, the working classes, the marginalized minorities, etc.—for their own personal fantasies as well as uncovers complex power dynamics that play out visually in the late nineteenth century, across lines of class, gender, race, and sexuality. In my dissertation I argue that this type of voyeurism is present in both the obsessive watching that occupies many characters in these naturalist texts and in the ways in which the middle-class reader is allowed to peer through the windows of the lower classes; once highlighted, the spectator in naturalism becomes like the man on the rooftop of *Night Windows*, causing the redistribution of the narrative weight of these works from the spectacle of urban poverty to the spectator who peers into these worlds. Vision and sight were central for the naturalists’ representation of the “real” world through their fictions, and by examining the characteristics of this gaze, the historical, cultural, and aesthetic implications of their project take on new meanings. Although I will be focusing primarily on the novels of major literary naturalist authors, I will also be considering the representation of similar voyeuristic impulses in the visual arts at the turn of the century because doing so allows for a slight but constructive shifting of critical perspective, thereby revealing aspects of both forms that may otherwise remain concealed.

Naturalist texts in particular take a certain delight in allowing us to watch the squalid lives of the lower classes, of the innocent youth being corrupted by the metropolis, of the sins of the city and its destructive powers. Part of the strange enjoyment that comes from reading works from this period derives from our continued role as reader-voyeurs, of the pleasure resulting

from watching the frequently sordid lives of the novels' protagonists unfold. This type of voyeurism presents itself in both the ways in which the texts allow the bourgeois reader to peer through the windows of the lower classes in works such as Stephen Crane's *Maggie* (1893) or Frank Norris's *McTeague* (1899), as well as in the obsessive watching that occupies many characters in naturalist fiction, such as the hovering mobs that watch the protagonists of Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900) or the compulsive spectatorship of Lawrence Selden in Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905). In addition to these novels providing voyeuristic access to the seamy lower classes, they also formalize this voyeurism through a narration that creates just enough ironic distance from the action to separate the reader while still allowing him or her to peek through the characters' windows. As the voyeuristic perversity of the naturalist's gaze becomes more evident within the text, the readers of the work become implicated in complex ways as they are coerced into taking up this gaze.

The voyeurism of late-nineteenth- and early-twentieth-century naturalism became an essential part of this art's aesthetic, and recognizing and foregrounding this fact helps elucidate the strange mix of otherwise unaccountable features that characterizes the gaze in these works. On the one hand, the naturalist's gaze emerges as one expression of a more general scientific trend that privileges the objectivity of the gaze, particularly in medicine, as part of what Michel Foucault labels the "clinical gaze." The idea of a detached, objective gaze is taken up as part of an intensification of the sociological impulse in the late nineteenth century to document contemporary society, a far-reaching desire that manifests itself in texts such as Jacob Riis's *How the Other Half Lives* (1890), the realist paintings of the Ashcan school, and the naturalist fiction of the period. On the other hand, however, these artists often took liberties with this gaze so that they could, in Norris's words, tell romantic tales of characters "twisted from the ordinary,

wrenched out from the quiet, uneventful round of every-day life, and flung into the throes of a vast and terrible drama that works itself out in unleashed passions, in blood, and in sudden death” (“Zola” 71-72). This irresolvable tension between scientific objectivity and romantic fantasy becomes central to naturalism, and it is in large part responsible for what makes these works simultaneously compelling and confounding. The bizarre, contradictory presence of both science and romance in naturalism produces a grotesque interplay between these two forces that results in the naturalist’s gaze becoming voyeuristic. The effect of this opposition is the oddly perverse pleasure that can be found in these works, a pleasure produced by a voyeurism both dramatized and enacted in these texts. The resulting reinterpretation of the gaze in American literary naturalism as voyeuristic enables us to recognize the tension between objective viewpoint and imaginative romance that pervades these texts, ultimately revealing the very instability of a turn-of-the-century culture predicated on visual knowledge.

Studies of American Literary Naturalism

Although there is little debate that the post-Civil War decades saw the flourishing of realism in the arts, defining American literary naturalism has long proved a difficult task, both for the artists participating in it and for the scholars studying it. Part of this difficulty has arisen from the attempts to distinguish “realism” from “naturalism,” a problem exacerbated because, with neither term having a set meaning and each often defined against the other, the definitions become necessarily relational and therefore always shifting in relation to one another. To begin with, though, standard definitions of the two movements usually proceed along the following lines. Realism has long been defined, writes Donald Pizer, as a “verisimilitude of detail derived from observation and documentation,” as “an effort to approach the norm of experience—that is, a reliance upon the representative rather than the exceptional in plot, setting, and character,” and

“an objective, so far as an artist can achieve objectivity, rather than a subjective or idealistic view of human nature and experience” (1-2); in other words, verisimilitude, representativeness, and objectivity were supposedly the cornerstones of the realist movement. With regard to naturalism, Pizer explains that “since naturalism comes after realism, and since it seems to take literature in the same direction as realism, it is primarily an ‘extension’ or continuation of realism—only a little different” (9). How this difference is characterized depends largely on the artist or critic engaged in the definitional process, and while distinguishing naturalism from realism is not my primary concern, the features of naturalism which *do* distinguish it from realism are significant because these are what, in large part, produce naturalism’s voyeuristic gaze. These differences depend largely on three separate but interconnected characteristics: naturalism’s intensification of realism’s emphasis on documentation, as evident in the relationship between scientific naturalism and literary naturalism; naturalism’s rejection of realism’s bourgeois subject matter for the seamier and more fantastic “realities” of the urban poor; and the different representational aesthetic of naturalism, which incorporates anxieties about spectatorship into its very form through the presence of a third-person narrator whose gaze provides an organizational framework for the fiction.

Similar to most artistic movements, literary naturalism was greatly influenced by concurrent developments in other branches of thought, and, as its name suggests, literary naturalism shares some affinities with the concept of naturalism that emerged in the sciences. Since at least the mid-twentieth century, critics have suggested that central to the naturalists’ vision of their art were, as Lars Ahnebrink explains, the “scientific tendencies of the period” that “were characterized by a repudiation of previously accepted propositions and by a reliance on observation, experience, and facts; the century may be described as analytic, intellectual, and

interrogative, in search of truth and exactness” (269). In Foucault’s *The Birth of the Clinic* he suggests that it was the transformation of the field of medicine in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries that led to an increased reliance on observation, which resulted in the formation of a new type of objective, clinical gaze.³ In this framework, the same impulse for objectivity that Foucault identifies in the clinical gaze of the sciences is perceived to underlie the naturalist’s project, with the language and methods of the sciences thought to play an increasingly vital role in shaping artistic imaginations. Ahnebrink points towards Claude Bernard’s scientific treatise *Introduction à l’étude de la médecine expérimentale* (1865), suggesting that it influenced both the sciences and the arts through its effort to “establish medicine as an exact science” through the “experimental method” (22). It was this text that French naturalist Emile Zola drew upon for his famous *Le Roman expérimental* (1880), in which he “demanded a literature governed by science” such that the author “used the same method as the scientist” (Ahnebrink 22). In theory, what this art demanded was for the artist to be like the doctor, “to be ‘as cold as a vivisectionist at a lecture,’ abstain from comment, never show his own personality, and never turn to the reader for sympathy” (Ahnebrink 26). Because the literary naturalists—both French and American—were thought to have wanted to model themselves on the scientific naturalists, this version of naturalism has the artists assuming similar scientific attitudes, with “impartiality, impassivity, scrupulous objectivity, rejection of *a priori* metaphysical or epistemological prejudice, the confining of the artist to the accurate observation and notation of empirical phenomena, and the description of how, and not why, things happen”

³ For a more extended analysis of Foucault’s clinical gaze and its relationship to literary naturalism, see Daniel Schierenbeck’s essay, “Is There a Doctor in the House? Norris’s Naturalist Gaze of Clinical Observation in *McTeague*,” in which he argues that Norris uses the clinical gaze as a normalizing force to demonstrate the abnormality of characters like the McTeagues as part of a larger nativist project.

(Nochlin 43) being at the forefront of their aesthetic practice. In this model, the effect of the literary naturalists' attraction to the sciences was that the naturalist's gaze became essentially indistinguishable from the scientific or clinical gaze.

However, American literary naturalism's relationship to Zola's theoretical model, specifically, and scientific naturalism, generally, is not as straightforward as Ahnebrink suggests. The example of Frank Norris, one of the few naturalists to attempt a theory of the genre in addition to producing fiction, serves as a useful illustration. Following Pizer's earlier accounts of Norris's engagement with the thoroughly non-scientific sensational and romance genres, recent critics such as Eric Carl Link have noted that "the problem with trying to describe and define literary naturalism through too close a connection with scientific naturalism" is that "such a definition does not accurately describe the fiction itself" (14). When we look at the fiction, and indeed even at a naturalist such as Norris's own theoretical writings, Link suggests that the romance emerges as the genre most significantly associated with literary naturalism because Norris believed that "the romance allowed for exploration of the extraordinary, the grotesque, the strange, and the unusual" (66).⁴ Norris's "naturalistic romance-novel" (49), as Link labels it, is in contrast to realism and what Norris describes as "its meticulous presentation of teacups, rag carpets, wall paper and haircloth sofas" ("A Plea for Romantic Fiction" 78) because naturalism, through its connection to the romance, probes deeper into the "neighbor's secretest life" ("A Plea for Romantic Fiction" 77) in its quest for "Truth":

So you think Romance would stop in the front parlor and discuss medicated
flannels and mineral waters with the ladies? Not for more than five minutes. She

⁴ In the introduction to *The Oxford Handbook of American Literary Naturalism*, Keith Newlin furthers this inquiry into naturalism's transgeneric nature by productively suggesting the correlations between literary naturalism and the melodrama. See "Introduction: The Naturalistic Imagination and the Aesthetics of Excess" in *The Oxford Handbook of American Literary Naturalism*.

would be off upstairs with you, prying, peeping, peering into the closets of the bedroom, into the nursery, into the sitting room; yes, and into that little iron box screwed to the lower shelf of the closet in the library; and into those compartments and pigeon holes of the *secrétaire* in the study. She would find a heartache (may-be) between the pillows of the mistress's bed, and a memory carefully secreted in the master's deedbox. She would come upon a great hope amid the books and papers of the study table of the young man's room, and—perhaps—who knows—an affair, or, great heavens, an intrigue, in the scented ribbons and gloves and hairpins of the young lady's bureau. (“A Plea for Romantic Fiction” 77)

This image of Romance “prying, peeping, peering” suggests a fiction that is part sociological, part detective, part voyeuristic; it should know no boundaries in its investigation of that “vast and terrible drama” (“Zola as a Romantic Writer” 72) of life. Norris argues for a fiction that does not “stop in the front parlor” but instead pursues “Truth” all the way to the “young lady's bureau.” In a way this is a continuation of the inquisitive scientific gaze, as naturalism is called upon to penetrate to the mysteries of the “neighbor's secretest life.” But a romantic fantasy pervades this vision, with Norris's personified Romance seeking “heartache (may-be)” or “perhaps—who knows—an affair, or great heavens, an intrigue,” suggesting that naturalism is as much about seeing what is there as imagining what is not.⁵

⁵ In “Fiction is Selection,” Norris seems to contradict this idea of artistic liberty: “Imagination! There is no such thing; you can't imagine anything that you have not already seen and observed” (52). However, a page earlier he suggests that “fiction is what seems real, not what is real” (51), suggesting that imagination must invariably play some role in writing fiction. While critics such as Michael Davitt Bell have noted the occasionally incoherent nature of Norris's literary criticism, I think the contradiction here stems from the very tension I have been outlining, and indicates the difficulties involved with attempting to reconcile these positions.

But with the clinical gaze in the naturalist work free to focus on whatever the author desires and to imagine whatever he or she fancies lies “between the pillows of the mistress’s bed,” it starts to become clear how naturalism represents a sharp break from the more staid, quotidian realities of most realist texts. In naturalist novels the supposedly neutral narrator can be found observing all matter of sordid and seamy characters and situations, from naked women and generally sexually charged subjects to brutal slum life and heinous crimes; it is a gaze as dependent on clinical documentation as deviant fantasy. Faith in the objectivity of the gaze grants the naturalists the authority to direct their gaze toward whatever object they choose, and in turn that authority explains and justifies that decision. But once granted this authority, the gaze turns repeatedly towards that which it would not otherwise be given access to, from the seamy to the steamy, the sordid to the sexual, to reveal the lives of characters that are “twisted from the ordinary, wrenched out from the quiet, uneventful round of every-day life” (“Zola as a Romantic Writer” 72), but done so by the spectator’s imagination. Ultimately one cannot separate naturalism’s clinical objectivity from the fantastic or the perverse.

The issue of spectatorship marks the final major difference between naturalism and realism, as vision becomes thematized within the novels through the presence of the third-person, seemingly objective narrator who is prevalent throughout literary naturalism. The consideration of the formal organization of these works from the perspective of a voyeur, rather than the narrator-scientist, further alters the way that we consider their content. In *Form and History in American Literary Naturalism* June Howard influentially argues that the relationship between the spectator and the brute “Other” constitutes a fundamental feature of literary naturalism. While Howard’s argument for this separation between the explicit or implicit narrator and the characters of the text is part of a larger study of the defining characteristics of

naturalism as a genre, the implications of this formal structure of the texts resonate beyond marking generic boundaries. I want to take up and extend her formulation by arguing that the specifically voyeuristic characteristics of these spectators reveals naturalism's complex negotiation between sociological documentation and twisted romantic fantasy, of, in Norris's words, "the enormous, the formidable, the terrible" ("Zola" 72). Howard suggests that "the brutes who inhabit determinism are treated as objects rather than as self-aware subjects; they are merely components of the spectacle displayed to the reader" (150), but this spectacle-spectator dynamic becomes more vexed when we consider that voyeurism is essentially an imaginative act; as Jacques Lacan argues, the voyeur attempts to see "the object as absence" because "what the voyeur is looking for and finds is merely a shadow, a shadow behind the curtain" where he can "phantasize any magic of presence, the most graceful of girls, for example, even if on the other side there is only a hairy athlete" (182). The spectator that Howard identifies suggests the presence of a figure always *watching* in naturalist work, foregrounding visuality as an important theme in naturalism while also suggesting the subjectivity of this individual observer, whose limited perspective limits him or her from achieving true omniscience. The presence of this spectator puts further pressure on the fraught negotiation of naturalism's contradictory impulses, toward science's objectivity and romance's fantasy, because it locates these compulsions in a specific viewer. Ultimately the interactions of these characteristics results in the voyeuristic gaze of American literary naturalism, which both causes and explains the unsettling mix of revulsion and pleasure that defines so many naturalist texts.

Theorizing Voyeurism

Although I have been using the term "voyeurism" as a relatively stable concept in comparison to the more problematic and contentious idea of literary naturalism, this perhaps

belies the complexity of voyeurism's own dense critical history. However, unlike the definition of naturalism, which through the work of my dissertation I hope to stabilize, maintaining the variability and volatility of the concept of voyeurism will actually prove useful, as each chapter will engage this idea slightly differently as different texts represent it in unique ways. In other words, even while defining literary naturalism I hope to productively trouble the definitions of voyeurism in order to illustrate the ways that vision was transforming at the end of the nineteenth century. I will, however, be drawing primarily on both psychoanalytic theories of voyeurism as well as those emerging from film criticism as I simultaneously construct and deconstruct this idea of voyeurism, so I will briefly sketch these two fields' usages of the term.

The first attempt to define and differentiate voyeurism can be found in psychoanalytic theory, with Freud's 1905 analysis of scopophilia in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality* marking its earliest theorization. Even though it derives from the French word "voir"—meaning "to see"—the word "voyeur" has certain connotations that differentiate it from other types of watching. In that text Freud describes voyeurism as a perversion of the pleasure of looking and an "overriding of disgust" (251). Later, drawing on Freud as well as Jean-Paul Sartre's consideration of the gaze and voyeurism in *Being and Nothingness* (1966), Jacques Lacan took up the question of voyeurism as it related to his theory of the gaze. As he writes in *The Four Fundamental Concepts of Psycho-analysis* (1973), the gaze is part of the creation and the division between the object and subject, and in "our relation to things, in so far as this relation is constituted by the way of vision, and ordered in the figures of representation, something slips, passes, is transmitted, from stage to stage, and is always to some degree eluded in it" (73). There is a slipperiness in Lacan's gaze, as subject and object are given shape through vision despite remaining relentlessly contingent upon the interaction of these dynamic forces. In the case of

voyeurism, the gaze is in fact the object, but the object cannot be seen without a witness. In this way the voyeur desires an impossibility—the obtaining of the gaze as object—and this fantasy remains a continual motivation. In Lacan’s model, voyeurs therefore do not want to *be* who they watch; they want to *imagine* themselves *being* who they watch, a crucial if subtle distinction.

Theories of the gaze developed by psychoanalytic theorists provide a useful starting point for understanding the mechanics of voyeurism. However, when voyeurism becomes represented in the arts, slightly different issues must also be taken into consideration. Most studies theorizing representational voyeurism locate its inception with cinema—Alfred Hitchcock’s *Rear Window* (1954) stands as the apotheosis—and suggest that the proliferation of reality television, web cameras, and internet social networking sites are evidence of today’s uniquely voyeuristic society. This places perhaps too much emphasis on the link between voyeurism and cinema—technology has allowed us to look into more people’s homes more frequently and with better efficiency, but the basic desire to stare through windows not one’s own is far from a new phenomenon—but beginning with Laura Mulvey, feminist film critics have usefully extended much of the psychoanalytic work on voyeurism and the gaze, begun by Freud and Lacan, into the realm of artistic production and consumption. Mulvey, in her highly influential 1975 essay “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” takes up this issue of the gaze and argues that “the determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure” so that “in their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*” (19). What is at stake in Mulvey’s argument is a power imbalance between the watcher and the watched, and this asymmetrical distribution of power and privilege through exclusively visual relations becomes a crucial feature of any theorization of voyeurism. Mulvey’s theory

emphasizes the relationship between voyeuristic fantasy and the effect of being looked at, concepts she deploys in relation to cinema but which can be usefully transposed on naturalist texts.

These ideas provide the critical framework from which any theorization of voyeurism must be drawn, and these are basic principles of the gaze that I will return to throughout my dissertation. However, I want to now begin expanding on these ideas, particularly as they relate to literary naturalism, and in doing so want to suggest the variety of ways in which the voyeuristic gaze can and will be applied in my dissertation. One critical, if under-theorized, characteristic of voyeurism is the role of fantasy. While the characters in naturalist texts, as well as the authors and the readers, are obsessively, even predatorily, watching their worlds and peering voyeuristically into the lives of strangers, they are also imagining the potential narratives developing behind these closed doors as they project themselves into these private settings. As opposed to the flaneur, the voyeur is not a passive observer but a *participant* in what he or she is watching. Voyeurs might begin by peering through the actual half-closed curtains, but then they must envisage themselves imaginatively entering these scenes. Another factor is the way the voyeur also controls what is and what is not private; the voyeur is a private person who turns another private individual into a public one through his or her gaze. But at the same time, the voyeur's position remains precarious, with the possibility that his or her deviancy might at any moment be exposed by another person; the privilege and power of this gaze is both extremely powerful and extremely unstable.

Perhaps most fundamentally, voyeurs watch for pleasure, but these pleasures do not always take the same forms. While Freud's, and to an extent Mulvey's, interests lie in scopophilia as a pathology emphasizing "sexual aims," taking pleasure in looking does not—

necessarily—have to end in any sexual gratification; it can instead, for example, result in the nonsexual pleasures of fiction. By recasting naturalism as not just a process of social documentation but instead a garnering of elicited visual pleasure, one can see the ways that reality is remade for the pleasure of the watcher, or in the case of naturalist fiction, the reader. The goal of this voyeuristic gaze is pleasure, a pleasure produced through the seeing of what is not meant to be seen, as the reader enters into spaces prohibited by differences of class, of race, or of gender. Ultimately all art records some version of this history of pleasure, as fiction tells the chronicle of the mind and its fantasies at any particular moment in time. By studying the voyeurism of literary naturalism, the desires and the fears of the turn of the century are revealed to have been beset with anxieties over a society that was in extreme and bewildering flux; the response was to seek a stable hegemony that relied on a privileged viewpoint from which to survey these changes so as to not be consumed by the volatility of societal upheaval.

Prying, Peeping, Peering: An Overview

My dissertation tracks the manifestations of these voyeuristic impulses through a variety of texts over a long historical period, from early nineteenth-century romances to twentieth-century modernism, with assessments of sensational fiction, documentary exposés, realist paintings, and major naturalist fiction in between. I begin in the first chapter by pursuing these changes in vision that were developing from the early nineteenth century onward in order to explore voyeurism's historical development, specifically in the context of urbanization. Through a range of materials, from the short fiction of Edgar Allan Poe to the reformist work of Jacob Riis, from the sensational fictions of Ned Buntline to the realist paintings of the Ashcan school, I consider how voyeurism became a peculiarly urban reality in the United States because of certain changing social and culture conditions: urbanization and the internal migration toward new

industrial centers; new economic mobility; and the mass immigration of foreigners to work in new factories. The effect of these changes was a huge influx of strangers living and working in close proximity to one another; this fostered inquisitiveness about the lives of these “others” who might be living next door even while the conditions of the city ensured that each party could remain hidden and anonymous. A sociological impulse emerges in texts such as Riis’s *How the Other Half Lives*, as the city becomes a site for exploration, and the documentation of its diverse inhabitants develops into a popular activity. However, what emerged in the last half of the century was a voyeuristic gaze, with these works frequently positioning an implied viewer in scenes in which they are not supposed to be, in locations where they would not normally frequent, and observing actions that they were not invited to witness; this culminates in a voyeurism that would become central to the developing movement of literary naturalism.

The second chapter explores the voyeuristic relationship created in many naturalist texts between the depictions of the sordid lives of the urban poor and the pleasure the middle-class reader takes from watching them unfold. This class- and race-based voyeurism can be found in the compulsive sociological drive in the late nineteenth century to document contemporary society, but this impulse quickly becomes corrupted. I examine how the inner city becomes an imaginary site for the authors, such as William Dean Howells and Jack London, as well as their readers to explore their own fantasies, regardless of the reality that the slums actually presented. I give particular attention to Stephen Crane’s sketches and fiction, which both dramatize and challenge this exploitation, as they take a perverse delight in allowing us to watch the lower classes while forcing us to acknowledge the deviancy of our own gaze. The slums are not really the slums at all, but fantasy worlds where the safe, bourgeois reader can imagine all sorts of

hedonistic, sexual, perverse happenings. The readers voyeuristically peer into these worlds, only to imagine whatever *they wish to see*.

In chapter three I investigate how inherent in the supposedly objective or “clinical” gaze of naturalism was a voyeuristic perversion. Naturalism has often been linked with the scientific discourse of its day, either as a formal or thematic feature. Focusing on several of Frank Norris’s novels as well as the paintings of Thomas Eakins, the chapter considers how the clinical gaze of naturalism was in tension with a romantic fantasy that imagined the private, sexual lives of one’s subject. Although the narrator of naturalist texts ostensibly deploys a gaze akin to the doctor in the clinic, the gaze of naturalist literature in fact often veers towards scenes of a sexual nature. The voyeuristic perversity also implicates the viewer outside of the work as they are coerced into taking up this gaze; masculine and feminine spectator roles trouble the possibility of a single, unified gaze, and as a consequence the authority of the naturalist gaze becomes severely undermined.

Chapter four investigates how literary naturalism engaged in the debate over definitions and configurations of publicity and privacy at the turn of the century. Naturalism’s voyeuristic gaze dramatizes the feeling of absolute visibility emerging in the modern urban environment; private space becomes increasingly fleeting as one’s life becomes the subject of everyone else’s prying gaze. I analyze Theodore Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie* through the Ashcan School artist John Sloan’s paintings and journal entries in order to consider how the novel both dramatizes and engenders these protean conceptions of privacy in its depiction of turn-of-the-century visual culture. A transpersonal voyeurism emerges that in its collectivity and its anonymity appears to justify its prurient interest in the private lives of others. However, each individual who comprises that collectivity finds his or her own privacy potentially jeopardized; this transpersonal gaze can

rapidly and unapologetically change directions, with each member of the crowd at risk of having his or her *own* private life made suddenly public. Where the line between public and private should be drawn, as well as who should be allowed to draw it, were in question at the turn of the century, creating a volatile tension between seeing and being seen in American literary naturalist texts that is dramatized by the paradoxical desire to protect one's own private space while trespassing the privacy of others. Dreiser's novel depicts the destabilization of the divisions between public and private space, transforming these seemingly stable spatial concepts into mercurial abstractions that not only have a dramatic impact on the lives of the characters but undermine the reader's privileged position as well; if the transpersonal gaze can and does turn on any of the characters within the text, then the reader's privacy becomes suddenly in doubt.

The final chapter considers the role that voyeurism plays in turn-of-the-century constructions of gender. I focus on Edith Wharton's fiction alongside a range of other materials, including the paintings of Mary Cassatt, Jack London's novels, and the history of strip clubs. The chapter examines how the voyeuristic gaze of literary naturalism undermines the rhetoric of masculinity with which the genre has often been associated: the deviancy and passivity of the voyeur's gaze trouble the image of the masculine, professional author. As discussed previously, the speculative nature of the naturalist's gaze produces a tension between reality and fantasy, with literary naturalism holding a precarious position between the real and the romance; unlike the romantic vision of the artist, which allowed for authorial flights of imagination and metaphysical inspiration, the professionalized naturalist author was supposed to draw from reality for his or her fiction. For the turn-of-the-century naturalists, however, these distinctions have distinct gendered connotations; the naturalist authors wanted to distance themselves and their masculine professionalism from the "effeminate" image of the romantic or sentimental

artist. Although Wharton was also invested in the same professionalization of authorship that the other naturalists sought, as one of the few female naturalist authors she was in a position to critique the masculinization of the genre's gaze. In *The House of Mirth* Wharton questions this gendered gaze of literary naturalism by dramatizing it as unable control the terms of the fantasy, with the repercussions leading to more than simply an aesthetic confusion between realism and the romance; this inability to control the fantasy of voyeurism undermines the naturalists' very attempt to maintain their professional distance and their masculinity, calling into question the authority of the gaze that the naturalist novelists attempt to wield.

Finally, in my conclusion I consider the way that the voyeuristic gaze so central to literary naturalism also becomes an aesthetic characteristic both deployed and manipulated by subsequent artistic movements. Although naturalism and realism are often used in criticism to represent the outmoded movements from which modernism makes its dramatic representational break, I argue that modernism in fact sustains naturalism's voyeuristic perspective in order to engage with and trouble the principals of subjectivity. Literary naturalism's voyeurism locates a specific viewer in space and time who peers through half-closed curtains, but through the fantasy of imaginative participation in these scenes naturalism opens the door for a subjectivity that is increasingly predicated on vision, which is to say predicated on extremely unstable and fluid ground. Although naturalism attempts objectivity through its subjectivity, modernism reveals the impossibility of this project even while celebrating this failure. In this way a full appreciation of literary naturalism's voyeuristic gaze reveals the tensions inherent to the movement itself while simultaneously illuminating the influential legacy of naturalism in twentieth-century modernism and beyond.

Chapter 1: Revolutions and Evolutions of Nineteenth-Century Urban Visuality

This chapter tracks the historical and aesthetic transformations of nineteenth-century visuality by analyzing the evolving relationships between the subject who gazes and the object of that gaze. In the nineteenth-century United States, the intersection and intertwining of two main factors resulted in alterations to this object-subject relationship: the revolution of the object itself, as the urbanization of the U.S. created a new type of environment densely populated by a diverse mix of urban inhabitants; and the evolution of a new kind of subject, someone who could peer from a privileged position of anonymity into the sundry spaces of these new cities, peeking into the private lives of those nearby. Spectatorship, in its many different iterations, was and is an integral part of urban experience, but many of the scenarios presented by the city, although ostensibly commonplace and acceptable, are, in fact, much closer to deviant voyeurism than ordinary watching. The goal of this chapter is to understand how visuality evolved over the course of the nineteenth century, an evolution represented in the arts by the shift from narratives which express an unselfconscious engagement with the spectacle of urban life to those which portray unsettling reflections on the truly deviant nature of this visuality. Understanding the nature of these shifts in nineteenth-century visuality will provide a context and framework for the subsequent chapters in which I focus on turn-of-the-century works of literary naturalism, texts in which visuality occupies a central concern.

Pursuing the transformations of nineteenth-century vision, that “strange contingency” (72), as Lacan describes the gaze, that forms between those watched and those watching, requires a consideration of the relationship between object and subject. Vision is constructed by what one is looking at and who is doing the looking—that is, it is both object and subject—and it is their relationship to one another that creates the experience of looking. Therefore

understanding the changes in vision and visibility means considering how the object—the city, by which I mean the physical signs and structures of the city as well as its urban inhabitants—is seen by the subject—the various surrogates for the urban voyeur who are represented in art by the characters, the authors, and the audiences of urban fiction who peer into the lives of their fellow urbanites. After beginning this chapter by detailing the historical development of this object—the city—I examine the multiple and competing representations of the urban landscape that developed during the nineteenth century. In order to see these changes in vision most clearly, I focus on several key figures in the development of, as Rebecca Zurier labels it, an “urban visibility,” which she defines as a “state of mind” encompassing “both the physical artifacts of the urban visual environment and the self-conscious cultural practices of seeing and being seen that operate in a big city” (6-7). I begin with one of the earliest representations of the urban scene by an American author, Edgar Allan Poe’s “The Man of the Crowd” (1840), in order to contextualize the challenge, as well as the opportunity, that the city provided for new types of vision, in particular the now famous figure of the flaneur.

Next I explore two of the dominant forms of urban writing that emerge in the nineteenth century: sensational fiction and reformist exposés. The midcentury sensational “city mysteries” traded on the novelty and opacity of the city to write fantastically lurid tales of prostitution, gambling, and poverty, all of which can be seen in Ned Buntline’s *The Mysteries and Miseries of New York* (1848) and George Foster’s *New York by Gas-Light* (1850). These texts deploy a vision that sees the city as a fantastic realm of lurid sexual exploits and scandalous criminal behavior. I follow this hallucinatory vision of the city into the paintings of David Gilmour Blythe, whose depictions of the lower classes of Pittsburgh provide some of the earliest attempts to represent the sordid side of urban life; in their grotesque depictions of urban dwellers,

however, Blythe's paintings begin the process of "othering" the poor into strange fantasies of destitution that can be seen in later works by other artists and naturalist authors. The reformists comprise the other type of vision, as they exposed the same shocking narratives of city life in which the sensationalists trafficked, but ostensibly to spark public outrage and kindle reform. Jacob Riis's *How the Other Half Lives* (1890), which became a sensation with its investigation of social conditions in the tenement slums of 1880s New York City, demonstrates this type of vision most strikingly. Critical to Riis's work was the recent invention of photography and new flash technology, which allowed him stalk the tenement houses at night to capture "real" images of the slums. Underlying all of these narratives, from Poe's tale of the obsessive flaneur to Foster's sensational "mysteries," from Blythe's phantasmagorical paintings to Riis's call for social reform, is an emerging form of urban vision that is becoming increasingly voyeuristic, with all of these texts suggesting an intensifying desire to look through the windows of the lower classes to witness their squalid conditions, be it for entertainment, terrified delight, or supposed reform.

Finally, I look at how this desire to peer into the lives of the "other" can be seen in the realist paintings of the Ashcan School, whose depictions of urban streets scenes were often meditations on urban vision. Formally realist paintings often provide a voyeur's glimpse into his or her object's lives by favoring perspectives that, as Zurier suggests, "broke down the distance implicit in this type of composition by situating a knowing, sympathetic viewer at street level and eschewing pictorial perfection for incompleteness" (32). This "knowing, sympathetic viewer" becomes the organizing principle for the painting, and consequently this implied observer turns any viewer of the work into a surrogate for the implied spectator on the street. Unlike the sensational writers who allowed their readers to imaginatively and fantastically "stand

in the cloak of invisibility” (Buntline 95) or “go in through the second story window, . . . yes, through blinds and all, in our *fancy*” (Buntline 98), the realist painters establish a corporeal vantage point, and in doing so the implications of voyeurism become less abstract and more concrete. The formal organization of many realist paintings depends upon this implied street-level observer, and consequently the realist aesthetic becomes about more than the realistic representations of modern life and urban settings: the works are voyeuristic fantasies of a city life that is intensely public but also mystifyingly private. The content of these works often focuses on women, frequently consisting of women undressing and women in bedrooms, revealing that the interest of the viewers—albeit imagined—is the interest of the voyeur, thereby constructing the viewer as voyeur. Although depictions of naked women have always been a staple of the visual arts, without any mythic, romantic, or even theological subtext the nudes of realist paintings become simply what they are: naked bodies. And as such they have the potential to disturb the staid objectivity of the realist gaze. These works cast the *viewer* into the role of the voyeur: to view many of these realist paintings is to be transformed into a voyeur.

This is ultimately an extension and manipulation of those same impulses that compelled the sensational and reformist visions of the city, that sought out sin and vice in the mysterious urban underbelly, but now the audience is being situated in such a way that they enact the moment of voyeurism and in so doing are forced to reconsider the type of gaze that the city propagates. These paintings represent a useful bridge for connecting an urban visuality that is increasingly voyeuristic with the manifestations of voyeurism in the formal characteristics of naturalist literature. These works implicitly provide pleasure to their readers or viewers—likely comprised of primarily the middle class, but almost certainly consisting of a class different than those portrayed—through a voyeuristic look into the lives of the poor. Pursuing the multiple,

changing iterations of urban vision and visibility through the slippery character of subject and object provides a necessary background for interpreting the voyeuristic gaze of turn-of-the-century literary naturalism that will be analyzed in subsequent chapters.

Urbanization in the U.S.

The pleasures of watching people did not originate with the city, and while the desire to see into lives of others almost certainly long predates the turn of the century, the city changed the possibilities and dynamics of vision. The U.S. endured a profound and fundamental change in the nineteenth century, as westward expansion, an industrial revolution, the Civil War, and mass migrations and immigrations forever altered the shape and composition of the country. As a result of these changes the U.S. experienced a process of urbanization of such monumental proportions that comprehending its scope can prove challenging. Up until 1840, only 10.8 percent of the U.S.'s population lived in cities (Miller 3), but by 1880 this number was up to 28.2 percent, and by 1910 it stood at 45.7 percent (Miller 65): "in absolute figures, 44,639,989 people lived in cities in 1910, up from a mark of 6,216,518 fifty years earlier" (Miller 65). As a consequence of the percentage of urban population increasing, the size of cities changed dramatically as well: although in 1830 only New York City had a population of more than 100,000 (U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Population of the 90 Urban Places: 1830"), by 1900 fifty cities had populations this size, and three (New York, Chicago, and Philadelphia) exceeded one million (U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Population of the 100 Largest Urban Places: 1910"). In addition, those three major metropolises each covered well over a hundred square miles (U.S. Bureau of the Census, "Population of the 100 Largest Urban Places: 1910"), a far cry from the walking cities of the early nineteenth century that had a radius of only a few miles (Miller 26).

One result of these immense changes to the urban composition of the U.S. was the intensification of race and class tensions. In addition to the massive internal migrations of both emancipated African Americans and rural populations seeking opportunities in the city, between 1880 and 1920 nearly 23.5 million people immigrated to the U.S., and by the end of this period 58 percent of the population of major cities with populations over 100,000 were either born outside of the country or were the children of immigrant parents (Miller 73). Class divisions became exacerbated as well, with the gap between the rich and poor made increasingly visible by the interaction of classes within the confines of a single city. In fact, the stratification of class became part of the structure of the city, as “the rich claimed the periphery, the poor and newcomers the ‘inner’ city, and the middle classes the region between the slums and the suburbs” (Miller 80). Throughout the nineteenth century, greater and greater percentages of an increasingly racially and economically diverse population lived in these cities that were becoming larger and larger; even for those who did not live in the cities the very idea of the modern metropolis began to loom large.

Clearly, the size, composition, and scope of U.S. cities transformed spectacularly in the nineteenth century, and these changes radically altered the psychology of urban dwellers. Because of the dimensions and density of these new cities, citizens interacted with each other in fundamentally altered ways; in particular, the anonymity of the city forced people into new relationships with one another, as in many cases the size of apartment buildings and tenements made it impossible to even know one’s neighbors. Whereas in the first decades of the nineteenth century most Americans lived in small towns among people they knew, the city was a wholly different entity, where one could no longer easily identify outsiders; indeed, *everyone* was a stranger or an outsider in these new urban environments. As a consequence, “in the cities of early

industrial America, the personal appearance of a stranger did not offer reliable clues to his identity” (Halttunen 37), and this was often manipulated by different groups, including the growing middle classes who sought to imitate for their own advantage the style and manner of the wealthy. The internal dynamics of the city exacerbated the inscrutability of the scene, as the city proved extremely fluid: “People now shifted residences incessantly. The general direction of the moves was towards the periphery, with outer residential wards of cities growing more rapidly than those near the center, but in a given year some people would move from center to the periphery, other would merely changes addresses within the center or the periphery, and still others would press into the core from the city’s edges” (Miller 45). There were attempts to make this new city intelligible; for example, guidebooks became increasingly popular, as they “offered to help the reader manage the increasing heterogeneity and alienating immensity of the city’s masses by indexing the social groups and individual types of which the urban crowd was composed” (Roberts 289). Cities were growing larger, denser, more fluid and more anonymous, and trying to understand and represent these new urban spaces would be one of the most acute social and artistic challenges of the nineteenth century.

Urbanizing Vision

Although not the first, Edgar Allan Poe’s depiction of a teeming urban scene in his 1840 short story “The Man of the Crowd” undoubtedly remains one of the most influential in antebellum American literature. The story describes how a man sitting in a London coffee house becomes obsessed with watching another man—the “man of the crowd” of the story’s title—navigate an urban crowd. As the narrator watches the street, with his “brow to the glass,” clearly removed from the urban scene while “scutinizing the mob” and doing his best to classify and categorize the various types he witnesses on the street, he observes “a decrepid old man, some

sixty-five or seventy years of age” whose uniqueness of expression elicits in him “a craving desire to keep the man in view—to know more of him” (267). The narrator thus rushes out into the street to follow the old man, and yet even after pursuing him through the night and into the next afternoon, he learns nothing more except that “he refuses to be alone. *He is the man of the crowd*. It will be vain to follow; for I shall learn no more of him, nor of his deeds” (272). The “man of the crowd” remains impenetrable to the narrator, a strange modern phenomenon that he can doggedly pursue but never understand.

Poe’s story has traditionally been discussed as depicting the archetype of the urban flaneur—that aimless city wanderer who saunters the streets taking in the sights and sounds of urban life—and indeed a whole body of scholarship has been built around this figure, from Charles Baudelaire’s famous initial observations in “The Painter of Modern Life” (1863) to Walter Benjamin’s extension of these in *The Arcades Project* (1940) and onward to contemporary literary criticism which positions the flaneur as a central figure for nineteenth-century fiction.⁶ For these critics, the image of the old man, insatiable in his appetite for urban spectacle, occupies a role of central importance in Poe’s story. His restless, manic ambling reveals an obsession with surface over depth and image over substance, fixations that are frequently cited today as being particularly “modern.”

More fundamentally, the story reflects on the act of spectatorship, as it considers the different iterations of looking possible in this urban scene. In addition to pursuing the “man of the crowd’s” mania for visual impressions, the story equally concentrates on the man *watching* the man of the crowd, who possesses his own brand of visual fixations. Content to simply watch, standing apart from the crowd, the narrator passively observes the action of others and attempts

⁶ See Dana Brand’s *The Spectator and the City in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* and Dennis Kennedy’s *The Spectator and the Spectacle: Audiences in Modernity and Postmodernity*.

to classify the various species and subspecies he witnesses: “I looked at the passengers in masses, and thought of them in their aggregate relations. Soon, however, I descended to details, and regarded with minute interest the innumerable varieties of figure, dress, air, gait, visage, and expression of countenance” (263). He organizes the crowds into tribes of clerks, pickpockets, gamblers, Jewish peddlers, street beggars, invalids, young girls (modest and otherwise), porters, coal-heavers, sweeps, organ-grinders, monkey-exhibitors, and ballad mongers (263-266).

Although ostensibly different than the old man’s random and compulsive street wanderings, the narrator’s pseudo-scientific cataloging of the crowds may not be as dissimilar from the old man as he believes; Brand suggests that in actuality “he too may be in search of nothing more than temporary satisfaction of a restless desire for the pleasure of a spectacle” (84-5). Reading the narrator’s role as flaneur against the flaneuristic old man and his compulsive craving for the “pleasure of a spectacle” reveals that although the specific manifestations of their mania for the urban scene differ, their obsessions are identical: both are captivated, even obsessed, with the urban milieu and the people that swarm through the crowded city streets.

These crowded urban streets are as central to the story as its two main characters, and they provide a clue as to why Poe made the somewhat unusual choice to locate “The Man of the Crowd” in London, one of the few major metropolises of the first half of the nineteenth century. This is “unusual” because of Poe’s tendency to locate his stories in vaguely fantastic settings: in an “old, decaying city near the Rhine” (“Ligeia” 159) for example, or a “misty looking village of England, where were a vast number of gigantic and gnarled trees” (“William Wilson” 218). These gothic descriptions stand in stark contrast to our introduction to the narrator of “Man of the Crowd” as he sits in a “large bow window of the D—— Coffee-House in London” (232); this London is a real, definite place located in a specific moment in time. And yet, despite the

comparative tangibility of this description, it remains, as Brand notes, an “imaginary London” (118), one created specifically to provide the kind of anonymity that Poe is interested in depicting. In fact “Poe had not been to London since childhood; he plays on the literary device of London’s immensity for what is obviously a New York audience who will read their city’s future into London’s fictive present” (Sharpe 70). Although Poe’s London may not be “real” in the sense that it accurately depicts London of 1840, unlike other Poe stories it *attempts* to depict the real, which might be ultimately more revealing. The real London may not have been a “tumultuous sea of human heads” (263), but Poe’s London serves a particular narrative purpose that no early American city could provide: masses of unknown, unfamiliar people incessantly swarming through streets filled with the signs and spectacles of the developing modern city. While no equivalent major metropolitan cities existed in the U.S. at this time, Poe identified in the obsessive watching of the old man and the narrator an emerging phenomenon unique in character to the urban scene.

At stake in Poe’s story is an urbanization that forces American writers to dramatically rethink their understanding of vision. And because of its emphasis on the city’s impact on vision, Poe’s short story provide auspicious points of entry for examining how a new type of looking was emerging in the nineteenth century. The story reveals the two critical components of this new vision: the impenetrable, visually alluring setting of the city, and the restless, mesmerized individual obsessed with seeing and making sense of these urban unknowns. As these two components develop alongside and in conjunction with each other over the course of the nineteenth century, the flaneur becomes an increasingly less accurate categorization for the kind of peering, deviant, and ultimately voyeuristic gaze that will come to characterize art at the end of the century.

The Erotics of the Midcentury “Mysteries”

Since at least the days of the Roman Empire, the city has been alternately viewed as a site of cultural progress or as one of moral decay, and nineteenth-century America was no different. While the former view often brought people to the city, the latter was what often engaged the wider public’s imagination. But despite their fascination, as discussed above, the urban landscape was a dense and complex mystery, and a dangerous one at that, so while following Poe’s narrator’s example of doggedly pursuing one’s object on foot was of course an option, it was not an attractive choice for exploring the city. In William Dean Howells’s 1890 novel, *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, two of the characters discuss another method: taking the elevated train through the city at night:

She now said that the night transit was even more interesting than the day, and that the fleeting intimacy you formed with people in second- and third-floor interiors, while all the usual street life went on underneath, had a domestic intensity mixed with a perfect repose that was the last effect of a good society with all its security and exclusiveness. He said it was better than the theater, of which it reminded him to see those people through their windows: a family party of workfolk at a late tea, some of the men in their shirt-sleeves; a woman sewing by a lamp; a mother laying her child in its cradle; a man with his head fallen on his hands upon a table; a girl and her lover leaning over the windowsill together.

What suggestion! What drama! What infinite interest! (66)

Provocative for a number of reasons, this passage stands out as particularly intriguing for the way that these two characters imagine their relationship to lives of those on the “second- and third-floors.” For them, these lives are not lives at all but theater, with clichéd vignettes playing

out upon the stages produced by every window. A sense of “intimacy” arises with these people because of the nature of their activities and the supposed privacy of their actions, but this kind of unobserved observation describes something more akin to voyeurism than the feeling of “good society.” And despite her claim to a “fleeting intimacy” that is “formed with” those people, clearly this remains a one-sided affair; no way exists for these apartment dwellers to reciprocate the intimacy she feels.

And that, perhaps, is the greatest virtue of this approach to the city. For despite flirting with urban unrest, like most of Howell’s work the story more often sustains the comfort of the middle-class drawing room than conjures the actual squalor of the unclean urban streets, and in this passage, for all of its suggestion of the lives of the “workfolk” and men in “shirt-sleeves,” no actual interaction with these people ever occurs. This passage suggests the possibility of both witnessing the urban scene and still remaining at a safe remove, in what amounts to the comfort of one’s own home. Unlike Poe’s “man of the crowd,” a new suggestive possibility emerges here that the desire to witness the urban spectacle can be satisfied while remaining separate from it.

Although the elevated trains in New York were not in place until the later 1860s, new forms of mediated access were already being deployed in the late 1840s to bring the city, particularly its more sordid regions, to readers. A new genre of “slum fiction” that brought the supposed sinfulness and moral depravity of the city to the safety of the readers’ home emerged during the second half of the nineteenth century. As Alan Trachtenberg explains, the metropolis as a whole was frequently represented as “a swarming mass of signals, dense, obscure, undecipherable” (“Experiments in Another Country” 138), but the inner city slums, with their tenement houses and underworlds of prostitution and gambling, were made both particularly mysterious and particularly intriguing to the middle and upper classes of the city. Consequently,

this historical moment is where we begin to see an increasing distance emerge between the subject-object, a divide that will become more and more central to turn-of-the-century visuality: because the structure of the city relegated the lower classes to inner city spaces that the middle and upper classes avoided altogether, the interior region of the slums became a site of even greater mystery (see chapter two for an extended analysis of the fantasy of the slum and late-nineteenth-century literary naturalism). The avoidance of these spaces had the paradoxical effect of creating a sense of the unknown and of mystery that prompted a desire by many middle class readers *to* know what was happening in the tenement houses and slums of the cities, and the authors of slum fiction were only too happy to oblige. While slum fiction would become a particularly popular genre near the end of the century—including Edgar Fawcett’s *The Evil that Men Do* (1889), Edward Townsend’s *A Daughter of the Tenements* (1895), and James Sullivan’s *Tenement Tales of New York* (1895)—one of the earliest expressions of this interest can be found in Ned Buntline’s 1848 five-volume work of sensational fiction, *Mysteries and Miseries of New York*. His sensational vision of midcentury New York City navigates winter streets, gambling houses, sewing rooms, bars, backrooms, and private bedrooms to tell tales of sewing girls trying to stave off men and poverty, drunk and fashionable young men turning to gambling, pickpockets taking advantage of would-be philanthropists, prostitutes manipulating young men, and adulterous husbands leading innocent young women astray.

Despite its melodramatic character, *Mysteries and Miseries of New York* begins with Buntline claiming that “so singular is the work I have now to write, so strange its scenes and incidents, so various and peculiar the characters which I have to delineate, that I feel bound to tell the reader that, strange as all may be, it is drawn from *life*, heart-sickening, *too-real* life” (5). He goes on to write that “I have sought out and studied the reality of each person and scene

which I portray” by visiting “every den of vice which is hereinafter described, and have chosen each character for this work during these visits” (5). Given the melodramatic character of the actual work, the veracity of Buntline’s claim seems dubious at best, but it suggests a persuasive strategy for representing the city. This idea of visiting the “dens of vice” and witnessing the “reality of each person and scene” implies a method for composing fiction that relies on *seeing* the city and depicting its darker side; in other words, the importance of Buntline’s work for my inquiry in this chapter becomes *how* he looks and at *what* he looks. In the opening section, for example, after the street lamps are lit, “miserable street walkers” could be seen “taking their nightly round up and down Broadway; poor, painted, tinsel creatures” that “shivered as they went along, for some were very thinly dressed; their powdered necks and swelling bosoms were not half covered” (10). Buntline’s description of the prostitutes calls forth simultaneously pity for their miserable, “thinly dressed” conditions and sexual interest in their thin dress and “swelling bosoms”; it is a vision intent on cataloging and sidetracked by desire, or perhaps intent on desire but cloaked in the veil of descriptive cataloging. These sorts of scenes recur repeatedly throughout the work, as when, in “the most celebrated *palace* of infamy which disgraces Gotham” (45), we find dozens of women whose “low-necked dresses revealed even more than bare, powdered shoulders; their arms were unsleeved, and those who had pretty feet, wore skirts sufficiently short to exhibit them. There were curled, and powdered and painted, until art could do no more to add to their looks, and now the poor miserable creatures were on exhibition, as pieces of finery ready for sale” (46). Regardless of intent, the erotic nature of the passage is similar to the initial street scene, but soon it becomes ratcheted even higher when, “amidst these, as a lily among nettles, or a dove among vultures, passed one of their own sex who was pure. . . . She was a young girl—a glance at her large blue eyes, golden hair, and *petite* figure, as she

passed beneath the lighted lamps, would tell one that she was not over sixteen” (10). Despite the previous pity for the miserable—but alluring—prostitutes, they are now “nettles” or “vultures” when compared with the morally pure young girl. Nevertheless, readers are still informed of her physical beauty; indeed, her physical characteristics reveal her inner morality.

These early scenes establish the pattern for articulating urban vision which follows and becomes repeated throughout the work. After the rescue of the young woman (a sewing girl, which is the standard profession of the impoverished innocents of slum fiction) from a group of drunken bachelors, the narrator tells us that “we will leave” this scene “while we follow the poor little sewing girl” (14). “We” then follow the girl home, eventually entering her home and witnessing a scene of domestic lament over the family’s poverty. When we recall that Buntline asserts in his preface that “I have sought out and studied the reality of each person and scene which I portray,” this declaration that “we follow” the girl assumes a particularly suggestive tone. Are we to imagine, then, Buntline himself following this girl (for the sake of his narrative fidelity, of course)? Even if we do not imagine that specific, somewhat unsettling, scenario, “we” do follow the girl, unobserved, thus enacting a rather troubling relationship with our “object” of study. The moral purity of Buntline’s vision becomes an increasingly untenable position to maintain, as later when he says “reader, stand in the cloak of invisibility with me, and let your imagination paint for you a beautiful boudoir, a lady’s chosen sanctum” and “in this room see a lady. She is alone. In her hands she holds a letter, and a variety of expressions come and go upon her beautiful face while she reads it” (95). Or when he informs us that “we will go in through the second story window, reader; yes, through blinds and all, in our *fancy*, and look at one who is there seated” (98). Because he deploys the first person plural, this intrusive gazing assumes a communal and therefore normalized appearance, but it does not change the fundamental nature

of its deviant spirit. These are ultimately fantasies of helpless women alone on the streets or lovers taken unaware in their bedrooms, and despite the author's claims to a mimetic portrayal of "heart-sickening, *too-real* life," the scenes readers are invited to witness more often reveal a fantasy version of the city full of vigorous men and highly-sexualized women. Buntline presents his women as erotic spectacles and then continually invites his reader to follow them, hide in their boudoirs, peek through and even climb into second story windows: Buntline renders a city full of erotic vice, and then he suggests that readers should do whatever it takes to witness the spectacle.

Following soon after Buntline's *Mysteries* was journalist George G. Foster's *New York by Gas-Light* (1850), a similarly sensationalized attempt to "penetrate beneath the thick veil of night and lay bare the fearful mysteries of darkness in the metropolis" of midcentury New York, primarily in order to witness the "festivities of prostitution, the orgies of pauperism, the haunts of theft and murder, the scenes of drunkenness and beastly debauchery, and all the sad realities that go to make up the lower stratum" (69). Like Buntline, Foster encourages the reader to "go on with us, and see" these "dismal realms" so that we can "discover the real facts of the actual conditions of the wicked and wretched class," and, as in the case of Buntline's invitation, this request ostensibly emerges in order that "Philanthropy and Justice may plant their blows aright" (69) and save the wretched from their conditions. But although philanthropy remains Foster's supposed goal, he does not waste an opportunity for us to witness "voluptuous bosoms half-naked" and "bright eyes looking invitation at every passer by" (70). After these prostitutes nab a "victim," Foster asks whether "we need follow him to the filthy streets, the squalid chamber where Prostitution performs her horrid rites and ends by robbing her devotees?" (71). He answers for us—"no—at least not now" (71)—but arguably we have already done just that, as

Foster has succeeded in leading us to at least imagine the “horrid rites” he claims we need not see. This tactic echoes a scene in *Mysteries and Miseries* when, after we see a young man coaxed off by a cunning prostitute, Buntline tells us that “we could, if we would, show you such mysteries and miseries here as you little dreamed of; but this is a book in which we have pledged ourself not to write one line that we would not lay before a young sister’s eye. . . . let you imagine more or less as you choose” (50) regarding the fate the young man. Although both writers lead us to the window and coyly suggest the debaucheries within, they leave the reader to imagine the particulars of the scene, forcing us—willingly or not—into a position of imaginative voyeurism.

Buntline’s and Foster’s texts are of course full of accounts of the other “mysteries” and the many “miseries” of the city, but these descriptions are likewise inspired by that same desire to reveal the seamy underbelly of the city for the pleasure of a clamoring readership. These texts expose the increasingly complex nature of nineteenth-century urban visuality, as the subject—the sensational writers and their readers—create, in part, the object—the city and its inhabitants—establishing an unstable but codependent relationship that only becomes more intertwined at the end of the century. Although the city was certainly a heterogeneous and often seemingly impenetrable space, it also seems safe to say that even at its lowest levels the city was not entirely populated by gamblers, manipulative and wily prostitutes, and naïve and innocent young men and women. And yet the presumed tastes of the subjects’ vision have already begun to shape their object, creating a version of the city that conforms to “our” fears as well as “our” fantasies.

Urban Fantasy as Phantasmagorical Voyeurism

When painters from the first half of the nineteenth century depicted the city—which was not often, as a preference reigned for idealized romantic landscapes, such as those made popular by the Hudson River School—they typically eschewed the kind of subject matter that preoccupied the sensational authors. The one notable exception was David Gilmour Blythe, whose paintings of Pittsburgh from the 1850s and 1860s were some of the first to address a less idealistic vision of the city. They depict scenes of the lower classes and their “mysterious” surroundings, themes which would not become widespread in painting until the turn-of-the-century Ashcan School artists, who will be discussed at the end of this chapter. As one of the first painters of the sinister side of the urban scene, Blythe reveals a city populated by strange, almost phantasmagorical figures that lurk in the recesses of every street. Sarah Burns suggests a link between Blythe’s paintings and sensational fiction: “the small but monstrous bodies, the theatrical light, and the sense of danger act as visual equivalents to the rhetoric of the sensational urban expose” (70). Although Blythe’s urban vision focuses more on the drunken and destitute than the eroticized prostitute of sensational fiction, in emphasizing the extreme otherness and titillating sordidness of the lower classes, his paintings similarly provide his viewers with voyeuristic access to their own urban fantasies.

However, unlike the sensational writers who claimed the fundamental veracity of their tales, Blythe painted urban portraits that do not seem to even attempt absolute verisimilitude. Rather, they purposefully highlight the unknowable character of the urban denizens by depicting them as strange creatures instead of recognizable humans. In *The Hideout* (1860-63, fig. 2), several disheveled “men” occupy themselves with various tasks, such as frying eggs and shaving, around a cramped and cluttered room. Other than the upper right corner of the room dissolving into blackness, the room is painted with a degree of realism. But the men are what



Figure 2. David Gilmour Blythe, *The Hideout*, 1860-3.

transform this picture into something unearthly: with their strange, tiny statures and monstrous, melting faces, they look more like refugees from the underworld than even the most destitute of slum dweller. The grotesque men take no interest in our voyeuristic intrusion into their little room, but as a consequence the painting emanates tension, as we fear them turning their hairless heads our way and the possible ramifications of being caught watching their uncanny domesticity. In his paintings prior to *The Hideout*, Blythe frequently allows his subjects to return the viewer's gaze; for example, in *A Match Seller* (1859, fig. 3), a young street merchant's eyes seemingly ask more questions about us than we do of him, or in *Ole Cezer* (1858-60, fig. 4), a man unsettlingly returns the viewer's stare as he emerges from a stairway that leads below the surface of the streets. Burns observes that "in refusing to preserve a margin of safety, and insisting on the enigmatic and perhaps unknowable nature of the city and its denizens," Blythe's urban creatures "confront us like the face of [Poe's] man of the crowd, which could mean



Figure 3. David Gilmour Blythe *A Match Seller*, 1859.



Figure 4. David Gilmour Blythe, *Ole Cezer*, 1858-60.

anything or nothing” (70). The voyeuristic fantasy which filters through Blythe’s work is not one of “voluptuous bosoms half-naked” but instead that more unaccountable desire to peer into the lives of the “other” in order to imagine their depravity. Blythe’s paintings provide us with this glimpse, but emergent in his work is the potential danger of our nightmarish fantasies, because these creatures delight us in their frightening aspect even while representing real dangers. But even that, too, may be part of the thrill of Blythe’s voyeurism; viewers gaze into a world in which they are clearly never to take part, and yet in the moment of viewing the painting they potentially enter these realms through their *own* voyeuristic imagination.

Urban Tourism Meets Urban Voyeurism

As the century progressed, the urbanization of the country ploughed forward unabated, aided by new inventions such as the steam engine, which opened the country to rapid westward expansion and the establishment of new cities, and the acceleration of industrialization, which

demanding more and more laborers relocate to urban centers. Although the midcentury representations of the city were often filled with scenes of urban depravity, the intensification of change in the second half of the nineteenth century amplified both the possibilities and liabilities of life in the city. In particular, poverty emerged as a significant social problem, as the inner city became overcrowded with poor, often immigrant, families. In response, reformist texts were written to publicize these squalid conditions, tracts such as Reverend E.H. Chapin's *Humanity in the City* (1854), Charles Loring Brace's *The Dangerous Classes of New York and Twenty Years' Work Among Them* (1872), Thomas De Witt Talmage's *Night Scenes of City Life* (1892), among many others. But it was in the 1890s, argues Keith Gandall, that "the slum emerged as a spectacle in the popular arts of representations: the urban poor were discovered as a fresh topic by police reporters, novelists, photographers, true-crime writers, muckrakers, and social reformers" (8). Similarly to the sensational writers, the reformers focused on the deplorable "sins" of the city—poverty, prostitution, gambling—but rather than overtly indulging in sensationalistic curiosity in the portrayal of these behaviors, the reformists ostensibly depicted these social realities for the purpose of reform.

The most famous and influential of these reformist texts was Jacob Riis's *How the Other Half Lives* (1890), which depicted the tenement slums of New York City. Riis's intentions were to expose the poor quality of life in the inner-city slums, and as a consequence he levels much of his attack at the owners of the tenements who charge exorbitant prices for substandard living arrangements, as well as the various issues that arise from these poor living conditions: death by fire, death by disease, and immorality (sex, thievery, etc.). Riis believes that improving the conditions of the tenements and lowering rents will consequently improve the lives of the poor and also cost less money in the end, because fewer social services will be needed to support

them. However, instead of reading Riis's reformist text against Buntline's and Foster's sensationalism, I want to use the *Mysteries and Miseries of New York* and *New York by Gas Light* to reveal the sensationalistic nature of *How the Other Half Lives*, and by doing so suggest that attempts to reform or document the city were almost always rooted in the pursuit of voyeuristic pleasure. Writing about similar British works of the nineteenth century, Peter Stallybrass and Allon White assert that "if the dominant discourses about the slum were structured by the language of reform, they could not but dwell upon the seductions for which they were the supposed cure" (135). Regardless of the intention behind the depiction, these works fixate on sin to such a degree that reform alone cannot be their goal.

In order to initiate any kind of reformist movement, Riis, like other reformers, had to show people the slums and their seductions, and he did so in two ways: through his descriptions and through his photography. As a police beat reporter, Riis became familiar with the slums "at a time when both urban and rural residents hungered for information about the slums, for confirmation of their fears about the growing chaos of urban life, and for the vicarious excitement and sensational rhetoric that police-beat reporting offered them" (Hales 277). In addition, while "clergyman and mostly female charity workers (or friendly visitors) generally made daylight visits and were out of the bad parts of town by nightfall" (Gandal 14), Riis often visited at night, witnessing the slums in their more "natural" and unguarded state. He also used photography, which was still a relatively new technology, as a way, in his own words, "of putting before the people what I saw there" (*Making* 172), and *How the Other Half Lives* contains dozens of photographs of the slums, many taken at night. The photos often reveal squalid rooms filled with dirty and dejected faces, and these pictures proved to be especially effective for influencing public opinion in ways that words alone were not. The pictures which

accompany the text are some of the earliest examples of documentary photography, and they proved fascinating for readers, a fascination that “might range from the obsessive—horrificed looking at gruesome photographs—to the voyeuristic—staring at the lives of others far removed from one’s own—and end at the extreme of catch-in-the-throat sentimentality, as emotionally charged stereotypes from recognizable sources surfaced in novel, exotic surroundings” (Hales 272). The photographs lent a sense of realism and an immediacy of time and place that provided an immersive experience for Riis’s readers, a sensation that one was actually present on these journeys through the slums.

This impression of immersion allowed Riis to play the role of the escort on a kind of “guided tour” (Trachtenberg, “Experiments in Another Country” 143) for those curious about the world of the slums, with the structure of the text making it appear as though the author were acting as a personal guide through the slums of New York. After three chapters detailing the origins and composition of the slum, Riis describes the beginning of “our” tour: “leaving the Elevated Railroad where it dives under the Brooklyn Bridge at Franklin Square, scarce a dozen steps will take us where we wish to go. With its rush and roar echoing yet in our ears, we have turned the corner from prosperity to poverty. We stand at the domain of the tenement” (20). This deployment of the first personal plural recalls the sensationalistic narration of Buntline’s and Foster’s texts, and it has the effect of allowing the readers to feel as though they are about to witness the mysterious and forbidden sights of some exotic location. As Maren Stange argues, “Riis’s representation of the touristic point of view offered a ‘respectable’ perspective on the photographs he showed; in addition, it helped him further flatter his audience, implicitly assuring them that they were the ‘half’ designated by history and progress to colonize and dominate” (488). Positioning his reformist work as a tour created clear boundaries between his readers and

the object of their tour. Indeed, the first person plural collectivizes all of the readers into the “we,” which necessarily turns the object of our gaze into the “them.” It also has the effect of creating both this “we,” a coherent—even if plural—subject with a single gaze, and the “them,” which are the othered objects of their gaze.

Another result of this tourism is that the seemingly clear reformist intentions turn out to be muddled, as his text quickly becomes wrapped up in questions of power and visibility. Gandal explains that “an issue of power and resistance is at stake here, but it is not the familiar game of policing or of reforming; it is the game of viewing. Riis is not a police reporter or a social reformer at this moment; he is a tourist. And tourism, it turns out, is only passive viewing when the sights are out in the open to see” (79). The “openness” of the sights remains a lingering question throughout the work, with Riis seeming to have little concern over the distinctions between public and private when it comes to the poor. This becomes particularly apparent when, after taking us walking through the back alleys, he makes a new suggestion:

Suppose we look into one. No.— Cherry Street. Be a little careful, please! The hall is dark and you might stumble over the children pitching pennies back there. Not that it would hurt them; kicks and cuffs are their daily diet. They have little else. Here where the hall turns and dives into utter darkness is a step, and another, another. A flight of stairs. You can feel your way, if you cannot see it. . . . Here is a door. Listen! That short hacking cough, that tiny, helpless wail—what do they mean? . . . we grope our way up the stairs and down from floor to floor, listening to the sounds behind closed doors—some quarrelling, some of coarse songs, more of profanity. (29-30)

Riis has no qualms about leading his readers through the private hallways and lives of the poor; indeed, he does not seem to consider them private at all. Although elsewhere “Riis is alarmed at the dearth of boundaries—between families, between the sexes, between the worthy poor and the pauper” (Gandal 78), he nevertheless repeatedly breaches the boundary between public and private space as he wanders these tenement halls, listening at closed doors. Because the objects of his tour are never given the opportunity to gaze back, they remain wholly othered and therefore without the basic rights of privacy that would otherwise be expected. This can be seen even more explicitly in Riis’s autobiography, *The Making of an American* (1901), when he dramatically details the realities of his documentary process; here he describes his midnight “raiding parties” that, after learning of a way to use a flashlight to take photos at night,

invaded the East Side by night, bent on letting in the light where it was so much needed. At least that was my purpose. To the photographers it was a voyage of discovery of the greatest interest; but the interest centered in the camera and the flashlight. The police went along from curiosity; sometimes for protection. For that they were hardly needed. It is not too much to say that our party carried terror wherever it went. The flashlight of those days was contained in cartridges fired from a revolver. The spectacle of half a dozen strange men invading a house in the midnight hour armed with big pistols which they shot off recklessly was hardly reassuring, however sugary our speech, and it was not to be wondered at if the tenants bolted through windows and down fire-escapes wherever we went.

(173)

Clearly Riis does not have any reservations about violating privacy for the sake of “reform,” but his attitude towards the tenements is such that he would likely never consider his actions

voyeuristic; this would imply some level of privacy that was being violated, and he does not seem to believe that there exists any public-private boundary to be traversed when dealing with the slums. One reason that Riis's exposé never feels as intrusive or voyeuristic as it actually is derives from his portrayal of the poor as mere objects of study, objects to be pitied certainly, but not individuals who even possess a privacy that could be violated. As Gandal notes, the text offers several conflicting messages about how we are to interpret the poor: "the poor are abused, overcrowded, and poorly housed, so feel for them," or "the poor are abused, overcrowded, and poorly housed, so condemn and fear them," or "the poor look different than us, they live differently, and they do things in strange ways, so enjoy their peculiarities and thrill to their bizarre conditions of life, but do not worry; they are remote from you and there to be looked at" (71). Only the first of these options makes the poor relatable, and even if this were indeed Riis's intention, his rhetorical choices indicate an attitude more similar to the latter positions. And yet, this "othering" of the poor, while rhetorically effective, obviously does not affect their actual personhood or make their privacy any less private, which means that Riis's work, while appearing to objectively document the lives of the tenement poor, could more accurately be described as a voyeuristic tour of the slums.

Because of its voyeuristic character, Riis's vision of the slums actively structures the identity of those he watches. The role of vision in constructing the identity of both the object and the subject manifests itself in his photography, revealing the intersection of the objective gaze and voyeuristic fantasy. Photography has long been considered a true method for documenting reality, because in theory the camera sees only what is there and presents this honestly and accurately. Photography purports to accurately portray reality in a way that could not have been previously accomplished, and as Peter Hales observes in *Silver Cities: Photographing American*

Urbanization, 1839-1939, “the photographs Riis produced operated by a rhetoric of realism, of verisimilitude: one believed them to be true of life, visual records of a moment in a larger experiential continuum” (272). Even now in the twenty-first century, in a technological age when images are regularly manipulated, the photograph retains a certain impression of authenticity that prose cannot match. Of course, even before modern methods for manipulating images were developed, the photograph was still not a faithful recording of the world. This is evident in Riis work, as Stange reveals that he in fact posed many of his most famous photographs (486). By manipulating the reality of the tenements in order to produce a fantasy of slum life, he could captivate and shock his audience enough that we would take action but not so much that it would cause them to recoil in such horror that they would turn away. Nevertheless, these photographs, “though ‘realistic’ in their unposed immediacy, must have seemed to their audiences, in some respects at least, much more conventional and less startling than we might think, because many of them rehearsed imagery familiar to any reader of illustrated periodicals” (Stange 486). Some of the pictures are more staged than others; “The Tramp” (fig. 5), for example, shows a “ragged and disreputable” (48) man sitting on a ladder in the back of an alley. Riis describes how the man who sat for the picture demanded that he be paid an additional quarter, on top of the ten cents he was already receiving, for the inclusion of his pipe in the picture, and “I had to give in” (49). The very fact that he includes this exchange in *How the Other Half Lives*, along with the photograph, suggests that he wanted to portray the particular shrewdness of the “tramp,” but why was it worth twenty-five cents to Riis to have the “tramp” include his clay pipe in the photo? He gives no explanation, but presumably Riis felt that a picture of a tramp in “philosophical contentment” (48) would be incomplete without a clay pipe to smoke, and that his readers would feel the same. The whole scene, from the act of photographing to the final published product, suggests the

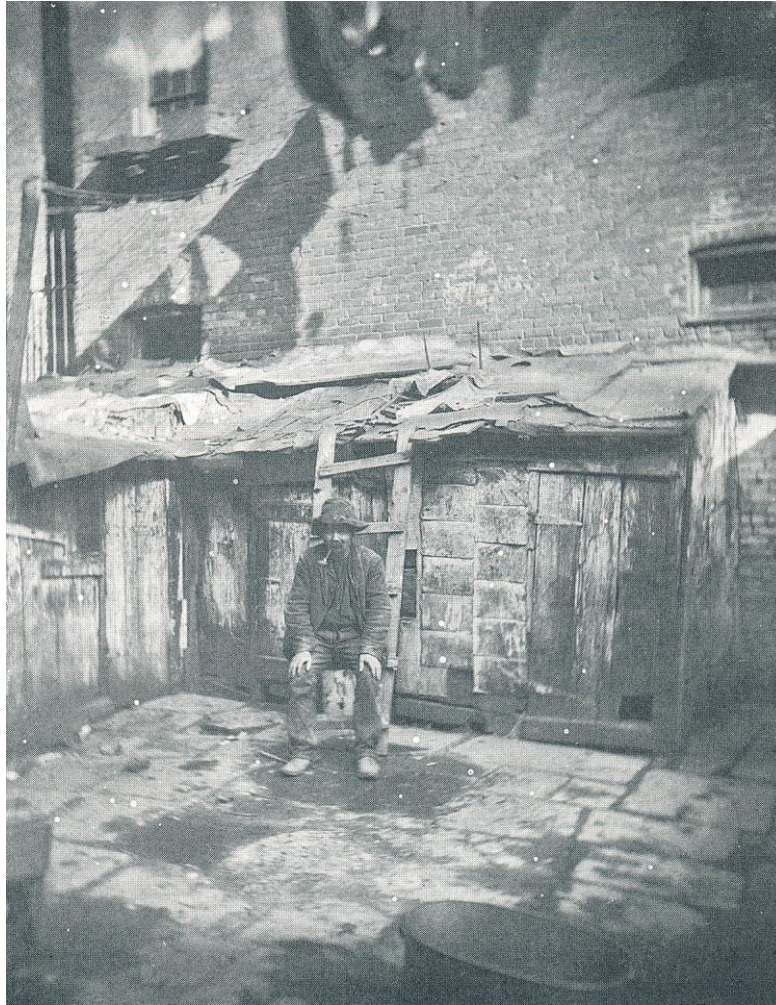


Figure 5. Jacob Riis, "The Tramp," 1890.

invocation of expectation: the tramp fulfils the role of the “philosophical” tramp, and each player in this scene is keenly aware of this fact. A fantasy of the poor underlies Riis’s portrayal here, as he enters the slum with a particular vision of the slum that he expects to see; when it fails to appear, he simply manipulates the reality in order to conform to the fantasy.

Sensational slum fiction and reformist tracts represent the two seemingly competing but often overlapping and intersecting attempts to depict the developing nineteenth-century city. Despite their differences in intention, these authors’ attitudes towards the city and its inhabitants reveal a particular type of urban vision that emerges at this moment in U.S. history, one that is

characterized by a strong voyeuristic impulse. These works utilize an authorial positioning that invites the reader into these worlds in order to peer into its secrets. While this attitude could be labeled “touristic,” this seems problematic, as it hardly conveys the realities of the intrusive nature of these works or the potential for fantasy, as seen in Foster’s prostitutes or Riis’s photography. Some critics, such as Mark Seltzer, have argued that this vision amounts to surveillance: “the realist vision of the urban underworld posits and fantasizes a disciplinary relation between seeing (seeing and being seen) and the exercising of power: the realist investment in seeing entails a policing of the real” (96). However, what neither “tourism” nor “surveillance” can completely portray is the illicit pleasure of this watching: tourism suggests pleasure, but it is too conventional and normalized; surveillance, while indicating some of the power relations at work, minimizes the deviant indulgence of this type of looking. The polarities can be seen in the texts already examined: whereas *The Mysteries and Miseries of New York* and *New York by Gas-Light* reveal the more highly sexualized nature of these voyeuristic tours through the city, *How the Other Half Lives* exposes the ways that class disparities appear to sanction this type of peeping. The authorial, voyeuristic fantasy plays a key role in constructing these narratives; this can be seen explicitly in the sexualized portrayal of the fallen prostitutes in Buntline and Foster, as well as in the fantasy of the “other half” being without autonomy or individual rights in Riis. All of these authors create first person plural narratives that consolidate themselves and their readers into a single vantage point, thereby constructing a “normal” subjectivity—presumably that of white, middle-class males—by which they can observe their othered urban objects: the poor, the tenement houses, the prostitutes, the immigrants, and so on. Because everyone shares this privileged gaze, the peering seems sanctioned, and it takes on the appearance of normalcy. The dominant form of urban vision has become one in which the author

and his readers stalk through unknown territories in order to peer in the lives of others, blurring public-private distinctions and observing and documenting the marginalized urbanites for the pleasure of a more privileged class; in other words, voyeurism had become, if not the dominant form of urban vision, a very real and instrumental way of engaging with this new environment.

Imagining City Space: Realism and the Ashcan School

During the last decades of the nineteenth century, these new articulations of vision and visuality were increasingly thematized and dramatized in art, particularly by realist painters and naturalist authors. A shift in philosophies of representation occurred following the Civil War, with artists distancing themselves from less realistic work and forsaking the romantic fictions produced by the American Renaissance writers or the idealized vistas of the Hudson River School. Instead, late-nineteenth-century artists sought a style that, in theory, would more realistically depict their world. Beginning in the late 1870s and early 1880s, realism became, if not a dominant force, than a dominant *idea* in American art, with artists increasingly eschewing the more imaginatively suggestive style of the Romantic mode. The role of the realist author was “to reject the romantic material and formulas of earlier fiction,” Donald Pizer explains, “in favor of a realistic aesthetic which demanded that the subject matter of contemporary life be objectively depicted, no matter how ‘unliterary’ the product of this aesthetic might seem to be” (6). Attempting an “objective” depiction of reality, however, is more easily called for than performed—and indeed the realists’ success has been discredited by critics such as Amy Kaplan and June Howard⁷—but these artists’ interest in the visuality of their historical moment clearly manifests itself in their work. David Shi observes that “the spectatorial sensibility associated with realism derived much of its legitimacy from the scientific spirit” and that “just as scientists

⁷ See Amy Kaplan, *The Social Construction of American Realism*, and June Howard, *Form and History in American Literary Naturalism*.

took visual facts and transformed them into knowledge, realistic writers and artists assumed that to see was to know” (86). This “to see was to know” attitude informs much of realism, as vision occupies a preeminent stature in realist art (see chapter three for an analysis of the relationship between the scientific gaze and literary naturalism).

Although depictions of American urban scenes were painted intermittently in the last decades of the nineteenth century, it was not until the late 1890s that depicting urban landscapes and the people who populated them became commonplace. Indeed, the realistic representation of cities and urban subjects formed the primary pursuit for a group of painters under the influence of Robert Henri, including George Bellows, William Glackens, George Luks, Everett Shinn, and John Sloan. This group was sometimes called the New York Realists, but more infamously, and lastingly, they were dubbed the “Ashcan School” for their focus on the dirtier side of urban living.⁸ Similarly to the sensationalists and reformists, these artists, at the encouragement of Henri, visited “pool halls, restaurants, and other sites described in the urban press” (Zurier 26) in order to make their depictions of the city more faithful and accurate. Likewise their choice of urban subjects tended towards the lower classes, although they typically stopped short of the extreme poverty of the slums that Riis depicted.⁹

The six artists of the Ashcan School all possess remarkably different styles and distinctive preoccupations within the urban landscape, but they were all invested in portraying the urban experience. Many of the Ashcan painters’ works invoke visuality as a theme, with different looking activities frequently the subject of the paintings. But they also transform visuality into a compositional feature, with our own role as viewer frequently called into

⁸ The term was first used in 1934 by Holger Cahill and Alfred H. Barr in *Art in America* (Lucie-Smith 61).

⁹ The exception was Shinn, who did paint breadlines and tenements, but despite their “realism” these works never approximate the brutal realities of Riis’s work.

question. Specifically, the Ashcan School painters emphasized the visuality of the city, as they painted scenes that captured the experience of looking in the city:

These six artists, all newcomers to the city, made works that seem to ask the viewer to reenact the visual experience of urban dwellers who were learning a new self-awareness about the uses of vision. Their art is marked by a *thematic of sight*, in which acts of spectatorship not only provided subject matter for their images but also contributed to a larger urban culture of looking in which both art and artists participated. Their depictions of New Yorkers looking, peeping, watching, and scrutinizing, of seeing and being seen, as well as engaging in spectacle and display, allow us to consider the pleasures and predicaments in seeing, knowing, and picturing a modern city. (Zurier 4)

Like the sensationalists and reformists, the Ashcan artists were intent on representing this new urban landscape, but they did so with seemingly less explicit intentions: these works do not sensationalize the city, although they do seem to take pleasure in these scenes; nor do they have the goal of reform, although in representing scenes of poverty for a more affluent audience there is the potential for this implicit message. Instead these works attempt to mirror the reality of the city, in all its virtues and vices. The spectacular, specular nature of the city marks a fundamental feature of these works as they attempt to realistically represent these urban environments.

The organization of the work from the singular perspective of a person on the street can be seen in a number of the Ashcan School paintings, as the interplay between visual representation and the urban environment frequently became the subject of these works. Zurier notes that the “Ashcan images assume the viewpoint of the urban observer-journalist, a city resident who shares space with the people depicted while viewing them—on the street, at a park,

in a restaurant, or from the window of a nearby apartment—and who then works up the image for a local viewer” (6). Many realist works are composed as though from the vantage point of a person on the street, and this compositional positioning of “a knowing, sympathetic viewer at street level” (Zurier 32) as an organizing principle for the paintings gives many of these works a clear origin from which the gaze originates. Consequently, it is through the eyes of this implied viewer that the pictures are often arranged. Examples of this abound, from Henri’s 1902 *Snow in New York* (fig. 6), which positions the viewer standing in the snowy street, to Luk’s 1905 *Hester Street* (fig. 7), which drops the audience into the middle of a bustling and crowded market. Sloan’s 1912 *Six O’Clock, Winter* (fig. 8) represents a particularly dramatic example of this, as it places the viewer a mere head above the crowded throng of travelers moving below the elevated train. The crowd presses suffocatingly close, and one can almost feel the jostling elbows of the evening swarms. This sense of drowning in the crowd creates both a relatable perspective and one that *feels* real; this is the perspective of a “man of the crowd.”

Once the organizing gaze of these paintings has been given a body, however, the nature of the content of these works becomes increasingly complicated. Although the viewer implied by these paintings is often considered an objective observer, an “urban observer-journalist” (Zurier 4), this imagined viewer is not without identity, at least not if we consider the subjects that seem to be of most interest to him: women in various states of being watched. Based upon the often erotic tone and frequently sexualized content of many realist works, we cannot simply posit that the spectators are like mannequins, free of individual desires and present merely as organizing principles for the genre. The “agents” or “viewers” implied by realist works are much more complicated, possessing as they do a voyeuristic fascination with the behavior of their fellow citizens. This implied viewer is not merely an organizing principle but has the specific



Figure 5. Robert Henri, *Snow in New York*, 1902.



Figure 6. George Luks, *Hester Street*, 1905.



Figure 7. John Sloan, *Six O'Clock, Winter*, 1912.



Figure 9. Everett Shinn, *Nude By The Door*, 1918.



Figure 10. William Glackens, *Nude Arranging Her Hair*, 1914.

characteristics of a voyeur. This can be seen in the way that the Ashcan painters invade private space to depict the secret acts of their neighbors. In Shinn's 1918 *Nude By The Door* (fig. 9), a naked woman either pulls on or off her stockings, as the implied viewer watches through an open door, while Glackens's 1914 *Nude Arranging Her Hair* (fig. 10), takes its perspective from behind a topless woman fixing her hair. This is not the nudity of mythological figures but of real women, perhaps the woman living next door, and the organization of these works from the perspective of an implied viewer only makes them that much more salacious and problematic. The more public voyeurism of these implied viewers is equally suggestive. Shinn's *Window Shopping* (1903, fig. 11) reveals the potential deviancy of this urban gaze, with its depiction of a solitary woman standing on the street in front of a department store display window. Her back is to the viewer, and the mannequins in the window flank her compositionally. This simple painting depicts only one person, but everywhere vision is emphasized: the woman looking into the



Figure 11. Everett Shinn, *Window Shopping*, 1903.

window, her head turned slightly to the side, perhaps examining the mannequin's dress; the two mannequins, one of which stares at the woman and the other directly at the viewer; and the presence of the viewer, made felt through the eyes of the mannequin, on the street directly behind the woman and almost uncomfortably close to her, given the otherwise desolation of the street.

These works all assume the specific vantage point of a person on the street, which has the effect of transporting the actual viewer into that same urban world and of conversely giving a corporeal body to the implied gaze which organizes and frames the painting. As result of this process of “engaging the audience in active viewing in search of information” the Ashcan artists “invited viewers to reenact a form of urban visuality” (Zurier 33). These realist paintings create a



Figure 12. John Sloan, *Spring Rain*, 1912.

viewer, an imagined surrogate that both *is* and is *between* the artist and the audience; these scenes are being watched by an invisible viewer who organizes the field of vision, and it is into his or her shoes that the viewer must step in order to view the paintings. To some degree this is true of all art, but part of the distinctiveness of these realist paintings derives from the viewer not occupying an impossible vantage point but instead being rooted in a corporeal body, a body with which viewers of the painting are forced to identify. Here the collective gaze of the sensational or reformist authors has been reduced to a single source, thus no longer guaranteeing the sanctioning of this potentially deviant gaze. For example, Sloan's painting *Spring Rain* (1912, fig. 12) has its perspective originating several steps behind a woman walking through a mostly empty park on a drizzly afternoon. The subject matter implies nothing sordid, but the *perspective* transforms the tone of the painting. Because it is painted from the perspective of a "street level" observer, this viewer must be following behind the woman, and her position in the center of the

frame clearly makes her the object of his or her gaze. The combination of the woman's solitude and the presence of someone stalking closely behind creates a sense of unease, as this voyeuristic perspective unsettles the objectivity of the scene. The vantage point from which the implied viewer gazes at the woman forces the actual viewer onto the path, a dozen steps behind the woman, for the viewer can be nowhere else and still witness this scene.

As a consequence this implied viewer-voyeur inscribes the voyeuristic gaze onto the actual viewer. The audience is turned into voyeurs through the composition of the painting but then subsequently alerted to their voyeurism through the thematic emphasis on visibility. In this way there becomes a triangulation of voyeurs in these realist works: the artist or author, the viewer-reader implied by the formal arrangement of the work, and the actual viewer-reader. Realist paintings create an implied viewer whose perspective actual viewers are forced to assume, and as subsequent chapters will demonstrate, naturalist texts do likewise, establishing an implied narrator who frames and organizes the story through his or her perspective, a perspective readers must likewise adopt. What needs to be asked, then, is not whether any of these realist painters are or are not voyeurs—a question that, even if answered in the affirmative, does little to enlighten us as to the meaning of these works—but whether the viewer these painters imagine *looking* at their paintings is a voyeur; the answer to this question, based on the content of their work, seems to be unmistakably yes. The question then becomes not *why* would an artist look through a woman's apartment window, but *who* would look through a woman's apartment window, a question that opens up the work to much larger issues regarding the social implications of voyeurism and what counts as private space. No longer can the viewer hide behind sensational fiction's first-person plural of collective voyeurism; to stand and publically view these paintings is to acknowledge the viewer's own disruption and disregard of private

space, but they also demand—or did, before images were so easily reproduced—that viewers look publically and be witnessed engaging in their own voyeuristic gaze.

The Object as Absence: Implications of Urban Voyeurism

What we find in the nineteenth-century representations of the urban scene is the development of a particular orientation of vision predicated on a voyeuristic gaze, which is itself a gaze dependent on fantasy. From Buntline's eroticized street-walkers to Shinn's window shopper, these texts depict the viewer's fantasy of the urban experience; the subject watching often creates—or determines—the identity of the object watched, replacing the identity of the object with the subject's own fantasy. Lacan argues that the voyeur attempts to see “the object as absence” because “what the voyeur is looking for and finds is merely a shadow, a shadow behind the curtain. There he will phantasize any magic of presence, the most graceful of girls, for example, even if on the other side there is only a hairy athlete” (182). In Buntline and Foster, for example, the attempts to depict the horrific realities, the “horrid rites” of prostitution, are repeatedly recast by the sexualized gaze, as the fantasy of “voluptuous bosoms half-naked” subsumes reality.

But despite the similarities between the voyeuristic gazes evoked by the diverse range of artists discussed in this chapter, the Ashcan School painters—and, as we shall see in the subsequent chapters, the literary naturalists—mark an important shift in urban vision. Lacan asserts that in the act of voyeurism, the subject is “not there in the sense of seeing, at the level of the scopic drive,” but that he “is there as pervert and he is situated only at the culmination of the loop” (182) that connects the voyeur with the object of his gaze. But the “object” here, as Lacan explains, is also the gaze, which is also the subject; in the act of voyeurism the divisions between subject, object, and gaze collapse. The very identity of the reader-voyeur is seemingly irrelevant,

as he or she is merely the “culmination of the loop.” Perhaps this explains why, as Joseph Entin argues, in realist and naturalist works the “disembodied readers and viewers are free to see and move beyond the confines of their bodies, to survey the embodied classes without placing their own bodies at risk” (314); the disembodied reader-voyeur is only necessary to culminate the loop of vision. This type of “disembodied reader” is suggested throughout the sensationalist and reformist works, but while they demonstrate this voyeurism through their subject matter and attitude towards it, the gaze of the Ashcan painters fully engages and acknowledges the voyeurism of this type of urban vision, thereby calling attention to the role of the subject in “culminating” the loop.

On some level, voyeurism must be *recognized* as voyeurism in order to *be* voyeurism; one must acknowledge the deviancy of the act, as the experience of shame or guilt is in fact critical to understanding voyeurism. As Sartre explains in *Being and Nothingness*, shame derives from being discovered in the act of voyeurism because it is “the *recognition* of the fact that I *am* indeed that object which the Other is looking at and judging” (350). Sartre argues that what causes shame is when “I recognize that I *am* as the Other sees me” (302). Lacan, too, argues for the role of shame in the gaze: “the gaze is this object lost and suddenly refound in the conflagration of shame, by introduction of the other” (182). What we find in writers as diverse as Poe and Riis is the voyeur’s gaze without shame, without even a body to root the gaze in, as the city’s slums are imagined not as closed and private sites but as open and public fields for investigation. The Ashcan School, however, introduces guilt into this gaze, as they call attention to the active role of the viewer’s fantasies in these images. By calling attention to vision *within* the work, as these paintings do so frequently, they force the audience into an awareness of their

own voyeuristic gaze, as the viewers, like the other urban dwellers, peek into private spaces to witness the spectacle of the city.

At this point, we need to consider the way that the voyeurism of realist painters such as those of the Ashcan School starts to redefine our ideas of how reality can be represented in art. The “objective gaze” now begins to take on even more complex dimensions as it becomes increasingly difficult to disentangle the “real” from the “fantasy” of their vision. The artistic investment in the gaze, and vision generally, has been evident throughout the period here surveyed, from Poe’s “Man of the Crowd” to Sloan’s *Spring Rain*, but the reliance on vision evident in pictorial realism and literary naturalism forces a reconsideration of the dynamic between reality and fantasy. By reinterpreting the gaze of these turn-of-the-century artists as voyeuristic we can recognize the way art from this period perversely overlays the “real” and the “fantastic.”

After following the “man of the crowd” for hours, Poe’s narrator declares “it will be vain to follow; for I shall learn no more of him, nor of his deeds” (272). Poe’s narrator resigns himself to the unknowable nature of the “man of the crowd,” thereby ending his quest. But while knowledge of the true nature of the man remained impenetrable, the ensuing decades found no lack of “voluptuous bosoms half-naked” to portray, as the emphasis on vision shifted artistic investment away from unknowable internal states to the more easily observable external appearances. And although the sensational and reformist writers still equated the external with the internal, late-nineteenth-century artists such as those of the Ashcan school recognized the impossibility of truly gaining access to their object’s elusive soul, concluding instead that peering through the window was ultimately more revealing than peering into the heart.

Chapter Two: Narration and Marginalization in Literary Naturalism

This chapter considers the way in which the emergent urban voyeurism outlined in the previous chapter becomes an integral feature of American literary naturalism's representations of class and race. Of particular focus will be the interplay between the third-person narrator and the world and people he or she observes, most often inner-city slums and their residents. Naturalist texts provide voyeuristic access to these spaces, with the slums acting as an ideal site for authors and readers to enact a sort of grotesque fantasy. The "real" slum is less fascinating for the naturalist than the imaginary potential it represents, with the inner city becoming a fantastical space for authors and readers to explore their own perverse fantasies, regardless of the realities that the slums or their inhabitants actually present. Because the naturalists are not entirely dependent on that reality for the creation of their fantasies, these texts produce visions of class and, less evidently, race that suggest more about the desires of the spectator than the realities of the spectacle they observe. In turn, naturalist visions of class and race reflect both the allure and terror of the "Other"; the slums provide an exhilarating alternative to the safe, middle-class world of the author and reader while simultaneously projecting a grotesquely alien space that has the potential to absorb them into this environment. As a result, these texts' representations of class and race reveal more about the scopophilia of the spectators who watch than the spectacles they perceive; the lower classes are projections of the middle-class reader-voyeur's fears and desires, not realistic attempts at accurate depictions. The voyeuristic positioning of the narrator, and by implication the author and reader, allows the middle-class voyeur to imaginatively enter these spaces. By analyzing this voyeuristic perspective in naturalist texts, the role of vision in the production of these provisional, contested depictions of class and racial identities becomes evident.

In chapter one, other nineteenth-century genres, such as sensational and reformist literature, were shown to contain voyeuristic characters or situations, but naturalism in both art and literature formalizes this voyeurism into its very structure. I begin this chapter by examining the specific ways that texts of literary naturalism, similarly to the Ashcan School paintings, construct a viewer through their narration, and the interpretative significance of this separation between the spectator and the spectacles he or she observes. I read this construction as dramatized by the narrative structure of these texts, since naturalist works are frequently organized from the point of view of a narrator who stands removed from the action but without a fully omniscient perspective. These narrators are rooted in the milieu of their fictional worlds, and their role as observers of the events are seemingly that of simple documenters of the moment. John Rignall contends that if these authors assume “the world to be a coherent and intelligible system of signs that can be understood by those who, like the novelist, have eyes to see, then the observing character is both the instrument and the emblem of the intelligent observation which thus makes sense of visible phenomena” (2). However, at stake in naturalism are the boundaries of “intelligent observation,” as well as what is acceptable to observe and record. I thus analyze one of the earliest works of American naturalism, Rebecca Harding Davis’s *Life in the Iron Mills* (1861), in order to consider how the spectator in naturalism perceives class and the implications of these representations for the reader. Despite the appearance of objective detachment, these works take an implicit pleasure in allowing their readers a voyeuristic peek into the lives of the poor.

Next, I examine the way that naturalist texts engage in a literary version of slumming, as they take the privileged reader on an imaginative visit of the slums. However, these texts present grotesque and disturbing visions of the inner city, emerging more from the fantasies of the

viewer than the realities of the slum. Despite the sordidness of these depictions, there is a perverse desire that seems to motivate these spectators; as Peter Stallybrass and Allon White argue, “if the dominant discourses about the slum were structured by the language of reform, they could not but dwell upon the seductions for which they were the supposed cure” (135). This imaginative slumming distorts depictions of class and race which, while forming the basis for real enough conflicts and crises at the turn of the century, are used in these texts in service of the spectator’s fantasy. These visions of the slum are increasingly voyeuristic, combining grotesque fantasy with perverse desire and ultimately revealing more about the spectator than the spectacle he or she observes. I analyze a range of works, from Paul Lawrence Dunbar’s *The Sport of the Gods* (1902) and James Weldon Johnson’s *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* (1912) to William Dean Howells’s “The Midnight Platoon” (1902) and Jack London’s *The People of the Abyss* (1903), in order to consider what motivates these voyeuristic excursions.

Finally, I turn to the biography and urban fiction of Stephen Crane as I explore the way that his life and work both reinforce and challenge naturalism’s traditional visual relationship to the slum and its inhabitants. His texts present alternatives to the slumming found in the fiction previously analyzed because they provide a vision of the slums that is neither wholly from within nor entirely from without, but somehow a mix of both: his texts create the fantasy of being a part of these worlds while still maintaining a sense of distance. And yet instead of using this double point of view to sanction these excursions by asserting an insider’s perspective, Crane uses these dual viewpoints to call attention to the role of vision and the voyeuristic intrusion of the reader’s gaze; the gap between the two viewpoints reveals the distance between the reality of the slums and the spectator’s fantasy. Understanding the voyeuristic gaze of literary naturalism requires recognizing the emphasis these naturalist artists placed on vision, while at the same time

entailing an awareness of the imaginative fantasy that shapes this vision and plays a critical role in the formation of the scopophilia of the naturalists' works.

Class and the Spectator in Literary Naturalism

In chapter one I examined the way that the audience was transformed from a part of a disembodied, collective tourism, as evidenced in the sensational and reformist texts' use of the plural "we" and its ethereal movements through space, to the singular and more firmly delineated vision of the implied viewer of the Ashcan School paintings. The obvious literary counterpart to a painting's implied viewer would seem to be the novel's implied reader, but this is a problematic parallel.¹⁰ For one thing, the text cannot position the reader in the same way that a painting can; regardless of the power of the novel, it is impossible to assume that all readers maintain a similar point of view as they would with a painting. By contrast, naturalist novels do offer a counterpart, however imperfect, to the realist painting's implied viewer: the third-person narrator who tells the naturalist narrative. In *Form and History in American Literary Naturalism*, June Howard makes a convincing case that naturalist texts often separate the narrator (whether dramatized or implied) and, by implication, the reader, from the objects of observation through a narration that aligns the narrator and reader apart from the lower class, often degenerate characters. The deployment of this kind of narrator was a shift from the older, Romantic narrators who frequently and noticeably interjected themselves into the fiction. Daniel Borus writes that "the size and growing complexity of the readership in the late nineteenth century

¹⁰ Peter Rabinowitz suggests that there are four types of possible audiences: 1) the actual audience, those "flesh-and-blood people who read the book" (212-213); the authorial audience, because "the author of a novel designs his work rhetorically for a specific hypothetical audience," and consequently "we must, as we read, come to share, in some measure, the characteristics of this audience if we are to understand the text" (213); the narrative audience, which is best understood by asking the question: "What sort of person would I have to pretend to be—what would I have to know and believe—if I wanted to take this work of fiction as real?" (214); and finally the ideal narrative audience, that "the audience for which the narrator wishes he were writing and relates to the narrative audience in a way roughly analogous to the way that the authorial audience relates to the actual audience" (220). In the case of these naturalist texts, both types of narrative audience would call for readers that desired to know the secrets of these characters, to peer through their windows, and in that sense they would be like the voyeur narrator.

rendered unworkable the intimate narrator, whose confidences had their social basis in the assurance that in interests and position the audience and narrator were much alike” (101). As a result, as Borus indicates, naturalism required a new kind of narrator. Similarly, Howard argues that naturalist authors purposefully create a narration that is distanced from the lives of the characters as a way of keeping the audience at a remove from the brute, the Other:

Although the menacing and vulnerable Other is incapable of acting as a self-conscious, purposeful agent, he can only be observed and analyzed by such an agent. Sometimes this perspective is inscribed in the text through a character, sometimes it is embodied only by the narrator or implied author. But although we explore determinism, we are never submerged in it and ourselves become the brute. (104)

Howard asserts that the observation of the Other by another character, narrator, or author is a defining feature of the genre, even if it is often overlooked. Because these novels are often “narrated from a third-person omniscient point of view closely equating the narrator and implied author,” the “narrator’s presence is effaced although it is no less important” (Howard 105). Even more important is the “assumption of a common ground between certain characters, the narrator and implicitly the author, and the audience,” suggesting the interesting way in which naturalists align the author/narrator *with* the audience and *against* the “brutes” of the narrative (Howard 104). The narrator as well as the readers implied by the tone of that narration stand removed from the characters observed, and, as I argue later in the chapter, it is through the text that they are provided voyeuristic access to these worlds.

The separation of the spectator—narrator and/or character—from the spectacle of the Other occurs primarily along lines of class and race. Historically the transformation of American

culture in the last quarter of the nineteenth century from a still largely agricultural country to an undeniably industrial nation—and all of the attendant changes wrought from urbanization, mass immigrations, and population migrations—had significant repercussions for definitions and delineations of class and race. From the new economic possibilities and liabilities engendered by the industrial revolution, for example, emerged a more stratified division of classes in the United States, with much of the lower classes comprised of ethnic and racial minorities. Developing in this cultural milieu, American literary naturalism dramatized these economic, social, and cultural tensions. In fact, perhaps the least contested aspects of definitions of naturalism involve its portrayal of the lower classes, which stand in distinct contrast to those in realist texts. As Frank Norris famously described it, realism tells of “teacup tragedies” (“Zola” 72), minor dramas of the middle-class parlor, while naturalism instead addresses “the wide world for range, and the unplumbed depths of the human heart, and the mystery of sex, and the problems of life, and the black, unsearched penetralia of the soul of man” (“A Plea” 78). Although the “unsearched penetralia of the soul of man” might be plumbed in mansions and ghettos alike, it is towards the lower classes that live in the slums, usually also delineated as ethnically different, that the major naturalist authors turned in order to do their reconnaissance. The slums and their residents did not alone possess “the mysteries of sex,” for example, but it was in these inner-city spaces that the naturalists found greater license to voyeuristically explore these “unplumbed depths.” Donna Campbell writes that the naturalist authors, characters, and narrators “assumed the stance of interpreters, thereby establishing de facto that the culture they were about to examine was in some way alien to their readers,” so that, as a consequence, “underlying the narrative voice or observer’s position is always the assumption—sometimes voiced, sometimes not—that these people are objects of study because they are not ‘like us’ in education, class, and ethnicity,” and

it is through this view point that “the reader may enter the text” (11). Jude Davies extends this argument, noting that naturalist novels often “interpolate readers as fellow members of the middle-class and offer them access to the public, domestic, and laboring spaces of those who work manually or who are unemployed” (307). Class and race therefore serve as fulcrum points dividing the narrative, as the spectator—narrator, characters, interpolated readers—voyeuristically peers down from his or her position of class and, presumably, racial privilege and into this “unplumbed,” “unsearched” spectacle of impoverished minorities.

In one of the first works of American literary naturalism, Rebecca Harding Davis’s 1861 novella, *Life in the Iron Mills*, the tensions between class and narration are already evident. *Life in the Iron-Mills*, argues Davies, offers an early example of one of the defining characteristics of naturalism, that of the “naturalist author as mediating the experience of an industrial, often immigrant working class for the middle-class reading public” (307). Although Davis’s story depicts numerous issues that might be profitably analyzed in relation to my topic, I want to focus in this section specifically on the way that *Life in the Iron-Mills* divides its spectators from the spectacles along class lines, and by analyzing it in this way I hope to draw attention to this fundamental formal feature of American literary naturalism so that I can further explicate its significance in the sections that follow. One of the earliest stories to depict the brutalizing effects of the American industrial revolution, Davis’s novella relates the story of how an iron worker, Hugh Wolfe, with an innate but undeveloped artistic sensibility is destroyed by a capitalistic system within which his individuality is meaningless. The story begins with a narrator of indeterminable gender—a fact emphasized by the story’s initially anonymous publication in the *Atlantic Monthly* (“Rebecca Harding Davis” 2598)—looking out from the window on the “slow stream of human life creeping past” (2599), which he or she describes as “masses of men, with

dull, besotted faces bent to the ground, sharpened here and there by pain or cunning; skin and muscle and flesh begrimed with smoke and ashes; stooping all night over boiling caldrons of metal, laired by day in dens of drunkenness and infamy; breathing from infancy to death an air saturated with fog and grease and soot, vileness for soul and body” (2599-2600). Located safely *inside* a building, the narrator looks *outside* onto the grotesque parade of the lower classes; the window provides a clear separation between the world of the narrator and the world he or she voyeuristically observes. The window also acts as a frame, turning the workers below into a spectacle to be watched from a safe remove. And despite a narrator who possesses undeniable sympathy for these masses, he or she nevertheless presents these men as grotesque “stooping” creatures, “begrimed with smoke and ashes,” suggesting their essential alterity, even if it is an otherness we are meant to pity.

The narrator’s descriptive “othering” of the masses becomes even more apparent as the narrator describes the story’s protagonist and his environment. Soon after this first glimpse of the “masses of men,” the narrator focuses in on the Cornish miners, among whom Hugh Wolfe is numbered: “They are a trifle more filthy; their muscles are not so brawny; they stoop more. When they are drunk, they neither yell, nor shout, nor stagger, but skulk along like beaten hounds” (2601). Although Davis’s descriptions are not nearly as gruesome as those found in later naturalist texts by authors such as Jack London and Stephen Crane, who would transform the lower classes into unrecognizable, monstrous creatures, these hunched and dirty miners do seem almost another species. Of Hugh the narrator explains that “he had already lost the strength and instinct vigor of a man, his muscles were thin, his nerves were weak, his face (a meek, woman’s face) haggard, yellow with consumption. In the mill he was known as one of the girl-men” (2605). Hugh’s feminization creates a non-threatening vision of the lower classes, grotesque and

horrific perhaps, but not necessarily dangerous. Because they are so unearthly and unnatural, the miners appear to be part of a world somehow different from the reader's. Also integral to the representation of this space as other-worldly are the depictions of the iron-mills, which are described in even more grotesque fashion than the workers: "wild caldrons filled with boiling fire, over which bent ghastly wretches stirring the strange brewing; and through all, crowds of half-clad men, looking like revengeful ghosts in the red light, hurried, throwing masses of glittering fire. It was like a street in Hell" (2603). This world and its inhabitants are frightening, but they are also almost unbelievably different; a "street in Hell" and its preceding description portray a space that exists only as an imaginative construct, as a fantasy of "otherness." The spectator overlays the real poverty with a fantastic, phantasmagoric alternative that is more terrifying than the reality but also somehow more alluring, perhaps because of its very articulation of the observer's fears and fantasies.

Immediately following the initial long description of the monstrous creatures of the lower classes, the narrator suddenly turns to the reader: "What do you make of a case like this, amateur psychologist?" (2600). Despite the incriminating tone of the narrator, the outburst nevertheless immediately aligns the reader and the narrator as characters both apart from the workers and in a position of privilege from which they can look down upon these sorry creatures, thus reinforcing this divide between the spectators of the middle and upper classes and the poor masses of men who make up the spectacle. Still, even if the naturalist narrator and reader shared more in common than either did with the characters, the conditions of the late nineteenth century were also producing increasingly diverse audiences, thus making assumptions about the similarities between writer and reader tenuous; the complicated relationship between author and audience was "compounded by the fragmentation of their audience along racial, ethnic, gender, and class

lines” (Borus 108). The actual identity of the audience therefore complicates this intended inscription of the reader as voyeur because an author cannot be certain of the reader’s full identification with this role as spectator. Instead the vicarious identification of the reader with either the peering voyeur *or* the peered at object of the voyeur’s gaze begins a disorienting process in which identification begins slipping between subject and object even while being predicated on this split between the two positions, a point which will be made even more explicitly when I examine Crane’s work later in this chapter.

The instability of these subject and object positions is also in large part the fear that motivates the strict construction of these divisions. These are permeable boundaries, represented by the narrator’s ability to “detect the scent” of the tobacco pipes of the “drunken Irishmen” reaching him or her up in the window, as well as the “smoke, clotted and black” that even makes its way inside the narrator’s room, covering the wings of “a little broken figure of an angel” with soot (2599). The division between the narrator/reader and the world of the ironworkers may seem stable, but cross-contamination between these spaces remains a possibility. Despite the interpolation of the readers as part of a class that is distinctly separate from the lower classes that they observe, there remains an interconnectedness between the spectator and the spectacle that raises serious questions about the ability to keep the two worlds separate. Campbell suggests that because these divisions are defined along unstable and ultimately remarkably fluid class divisions, “naturalistic works threaten to include readers in the uncertain and frequently miserable world they depict, deliberately undercutting the safe position traditionally enjoyed by the reader” (110). In other words, the reader’s alignment with the narrator may occur along class and even racial lines, but this separation was never as secure as the spectator’s might have wished or imagined.

Exposing the potential permeability even further, the narrator directly addresses the reader, imploring him or her to imaginatively travel into this realm: “This is what I want you to do. I want you to hide your disgust, take no heed to your clean clothes, and come right down with me,—here, into the thickest fog and mud and foul effluvia. I want you to hear this story” (2600). In some ways, this echoes the sensational and reformist fiction analyzed in chapter one, suggesting a kind of touristic impulse. Furthermore, unlike later naturalist works, Davis does seem to have reform in mind as she leads this tour. What makes her approach more complicated, though, is the appearance of a group of “five or six” (2606) wealthy men—an indeterminacy which signals that the story is being narrated from a single, restricted point of view—who are *themselves* touring the mills, the appearance of whom highlights our own intrusive, voyeuristic excursion into the mills. Anticipating the shifting perspectives that characterize Crane’s more nuanced naturalistic vision of the lower classes, Davis momentarily narrates the encounter between these wealthy industrialists and the workers from Hugh’s perspective: “What made the difference between them? That was the mystery of his life” (2606). The question could likewise be asked of the difference between Hugh and the narrator and reader, thus calling into question the separation that underlies the story.

Even if physically separate, the spectator does imaginatively enter these spaces through his or her voyeuristic fantasy. One of the men who recognizes Hugh’s artistic ability, Mitchell, speculates aloud that “one could fancy these red smouldering lights to be the half-shut eyes of wild beasts, and the spectral figures their victims in the den” (2608). Kirby, son of the mill owner, then replies: “You are fanciful. Come, let us out of the den. The spectral figures, as you call them, are a little too real for me to fancy a close proximity in the darkness,—unarmed, too” (2608). Mitchell transforms the reality of the mill into a fantastical spectacle, despite Kirby

thinking the scene hardly needs an imaginative leap to be terrifying. The role of imagination in these “fancies” transforms the figure of the observer into something more proactive and potentially disturbing than Howard suggests. The viewer is not just a passive audience member observing the action, as the scenes these novels depict are not theater; observers, through the help of the narration of the novel, act as voyeurs, peering into the private lives of the characters, seeing what they can, imagining what they desire and desiring what they imagine.

Throughout *Life in the Iron-Mills*, the intentions and reliability of the narrator remain in question. These issues of narration pervade naturalism, with such texts oftentimes featuring deceptively simple narrations that functionally belie their highly voyeuristic narrators. Contrary to the arguments of some critics, such as Howard and Campbell, these types of narrators, often described as touristic, cannot be interpreted as objective, detached guides of these other worlds. Instead, their distinct narrative voices, combined with the sometimes sexual, sometimes just grotesquely fascinating objects of their gaze, suggest much more perverse spectatorial roles. In Davis’s novella, the narrator’s gaze finds Hugh Wolfe and his situation tragic, but he or she also exploits this perverse tragedy as an opportunity for fantasy and speculation. The implications of this voyeur narrator are far-reaching, affecting the very conceptualization of the act of reading. The relationship between the imagined reader and the voyeur-narrator that then emerges alters the identity of the imagined reader, transforming him or her into someone much more deviant. This inscription of the audience has a reverse ripple effect, as the actual audience must assume, or be forced to assume, these multiple roles while reading the text. Not only is the narrator of *Life in the Iron-Mills* a voyeur, but the actual reader is one as well, at least while reading the story.

Slumming in Naturalism

In the decades following the publication of *Life in the Iron-Mills*, the economic conditions and literary developments that produced Davis's novella only became more pronounced. The industrial revolution exacerbated class divisions, changing both the distribution of wealth and the living conditions for those on both ends of the economic spectrum. In particular, the inner city became a site of increased poverty, leading to the growth of slums that Jacob Riis documented in *How the Other Half Lives* (1890), as analyzed in the previous chapter. Because of the growing disparity between the classes, the lives and conditions of the lower classes living in the slums became of growing interest to the middle and upper classes that lived a more privileged existence. This voyeuristic fascination prompted actual slumming parties, as more well-to-do citizens traveled into the inner city to witness the urban slums for themselves, as well as literary versions of the same practice, particularly in works of naturalism. As the previous section demonstrated, literary naturalism divides its spectators—in the form of characters, narrators, and/or readers—from the spectacles of the sordid characters they observe along class and race lines; these texts position the privileged spectators distinctly apart from the inner-city lives they voyeuristically watch, creating a form of literary slumming. With this formal split firmly in mind, in this section I examine the implications of this divide by focusing intently on the voyeuristic spectators in order to analyze both their motivations and how their fascination distorts the spectacle of the lower classes in specific and significant ways.

Such fascination can be seen in Paul Lawrence Dunbar's 1902 novel, *The Sport of the Gods*, in which an African-American family moves from the rural South to the urban North after the father is falsely imprisoned for stealing from his employer. Once in New York City, the family succumbs to the typical tribulations of the naturalist novel, as sex, alcohol, and violence destroy the lives and morals of the family. The son, Joe, begins his descent from naïve country

boy to debauched criminal at the Banner Club, an “institution for the lower education of negro youth” (116-17). The narrator describes the people who frequent the club as “composed of all sorts of and conditions of men, educated and uneducated, dishonest and less so, of the good, the bad, and the—unexposed” (117). This description is not unusual, recalling images of any number of the seedy establishments described in the sensational and reformist texts of the previous chapter. However, the narrator goes on to detail additional groups not usually mentioned: the “parasites” who “came there to find victims, politicians for votes, reporters for news, and artists of all kinds for colour and inspiration” (117), as well as “the curious who wanted to see something of the other side of life,” among whom “white visitors were not infrequent,—those who were young enough to be fascinated by the bizarre, and those who were old enough to know that it was all in the game” (118).

Ten years later, James Weldon Johnson in his naturalist novel *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* (1912) described a scene strikingly similar to the Club in Dunbar’s text, complete with white visitors. Like Dunbar’s novel, Johnson’s text features some of the classic naturalist elements of poverty and violence, with the story also focusing on the education of the “Ex-Coloured Man” of the title. While experiencing the more sordid aspects of his education, he visits a club which attracted

almost every night one or two parties of white people, men and women, who were out sight-seeing, or slumming. They generally came in cabs; some of them would stay only for a few minutes, while others sometimes stayed until morning. There was also another set of white people who came frequently; it was made up of variety performers and others who delineated ‘darky characters’; they came to get their imitations first-hand from the Negro entertainers they saw there. (107)

Just like Dunbar's "curious," these white visitors are, of course, "slumming," that peculiar nineteenth-century phenomenon that found middle- and upper-class citizens journeying to the inner city to explore these forbidden spaces. Both Dunbar's and Johnson's texts suggest a steady population of white people visiting these spaces that, for economic and racial reasons, were normally off limits.

But why go "slumming"? What motivates these white visitors to enter these forbidden spaces to see these "Others"? In *Slumming in New York: From the Waterfront to Mythic Harlem*, Robert Dowling argues that "the forbidden nature of slumming in moral regions affords the practice a stinging potency and so has the potential to transform conventional morality: the more the moralizing middle-class American impulse condemns moral regions and their entertainments, the more rigorously curiosity seekers will explore them" (11). The sense of slumming as "forbidden," and "curiosity" as the primary motivation behind exploring these spaces, is a fairly common explanation for what prompts this behavior, but it also fails to fully explain what compels these people to explore these sites. In other words, curiosity seems like merely the beginning of the answer to this question, not the end. Considering these questions in light of Dunbar's and Johnson's texts provides unique insight into the motivations behind these impulses, as they are written not from the perspective of the white visitor entering into this world—as is the case with most naturalist texts, such as *Life in the Iron-Mills*—but from the vantage of those who are instead *part of* this world. As we shall see from other literary examples, most of the slumming that occurs in texts from these periods is enacted by the texts themselves; therefore the motivations behind slumming are largely ignored because whatever these intentions are they presumably remain to a large extent *implicitly* shared by both the author and the reader. Because these two slumming instances are articulated largely—but not exclusively—along racial

lines, the consideration of these two African-American authored texts that include moments in which white visitors go “slumming” in black neighborhoods allows us to consider those “slumming” from an alternative angle that potentially divides the author and reader from the voyeuristic characters within the text, thereby gaining a more complete understanding of these impulses.

Both *Sport of the Gods* and *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man* provide perspectives on slumming that potentially turn the spotlight back on those slumming, rather than on the worlds into which they peer. Neither author suggests that Jacob Riis-style reformers could be counted among these visitors; instead Dunbar writes that some were motivated by curiosity and some just “fascinated by the bizarre.” This emphasis on fascination rather than compassion seems to acknowledge a wide rift that exists between the two parties who enter the slums: reformers with compassion and those curious “slummers.” The narrator in *Autobiography* also identifies an additional group, “good-looking and well dressed” women “in company with coloured men” (108). Although the sexual nature of these interracial relationships remains merely implied, there can be little doubt that the narrator highlights the presence of these women as a way of indicating the erotic curiosity that similarly compels these visitors. Additionally, both Dunbar and Johnson cite the presence of artists, some searching for “all kinds for colour and inspiration” (Dunbar 117), others trying to learn “their imitations first-hand” (Johnson 107), which similarly highlights the exploitive nature of this slumming. Curiosity, then, might be refined along three related lines: as grotesque revulsion, as erotic fantasy, and as imaginative inspiration.

This sense of the curiosity of slumming as motivated by a complex mix of grotesque revulsion and sexual attraction mediated through fantasy helps explain not only the possible

reasons that people actually went slumming, but it also illuminates what might draw authors and readers to produce and consume narratives that recreate this experience. In *Around Quitting Time: Work and Middle-Class Fantasy in American Fiction* Robert Seguin writes that the “genre” of “class tourism”

was essentially the product of a liberal-reformist sensibility and strove to bring working-class life home to diverse strata of the bourgeoisie, but in a predictably ambiguous fashion. From one perspective, the careful framing devices and sturdy moralism of the class touristic text served to keep this lower world at a distance, with a clear cordon sanitaire around it. But the genre did proffer working-class life in the form of a kind of knowledge, and, more importantly, the touristic gaze, with its playing off the boundaries of readable surface versus inner secret and simulation versus authenticity, opens this world up to a range of possible affective investment. Through this genre, the realm of proletarian existence, however sensationalistically or phantasmatically conceived, could exert an unsettling pull on the unwary bourgeois subject. (54)

Seguin identifies the essentially voyeuristic nature of this genre, as those who use this genre desire both maintaining distance while simultaneously imaginatively projecting themselves into the scene, of making an “affective investment” which all the while risks collapsing this barrier between worlds. The slumming *through* fiction closely mirrors its actual counterpart, but it also allows for the intensification and more complete realization of the slum as an imaginative space. Sarah Burns writes that while “the social problems of immigration, poverty, and oppression were real and urgent enough,” the “geography of the slums—dark, fetid, alien—was also the terrain of the imaginary, where fantasy might enjoy free play” (235). As a consequence, the “stifling

routines and emasculating comforts” of the middle class could find imaginative outlet in the “spectacle of the slum,” which “offered a new territory for adventure, exciting, dangerous, and strange,” as well as “opportunities for heroism, with its revitalizing energies, unrestrained and raw” (Burns 235). James Giles explains that for the naturalists, the slum became a fantasy space: “the inner city ceased to be primarily a physical space; it assumed, instead, the status of an idea or image of something sordid and dangerous as well as mysterious and fascinating. More or less subconsciously, it came to represent for them the world of the Other, the unacknowledged and repressed areas of middle-class sexuality and the subconscious” (*Naturalistic Inner-City Novel* 4). Even more than *actual* slumming, then, the *imaginative* slumming that occurs through the act of reading allows the individual to represent the slums in his or her own mix of grotesque fantasy and voyeuristic fascination.

Despite the widespread acknowledgement of the practice of slumming, these naturalist texts that otherwise seek to record the realities of the slum rarely feature the presence of characters slumming. Instead, the texts *themselves* enact the practice of slumming. In their representations of the slum, it would seem that the naturalists encountered essentially two options: to visit the slum in full recognition of one’s role as a tourist, or, perhaps the more popular option, to assume an insider status through the use of disguise, whereby only the reader is aware of the author’s true identity. As I will demonstrate, unlike Dunbar’s or Johnson’s texts, most naturalist works do not make slumming an explicit presence in the narrative, so learning more about the fears and desires that motivate these explorations requires analyzing those characters or narrators who relate these experiences.

William Dean Howells’s 1902 sketch, “The Midnight Platoon,” presents an incredibly limited view of the slums while providing a surprisingly insightful portrait of a man encountering

this other world; by focusing on the revelations of the latter, rather than the limitations of the former, we can better understand the fears and desires that motivate these kinds of encounters. The portrayal of a middle- or upper-class spectator “slumming” and his own psychological experiences of this action represents the narrative drive of the story; as is essentially true of all slumming tales—but almost never manifestly demonstrated—the spectator, not the slum, is the most important feature of the story. Although some critics, perhaps most notably Joseph Entin, have found Howells’s portrayal of the slums to be narrow and the man’s “position of privilege” to be “fundamentally unchallenged and unquestioned” (Entin 319), this seems to suggest that this was not, after all, the intention of the story. Howells’s story makes the spectator and his scopophilia the center of the narrative, placing its emphasis on his encounter with the slum as it records both his feelings upon approaching the lower classes and this visit’s subsequent affect on him. The man desires to witness a breadline, and he comes to the scene with an imagination full of preconceived images about the slums: “He imagined it very dramatic, and he was surprised to find it in his experience so largely subjective. If there was any drama at all it was wholly in his own consciousness” (154). This recognition of the subjectivity of the man’s experience of the slums is a radical departure from other narratives of slumming, highlighting as it does the role of the imagination in the production of the *idea* of the slum.

In addition to this acknowledgment of the role of the imagination in the production of the slum, Howells’s story also derives its uniqueness from the recognition of the *pleasure* that witnessing the slums affords the man. This is a “spectacle he had often promised himself the pleasure of seeing”:

Pleasure is the right word; for pleasure of the painful sort that all hedonists will easily imagine was what he expected to get from it; though upon the face of it

there seems no reason why a man should delight to see his fellow-men waiting in the winter street for the midnight dole of bread which must in some cases be their only meal from the last midnight to the next midnight. But the mere thought of it gave him pleasure, and the sight of it, from the very first instant. He was proud of knowing just what it was at once, with the sort of pride which one has in knowing an earthquake, though one has never felt one before. He saw the double file of men stretching up one street, and stretching down the other from the corner of the bakery where the loaves were to be given out on the stroke of twelve, and he hugged himself in a luxurious content with his perspicacity. (154-5)

This is a remarkable passage, both for its insight into the motivations behind the man's slumming as well as for its status as perhaps the only self-conscious literary commentary of its kind about slumming. The very question of what motivates members of the middle class to venture into the poor spaces of the inner city is essentially absent from this literature. This absence speaks to the alignment of the reader with his or her textual representative within the text, because the literature implicitly assumes that both share the desire to see this world to such a degree that it need not even be discussed. That the middle-class voyeur discovers a "pleasure" in the spectacle of the breadline indicates that the desire to witness this scene does not emerge from a reformist position, nor does it come simply from a desire for knowledge, although these are certainly part of the motivation. The pleasure comes from "knowing just what it was at once," of the reality of the breadline conforming so fully with his imagination of that scene, although given that the drama "was wholly in his own consciousness," differentiating the pleasure of the scene from the pleasure of his imagination becomes impossible. The man also derives a bodily pleasure, as he "hugged himself in a luxurious content with his perspicacity," indicating an almost sensual

pleasure felt upon observing this scene. The man wanted to “glut his sensibility in a leisurely study of the scene” (155), and his “heart beat with glad anticipation” (156) of witnessing this spectacle, further highlighting the bodily, sensuous, and perhaps even sexual enjoyment the man receives while contemplating the spectacle of the poor.

The position of the man in relation to the breadline creates an important tension between the spectator and his spectacle. Because the man rides in a coupe, “warmly shut against the sharp, wholesome Christmas-week weather” and “wrapped to the chin in a long fur overcoat” (155), there is no question of his identity becoming confused or blended with the poor he observes. However, his outsider status also leaves him exposed to the gaze of the poor, and indeed “their eyes seemed to pierce the coupe through and through” (160). As a consequence, he “was suddenly aware of a certain quality of representativity; he stood to these men for all the ease and safety that they could never, never hope to know. He was Society” (160). The man realizes that, to those in the breadline, he is as much an abstraction of “Society” as they are for him of “the Poor”; neither group sees the other, either individually or collectively, instead overlaying their own fantasy onto the physical reality they find.

The same year that Howells published “The Midnight Platoon,” Jack London embarked on his own slumming adventures in London’s East End, which he published the next year as *The People of the Abyss* (1903). London “spent seven weeks living in and writing about” (Peluso 55) the slums, disguising himself in filthy rags and worn out clothes to appear as though he were one of the poor, in order, London writes, “to know how those people are living there, and why they are living there, and what they are living for” (3). However, although London really did journey into the slums in order to write his book, his immersion in this world was probably less than he would have us imagine. In a letter “not to be passed on,” he wrote that he “gathered every bit of

the material, read hundreds of books and thousands of pamphlets, newspapers, and Parliamentary Reports, composed *The People of the Abyss*, and typed it all out, took two-thirds of the photographs with my own camera, took a vacation of one-week off in the country—and did it all in two months” (quoted in Stasz vii). Because the narrative only relates the slumming experiences, and not any of the extraneous but no less critical information about the text’s production or rapid composition, London’s story is closer to a fictional account than a factual representation. In *The People of the Abyss*, London’s narrator, a fictionalized version of himself, heroically enters into this terrifying unknown, peering into its darkest corners and relating his experiences back to the reader. This can be seen in the descriptions of the slum itself, which, despite being a real space into which he actually immerses himself, he repeatedly describes as an otherworldly region. For example, before he embarks, he asks some of his friends to tell him what they know of the East End: “‘But we know nothing of the East End. It is over there, somewhere.’ And they waved their hands vaguely in the direction where the sun on rare occasions may be seen to rise” (3). It is not an actual space, then, so much as a fictitious territory that can only be explored through the imagination. Although the narrative emerges from London’s actual experiences, the narration of these events transforms the real spaces and real people into grotesque fantasies of poverty and perverse visions of otherness.

The people that London finds inhabiting this space only reinforces the sense of alterity implied by the narrator’s friends’ vague hand gestures that describe the slums. He writes of the streets being filled with “a new and different race of people, short of stature, and of wretched or beer sodden appearance” (6), a “race of people” he also describes as an “army of ghouls” with “squat, misshapen bodies” that “resemble some vile spawn from underground” (109). As horrible as the reality of the East End slums were at the turn of the century, London’s nightmarish vision

transforms these people into fantastic creatures that seem scarcely human. Indeed, part of his project is to reveal the devastating effects of poverty on London's citizens, but in doing so these people are distorted into grotesque caricatures, barely recognizable as sharing a common ancestry with the narrator or the reader and therefore difficult to pity because of their extreme otherness. Instead of creating opportunities for sympathy, *The People of the Abyss* gives the imagination free reign, as the voyeuristic narrator peeks into this other world only to find his own morbid fantasies brought to life, consequently obliterating the horrific reality of the East End.

Throughout most of the text, the narrator assumes a disguise of a down-and-out American sailor so that he can experience the slums first hand. This ostensibly provides an insider status that allows him to see a more authentic vision of the slums, but despite being granted greater access to these spaces the narrator in his rags does not seem to see this world from a perspective that differs much from Howells's man in the carriage. At one point in the text, however, he inexplicably chooses not to wear his slumming disguise, a change that produces even greater rhetorical exaggerations that consequently distance him still further from the slum dwellers. As the now modestly-dressed narrator descends into the East End, he finds even describing what he sees difficult:

It is rather hard to tell a tithe of what I saw. Much of it is untellable. But in a general way I may say that I saw a nightmare, a fearful slime that quickened the pavement with life, a mess of unmentionable obscenity that put into eclipse the 'nightly horror' of Piccadilly and the Strand. It was a menagerie of garmented bipeds that looked something like humans and more like beasts, and to complete

the picture, brass-buttoned keepers kept order among them when they snarled too fiercely. (180)

This “nightmare” world is wholly alien, clearly meant to be dramatically set off from the “real” world of middle-class respectability. Even the police are interwoven into this phantasmagoria, acting as “brass-buttoned keepers” of these creatures. And yet despite it being “untellable,” London’s narrator does seem to take a perverse enjoyment in the descriptions of the poor, delightfully piling on the hyperbolic adjectives: “And there were others, strange, weird faces and forms and twisted monstrosities that shouldered me on every side, inconceivable types of sodden ugliness, the wrecks of society, the perambulating carcasses, the living deaths” (182). London presents a grotesque nightmare of the slum, a hallucination that seems to owe more to an active imagination than actual experience. For a text that ostensibly sets out to understand the poor and “what they are living for,” the work seems rather unconcerned with depictions of the reality of the slum.

When we reconsider slumming as largely a complex imaginative act—as the examples of Howells and London have demonstrated—then the slumming that these texts engage in can be understood as leading to an “othering” of the slum world and its inhabitants. This use of another group or space to construct a fictive “them” as an imaginative contrast to “us” resembles Edward Said’s theory of Orientalism. In Said’s model, the Orient “helped to define Europe (or the West) as its contrasting image, idea, personality, experience,” and yet this Orient is not “merely imaginative” but is in fact “an integral part of European *material* civilization and culture” (1-2). As Said explains, this imposition of one culture’s reality onto another’s should not be surprising, “as cultures have always been inclined to impose complete transformations on other cultures, receiving these other cultures not as they are but as, for the benefit of the receiver, they ought to

be” (67). As the preceding examples sought to demonstrate, this model can productively be applied to these authors’ representations of the slums, as the poor parts of the city are similarly used as sites of fantasy for the middle class. The slums, then, are in large measure imaginatively transformed into fantasy worlds where the safe, bourgeois reader can imagine all sorts of perversely enjoyable tragedies and depraved activities. The readers voyeuristically peer into these worlds, to a great degree imagining whatever *they wish to see*. In *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, Stallybrass and White apply a version of Said’s model to the slums, with the poor being “othered” in order to define the middle and upper classes, which creates a peculiarly complex, interdependent relationship between the two groups. There exists a “striking ambivalence to the representations of the lower strata (of the body, of literature, of society, of place) in which they are both reviled and desired,” write Stallybrass and White, because “repugnance and fascination are the twin poles of the process in which a *political* imperative to reject and eliminate the debasing ‘low’ conflicts powerfully and unpredictably with a desire of this Other” (4-5). As a result, the poor are “instrumentally constitutive of the shared imaginary repertoires of the dominant culture” (6), such that

the ‘top’ attempts to reject and eliminate the ‘bottom’ for reasons of prestige and status, only to discover, not only that it is in some way frequently dependent upon that low-Other (in the classic way that Hegel describes in the master-slave section of the *Phenomenology*), but also that the top *includes* that low symbolically, as a primary eroticized constituent of its own fantasy life. The result is a mobile, conflictual fusion of power, fear and desire in the construction of subjectivity: a psychological dependence upon precisely those Others which are being rigorously

opposed and excluded at the social level. It is for this reason that what is *socially* peripheral is so frequently *symbolically* central. (5)

As Stallybrass and White reveal, despite the physical separation of the lower classes from the upper, the two are intertwined through their symbolic reliance on one another, specifically the upper classes' dependence on the lower. In this model, the slums are not just a site that the middle and upper classes can use to define their identity *against*—as in “the poor are slovenly and we are not”—but people and spaces where these social elite can imaginatively explore their own convoluted fantasies. We might recall Mitchell and Kirby's conversation in *Life in the Iron-Mills*, discussed in the previous section, where the former fancies seeing “the half-shut eyes of wild beasts, and the spectral figures their victims in the den” (2608), as evidence of the imaginative power these space hold for the privileged spectator.

When considered as portraying the fantasies imagined by the slumming visitors rather than the realities of the slum, the naturalists' depiction of the inner city and its inhabitants must be completely reassessed. As Burns notes, inner-city poverty and vice were real enough, but these facts become just the occasion for speculation, and representing these conditions accurately is not the objective for naturalist fiction. Instead, reading these works allows us to understand the fears and desires of the spectator, not the realities of late-nineteenth-century poverty. Naturalist texts do reveal much about the middle- and upper-class audiences of their time, and so in our analysis we must keep our focus on the spectator, not the spectacle, as this is where the true interest of naturalism lies.

Fantasy and Speculation in Stephen Crane's Sketches

Stephen Crane's urban sketches are both a continuation of and a response to the slumming impulse that marks these other works of naturalism, with the spectator in Crane's

work occupying a central, if contested, position. For example, *George's Mother*, the 1896 sequel of sorts to *Maggie*, tells the story of George Kelcey, another lodger in Maggie's tenement, who "had a vast curiosity" concerning the "impenetrable mystery" of the city, and how "he longed to comprehend it completely, that he might walk understandingly in its greatest marvels, its mightiest march of life, sin" (108-9). Crane clearly utilizes many of the same conventions found in authors such as Howells and London, but he does so, in part, in order to problematize this slumming and voyeuristic curiosity that pervades so much of the writing done on the nineteenth-century city. This is not to say, however, that he does not also engage in these voyeuristic impulses himself, which suggests just how deeply ingrained this kind of scopophilia has become by the turn of the century.

Crane's 1894 short story, "The Men in the Storm," illustrates the temptations and vulnerabilities of spectatorship. In the story, a "rather stout and very well clothed" man looks down from the window of his dry-goods shop with "an attitude of magnificent reflection" at "the snow-encrusted mob" gathered below (152). Crane then shifts perspective to the street: "from below, there was denoted a supreme complacency in him. It seemed that the sight operated inversely, and enabled him to more clearly regard his own environment, delightful relative" (152). From above, the man can complacently construct the lives of those below, mainly a mob of men waiting in line for a soup kitchen to open. But instead of being allowed to maintain his voyeur's gaze from the remove of his window, suddenly "one of the mob chanced to turn his head and perceive the figure in the window," at which point, after mocking the man's mustache, "many of the men turned then, and a shout went up. They called him in all strange keys. They addressed him in every manner, from familiar and cordial greetings to carefully-worded advice concerning changes in his personal appearance. The man presently fled, and the mob chuckled

ferociously like ogres who had just devoured something” (152). The gaze of the man in the window loses its power when the object of his vision challenges him by staring right back. In *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre explains how the process of seeing another man, and recognizing the man—the “other”—as object leads in turn to the recognition of being seen by the other as object, which finally makes possible the awareness of the Other-as-subject. This mutual recognition reveals the common dependence of subject and object formation on vision and the reciprocal nature of these constructions. As Joseph Entin points out, in “Men in the Storm” Crane “recognizes the provisional, protean nature of urban visual experience as well as the intersubjective mutuality such urban looking potentially implies—if the wealthy man relies upon the poor to serve as the negative representation of his own well-being, he ironically endows them with the power to disrupt his sense of privilege” (330). Within the scene itself this certainly holds true, and I would argue that the “intersubjective mutuality” of this urban vision resonates beyond the relationship between the man and the mob, all the way to our relationship with the text; readers become like the man in the window, experiencing a “loss of balance” and the momentary destabilization of the subject-object relationship.

In naturalist texts, we also stand like the wealthy man, gazing through our window onto the lives of the poor, imaginatively constructing their identity. The “we” and “our” here are problematic at best, as they obviously assume a static identity for the reader that everyone—Crane’s contemporary readers, myself, and yourself included—shares, and this is clearly false. But it is also inaccurate to assert that all readers’ identities are wholly unique or that a consideration of the shared ideology of the reader is impossible and therefore not worth pursuing; if nothing else, we can at the very least consider the idea of the reader these authors are

constructing, particularly since these texts all actively imagine our voyeuristic participation in their narratives. In discussing Crane alongside Jacob Riis, Keith Gandal writes that their books were aimed at a middle-class audience whose morality had previously forbidden anything but high-minded and moralistic accounts of the poor; here were books that gave middle-class readers the cheap street spectacle of the lower classes and affirmed the middle-class desire for what in some circles was still called ‘morbid’ entertainment. Even when looking at the poor, these new books said, it was fine to trample traditional moral concerns and search for excitement. (86)

The works of writers like Riis and Crane, and I would argue Howells and London, imply the existence of a homogeneous middle-class readership, one that would derive entertainment and excitement from the spectacle of the slums, but the creation of this readership was, in part, a reciprocal process: “nineteenth-century commentators, novelists, and painters invented and portrayed these ‘nomads’ [the lumpenproletariat] as a spectacle of heterogeneity. Yet through this spectacle of heterogeneity they shaped their own specular, homogenizing gaze” (Stallybrass 70). Indeed, the very representations of the urban poor “were responses not only to middle-class worries about the slums but also to middle-class anxieties about itself” (Gandal 13). In this way, the middle-class readers were *themselves* constructed by their vision of the slums, of their voyeuristic peering into the lives of the urban poor.

But as Crane reveals in “An Experiment in Misery” (1894), this reliance on vision alone to understand the lives of the urban poor is faulty. In this story, a well-to-do character dresses in the rags of the poor in order to observe the lives of the downtrodden, anticipating London’s experience by several years. The catalyst for this decision is a discussion between an older and younger gentleman, the latter of whom wonders “how [the tramp] feels” (154). This leads the

young man to dress in “rags and tatters” so that he can perhaps discover the tramp’s “point of view or something near to it” (154). Simply “regarding a tramp” does not make his mind or feelings accessible; in other words, vision does not innately grant access, as one must actually *be* that person to know them. Of course, this is an impossible task, but perhaps, as the younger man suggests, one can find “something near to it.” This desire leads him to live in the slums for a time, but there still remains a distance between the young man and the tramps he wishes to understand, an irredeemable gap between the watcher and the watched. For example, while attempting to sleep in a boarding house amidst cots littered with “the forms of men sprawled out, lying in death-like silence or heaving and snoring with tremendous effort, like stabbed fish” (159), the young man “lay carving biographies for these men from his meager experience” (161). As with London’s narrator, no matter how close he gets to being a “tramp,” even lying with them at night, he can only come so “near to it,” and the remaining distance must be crossed in his imagination; however, unlike the narrator of *The People of the Abyss*, the young gentleman *does* recognize this immeasurable divide. So although the youth sleeps in this awful boarding house and generally mingles with the other men of the slums, it is ultimately just a fantasy in which he briefly partakes; this is not his life, and assumedly he returns soon after to the realm of his own class (in fact we know he does because of the events of “An Experiment in Luxury,” the story’s sequel which follows him on the opposite trajectory). And like Crane’s narrator, we, too, are able to settle back into our comfortable lives after our voyeuristic sojourn in the lives of the poor, although whether we have truly seen the reality of the lower classes, or just our own projected fantasy of these lives, remains unanswered.

The Biography and Aesthetics of Stephen Crane

Crane's sketches explicitly address the problematic relationship that emerges between these spectators and spectacles in the urban slum, foregrounding as they do the specular and speculative nature of these encounters. However, this emphasis on the contentious nature of these confrontations helps distract our attention away from the equally enigmatic relationship of Crane as a naturalist author to his lower-class subject matter. Before beginning my final analysis of Crane's classic naturalist text, *Maggie*, which incorporates the spectatorial gaze in a less overt but no less problematic way, I want briefly to consider the biographical events surrounding the emergence of this work in order to try and more completely understand both the motivations of these voyeuristic, slumming naturalists as well as the affect this positioning of the spectator has for fictional representations of class. Born into the middle-class family of a Methodist preacher and his reformist wife, Crane's upbringing would not suggest any ready evidence for what interested him about the lower classes. However, his attraction to the "other half" was evident by the time he began attending Syracuse University in 1891, with this world already exhibiting a pull on his imagination. As the Syracuse correspondent for the *Tribune*, Crane used his role as a newspaperman to seek out spaces not normally accessible to someone of his background. He frequented the police station, as Linda Davis writes in *Badge of Courage*, and "watched prisoners brought in for petty crimes, and he talked with 'shambling figures who lurked in dark door-ways or deserted slum streets,' said a classmate" (33). Another classmate at Syracuse also describes him as "strolling the streets, looking at the faces that passed" or visiting the "Central Railroad station, where large numbers of people daily congregated," as men "always had a greater interest for him than books" ("Clarence Loomis Peaslee" 85). Crane's slumming brought him into contact with prostitutes and criminals, and his fascination with this other world appears to have been stronger than the appeal of bookish, university learning.

Similarly to the visitors described by Dunbar and Johnson, Crane seems to have been motivated by the desire “for colour and inspiration” (Dunbar 117), with the writing of *Maggie* thought to have begun sometime while Crane was still at Syracuse and wandering its less savory avenues. The novel’s composition demonstrates what might be considered one of the fundamental dualities of naturalism: the uncomfortable mix of imaginative flights of fantasy and real observation. Although Crane’s interest in the underworld was undoubtedly emerging during his time at Syracuse, his actual knowledge of the slums would have been rather minimal while working on the early draft of the novel. “His materials for *Maggie*,” asserts Alan Trachtenberg, “seem to have been derived almost entirely from written accounts of the lives of slum people by investigators like Riis and the evangelist T. Dewitt Talmage” (“Experiments in Another Country” 144), suggesting that, similarly to Crane’s other famous novel, *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895), this text was produced as much through speculation as observation. However, in 1892 he moved into an apartment in a New York City ghetto, between the infamous Bowery and the East River. Frederic Lawrence, one of his roommates in this bohemian experiment, writes of Crane during these early days in New York:

As the story [*Maggie*], a sordid tale of life in the tenements and the under-world took shape in Crane’s mind, he became enthusiastic, I with him, and we sallied forth into the mean streets and dangerous neighborhoods in search of the local color that would give life to the great work. Our search took us far afield. We explored the Bowery, then in the heyday of its multicolored existence. We saw life and incidentally spent many a pleasant evening in the old Atlantic Garden or at Blank’s, nearer Fourteenth street, in either of which one could enjoy good music and passable variety at the cost of a few glasses of beer. . . . All the time

Crane was observing details of this more or less seamy side of life and mentally grouping them. During the afternoon he wrote. (“Frederic Lawrence” 116-17)

These explorations represent the unusual complexity of Crane’s slumming, because in addition to merely wanting to witness this life, there remains the undeniable fact that he also lived in poverty during this time, making him both insider and outsider to the slum world he visited.

Crane’s biography blurs this boundary, as Davis writes that

as he experienced first-hand how the other half lived, living in poverty himself and soaking up the atmosphere for his novel about a girl of the slums, he was undoubtedly influenced by Riis’s work. Like an actor playing a part, he donned ragged clothes and entered a store on Beekman Street where Edmund [his brother] was working. He had already told his brother not to give him more than a nickel if he ever came in, and on this day, when he saw Stephen enter the store, Ed obliged him, silently dropping the coin into the hand of the hungry-looking beggar who approached him. (53)

Similar experiences become the subject of Crane’s city sketch, “An Experiment in Misery,” analyzed in the previous section, and together they underscore his desire to be a part of the slum, not just an outside observer. In the preface to *The People of the Abyss*, London writes that he went “with an attitude of mind which I may best liken to that of the explorer” (xv), and something of this kind of thrill of adventure may similarly underlie Crane’s desire to live out this bohemian fantasy: he essentially acts the part of the slum dweller even while voyeuristically peering into this other space.

Lawrence’s recollections also posit a definitive connection between Crane’s “sallies” and his writing: Crane explored the slums and wrote what he saw. That he wrote from life defines

both Crane's own literary theory and the general theories of realism being propounded at the time. Because he did not write any literary manifestos or spend much time articulating his philosophy of naturalism or realism, there exists very little record of Crane's aesthetic theory. In an 1896 letter to the editor of *Demorest's Family Magazine*, Crane wrote that the "most enduring literature was that which reflected life accurately" (230) and that "therefore I have tried to observe closely, and to set down what I have seen in the simplest and most concise way" (230). This seems to be a fairly traditional realist position—the assessment of Crane as a naturalist would not occur until the twentieth century—and shows Crane's support for the theories of William Dean Howells and Hamlin Garland, two of the major realist writers that Crane admired and who likewise took an interest in Crane's work. Indeed, in a letter to J. Herbert Welch from the same time period, Crane also contends that "the nearer a writer gets to life the greater he becomes as an artist, and most of my prose writings have been toward the goal partially described by that misunderstood and abused word, realism" (232). However, observing closely and getting nearer to life are not necessarily equivalent ideas; as Norris specifies, there is a difference between Accuracy and Truth, the latter of which, he argues, should be the basis for naturalism ("Frank Norris' Weekly Letter" 73).

But neither *Maggie* nor *The Red Badge of Courage* emerged solely from close observation, with the latter based almost exclusively on Crane's readings of popular magazine accounts of the war. Crane is not unusual in his failure to follow his own literary philosophy—in fact, the ability to claim one aesthetic project while practicing another seems a hallmark of literary naturalism—but his writings unquestionably do more than just reflect life accurately; he was equally dependent on the imaginative process as he fantasized about the private lives of those he encountered on the streets of the slum. That there are inconsistencies between Crane's

limited remarks about literary aesthetics and his actual practices should not be surprising; writers who have invested much more energy in articulating their theories have just as frequently fallen short. What is interesting about Crane's contradictions is that they are so fundamental to his actual aesthetic: as we shall see in the next section, his work creates a tension between a wish to remain wholly distant, separate from these grotesque worlds, and an almost erotic desire to possess them, to enter bodily into this alien environment and become one of its residents.

Challenging the Reader in Crane's *Maggie*

Crane self-published his first novel, *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets. A Story of New York* in 1893, an era that clearly was one of heightened interest in the slum life of the city. The basic outline of the story was nothing revelatory: a poor—but pretty—daughter of the tenements is seduced, turns to prostitution, and dies. This particular narrative of the fallen girl haunts much of popular writing on the slums, but what was shocking about the novel when it was published was its acutely brutal vision of life in the slums and Crane's lack of overt moralizing: “for Crane the plot was an occasion to tell a familiar tale with vividness, with exactness of observation” (Trachtenberg, “Experiments in Another Country” 145). However, throughout the novel, this “exactness of observation” also succumbs to a terrifying, nightmarish vision of the slums. Similarly to London's *The People of the Abyss*, the novel depicts the slum as a kind of grotesque fantasy, as evidenced by the extended description that begins the second chapter:

Eventually they entered into a dark region where, from careening buildings, a dozen gruesome doorways gave up loads to babies to the street and the gutter. A wind of early autumn raised yellow dust from cobbles and swirled it against an hundred windows. Long streamers of garments fluttered from fire-escapes. In all unhandy places there were buckets, brooms, rags and bottles. In the street infants

played or fought with other infants or sat stupidly in the way of vehicles.

Formidable women, with uncombed hair and disordered dress, gossiped while leaning on railings, or screamed in frantic quarrels. Withered persons, in curious postures of submission to something, sat smoking pipes in obscure corners. A thousand odors of cooking food came forth to the street. The building quivered and creaked from the weight of humanity stamping about in its bowels. (7)

The slum here is a “dark region,” unmapped and unknowable, less a real space than a nightmare vision, with even the city itself a personified, living creature as horrid as the people who stamp “in its bowels.” This hardly seems an example of Crane having “set down” what he has “seen in the simplest and most concise way”; instead he presents a terrifying, otherworldly vision of the city. Indeed, this kind of impressionistic language calls attention to the literariness of the passage, filled as it is with personified buildings and embroidered descriptions of “yellow dust” swirling “against an hundred windows.” These personifications and embellishments indicate a specific, subjective narrative point of view: rather than a clear-eyed, objective narration this is one man’s impressionistic vision of the nightmarish urban slum.

And it is, crucially, a *vision* of the city, representing a particular subjective interpretation of the city as grotesque nightmare. The role of vision occupies a pivotal role in the text, as everywhere eyes peer through doorways and out of windows, an emphasis that draws attention to both the subjectivity of the spectator and his own perverse interest in the spectacle of the slums. This watching starts at the beginning of the story, with Jimmie’s opening fight with the children of Devil’s Row—“from a window of an apartment house that upreared its form from amid squat, ignorant stables, there leaned a curious woman. Some laborers, unloading a scow at a dock at the river, paused for a moment and regarded the fight. The engineer of a passive tugboat hung lazily

to a railing and watched” (4)—and it continues to the final scenes in the tenement house after Maggie’s mother has learned of her daughter’s death: “The neighbors began to gather in the hall staring in at the weeping woman as if watching the contortions of a dying dog” (73). Gandal argues that “there is never any sense of unseemly voyeurism or violated decorum among the aggressive spectators in Crane’s Bowery, because excitement and pleasure are values there” (83), but does the aggression of the spectators actually alter the reality of their acts? In other words, just because everyone peeps through their windows to watch the events on the street, does it mean this behavior no longer represents an “unseemly voyeurism”? Gandal thinks not, but this seems to hinge on whether “decorum” has been “violated,” which is, as we saw in the previous chapter with the mutability of public-private space in Riis, difficult to evaluate in the slums. Mark Seltzer argues that “one discovers in the realist fascination with seeing, and not least in the spectacles of violence, and thrilled identification with representations, in the realist text, an eroticizing of power and of the power of making-visible” (96). The erotics of power derived from this type of watching, of “making-visible,” are hardly innocuous, which suggests that neither the aggressiveness of the spectators nor the lack of clear spatial boundaries mitigates the voyeurism that we find in Crane’s novel because neither alter the fundamental character of this looking: it is a gaze that seeks access to what should be forbidden, and merely because the slums do not provide a refuge from aggressive eyes does not mean that those sights should necessarily be public.

The two primary settings of *Maggie*, the tenement and the street, each offer slightly different opportunities for Crane to explore the spaces of the slum, and each are integral to his consideration of the voyeurism of the urban milieu. Similarly to the other texts analyzed both in this chapter and the previous one, Crane’s novel depicts the tenements as compromising the

distinction between public and private spaces. Most of these voyeurs' eyes belong to other tenants prying into the affairs of Maggie Johnson and her family, with "curious faces appear[ing] in the doorways" (14) to watch Maggie's parents' brawl or a "doorful of eyes" (61) observing Maggie's banishment from her home. But despite the synecdochic nature of these disembodied gazes, an awareness nevertheless exists on the part of the watched that they are being observed. For example, when her drunk mother "floundered about in the lower hall," a "door was opened and a collection of heads peered curiously out, watching her," but when she confronted them "it was slammed hastily in her face and the key was turned" (36). These eyes, with their peering curiosity, signal the prurient curiosity of the eyes of the reader, as well, who likewise watch Maggie's mother's drunk floundering with sensationalized interest; they are, then, "our" eyes in the sense that Crane assumes them to be ours, and similarly to the mob in "The Men in the Storm," Maggie's mother's confrontation of their voyeuristic gaze challenges the unidirectional nature of this vision.

These "curious faces" and "doorfuls of eyes"—and they are still, crucially, *our* eyes—play an important role in Maggie's downfall, as well, because both her crime and her punishment are revealed through their gaze. An old lady "trembling with eagerness to tell her tale" informs Jimmie of the conversation she overheard that incriminates Maggie:

I was by me door las' night when yer sister and her jude feller came in late, oh, very late. An' she, the dear, she was a-cryin' as if her heart would break, she was. It was deh funnies' ting I ever saw. An' right out here by me door she asked him did he love her, did he. An' she was a-cryin' as if her heart would break, poor t'ing. An' him, I could see by deh way what he said it dat she had been askin' orften, he says: 'Oh, hell, yes,' he says, says he, 'Oh, hell, yes.' (39-40)

The old woman relates an incredibly private scene to Jimmie, and in some ways it is even more private than if we had witnessed Maggie's loss of innocence; she is exposed in a different way, obviously, but one that is profoundly more embarrassing and sad. Although only the old woman overhears the conversation, soon everyone in the tenement knows of Maggie's ruin, as the "loud, tremendous sneering of the mother brought the denizens of the Rum Alley tenement to their doors" (61), where "through the open doors curious eyes stared in at Maggie," and "children ventured into the room and ogled her, as if they formed the front row at a theatre" (61). This compelling comparison to the theater gives a more familiar shape to the scene transpiring, and yet it is important to consider that this is *not* a theater; these tenants are watching the private drama in a private residence, a distinction which Crane highlights through this very comparison. Again, however, transgressions occur between the boundary separating the watcher and the watched: "a baby, overcome with curiosity concerning this object at which they were all looking, sidled forward and touched her dress, cautiously, as if investigating a red-hot stove. Its mother's voice rang out like a warning trumpet. She rushed forward and grabbed her child, casting a terrible look of indignation at the girl" (61). The child does not understand that Maggie is to be watched only, and that this kind of gaze demands distance and passivity. Finally, the same peering eyes that destroyed Maggie mark her exit from the tenement: "she went before open doors framing more eyes strangely microscopic, and sending broad beams of inquisitive light into the darkness of her path" (62). This fascinating final clause suggests that rather than "knowledge" or "truth," "inquisitiveness" is light and that *it* will light her dark path. This should come as no surprise given the number of peering eyes in Crane's text, but it nonetheless reveals the centrality of this kind of curious gaze. Although tempting to speak of a scene like this in the more familiar "spectacle" and "spectator" terminology, as this last line suggests, these spectators

have a much more active and complicated relationship to their spectacle, in this case Maggie: their gaze determines her fate.

In the streets we see the emergence of a more sexualized gaze, reminiscent in some ways of the sensational texts discussed in the previous chapter, where a boy like Jimmie's "occupation for a long time was to stand on street-corners and watch the world go by, dreaming blood-red dreams at the passing of pretty women" (16). This sexualized gaze becomes particularly prevalent once Maggie falls from grace. Soon after Pete abandons her, she finds herself on the street, subject to the "calculating eyes" (65) of the men passing by, and several months later she has become just another "girl of the painted cohorts of the city," throwing "changing glances at men who passed her, giving smiling invitations" (66). In a similar way to the depiction of white women who were drawn to the Club in *The Autobiography of an Ex-Coloured Man*, this representation of the slum portrays it as site of sexual promiscuity, of lax social mores; in the slum, every man is a mark, every woman for sale.

Framing the vision of the entire novel is the narrator, whose point of view provides an important perspective for understanding the relationship between visibility and the slums. The narrator, particularly his ironic tone, has often been cited as one of the distinguishing features of *Maggie*, and this irony results in the distance between the narrator and the characters he observes. Howard in fact uses Crane's *Maggie* as an example of the separation between the spectator and spectacle in naturalism, with the "unreasoning characters" juxtaposed against a "highly sophisticated narrator" (105), which results in "a line between the narrator and the reader and the characters" (111). This is evident from the outset of *Maggie*, with it clear even in Jimmie's opening battle with the "howling urchins" that the inhabitants of Rum Alley with their "dey'll get yehs" and "dese micks can't make me run" would never speak of an "infantile

countenance” that was “livid with fury” or of “barbaric trebles” being sworn by “true assassins” (1). Beginning a pattern repeated throughout the novel, the narrator transforms a pathetic scene of urban degradation into a romantic, epic battle through the use of elevated language. Because of the discrepancy between the rhetoric and the subject matter, Giles assert that this is a “mock-chivalric language” that “calls attention to the implied narrator’s role as tour guide of a distinctly foreign ghetto, and the condescension inherent in such language further distances the narrator from the world he observes for the middle-class reader” (“Grotesque City” 324). According to Giles, because of the narrator’s highly ironic perspective, the reader becomes similarly distanced from the characters and events of the novel, creating a touristic perspective as the reader and narrator peer interestedly into the lives of Maggie and company.

While it seems clear that the narrator’s tone and perspective create a distance from the characters, and that this distance constructs the way that the reader approaches this spectacle as well, there are several interrelated points of Giles’s that are worth interrogating further because they represent somewhat standard views of Crane’s work: is the narrator’s language consistently ironic, and is this viewpoint touristic? Regarding the first question, the language of the narrator undoubtedly separates the narrator from the action of the narrative, and at times the novel ironically mocks its characters. For example, the descriptions of Pete, seemingly from Maggie’s perspective, that he is “one whose knuckles could defiantly ring against the granite of law,” or that “he was a knight” (24) stands as obvious examples, since Pete seems to be anything but a heroic figure. If read ironically, this description embodies Maggie’s false idealization of her world; the irony therefore emerges from the incongruity of the reality Maggie lives with the idealized perspective through which she views it. Trachtenberg argues that there is “sufficient irony to make it apparent that the characters themselves viewed their world melodramatically,

through lenses blurred with the same false emotions they inspired—as ‘low life’—in the many popular tellers of their tale” (“Experiments in Another Country” 145). If we also interpret the narrator as a touristic guide, than this perspective makes a certain amount of sense: he takes on the role of the experienced, mocking observer who can induct his fellow visitors into a sordid and gruesome world, all while maintaining a comfortable rhetorical distance. But similar to Howells and London, and unlike the sensational fiction or even the reformist work examined in chapter one, there is no “we” that is consciously addressed by the narrator, no explicit acknowledgment that the narrator is accompanied on this slumming excursion. And without a tour to guide, for whose enjoyment is this irony meant? Instead, this ironic tone seems intended as much to mock the characters’ melodramatic vision as the spectator-narrator’s—and, by implication, the reader’s—imaginative overlaying of the real slum with its grotesquely dramatic fantasy version; the distance created by the narrator’s irony reveals his own distorted vision, a vision much like that found in the slumming figures of Howells and London.

Chapter seventeen’s famous portrayal of the downward spiral of Maggie’s career as a prostitute challenges the narrator’s ability to maintain this distance, and in the process calls attention to the very distance he had wished to preserve. In this chapter the slum again becomes otherworldly: “She went into the blackness of the final block. The shutters of the tall buildings were closed like grim lips. The structures seemed to have eyes that looked over her, beyond her, at other things. Afar off the lights of the avenues glittered as if from an impossible distance” (68). These impressionistic similes and personifications signal both the narrator’s distinct presence and our own as well, a presence made problematic by the chapter’s disturbing narrative progression. We follow Maggie, or the prostitute who acts as a surrogate for her, along the streets as she invites men with her glances, and eventually she does, in the terms of sensational

fiction, catch a “victim.”¹¹ But instead of it being an unsuspecting young man seduced by the manipulative prostitute, as happens frequently in sensational texts of this period, we are instead invited to imaginatively consider the ensuing “festivities of prostitution” (69), as George Foster describes them in *New York by Gas-Light*, with a “huge fat man in torn and greasy garments” with a body that “shook like that of a dead jelly fish” (68). The “fat man” section, included in the original 1893 self-published version of the text but excised from the 1896 reissue of *Maggie*, challenges both the ironic tone and the touristic role of the narrator. Whereas with the sensationalists, such as Buntline and Foster discussed in the previous chapter, we followed young, pretty things with “voluptuous bosoms half-naked” (Foster 70) to their rooms and were tacitly encouraged to gaze through their windows if we wanted to see more, in Crane’s text we follow our prostitute only to witness her encounter a “great figure,” a man of “great rolls of red fat” and “brown, disordered teeth” (68); it is a disturbing and unsettling scene to encounter, particularly as it depicts the last we will see of our Maggie who “blossomed in a mud puddle” (20). What is particularly unsettling about this scene is that it is so anti-sexual at a moment where, based on the previous half century of urban fiction, we expect to be tantalized; Crane avoids a sensationalized treatment of sex, opting instead for only a grim picture of the repulsive nature of prostitution. Giles writes that “Crane’s central problem in writing the novel was showing Maggie descending into the pit of prostitution without destroying the reader’s image of her innocence and romanticism,” and that “he attempts to do this by consistently depicting her as a victim and by narratively distancing himself *and the reader* from her in the climactic chapter 17” (*Naturalistic Inner-City* 23). However, this chapter also seems to be the most radically

¹¹ The prostitute in this chapter is never named, and even Maggie’s career as a prostitute is never explicitly confirmed in the text. However, because of the positioning of this chapter between the last time the reader encounters Maggie alive and the final announcement of her death, almost all critics assume that this is Maggie, or, because that fact is impossible to confirm, read her as another woman whose tragic arc parallels the title character’s and who thus acts as a surrogate for all “fallen women,” Maggie included.

intimate of all the chapters and the most impossible to avoid, as the fat man makes Maggie's fate both horrific and captivating, an uncomfortable mix of emotions for the reader. Seltzer suggests that "Crane insists on the ways in which the power of seeing is quickly disrupted by the pleasures of seeing: the very absorption in, even intoxication with, seeing opens the possibility of violent loss of balance or *disempowerment*" (97), and Maggie's final scene would seem to suggest just this kind of "loss of balance" for the both the narrator and reader who, up to this moment, were absorbed in the act of watching her but now must recognize the interruption of the voyeuristic fantasy they had been creating.

Maggie's brother Jimmie "studied human nature in the gutter, and found it no worse than he thought he had reason to believe it" (16), and this novel reveals a similar state of affairs for readers—or Crane's idea of his readers: when peering into Maggie's life, they have a certain expectation of what they will find there, that it will be as bad as one could imagine urban poverty but also exactly as expected with its clichéd "long streamers of garments" (7) fluttering from fire-escapes. However, despite following the same basic narrative structure of so much slum fiction, the details of Crane's story of the fallen woman are more brutal and less salacious than previous tellings. Crane accomplishes this by emphasizing the space of the slum as largely imaginatively constructed, continually forcing his reader to compare the slum of their fantasies to the slum Crane depicts, and the slum of Crane's novel to the empirical realities of urban poverty.

Naturalism and the Problem of the Spectator

Writing in a letter of his disappointment with *Maggie*'s initial public and critical reception—"nobody seemed to notice it or care for it"—Crane goes on to proclaim, "Poor Maggie! she was one of my first loves" ("To J. Herbert Welch" 232). It is not entirely clear from Crane's letter whether he is referring to the text itself or to the novel's titular character, but he

does offset an earlier mention of the text with quotation marks, and because these subsequent references to Maggie are not marked by any punctuation it appears that he is referring to the character, not the book. As his first novel, one way for accounting for Crane's love of Maggie is simply as that of the artist towards his work, and as the most obvious answer this is, in a way, the most satisfying. And yet this is a deeply troubling novel, full of violent abuse and sexual exploitation, subjects which are, to say the least, hard to love.

But Crane's expression of love for Maggie suggests the perverse mix of desire and revulsion that has characterized so much of this slumming literature. His attachment to the character reveals a compassion for her that the narration's seemingly ironic detachment does not initially make evident. Indeed, Maggie seems to pose a special challenge to Crane, as the novel's callous commentary rarely subjects her to the same kind of cruel mockery that it reserves for Maggie's mother or the male characters such as Jimmy and Pete. There persists an inability to remain wholly unconcerned about the plight of this character, with this girl who "blossomed in a mud puddle" exhibiting an allure and imaginative pull that almost allows her to transcend the grotesqueries of the slum, only to be finally and horribly subsumed by them. Crane's "love" for Maggie may be ambivalent, but the narrator clearly takes an interest in her that goes beyond his typical cold-blooded appraisals. This fascination of the narrator, like that of all spectators in naturalist texts, seems to give shape to this novel of voyeuristic fantasy, but at the same time it prevents the narrator from fully transforming Maggie into simply a figure in his own personal fantasy.

Unlike many texts which take the lower classes as their inspiration, then, *Maggie* exposes a glimmer of humanity in its envisagement of the title character. But this surviving glimmer reveals a tension that is in fact fundamental to naturalism in general. On the one hand, the

process of fantastical reconstruction in many of these texts threatens to convert certain characters into the mere imaginatively manipulated pawns of other characters, of the narrators, and even of readers. Class differences in these texts give the voyeurs—narrators, characters, readers—the occasion *and* the excuse for their scopophilia, as they pry into the lives of others and attempt to imaginatively construct these worlds. On the other hand, however, these are not simply fantasies enabled by class difference, but fantasies that are haunted by their own status *as fantasy*; this is revealed in moments such as Kirby’s hallucination of “wild beasts” and “spectral figures” in *Life in the Iron-Mills* or the “fat man” in *Maggie*, moments that expose the spectator’s failed attempt to imaginatively overlay his or her own fantasy on the slum’s cruel world. The voyeuristic fantasizing that gives birth to complex confluences of grotesque and erotic fantasy never fully succeeds, a failure that reveals the limitations of the spectator’s ability to control the terms of these fantasies. Anxiety over the potential loss of authority originally motivated the spectators to attempt to dictate the terms of these fantasies, and ironically it is this same lack of control that these failed fantasies ultimately confirm.

Chapter Three: The Perversion of the Clinical Gaze

This chapter investigates the voyeuristic perversion inherent in the supposedly clinical objectivity of the naturalist gaze. As argued in the previous chapter, naturalist texts formally construct a division between the observer and the observed, separating the narrator—and consequently the reader—from the characters he or she watches. This division between spectator and spectacle, which usually occurs along lines of class and race, provides a space for authors and readers to explore their own illicit fantasies involving these “othered” characters and their inner-city environments. Although problematic for a number of reasons, naturalism’s ventures into wanton fantasy are made even more complicated because of the genre’s legacy with scientific naturalism. Traditionally literary naturalism has been aligned with scientific naturalism, and so consequently naturalist narrators have been interpreted as presenting the facts of the story with clinical neutrality, representing an intentional break from the romantic tradition of “‘friendly’ authorial narrators” (Hochman 4). Instead of opening a space for unrestricted desire, then, this split between the spectator and spectacle has been understood as granting these narrator-spectators a clinical detachment from the objects of their gaze. Because naturalism engages with both of these opposing characteristics, the primary goal of this chapter is to understand how the concurrent expressions of illicit fantasy and a scientific, clinical gaze jointly define naturalism.

In the nineteenth century, an obsession with objectivity dominated the sciences, and the naturalist gaze emerges as one manifestation of this “clinical gaze,” as Michel Foucault describes it. One branch of science which relied increasingly on observation was medicine; as Foucault details in *The Birth of the Clinic*, the development of medical rationality in the late eighteenth and early nineteenth century led to “an empirical vigilance receptive only to the evidence of

visible contents” (xiii). This focus on “visible contents” consequently made the eye “the depository and source of clarity” (xiii). The belief in objectivity through observation that prevailed in the sciences similarly led the naturalists to deploy a medicalized or clinical gaze in their art, and this detached perspective became integral to the formal structure of their work: as discussed in the previous chapters, the implied viewers (in art) or third-person narrators (in literature) suppose a neutral figure as the owner of the gaze, and in the context of naturalism’s privileging of science, these figures have often been interpreted as dispassionate doctors or scientists surveying their subjects. However, when the clinical gaze shifts from the “real” world of living doctors to the aesthetic world of representation, the artists’ conscious construction of scenes and situations invoking this clinical gaze reveals the perversity of the gaze now that its original intentions—e.g. diagnosis—have been removed. Instead of a neutral gaze seeking a cure, the clinical gaze as manifested in these naturalist works reveals how frequently the supposedly benign gaze can be found peering at naked women, sexual activity, and generally sexually suggestive subjects. The voyeuristic perversity of this clinical gaze also implicates the viewers outside of the work in complex ways as they are compelled to accept this voyeuristic gaze as their own.

I begin this chapter by examining the clinical gaze and its complex relationship to literary naturalism. Starting in the 1870s and lasting through the first decades of the 1900s, realism and then naturalism proliferated widely in both literature and painting. Like most artistic movements, they were both greatly influenced by concurrent developments in other branches of thought, and central to these artists’ vision of their art were the “scientific tendencies of the period” that “were characterized by a repudiation of previously accepted propositions and by a reliance on observation, experience, and facts; the century may be described as analytic, intellectual, and

interrogative, in search of truth and exactness” (Ahnebrink 269). Even in light of their oft-cited failure to actually objectively represent the world, these texts nevertheless have an investment in those “scientific tendencies,” particularly the dependence on observation for understanding; as David Shi notes, these artists “assumed that to see was to know” (86). At stake is not the issue of whether the artists *did* objectively represent their environment, but that they *believed* objective representation possible. This belief led to a peculiar positioning of the spectator and a conviction that their gaze could, like the neutral scientist’s, be justifiably turned towards any subject matter they so chose, from the spectacular to the sordid to the seamy. Although central to both realism and naturalism, this enthusiasm for objective observation becomes even more problematic for the naturalists because of their depictions of, in Frank Norris’s words, a “vast and terrible drama that works itself out in unleashed passions, in blood, and in sudden death” (“Zola” 72). In other words, realists similarly deployed a clinical gaze, but their work tended to focus on respectable middle-class drawing rooms rather than sordid tenements, making their deployment of a flawed objective gaze was somewhat less problematic.

Because many of Thomas Eakins’s paintings focus intensely on the sciences, visuality, and the body, his work provides a useful point of entry for analyzing the intertwining of the clinical and naturalist gazes. Specifically, two of his most famous works, *The Gross Clinic* (1875) and *The Agnew Clinic* (1889), depict doctors in the clinic, performing surgeries in front of audiences filled with students. Although usually defined as a realist painter, Eakins stands out from his contemporaries—such as John Singer Sargent and Mary Cassatt—exactly because of his unusually grotesque subject matter, and with these two paintings the implicit perversity of the medical gaze becomes revealed: the sexualized nature of the patients who occupy the stage of the clinic make the objectivity of the clinical gaze impossible. The gaze here becomes increasingly

complex and twisted through the multiplicities of audience responses, both internal and external to the paintings: the doctors and students, all men, peering at the half-naked bodies; a lone woman in each who presents an alternative to this male gaze; and the audience looking at the paintings who might assume or least identify with the different masculine or feminine perspectives suggested by the figures within the works. Feminist film theory will provide a useful framework for examining how masculine and/or feminine spectator positions alter the interpretation of these sexualized images.

After examining the clinical gaze in Eakins's work and outlining basic issues pertaining to audience identity, I will look at how Frank Norris's posthumously published *Vandover and the Brute* (1914) deploys the same type of clinical gaze in naturalist fiction that Eakins utilizes in his realist paintings. Norris documents the disintegration of a man's mind with both clinical meticulousness and voyeuristic fascination. The novel suggests that Vandover's degeneration originates with his glimpse of an encyclopedia entry on obstetrics and that this seemingly scientific representation of female anatomy initiates his collapse into sexual promiscuity. Vandover cannot maintain the clinical objectivity required of a great artist, but it is questionable whether the novel can either: the reader becomes similarly positioned to observe the main character's perverse degeneration from a voyeuristic position.

I conclude with an examination of the way that this perverted, clinical voyeurism operates in Norris's *McTeague* (1899) and the way that the author establishes a specific voyeuristic perspective through the narration. This allows further exploration of these issues of audience identity, with the novel intentionally inscribing the reader with a particularly voyeuristic perspective in order to ultimately implicate the reader's own prurient curiosity. Because of its foregrounding of questions surrounding the masculine and feminine gaze,

McTeague provides an opportunity to investigate the full implications of the perverse, clinical gaze for the reader. The narrative of degeneration therefore becomes less about the oft-cited deterministic philosophy of naturalism than about allowing the reader-voyeur to observe the mental and physical deterioration of those “brutes” whose salacious downfalls both engage and repulse. A psychological, clinical voyeurism persists in Norris’s work, as the reader peers into the psyches of the variously disturbed characters of his fiction with an uncomfortable mix of revulsion and pleasure. This strange mixture manifests itself, as well, in the different gendered responses that these voyeuristic moments elicit, with the identity of the reader producing potentially uncomfortable identifications with both the voyeur and the object of the gaze, a fracturing of vision that ultimately has far-reaching implications for the way we interpret naturalist texts.

Representing the Clinical Gaze

Realism and naturalism came to the forefront of the arts in the United States in the 1870s and 1880s for a variety of reasons, including the advent of photography, the rise of the middle class, and the psychological toll of the brutal Civil War on prewar idealism. The culminating impact of these changes was the sense that the “sublime landscapes, historical subjects, and allegorical themes so popular during the antebellum era now seemed bankrupt” (Shi 128). Artistic focus turned away from sweeping, romantic landscapes, replaced instead by an interest in the contemporary “real” and modern world, a world that was becoming increasingly technological and increasingly urban. In addition to a shift in topics and themes, these artists’ approach to their subject matter changed as well, with art increasingly being seen as an avenue to empirical truths rather than symbolic ones.

These representational changes occurred largely because of the transposition of the language and methods of the sciences into the arts. This is best represented by French naturalist Emile Zola who, argues Lars Ahnebrink, drew upon Claude Bernard's scientific treatise *Introduction à l'étude de la médecine expérimentale* (1865), which established "medicine as an exact science" through the "experimental method," for his own theory of the relationship between science and literature, *Le Roman expérimental* (1880). For Zola, "literature, like medicine, was no longer an art; it was a science," and "by applying the method of the scientist to literature, he hoped to raise the novel to the level of science, since to him and to others of his time the voice of science was ultimate truth" (Ahnebrink 22). In this new approach the artist was to behave like the doctor, "to be 'as cold as a vivisectionist at a lecture,' abstain from comment, never show his own personality, and never turn to the reader for sympathy" (Ahnebrink 26). One method for accomplishing this new perspective would be to eschew the romantic tradition of the narrator as friendly confidant, instead depicting modernity's empirical truths with dispassionate, distant objectivity.

Literary scholars have long been critical of the naturalists' successes in achieving these goals, however, and contemporary criticism has attempted to simply eliminate objectivity as one of the intentions of the naturalists. Eric Carl Link, for example, argues that "the problem with trying to describe and define literary naturalism through too close a connection with scientific naturalism, as Zola did with his description of the experimental novel," is that "such a definition does not accurately describe the fiction itself" (14). Although it is certainly true that the fictions themselves reveal naturalism's failures to achieve objective representations of reality, this does not change the naturalists' project *as they imagined it*, and, consequently, returning to this question of the naturalist's quest for an objective gaze remains productive. Confidence in the

existence of empirical truths, and the reliance on observation to discover those truths, remain essential characteristics of naturalism, even if all the while they are being undermined by the countercurrent of subjective, speculative fantasy.

Central to the naturalists' engagement with the sciences was the shared belief in the possibilities of objective observation. Vision has a long history of being the preferred method for the "acquisition of valid knowledge of nature," and "science and medicine have been explicitly concerned with the correct interpretation of visual signs, and skill in those fields was pre-eminently seen as a form of visual acuteness" (Jordanova 91). This type of objective medical vision was further codified in the nineteenth-century clinic, which "became the paradigmatic scene for representing medical empiricism: the space was public and the object of study, often the female body, was laid out for all to view" (Browner 141). In Foucault's *The Birth of the Clinic: An Archaeology of Medical Perception*, he suggests that the transformation of the field of medicine in the eighteenth and early nineteenth centuries led to the formation of a new type of "clinical gaze," as "medical rationality plunges into the marvelous density of perception, offering the grain of things as the first face of truth, with their colours, their spots, their hardness, their adherence" (xiii). This deployment of the gaze as a method for empirical study comes about because of a belief in its objectivity:

The observing gaze refrains from intervening: it is silent and gestureless.

Observation leaves things as they are; there is nothing hidden to it in what is given. The correlative of observation is never the invisible, but always the immediately visible, once one has removed the obstacles erected to reason by theories and to the senses by the imagination. In the clinician's catalogue, the

purity of the gaze is bound up with a certain silence that enables him to listen.

(107)

Foucault's description of the clinician's observing gaze articulates many of the commonly held assumptions about the possibilities of vision's objectivity. There is a belief in "the great myth of a pure Gaze that would be pure Language: a speaking eye" which "would scan the entire hospital field, taking in and gathering together each of the singular events that occurred within it," and this "speaking eye would be the servant of things and the master of truth" (Foucault 114-5). The power of this non-interventionist, noninvasive gaze that is a "speaking eye" lies in its ability to discover the truth; indeed, "the clinical gaze is a gaze that burns things to their furthest truth. . . . the clinic no longer has simply to read the visible; it has to discover its secrets" (Foucault 120). For the doctor, these "secrets" are the keys to the cure, and discovering the cure for the disease ostensibly justifies the otherwise potentially invasive qualities of the clinical gaze.

In literature, deploying the clinical gaze meant "invoking, however tacitly, a complicated system of techniques, conceptual configurations, presuppositions, and protocols of interpretation that enable one to take signs as symptoms and thereby to impose a particular order on reality" (Rothfield 175). Many cite Gustave Flaubert's *Madame Bovary* (1857) as a paradigmatic example of the literary version of the clinical gaze because of the text's surgical quality—in 1857 Sainte-Beuve wrote that "Flaubert holds the pen as others do the scalpel" (quoted in Nochlin, 43)—as the author unsentimentally, and at times brutally, treats his characters as mere objects of cold analysis. Seltzer notes this trend in realism as well, observing that there are "frequent associations of later nineteenth-century realism with a sort of dissection, vivisection, or surgical opening of the body," which are part of an "imperative of making everything, including interior states, visible, legible, and governable" (95). The clinical gaze bestows a sense of

justified privilege on the subject who wields it, thus imparting naturalists with a new level of purpose and authority: they are now the doctor tasked with discovering the disease, relentless and uninhibited in their quest for truth.

Although an admirable goal, the pursuit of the cure at least to some degree becomes—or has the potential to become—a rationalization for doctors peering into the secrets of their patients, be they secrets of the body, of the mind, or of their private lives. This is not to question the doctor's benevolent goals, but to simply call into question how fully one can *become* one's role or profession: as a doctor the gaze may be pure, but as a man or a woman the gaze wavers between pure and deviant desires. In naturalism this tensionality becomes manifest because there is no longer even the façade of the quest for the cure; when the clinical gaze is thematized in art, the latent deviancy of this type of vision becomes increasingly visible. Without a disease to ostensibly cure, the clinical gaze in the naturalist work is free to focus on whatever the artist desires.

The deviancy of the aestheticized medical gaze can be seen dramatically in the paintings of Thomas Eakins. One of the leading American realist painters of the period, Eakins focused on creating ruthlessly realistic depictions of his subjects, emphasizing in particular the human body. His depictions of men are detailed studies of human anatomy at work in the everyday actions of modern life, such as rowing in *Max Schmitt in a Single Scull* (1871) or lounging on or diving off rocks in *Swimming* (1884-5). Although traditionally defined as a realist, Eakins produced radically different work than his realist contemporaries in large part by training his clinical gaze on the more varied, less conventional aspects of modernity; consequently, his belief in the clinical nature of realism, of realism as a scientific endeavor as well as an artistic one, sheds light on the literary naturalists who not only held similar aesthetic convictions but also depicted life

outside of the middle-class drawing room. Similarly to the doctors in the clinic, Eakins sought greater insight into the human body through “thorough anatomical knowledge and psychological observation” (Simpson 27), as testified by his archive of photographic studies of subjects, many of them nudes. In addition, he prepared numerous preparatory sketches that reveal a highly schematic composition process that emphasized “system rather than perceptual generalization” (Simpson 27) and which served as the basis for many of his paintings. This type of clinical gaze also enters Eakins’s work thematically, with vision often occupying a central role in his paintings. Because his doctors, athletes, and other various figures of modern life often linger between actions, the gazes of his figures frequently become the primary narrative action of his paintings. The thematization of the clinical gaze allows Eakins to consider the gaze itself, removed from its ulterior, curative functions.

In the process of composition Eakins seems to have utilized the same “silent and gestureless” form of observation Foucault describes of the clinical gaze, but his interest in this type of gaze extends to his subject matter as well. Eakins’s 1875 painting, *The Gross Clinic* (fig. 13), represents an obvious but constructive example of the thematization of the clinical gaze as well as the utilization of this detached perspective for its very composition. The painting depicts the real Dr. Samuel Gross, a surgeon at Jefferson Medical College, in the midst of performing a surgical operation in an amphitheater in front of dozens of students. Dr. Gross stands in the center of the frame, pausing with a bloodied scalpel in a bloodied hand, apparently addressing the audience. The patient lies mostly obscured behind five of Dr. Gross’s assistants, who aid the doctor by either administering ether or holding open an incision in the patient’s leg. In the left of the frame a woman—usually interpreted as the patient’s mother—covers her eyes in terror,



Figure 13. Thomas Eakins, *The Gross Clinic*, 1875.

unable to watch the procedure; it is the only show of emotion in the otherwise detached scene of cold, clinical medicine, realistically portrayed.

The overall impression of the scene confuses even on repeated viewings, with the eye, after first settling on the dramatic figure of Dr. Gross, traveling down to the procedure itself, a claustrophobic jumble of heads, arms, medical tools, and bloody flesh. One might argue that the

confused arrangement was simply a reality of the operation, and that *The Gross Clinic* consequently simply faithfully depicts the reality of the situation; the precise arrangement of the body and its attendants, the poised scalpel, the disaffected students: all these separate components are rendered with clear exactitude and calm, clinical detachment and precision. However, seeking to correct this reading and the belief in the existence of an “original scene that in effect demanded its own exact transcription” (10-11), Michael Fried argues in *Realism, Writing, Disfiguration: On Thomas Eakins and Stephen Crane* that

consciously or otherwise Eakins *chose* to obscure the disposition of the patient’s body, to almost wholly eclipse the assistant behind Gross, and to assault the viewer twice over—with the open wound from which blood oozes and, more stunning in its impact because an even starker violation of decorum, with Gross’s bloody right hand holding a scalpel—or three times, if we include the figure of the cringing mother unable to look at what is taking place, and that each of these choices could have been modified without sacrificing the painting’s overall realism of effect. (11)

Fried’s point in this passage—that realism is not simply a “transcription”—is a crucial one to make, particularly in relation to works that invoke the detached authority of the clinical gaze. Eakins’s painting is highly constructed, and any interpretation must question whether the clinical gaze in art “refrains from intervening” and “is silent and gestureless,” as Foucault suggests the doctor’s gaze is in actuality.

The manifestation of the clinical gaze in the work of art reveals the subjectivity always latent in medicine’s supposed objective vision. For example, Fried asserts that a “deliberate aggression,” even “sadism,” persists in Eakins’s depiction of the body, a reading which troubles

our potential for clinically observing the painting. There is something unsettlingly compelling about the painting's depiction of a public spectacle of violence, as an auditorium full of men—excepting the mother—gather to watch a man's leg be brutally sliced open. In the “real” world it is, of course, for ostensibly educational purposes that a group like this would assemble to witness an operation, but in the aesthetic framework created by the painting, looking at the operation feels as invasive as Dr. Gross's scalpel; without the didactic function of the gaze, the naked thigh and half-exposed buttocks contrast starkly to the well-dressed men who fill the picture with their ties and jackets, making unmistakably apparent the fundamental incongruity of the scene. If in the reality of this scene the violence of this spectacle seems justified by the curative function of medicine, the aesthetic recreation of the moment shatters that rationalization and exposes the act as a perversely intrusive operation. Fried argues that the painting even suggests a “quasi-sexual note of violence in the climactic recognition, the end result of the viewer's labors, that those are stockinged feet, a length of thigh seen mostly from below, and a bony posterior, the last of which in particular raises but conspicuously fails to answer the question of the body's gender” (59-61). The patient is, based on what is known about Eakins's intentions, a man (Fried 61), but this does not alter the potentially sexual imagery evoked by the cut in the thigh, the scalpel in hand, or the rod probing the incision; these are choices “conscious or otherwise” made by Eakins, as any moment in the operation could have feasibly been the subject of his painting. This aesthetic medical scene is granted an implicit authority because it calls forth suggestions of the *real* scene, and in doing so the painting's publically displayed conflation of sex and violence are almost masked. But the strange compositional choices of the painting—particularly the inclusion of the mother and the strange obscuring of the patient's body—begin to reveal the perverse potentiality of the clinical gaze, both real and aesthetic.

While the clinical gaze demands a cold precision in its scrupulous attention to the body, it also gives artists the authority to point their gaze toward whatever they like, and to do so with both artistic *and* scientific license. When Foucault writes that the clinical gaze “was no longer the gaze of any observer, but that of a doctor supported and justified by an institution, that of a doctor endowed with the power of decision and intervention” (89), he is suggesting that the doctor’s gaze is not that of merely a man but instead that of a conduit for the medical institution. Even if this authority is granted to the doctor, the situation of the artist remains much more complex and nuanced because he or she does not have the same implicit institutional justification. Eakins’s work remains compelling because of the way in which he deploys the clinical gaze while *depicting* the clinical gaze, and this thematization of the gaze *by* the gaze creates a kind of endless feedback loop in which the viewer becomes caught clinically considering the clinical gaze. In *The Gross Clinic* this results in the clinical gaze of Dr. Gross, and all of the implied authority that stands behind it, being examined and called into question, but paradoxically this interrogation is performed by the same gaze that it questions. Consequently, the authority of the clinical gaze—in its deployment in either the real world or the aesthetic—becomes destabilized just long enough to glimpse the cracks in its power, both in reality and aesthetically.

The perversity inherent in the clinical gaze becomes even furthered revealed in Eakins’s 1889 painting, *The Agnew Clinic* (fig. 14), which returns us to the clinic nearly fifteen years after the completion of *The Gross Clinic*. Again we witness an operation, but with several important differences that are key to understanding the flaws in the traditional assumptions about the clinical gaze’s objectivity. The first difference appears immediately upon seeing the painting: unlike *The Gross Clinic*, one’s eye is drawn not to the illuminated visage of the doctor—in this



Figure 14. Thomas Eakins, *The Agnew Clinic*, 1889.

case Dr. Agnew—but instead to the easily legible body of the half-naked woman on the operating table. Her right breast exposed and attractive profile only partially obscured, in this painting there is no question of the patient's sex. Instead of a barely recognizable thigh undergoing an operation, we have a half-clothed, attractive young woman going under the knife. As with *The Gross Clinic*, a lone female observes the operation, but this time, instead of a cringing mother, a young nurse looks on, her face blank as she stands among the men performing the surgery. The attitude of the men performing the operation as well as those watching from the auditorium seats remains similarly detached, although it is interesting to note a certain restlessness in the crowd, as many more heads are craned to see this particular operation than the one performed by Dr. Gross. Are they simply trying to get a better view of the breast for

scientific and educational purposes? Or is their wish for an unobstructed view motivated by less pure intentions? It is impossible to know, and moreover it is difficult to ascertain Eakins's intent with such a detail. But whether he was suggesting medical curiosity or sexualized interest through these craned necks, both readings remain possible. Through the aesthetic representation of these opposing possibilities the voyeuristic impulse latent in the actual clinical gaze becomes apparent.

Because of the type of operation—a mastectomy—all eyes are literally on the woman's breast. Of course, this is merely science at work, which, unlike the sensationalists discussed in chapter one, takes no interest in “voluptuous bosoms half-naked” (Foster 70). Except, of course, that science does, repeatedly. The placement of women in the patient role is a repeated motif in works depicting medical procedures, and as Stephanie Browner argues in *Profound Science and Elegant Literature: Imagining Doctors in Nineteenth-Century America*, during the nineteenth century “the image of the male doctor at work on the female body was a common and powerful representation of the masculinity of medicine,” thus making “the doctor a man who can manage the knowledge and dangerous forces unleashed by the naked female body” (141). This idea of the woman's body possessing secrets for the male doctors to uncover is echoed by Ludmilla Jordanova when she suggests that “in the case of dissection, an actual female body could be possessed, made to yield up secrets, generate knowledge” (98). As Jordanova explains, although depictions of dissections were for a long time of either “male or un-sexed” corpses, the “obsession with the female corpse in particular seems to be a late eighteenth and a nineteenth-century phenomenon” (98), and she details a number of paintings from this period which display female corpses, beautiful and naked, being examined by male doctors. As a corollary, during the latter half of the nineteenth century, anatomical museums became popular, and their displays of

collections of skeletons, wax bodies and models, and various body parts allowed patrons to peer into the very intestines of their fellow man, or in most cases, woman, as “displays of female sexual anatomy outnumber male by twenty to three” (Sappol 283-6). Women were the objects of study, but they were treated as though their sex was irrelevant when it came to the pursuit of knowledge.

And yet their sex was relevant, even central, to these works. Eakins based *The Agnew Clinic* on a photograph that depicted a leg operation as the central medical procedure, but he reconfigured the operation as a mastectomy (Browner 145); clearly placing a naked woman at the center of the painting was important and intentional for Eakins’s project. Stephanie Browner suggests that “Eakins’s decision to change the leg operation in the photograph to a mastectomy further dramatizes medicine’s professionalism—the bare breast that catches the viewer’s attention is of no interest to doctors—and raises gender issues only to dismiss them” (145), but the dismissal of these issues rests upon our faith in the objectivity of the doctors, a faith that is becoming increasingly difficult to maintain. Additionally, the photograph from which Eakins based his painting does not feature the female nurse, suggesting the added role of gender for the narrative he was creating in his work. The patient’s sex cannot be ignored in *The Agnew Clinic*, and yet because of the setting and indeed because of the blatancy of her nudity, the clinical gaze seems to invoke its objectivity; these are doctors practicing their craft, after all, not perverts interested in looking at naked women.

The boundary between clinical objectivity and voyeuristic perversion, however, is nearly imperceptible and arguably nonexistent, and Eakins’s career stands as a testament to this lack of a clear distinction. Because the subject matter of these paintings no longer held any explicit

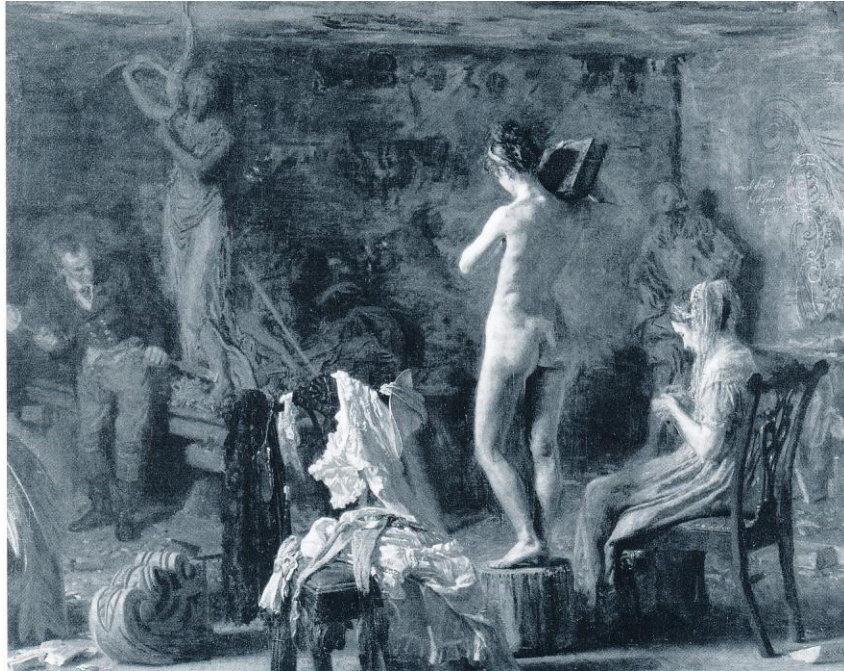


Figure 15. Thomas Eakins, *William Rush Carving His Allegorical Figure of the Schuylkill River*, 1876-77.

allegorical implications, the women in various states of private undress who are the focus of both paintings and literature of the late nineteenth century become simply what they are: half-clothed or nude women. The combination of these developments has a striking impact on the viewer: although partially-dressed and/or naked women have always had their place in the visual arts, without any allegorical, romantic, or historical associations the nude must now be considered as such and nothing more. A contemporary reviewer of Eakins's 1876-77 painting *William Rush Carving His Allegorical Figure of the Schuylkill River* (fig. 15), which depicts the carver working on his statue, highlights the impropriety of this nudity: "What ruins the picture is much less the want of beauty in the model (as has been suggested in the public prints) than the presence in the foreground of the clothes of that young woman, cast carelessly over a chair. This gives the shock which makes one think about the nudity—and at once the picture becomes improper" (Philadelphia Museum of Art). Because Eakins depicts the transformation of a nude model into an allegory, the work immediately announces the reality of the model's nudity. In the

years between *The Gross Clinic* and *The Agnew Clinic*, Eakins “increasingly devoted his time to photographic studies of the nude,” but eventually “this emphasis on the body unsettled many, and Eakins was asked to resign from the Academy in 1886 because of rumors about his use of nudity in the studio and his sexual relations” (Browner 146). Eakins’s photographs are full of naked men and women, and although they are not necessarily lurid, their sheer volume is staggering, particularly during the years leading up to his painting of *The Agnew Clinic*.¹²

Are these nudes merely studies meant to help understand the human anatomy, as Eakins and his followers suggested, or are there more perverse elements at work here, in both Eakins’s photography as well as his paintings? The posing of these questions as they relate to Eakins ultimately elides the problem inherent in the clinical gaze: one cannot separate the objectivity from the perversion. In both of these paintings, medical men deploy their clinical gaze within the work, and their presumed detachment—which, as discussed above, is obviously questionable — seems to suggest a guide for our own viewing of the work; like these men of science, we should gaze on the bodies that lie at their centers with cold detachment. However, achieving an understanding of what “we” do when we look at any painting, and indeed how “we” look more generally, remains nearly unachievable, since “we” are not a single homogenous mass but are instead a heterogeneous collection of races, classes, and genders, all of which affect the gaze.

As discussed in chapter two, all of these factors figure into the gaze, but the last of these—gender—proves the most useful to consider in this discussion of the perversity of the clinical gaze. Feminist film theory provides the most thorough account of the different gendered gazes and their repercussions, and these will prove the most useful for beginning to understand the complexities of naturalism’s clinical gaze. In Laura Mulvey’s highly influential “Visual Pleasure and Narrative Cinema,” she argues that there are

¹² For examples see *Thomas Eakins*. Ed. Jane Watkins with Jane Boyd.

two contradictory aspects of the pleasurable structures of looking in the conventional cinematic situation. The first, the scopophilic, arises from pleasure in using another person as an object of sexual stimulation through sight. The second, developed through narcissism and the constitution of the ego, comes from identification with the image seen. Thus, in film terms, one implies a separation of the erotic identity of the subject from the object on the screen (active scopophilia), the other demands identification of the ego with the object on the screen through the spectator's fascination with and recognition of his like. (18-9)

Mulvey essentially articulates two possible structures underlying scopophilia: pleasure in considering the object of the gaze as a sexual object; and identification with the figure on the screen who also considers the woman as sexual object. There are the men on the screen who actively gaze on the passive female sex objects, and there are the men in the audience, who also gaze at the woman as sex object, so that the woman exists "as erotic object for the characters within the screen story, and as erotic object for the spectator within the auditorium, with a shifting tension between the looks on either side of the screen" (20). Both these gazes are identified as active and male. For the feminine gaze, the options then are potentially limited to the passive identification with the sexual object.

However, this sort of clear division between the active/male and passive/female gaze, and the corresponding gendered identification with these gazes by audience members, fails to account for the actual experience of being a spectator. As Teresa de Lauretis argues, if there was "a single, undivided identification of each spectator with either the male or female figure, the passage through the film would simply instate or reconfirm male spectators in the position of the mythical subject, the human being" (141), and if it were simply a case of reconfirming one's own

gendered identity, “how can the female spectator be entertained as subject of the very movement that places her as its object, that makes her the figure of its own closure?” (141). De Lauretis explains that identification is “a movement, a subject-process, a relation: the identification (of oneself) with something other (than oneself)” (141), and consequently male and female identification can oscillate between points or even exist in both at a single moment. So while we have either masculine or feminine spectatorship, as Mary Ann Doane suggests in relation to cinema,

the terms *femininity* and *masculinity*, *female spectatorship* and *male spectatorship*, do not refer to actual members of cinema audiences or do so only in a highly mediated fashion. Women spectators oscillate or alternate between masculine and feminine positions . . . and men are capable of this alternation as well. This is simply to emphasize once again that feminine and masculine positions are not fully coincident with actual men and women. (8)

Doane notes that these ideas of masculine or feminine spectatorship must be considered not as sexes, but as positions that can be assumed by either sex. So while the gendered gazes to some degree flow from socially constructed gendered roles, they are not ultimately confined to a single gender, and these active and passive identifications must be considered as always in tension and flux.

In Eakins’s paintings, these spectator roles are in continual motion, and much of the meaning of the works originates in this movement. In *The Gross Clinic*, part of the emotion of the painting arguably derives from our position as viewers, as we are located not as members of the rather staid, perhaps even bored, audience, but on the same visual plane as either the kneeling assistants or, perhaps more interestingly, the cringing mother. And we might recoil along with

her, as there is indeed a “cringe factor” to the painting when one realizes that the patient’s thigh is being held open and probed, that blood covers these men’s hands. Turning away with disgust, eyes covered by one’s hand like the presumable mother, seems a likely response by the audience. Her placement in the picture at all highlights this as a possible reaction, particularly given the unmoved faces which otherwise fill the frame; she alone suggests our horror at the bloody procedure. Eakins’s calculated precision in his representation of the operation replicates the clinical gaze of Dr. Gross, but the same cannot be said for its effect on the viewer. Yet we cannot fully identify with the mother, as we do not turn away from the operation as she does, and even if we do recoil in disgust we still have seen more than she has. Because of the dominance of the theme of visibility, the painting everywhere enacts the gaze, and our identification becomes increasingly refracted; Dr. Gross, the patient, the assistants, the medical students, and even the mother all offer sites for identification, and reading the painting requires a continuous movement between these moments of identification.

In *The Agnew Clinic*, these issues become decidedly more complex, as a naked woman occupies the focal point of the work. The spectator’s gaze would seem to then fall into the more traditional gendered roles feminist film theory articulates, particularly as the male doctors’ operating on an unconscious woman exaggerates the active/passive split. Through both versions of the active, masculine gaze we watch the powerless woman: through our position in the audience and through our identification with the scalpel-wielding doctor. Simultaneously, we look with the passive, feminine gaze that identifies with the patient, etherized upon the table. Identification along these gendered lines is of course possible, although there are likely multiple, simultaneous identifications at work here. Indeed, the composition of the painting would seem to locate us somewhere in the audience, as we are peering slightly down onto the operation, and this

seems to call into question the nature of these students' gaze. They are theoretically detached and clinical, but they also are simultaneously deploying the active, masculine gaze, looking at the woman as a sexual being. And as students they occupy a passive role, for they are not allowed to participate in the operation but must observe the more powerful figure of Dr. Agnew at work, which potentially leads to concurrent identifications of these students—and the viewer—with Dr. Agnew *and* the patient.

Another potential site for identification lies with the only other woman in attendance: the nurse. Determining her specific role in the operation remains difficult, as at present she only watches the procedure. Her gaze is intense, but it is unclear what lies behind it. Is she commiserating with the half-naked woman—exposed to dozens if not hundreds of prying eyes—and therefore disapproving of the male medical world, which gazes so freely on her naked form, or is her critical gaze directed at the woman for allowing herself to be placed in such a situation, for exposing herself to science? Or is she simply affecting the detached clinical gaze of the men around her? Her attire bespeaks the impropriety of the event, as it covers all but her face, a stark contrast to the patient's nudity. Indeed, her very presence calls further attention to the patient's nudity; the nurse's feminine gaze falling upon another woman interrupts the continuous flow of the masculine gaze emanating from the male doctors and the male students within the painting, as well as the potentially masculine gaze of the viewer. Through this interruption her presence draws attention to the masculine gaze that sexualizes the naked patient: she makes the viewer suddenly aware of the latent perversity of the clinical gaze.

Although the authority of both the environment and of the clinical gaze ostensibly mediates the nudity in these paintings, these works challenge the possibility of a unified, objective gaze, instead compelling us through the overtly sexual subject matter to consider the

different potential gendered reactions. These different responses start to challenge the coherency of the medical gaze, as the deviancies inherent to this gaze are slowly revealed. In Eakins's paintings the perversity of the clinical gaze emerges from the complex intersection of the gazes within the paintings and the viewer's gaze as he or she observes the paintings in the gallery; the masculine and feminine spectator roles begin both multiplying and conflating, creating a swirling, undulating mix of gendered gazes, of scientific objectivity and sexual desire.

The City as Clinic in Norris's *Vandover and the Brute*

Eakins's paintings implicitly locate the audience somewhere in a closed auditorium, supposedly also invested with the authority of the medical discipline; even though the viewer looks at the painting alone, the faces in the painted auditorium surround the viewer as they all collectively peer into these opened bodies. In the clinical setting, the legitimacy of the act at hand theoretically authorizes the gaze, even if, as we have seen, the reality is more complicated. For the literary naturalists, the city likewise became a kind of laboratory or clinic, a site for examining social ills and diseases. Like the human body, the city offered any number of mysteries to be sought out and exposed, and doing so with the authority of the clinical gaze gave these artists a license to dissect regions and populations of the city with the same surgical intensity found in the clinic. But when naturalism moves into the streets, its gaze, while remaining penetrating and clinical, is no longer so clearly backed by the authority of the institution. The changing of location has a crucial effect on the quality of the gaze, and the movement of this type of gaze out of the explicitly scientific venue and into the cities and people's private lives reveals the problematic nature of naturalism's voyeuristic gaze.

Norris's *Vandover and the Brute*, likely written between 1893-4 (but not published until 1914, well after Norris's untimely young death), transposes the clinical gaze of Eakins's

paintings to the streets of San Francisco. One of the original subtitles of Norris's novel was "A Story of Life and Manners in an American City at the End of the Nineteenth Century" (McElrath and Crisler 160), suggesting the role of the city in the novel as both clinic *and* patient. "In the nineteenth century the big city appeared often in the guise of mystery" argues Alan Trachtenberg, with "its whole reality hidden within denser crowds, closed off much the way older vistas are now blocked by taller, inexplicable buildings" ("Experiments in Another Country" 138). Like a mysteriously ill patient, the city demanded intensive investigation and dissection. By assuming a clinical gaze, naturalism could, in theory, authoritatively enter into any private space it wished, all in the name of the scientific documentation of society. But as Peter Stallybrass and Allon White argue in *The Politics and Poetics of Transgression*, "the bourgeoisie's organization of the gaze was always problematic" because "if the dominant discourses about the slum were structured by the language of reform, they could not but dwell upon the seductions for which they were the supposed cure" (135). These seductions—usually drinking, gambling, and prostitution—are what will destroy Vandover, and although naturalism's clinical gaze claims no interest in the spectacle, repeatedly we find it turned toward that which is most salacious, providing a perverse entertainment for the narrator and reader alike, as demonstrated in *The Gross Clinic*'s gaping thigh wound or *The Agnew Clinic*'s exposed breast.

Vandover chronicles the downfall of an aristocratic youth as the "brute" inside overtakes him, a brute awakened by the same scientific knowledge that was supposed to be free from desire and emotion. Although reminiscent of the mid-nineteenth-century sensational stories of Buntline and Foster with its focus on the various moral traps that threaten the respectable youth of the city—alcohol, gambling, and sex all consume Vandover at some point in the narrative—the presentation of Vandover's degeneration occurs without sensationalism or overt moralizing.

The novel depicts Vandover's symbolic dissection with seeming detachment, a cold medical vivisection of one man's degeneration; "given the importance of Zola's influence on naturalist aesthetics in general, and on Norris in particular," explains Daniel Schierenbeck, "it is not surprising, then, that in his own aesthetics Norris places a great deal of emphasis on the clinical gaze, for observation and experiment are the hallmarks of the experimental method" (65).

Additionally, Donald Pizer suggests that Norris was likely aware of contemporary work on criminal anthropology and incorporated medical theories of degeneracy and atavism into his own fiction (*Novels of Frank Norris* 56-63), and in this case Vandover becomes an exemplary specimen.

Vandover's disease is, paradoxically, his own instinct, awakened when he "acquired the knowledge of good and evil" (9) from reading an article on "Obstetrics," which was "profusely illustrated with old-fashioned plates and steel engravings," and which he read "from beginning to end" (10). Although merely a chance discovery—he was reading the encyclopedia hoping to discover a dollar his father claimed was left inside one of the volumes—the revelation at this moment in his development seems to be enough to ruin his innocence. A scientific presentation of the female body corrupts Vandover, an educated gentleman, and his corruption contrasts with the idea of the medical men of Eakins's clinic who are, or at any rate are supposed to be, immune to the sight of female nudity. Vandover's ruin begins with scientific knowledge, a bizarre fact given this age of scientific reason: if the encyclopedia is simply presenting the cold facts truthfully, how can anatomical drawings corrupt him? "What hinders Vandover in his art and in his life," suggests Donna Campbell, "is an inability to transcend the conventional feminine attitudes that his culture has inculcated in him, an inability compounded by his tendency to exaggerate and to parody those feminine attitudes in his life and in his art" (93). In the language

of the era, Vandover's collapse is brought on by his failure to maintain a scientific *masculine* perspective, to remain professional in the face of the explicit subject matter.

As in Eakins's paintings, the perversity inherent to the clinical gaze can be seen creeping just below the surface of detached objectivity, licentiousness that Vandover himself must sense when he peeks at the images of unclothed women. This erotic knowledge of the female body awakens the inherent instincts of the "brute" in Vandover: "little by little the first taint crept in, the innate vice stirred in him, the brute began to make itself felt, and a multitude of perverse and vicious ideas commenced to buzz about him like a swarm of nasty flies" (11). Although ostensibly a detached narrator, just like Vandover's crumbling neutrality, cracks in the narration's clinical gaze are also showing, with the language sliding into moralistic commentary ("perverse and vicious ideas") and literary flourish (the simile of "nasty flies"), thus underscoring the potential instability of the clinical gaze at all levels of representation.

While in college several years later, Vandover finally acts on these brute instincts when he has sex with one of the "fast" women whom he had only the day before scorned: "moved by an unreasoned instinct, he sought out the girl who had just filled him with such deep pity and such violent disgust, and that night did not come back to the room in Matthew's. The thing was done almost before he knew it" (24). After Vandover loses his virginity, he briefly resolves to live a moral, virtuous life, but he soon "assumed the manners of these young men of the city, very curious to see for himself the other lower side of their life that began after midnight in the private rooms of fast cafes and that was continued in the heavy musk-laden air of certain parlours amid the rustle of heavy silks" (28). Although Vandover repeatedly swears off his immoral behavior, he also repeatedly relapses, and "drunkenness, sensuality, gambling, debauchery, he knew them all. He rubbed elbows with street walkers, with book makers, with saloonkeepers,

with exploiters of lost women” (207). The “brute” in Vandover inevitably triumphs, granting the reading audience the opportunity to witness the spectacle of the degeneration of a man.

Interestingly, but perhaps not surprisingly, the novel’s dissection of Vandover reveals the source of his deterioration as sexual; as with Eakins’s paintings, the patient at the center of the work cannot escape from some measure of sexuality. In Eakins’s work, the patients are sexualized, whereas in Norris’s novel we find Vandover’s disease to be sexual, but in both cases the foregrounding of sexuality dramatically troubles the possibility of an objective gaze. Vandover’s dissection reveals to the reader that his degeneration begins with his discovery of the truth of the female body and the reproductive system—and presumably the act of sex itself—and culminates with his own sexual escapades. His knowledge of the female body leads to his loss of virginity, which in turns results in his seduction of Ida Wade, and her subsequent suicide when she learns she is pregnant. Her death catalyzes a series of events in Vandover’s life—the shipwreck and his father’s death—that, while momentarily staving off his psychological collapse, ultimately also sink the ethical buoys to which he had clung for moral salvation. And these desires lead to the sexual encounters that ultimately destroy him: his dalliance with the prostitute Flossie presumably infects him with syphilis, which presumably causes his “lycanthropy-mathesis” (277), which erodes Vandover’s remaining morals and hastens his destruction.

Even Vandover’s one true love, art, which is the only thing that has the capacity to save him, is rooted in the body and sex: “the model for that week was a woman, a fact that pleased Vandover, for he drew these nude women better than any one in the school, perhaps better than any one in the city. Portrait work and the power to catch subtle intellectual distinctions in a face were sometimes beyond him, but his feeling for the flesh, and for the movement and character of

a pose, was admirable” (66). Vandover’s “feeling for the flesh,” at once so necessary to his art, intertwines with the same sensual desires that lead to his collapse. Vandover would seem to be the ideal naturalist: like many painters of his day, “his style improved immensely the moment he abandoned flat studies and began to work directly from Nature” (25). The notion of working “directly from Nature” was an important principle for many naturalists, who eschewed the confines of the traditional studio in order to seek direct inspiration from “real life.” And yet Vandover’s attempts to deploy the clinical gaze of the scientific naturalist, to be as the doctors operating on the naked breast in *The Agnew Clinic*, fail. He cannot remain detached, and indeed “his strong artist’s imagination began to be filled with a world of charming sensuous pictures” (29); instead of objectively reproducing the world in his art, Vandover finds the objective world he sees through his art corrupting him.

The seemingly innocuous cause of Vandover’s degeneration is potentially troubling, as the narrative itself replicates the same clinical knowledge that drove Vandover to his destruction. The novel argues that even witnessing these debaucheries is not without its perils, at least for the weak Vandover. Is it truly possible, even for an educated gentleman like Vandover, to expose himself to these images of naked women, no matter the benign intentions, and not succumb to the beast within? And will the medical students in Eakins’s auditoriums then fall to the same fate as Vandover? Norris’s novel suggests that no clear line exists between the objective portrayal of sexuality offered in textbooks or art and the sordid sexuality of the roadhouses and saloons; both corrupt Vandover with seemingly equal measure. These questions become even more acute when we consider the plight of the reader, for if Vandover was corrupted by this medical knowledge, very little would seem to prevent the reader’s similar collapse when exposed to the details of Vandover’s degeneration.

As with Eakins's paintings, the novel appears to offer its audience a medical dissection, but in both cases the clinical gaze is corrupted by a desire to reveal decidedly sexual secrets for the benefit, it would seem, of their voyeuristic audiences, potentially troubling any ability to remain neutral. Evaluating Norris's novel after Eakins's two paintings reveals the ways that naturalism deploys the clinical gaze to survey the modern landscape, but these examples also demonstrate the perversity that lies deeply embedded in this supposedly objective gaze. The novel ultimately indicts those who cannot look, as Norris claims fiction must, into the "unplumbed depths of the human heart, and the mystery of sex, and the problems of life, and the black, unsearched penetralia of the soul of man" ("A Plea for Romantic Fiction" 78) without succumbing to perversion, and yet the text, and by implication the reader, appears to teeter dangerously close to falling into this same mire of sordid pleasure that ultimately consumes Vandover. The literary naturalists attempt to deploy a clinical gaze, but Norris's novel reveals that embedded within this gaze is a perversity that makes their detached survey of contemporary life deeply problematic.

The Sadomasochism of the Clinical Gaze in Norris's *McTeague*

The clinical gaze of Eakins's paintings and Norris's *Vandover* exposes the deviancies and perversions rarely suspected in the ostensibly neutral gaze. And while these works suggest the possibilities of the corrupting power of images of sexuality, it is in Norris's *McTeague: A Story of San Francisco* (1899) that this perverse fusion of impersonal, scientific objectivity and illicit, speculative fantasy most dramatically intersects with one of the central conventions of naturalism—the detached, third-person narrator—to have a disquieting impact on the reader. The narrators of naturalist fictions have frequently been described as being like medical examiners dissecting a body, as they turn their professional, clinical eye on the world and report it in

objective terms back to their curious readers; these narrators are supposed to be dispassionate reporters of events, not excited sensationalists or outraged reformers. Barbara Hochman asserts that this turn towards “scientific accuracy and professional impartiality” (33) was motivated by the changing relationship between readers and authors, as the “depersonalized authorial persona was not only a reaction to but also a kind of mirror image of the projected reader who was perceived as increasingly cold and distant on the one hand, but, paradoxically, intrusive and all too personal on the other” (34). However, as the previous sections have demonstrated, these works struggle to maintain their impartial neutrality, and this is likewise true of the naturalist narrator.

But even more importantly, these narrators provide the point of view by which we read these novels, and in so doing they inscribe the reader with a similarly voyeuristic perspective; along with the narrator, the reader performs as a voyeur, peering into the lives—and psychoses—of the characters. And *McTeague* provides the reader quite a voyeuristic thrill, as the novel tells a sordid tale of greed, ambition, brutality, and heredity, as it peers into the life of McTeague, the brutish but simple dentist who falls in love with the petite and sweet Trina. After they are married Trina’s obsession with hoarding money becomes scandalously worse, and once McTeague loses his dental business, their relationship quickly crumbles into sadomasochistic disarray; McTeague begins drinking, the couple becomes increasingly impoverished, and he eventually murders her. McTeague then heads south, motivated by his “brute instincts,” first returning to the mines of his youth, then to gold prospecting, where he is finally hunted down in Death Valley by his ex-best friend Marcus, where the two die handcuffed to one another, all while the reader looks on, appalled and fascinated in equal measure.

As discussed in the preceding chapters, vision was central to the urban experience at the turn of the century, and Norris's novel reveals a similar contemporary culture of spectatorship. The novel's repeated emphasis of visuality calls the reader's attention to the visually constructed world of the turn of the century. When the reader first meets McTeague, he is in his dentist office, where "bull-like, he heaved himself laboriously up, and going to the window, stood looking down into the street," a street that "never failed to interest him" (4). From the "bay window of his Dental Parlors," he "watched the world go past" (7). After their marriage, the narrator describes Trina sitting "all day long" in "the bay window of the sitting room that commanded a view of a small section of Polk Street" (143): the spectacle of the modern city street fascinates both McTeague and Trina. But as in Stephen Crane's *Maggie*, this looking has a more deviant side, with watching taking on a more sinister and violating form. *McTeague's* Maria Macapa, for example, describes how her husband, Zerkow, a greedy-to-the-point-of-ridiculousness Jewish shop owner, stalks her as he lusts after her fabled gold dishes: "I was doin' a bit of ir-ning, an' by an' by all of a sudden I saw him peeping at me through the crack of the door. I never let on that I saw, and, honest, he stayed there over two hours, watchun everything I did. I could just feel his eyes on the back of my neck all the time" (232). Although Zerkow's peeping through the door crack obviously marks him as abnormal and deviant, only pages later, after Zerkow murders Maria as the culminating act of his lust for gold, we find the locals all trying to crowd into the junk shop to glimpse Maria's nearly decapitated body: "half a dozen people—the wild-game peddler, the man with the broad-brimmed hat, the washwoman, and three other men—were in the front room of the junk shop, a bank of excited faces surged at the door. Beyond this, outside, the crowd was packed solid from one end of the alley to the other" (251). The crowd is not characterized as horrified at such a murder but instead as possessing "excited

faces,” eager to see the spectacle of violence; spectatorship, in all of its forms, is an essential part of the urban experience.

The centrality of vision in naturalist texts prompts a consideration of how sight is being deployed, both thematically as well as in the construction of these narratives. The previous chapter considered the narrator’s role in naturalist texts and how his point of view, however clouded by deviant fantasies and illicit desires, organized the perspective of the novels.

McTeague’s narration continues and even extends these problems of perspective, with the novel’s narrator both more clearly defined and yet more elusive than other naturalist texts. We do know that the narrator lacks omniscience, as he indicates several times early in the novel that he does not possess all the facts concerning these characters¹³: “Marcus had picked up a few half-truths of political economy—it was impossible to say where” (10), and later: “Did Miss Baker still treasure up in a seldom-opened drawer or box some faded daguerreotype, some strange old-fashioned likeness with its curling hair and high stock? It was impossible to say” (13). This notion that it is “impossible to say” suggests both the narrator’s own limited field of vision and his relative detachment from the lives he narrates. The narrator seems to have no knowledge of these characters beyond what is immediately available within his field of vision; he is as the scientist or the doctor, after all, and not an omniscient God. It is important to note that this inclusion of the narrator at all appears to be conscious and deliberate, as earlier drafts of the novel do not include these intrusions.¹⁴

¹³ I say “he” with the uncertain belief that this figure is male, but in the absence of indicators otherwise his masculinity seems more likely than not.

¹⁴ In the February 20, 1895 “McTeague” entry of his student themes, Norris describes Marcus, who in this early draft is Trina’s sister, as “having imperfectly grasped a few half-truths of Political Economy and of theories of population, picked up at some of the ward clubs” (*Novelist in the Making* 85). This line is almost wholly lifted for use in his novel, with the notable exception that in *McTeague* the narrator’s knowledge has been noticeably limited.

The narrator's clear separation from the characters of the novel, however, does not mean that he lacks a distinct personality; on the contrary, *McTeague*'s narrator frequently provides us with his own beliefs and preoccupations. He seems to appreciate Trina's "adorable little chin" (22), using adjectives unlikely to be uttered by the "bull-like" McTeague, a man governed by brute instincts that are likely preoccupied with other aspects of her anatomy. When the narrator later wonders about Trina's relationship with the dentist, asking "did she love McTeague?" he then seems to answer the question himself, declaring it a "difficult question" before contemplating the possibilities:

Did she choose him for better or for worse, deliberately, of her own free will, or was Trina herself allowed even a choice in the taking of that step that was to make or mar her life? The Woman is awakened, and starting from her sleep, catches blindly at what first her newly opened eyes light upon. It is a spell, a witchery, ruled by chance alone, inexplicable—a fairy queen enamored of a clown with ass' ears. (70)

Given naturalism's oft-cited interest in determinism, this consideration of free will versus determinism might seem natural within a naturalist text like this, but it clearly signals a voice outside of the action of the narrative; Trina may wonder if she loved McTeague, but she would not ask questions of fate and chance, at least not in the language used in this passage. And there are as well clearly different attitudes being presented by the narrator towards Trina, "a fairy queen," and McTeague, "a clown with ass' ears"; one almost hears a hint of jealousy in his tone.

From his general tone throughout the first half of the book, the narrator stands like Dr. Gross or Dr. Agnew, apart from the action, but he often seems disdainful towards the characters, especially McTeague, whom he frequently mocks for "gazing stupidly" (10) at ordinary events.

In this light, that it was “impossible to say” also implies the inscrutability of the behavior of these characters, as though trying to discern their actions or motivations was beyond the scope of respectable people, such as the narrator. He mocks McTeague and Marcus’s friendship as well, playing the hyperbolic-heroic card: “What a fine thing was this friendship between men! The dentist treats his friend for an ulcerated tooth and refuses payment; the friend reciprocates by giving up his girl. This was nobility” (45). This was, of course, hardly “nobility,” and the narrator’s attitude seems mostly calculated to establish an ironic distance from the events unfolding. As discussed in chapter two, naturalist texts frequently deploy a sort of ironic distancing through narration, and John Dudley links this irony to the novel’s scientific impartiality, suggesting that *McTeague*’s narrator “cultivates a fierce ironic detachment from the characters . . . through clinical, scientific language borrowed from contemporary anthropology” (32). But even once we acknowledge the characters’ clear separation from the narrator, this does not necessarily give us any greater sense of the narrator’s identity except that he is unlike these “brute” characters.

Norris’s narrator seems at times disdainful of his characters, at others sympathetic, and at still others merely voyeuristically fascinated. Joseph McElrath notes that “Norris’s perspective frequently proves elusive, and unsettling to those who want clear codification; and interpreters who *will* clearly categorize tend to gloss over the real problem of dealing with Norris’s apparently unclear attitude towards his characters in novel after novel,” which leads him to ask, perhaps rhetorically, perhaps with maddening frustration: “What *is* Norris’s point of view, if there is *one*, in *McTeague*?” (“Frank Norris’s *Vandover and the Brute*” 177-8). Much of the narrator’s elusiveness stems from the changes in his voice that occur when the object of his gaze shifts. He can mock the “bull-like” McTeague when he bumbles through a conversation, but the

narrator's tone loses that ironic edge when he observes the characters in private acts which should otherwise remain unseen. For example, during McTeague and Trina's initial series of meetings at the Dental Parlors when he fixes her broken teeth, the dentist finds himself overwhelmed by the more sinister brute inside of him as she lies in the chair under the ether: "for some time he stood watching her as she lay there, unconscious and helpless and very pretty. He was alone with her, and she was absolutely without defense" (18). The narrator loses his ironic tone, wholly absorbed, it would seem, with the perverse scene before him. This reveals too that McTeague is not really alone with Trina, as both the narrator and his readers are present, watching, and a strong voyeuristic pleasure arises from the scene.

Sex and sexuality, the most obviously private and therefore secretive aspects of human behavior, are clearly items of interest for the narrator. The narrator appears particularly preoccupied with McTeague and Trina's love, frequently pondering their relationship with questions that seem simultaneously internal to the characters and more complex than they are capable of asking. When McTeague kisses the unconscious Trina, the narrator wonders "why could he not always love her purely, cleanly? What was this perverse, vicious thing that lived within him, knitted to his flesh?" (19). On the other side of the relationship, the narrator wonders why Trina felt "the desire, the necessity of being conquered by a superior strength? Why did it please her?" (50). In both instances, these questions seem at first to arrive from the thoughts of the characters, but they are too sophisticated to have originated in their brains; instead, these thoughts seem to be the narrator's attempt to imagine what these characters might think, his imaginative attempt to peer inside these characters' brains while they lie on the novel's dissection table.

But midway through the novel, after McTeague loses his dental practice because he does not have a degree in dentistry, the narrator seems to disappear. Gone is the playful tone, the comic mocking of the characters and their follies. It would be inaccurate to say that the narrator simply assumes a more serious tone; in fact, he seems to simply vanish. At this point the novel assumes the more clinical detachment that characterized *Vandover*, as we witness the rapid and horrific degeneration of McTeague and Trina. And similarly to *Vandover*, *McTeague* becomes a dissection, as both McTeague and Trina are cut open for inspection. But the disease that troubles them is much more complicated than the mythical werewolf disease that afflicts Vandover. In *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism*, Walter Benn Michaels provocatively asserts that *McTeague* is “probably the first representation of masochism in American literature” (119), a statement which is more interesting in its highlighting of the masochistic themes of the text than claims to the novel’s origination of this behavior. He compares McTeague and Trina’s marriage to the other brutal relationship in the novel, Maria and Zerkow’s, explaining that “where Maria only tolerates her husband’s brutality, Trina takes an explicitly erotic pleasure in it” (119). Michaels’s assertion about Trina contains something of the narrator’s own attitude as well, since he does not simply tolerate the novel’s more debauched elements but takes a definite pleasure in them; what we find is that the clinical gaze of the novel’s second half is in fact the voyeur’s gaze, a gaze fixated on the more perverse qualities of these characters. This becomes dramatically apparent as McTeague and Trina’s relationship begins rapidly deteriorating under the pressures of alcohol and poverty:

The fact of the matter was that McTeague, when he had been drinking, used to bite [Trina’s fingers], crunching and grinding them with his immense teeth, always ingenious enough to remember which were the sorest. Sometimes he

extorted money from her by this means, but as often as not he did it for his own satisfaction.

And in some strange, inexplicable way this brutality made Trina all the more affectionate; aroused in her morbid, unwholesome love of submission, a strange, unnatural pleasure in yielding, in surrendering herself to the will of an irresistible, virile power.

Trina's emotions had narrowed with the narrowing of her daily life. They reduced themselves at last to but two, her passion for money and her perverted love for her husband when he was brutal. She was a strange woman during these days. (244)

The relationship, laid on the operating table, has been sliced open to reveal the shocking ravages of violence, sex, and greed. The doctor-narrator stands poised, like Dr. Gross, scalpel in hand, offering commentary: "she was a strange woman during these times." But it is as though Norris taunts the reader into voyeuristically peering into these lives, presenting these sordid but compelling glimpses into the characters' pathologies as though they were part of a medical diagnosis when they really just provide provocative pleasure. That these diseases escalate to the scandalous seems almost inevitable, as even Trina's miserliness turns salacious: "One evening she had even spread all the gold pieces between the sheets, and had then gone to bed, stripping herself, and had slept all night upon the money, taking a strange and ecstatic pleasure in the touch of the smooth flat pieces the length of her entire body" (283). Similar to Eakins's choice to replace the leg operation in *The Agnew Clinic* with a mastectomy, Norris's decision to transform Trina's seemingly straightforward greed into "ecstatic pleasure" as she lies naked on her gold coins appears to be a calculated choice, one designed to titillate the reader as much as detachedly

chronicle the disease. And readers are left peering in, observing a sight clearly not meant for our eyes.

Much like Crane's Maggie being ogled by a man whose body "shook like that of a dead jelly fish" (68), moments such as this in Norris's work force us to uncomfortably acknowledge our own aberrant gaze and the role it plays in the actions of the story: for whom does Trina strip and roll naked in gold coins if not for us, the reader? As discussed in relation to the viewers of Eakins's paintings, the "us" of readers is clearly problematic, with the sexual nature of a scene such as this highlighting the potentially complicated splits in the ways that different gendered gazes result in different readings. Although definitively identifying the gender of the implied viewer is perhaps impossible, particularly for readings across time, Norris was among those writers—including Crane and Theodore Dreiser—who "called for a masculine literature that was in touch with the vibrancies of modern masculine life" (Borus 114). Norris proclaimed that fiction was "not an affair of women and aesthetes, and the Muse of American fiction is no chaste, delicate, superfine mademoiselle of delicate poses and 'elegant' attitudinizings," but instead a "robust, red-armed *bonne femme*" who will lead one "straight into a World of Working Men, crude of speech, swift of action, strong of passion" ("Novelists of the Future" 278). Norris's vision of fiction is intensely masculine, and consequently assuming that his construction of the implied audience as predominantly male seems as safe as most assumptions about authorial intent.

But even given the likelihood that Norris envisioned a male audience, and therefore was inscribing a male reader-voyeur, this formulation only takes us so far, as the actual reading public is a complex and diverse entity, and women undoubtedly read (past and present tenses) *McTeague*. Returning to feminist film theory, Mulvey writes that the "pleasure in looking" is

“split between active/male and passive/female” as “the determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure,” forcing women into being “simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote *to-be-looked-at-ness*” (19). Accounting for Trina’s behavior is difficult if we do not consider her actions as a projection of the narrator and, by association, the reader; the implied male gaze of the narrator/reader enforces her “*to-be-looked-at-ness*,” suggesting the role the male gaze plays in her actions. In this formulation, we find that, for the female reader, this places her in the uncomfortable position of identifying with Trina, and of also being the object of *her own* gaze. This sort of perverse narcissism boomerangs back into the passive/male readers as well, as the “active/male” and “passive/female” splits are clearly less definitive and more complicated than simple gender binaries would suggest: all viewers occupy both gazes, to different degrees, at different moments.

In this increasingly perverse formulation of active/passive male/female readers lurks the sadomasochism embedded in the reader’s own desires. While the active reader—male or female, or rather male *and* female—becomes the implied viewer voyeuristically watching as Trina rolls naked in her bed of coins, the passive reader identifies with the looked-at object of the gaze, with Trina as she is objectified through the gaze. This active gaze includes a sadistic quality, with the reader always impelling these narrative actions onward; Mulvey suggests that voyeurism “has associations with sadism: pleasure lies in ascertaining guilt (immediately associated with castration), asserting control and subjugating the guilty person through punishment or forgiveness” (22). Half a century earlier, psychoanalyst Otto Fenichel also noted the relationship between sadism and vision, arguing that “very often sadistic impulses enter into the instinctual aim of looking: one wishes *to destroy* something by means of looking at it, or else the act of

looking itself has already acquired the significance of a modified form of destruction” (377). In this way, on the one hand the voyeur *creates* these scenes by seeing them, by moving them from the wholly private sphere and into the public, and in doing so must find some pleasure in the pain of watching these events unfold; on the other hand this wish to destroy, particularly the privacy of a moment like Trina’s ecstasy, manifests itself. But in the identification with the object of the gaze, the passive reader takes some masochistic pleasure in suffering under the voyeur’s gaze as that gaze destroys the possibilities of intimacy or privacy. These sadistic and masochistic desires are kept in continual tension, as the active, sadistic reader’s identification with the voyeuristic narrator looks upon a figure with whom the passive, masochistic reader vicariously identifies, and all of these tensional binaries are constructed and maintained by each other, making it a potentially endless recursive loop.

Even while stuck within this complex sadomasochistic loop it is hard not to find some voyeuristic pleasure in watching these scenes unfold, as even in their degenerative destruction the McTeagues are an entertaining spectacle. The narrator, despite losing his distinctive voice in the second half of the novel, appears to have only become *more* fascinated by them and their neighbors, as he clandestinely observes their behavior as Foucault’s “speaking eye.” Yet when the domestic violence finally becomes “abominable” and Trina’s death immanent, the narrative viewpoint transfers briefly to a cat outside of the room: “the cat listened to the sounds of stamping and struggling and the muffled noise of blows, wildly terrified, his eyes bulging like brass knobs. At last the sounds stopped on a sudden; he heard nothing more. Then McTeague came out, closing the door. The cat followed him with distended eyes as he crossed the room and disappeared through the street door” (294-5). This shifting of vision to the cat, and the simultaneous limitation of the scope of that vision by not allowing us inside the closet during the

murder, draws attention to the role of the voyeur's gaze in the novel, and the unsettling nature of what we have, up until this point, been finding entertaining.¹⁵ Calling attention to the role of vision in the novel disrupts our own gaze, which has steadily been merging with that of the narrator; in a sense, the disappearance of the narrator midway through the text is less about *his* vanishing than *our* adoption of that narrative role as voyeur. But this shift to the cat interrupts that gaze, and in doing so momentarily breaks the loop of our vision and allows us to glimpse the awful power and destructive deviancy of the voyeur's gaze. By highlighting the true perversion of the voyeur's role, the pleasure of the gaze and potentially our willingness to wield its power are severely troubled.

Implications of Clinical Voyeurism

When we read works of naturalism—literature or art—we find ourselves repeatedly placed in the position of the voyeur as we act out this allegedly clinical gaze. As June Howard observes, the narrator in these works “is generally the ‘character’ who is closest to the reader” (105), and consequently whatever deviant behavior the narrator undertakes implicitly ensnares us as well. We are placed in a disconcerting position, lulled into the belief in the clinical objectivity of the work while we are in fact unknowingly being placed into the role of voyeur, until we are suddenly made painfully aware of that role. In *Being and Nothingness* Sartre dramatizes the experience of becoming the voyeur:

Let us imagine that moved by jealousy, curiosity, or vice I have just glued my ear to the door and looked through a keyhole. . . . I *am my acts* and hence they carry in themselves their whole justification. I am a pure consciousness *of* things, and things, caught up in the circuit of my selfness, offer to me their potentialities as

¹⁵ The presence of the cat was also a later addition to the novel, as in his “McTeague” student theme from February 19, 1895 it is evident that Norris had already established the details of the aftermath of Trina's death, with the notable exception of the role of the cat (*Making of a Novelist* 84-5).

the proof of my non-thetic consciousness (of) my own possibilities. This means that behind that door a spectacle is presented as ‘to be seen,’ a conversation as ‘to be heard.’ (347-8)

Sartre describes a disembodied gaze, much like Foucault’s “speaking eye,” which becomes purely “*my acts*” and no longer connects to a sense of self. But this changes when “all of a sudden I hear footsteps in the hall. Someone is looking at me! What does this mean? It means that I am suddenly affected in my being and that essential modifications appear in my structure—modifications which I can apprehend and fix conceptually by means of the reflective *cogito*” (349). The gaze of the other re-embodies the voyeur, snapping him or her back into the body that only moments before seemed to dissolve into the pure gaze. As discussed in the first chapter, voyeurism must be recognized as such in order to be voyeurism; one must know that the gaze is deviant for its deviancy to be felt. And moments abound in these works that call attention to the nature of our gaze, that sound the “footsteps in the hall”: from the cringing mother of *The Gross Clinic* to the nurse in *The Agnew Clinic* to the cat outside the closet door, we are made aware of our gaze at crucial narrative moments. These footsteps have the effect of disrupting our sense of the naturalist gaze as clinical. We are startled when we hear them because we realize that we have not been engaged in scientific, objective contemplation of a mastectomy or the social illness of greed but a voyeuristic pursuit of pleasure. Despite arguably enacting voyeurism in their works, these artists, knowingly or unknowingly, also present a critique of the limits of the objective gaze. The eye cannot speak, for it is always linked to a brain that seeks pleasure above all else. By reinterpreting naturalism’s clinical gaze as voyeuristic it becomes possible to see the fissures in the authority of this gaze and the potential vulnerability of the voyeur, whose penetrating gaze is only licensed by a false authority falsely assumed.

Chapter Four: The Making and Unmaking of Public and Private Space

This chapter investigates how literary naturalism's voyeuristic gaze both dramatizes and engenders unstable configurations of privacy and publicity at the turn of the century. The naturalist's voyeuristic gaze, and the turn-of-the-century urban environment of which it was a part, helped produce a feeling of absolute visibility in the city, with people always watching one another and any action undertaken in private potentially witnessed by someone else. In part what emerges is a transpersonal voyeurism, a gaze that in its collective anonymity can justify its prurient interest in the private lives of others. But at the same time, every individual also risks being seen, of becoming the focal point of this transpersonal gaze and having his or her own private life made suddenly public. This tension between seeing and being seen in American literary naturalist texts can be understood as engaging in a larger contemporary conversation about conceptions of privacy, as the desire to mark off private space emerges paradoxically from the same desire to trespass those spaces. The resulting tension between wanting to see into someone else's life and not wanting *others* to see into one's own, or at least controlling the terms of this invasion, destabilizes the divisions between private and public space, transforming them into ever-changing, malleable concepts. The terms of privacy are continually defined and redefined, shifting based on situational changes such that spatial classifications are joined with visual, class, behavioral or even psychological criteria in playing a role in how these concepts are conceived. No longer a fixed concept, privacy becomes a plastic idea that requires continual reevaluation and reinterpretation, as whom and what is private turn out to be increasingly subjective and contested questions.

In its representation of and participation in this historical moment, literary naturalism embodies this instability, as the texts frequently invoke a tension between the absolute visibility

of the city and the desire for privacy. Consequently these narratives reveal the mercurial dimensions of privacy, but in doing so they often turn the private into a space for public fantasy: those regions once hidden become sites where voyeuristic fantasy can be enacted. These spaces right next door are closed to public view, and yet they are always at risk of being made public and of becoming part of a voyeuristic fantasy. In some way this replicates the very act of reading a novel, as the private individual imaginatively enters into the lives of strangers, but literary naturalism intensifies these thematic issues through its formal characteristics. Formally the third-person narrator of naturalist texts opens these characters' private scenes to the reader's public eye, and in doing so the narrator's voyeuristic gaze plays a crucial role in framing and giving form to these confidential moments. By locating a specific viewer as the origin this gaze, these works call attention to the motives behind the transpersonal gaze of the city and reveal how this voyeurism destabilizes traditional divisions between public and private space, transforming private space into the site to enact fantasy. Because they act to trouble these spaces and suggest the possibilities of voyeuristic fantasy, the narrator possesses a more assertive, less passive role in the construction of these scenes than is usually considered. This in turn has significant implications for the role of the reader, because with privacy such an unstable concept, the reader risks being targeted by this voyeurism as well.

I begin this chapter by considering how material developments at the turn of the century were shaping ideas of visibility and spatial relationships. The changing urban conditions of the late nineteenth century resulted in new physical considerations of space, as living quarters and commercial areas became increasingly compressed and the city became more densely and diversely populated. Despite the unreliability of vision as a way of attaining objective knowledge, through a combination of factors, such as changing technologies and an increasingly

complex and difficult to decipher city scene, the late nineteenth century saw an increasing dependence on vision as a way of understanding the world, particularly in the growing cities. The anonymity of the city that results from an increased size and diversity led to an increased suspicion of one's fellow city dwellers, and attempts to categorize and classify a city of strangers placed a premium on visual cognition. This "culture of looking" (Zurier 4)—brought about as well by the rise of photography, newspapers, the city, and even naturalism itself—sought the dissolution of these divisions between public and private space, but this simultaneously led to privacy becoming even more desired. The boundaries between private and public were in the process of being continually reconfigured and redefined throughout this period, as the very space of the city was altering ideas of how public and private spaces were to be conceived. Even as people argued for tightened rules to protect privacy, the desire to invade these private spaces was increasing.

After examining the historical implications of space and visibility at the turn of the century, I consider how these conceptions become represented and dramatized in naturalism. To see how the movement articulates these unstable conceptions of privacy in its depiction of the visual culture at the turn of the century, I will be reading Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900) through the Ashcan School artist John Sloan's paintings and journal entries as a way of more fully illuminating the visuality of the literature as well as the ubiquity of these concerns at this time. Sloan's work depicts the city as an erotic fantasy, with images of women occupying the focus of many of his paintings. Whether illustrating moments transpiring behind private apartment walls or urban street scenes, Sloan's work suggests a highly sexualized gaze that turns private scenes uncomfortably public and public moments oddly private; and throughout both lurks a voyeuristic fantasy of witnessing what is not supposed to be seen.

Central to *Sister Carrie* is the way that characters compulsively watch one another, and these scenes mark both crucial narrative moments as well as critical disruptions of traditional notions of public and private space. The influence of the gaze is a prominent theme in *Sister Carrie*, with the act of watching—through windows, in the theater, on the street—mixing uncomfortably with speculative fantasy, as characters imagine the private lives of others; the intermixing of these elements draws attention to the ubiquitous but problematic nature of spectatorship. The narrator of the novel also plays a fundamental role in revealing the volatile nature of public and private space, as his presence introduces the contingency of vision as a primary vehicle for constructing space. The novel becomes a representation of the relationship between visibility and the unstable nature of urban space emerging at the end of the nineteenth century, as well as an attempt to respond to these tensions by suggesting the voyeuristic gaze's responsibility in both creating and unsettling spatial distinctions.

The gaze in these works appears always drawn by a desire to see the hidden, the unrevealed, the private. The implications of literary naturalism's illicit voyeurism emerge in the crucial role this deviant gaze plays in the fluid and complex construction of public and private selves. In one sense, the voyeur—be it author, narrator, character, or reader—troubles the already unstable boundary between public and private space by turning the private scene he or she watches into a public spectacle; scenes taking place in private are suddenly made public through the voyeur's gaze. But this transformation moves in both directions at once, as in the act of looking into private spaces, the voyeur also becomes a vulnerable figure, publicly engaged in a private act. If recognized in the act, voyeurs will instantly themselves become public, and it is this difference that distinguishes the voyeur's gaze from other iterations, such as the flaneur.

Voyeurs, then, while participating in unsettling the division between public and private through their own gaze, are always at risk of have their own private identity made suddenly public.

This desire to witness the private moment motivates the observer in naturalism, forcing us to restructure our understanding of the dynamic between the observer and the observed in these works because it reveals how these texts are structured around the fantasy of revealing private secrets for the pure pleasure of the voyeur. This chapter seeks to correct the misconception that realist and naturalist texts are, as Mark Seltzer argues, intent on surveillance and discipline, on the “disciplinary relation between seeing (seeing and being seen) and the exercising of power” and invested in the “policing of the real” (96); instead I argue their focus rests on the pleasure and fantasy of vision in the city. Consequently the readers or viewers of naturalist works are implicated in a different way, and through their voyeurism they are made suddenly public despite their private act of reading or viewing. The consumers of naturalism must encounter the dissolution of their own private space even while confronting these issues in the text, and in this way the turn-of-the-century “urban culture of looking” (Zurier 4) must confront itself in the very act of viewing.

Destabilizing Public and Private Space through Vision

In *Vandover and the Brute* (1914) Frank Norris writes of his eponymous protagonist that “at times the strangest and most morbid fancies took possession of him, chief of which was that every one was looking at him while he was walking in the street” (9). As discussed in the previous chapter, Vandover suffers from his own unique maladies—particularly his lycanthropy-mathesis, or werewolf disease—but based on the discourse emerging at the turn of the century, this feeling of absolute observation seems to be an increasingly common feeling. Clearly this sense of being watched affected how people conceived of everything from their behavior to the

construction of social space, from how they acted in private to what they even imagined the word “private” to mean. However, like Jeremy Bentham’s Panopticon, it is not only that people increasingly find themselves being watched by the unknown denizens of the metropolis but that they always believe that there is the *possibility* that they are being watched.¹⁶ The reasons behind this feeling were multiple and intertwined, ranging from the invention of photography and the proliferation of small, snapshot cameras, which could rapidly “snap” anyone’s unsuspecting portrait, to the increasingly pervasive news media, which often mixed reporting with sensationalism as it focused on the sordid and salacious lives of both the rich and the poor alike. Particularly important was the size and density of urban environments, which brought together vast numbers of strangers into relatively small spaces, with many living in closely packed apartment buildings, as well as other architectural developments, like the introduction of the plate glass window and the growth of urban parks. Influential, too, was the consumer culture emerging at this time that was transforming the city into a spectacle to be consumed. These more innocuous forms of the “urban culture of looking” were also developing concurrent to more widespread forms of surveillance, as the city became a site for social regulation through a variety of methods, such as undercover detectives who roamed unidentifiable through the streets.¹⁷ The result was the continual negotiation of the line between public and private space.

A contemporary response to this threat of ubiquitous urban supervision can be found in law professor and future Supreme Court Justice Louis Brandeis and his former law partner Samuel Warren’s 1890 article from the *Harvard Law Review* titled “The Right to Privacy.” The

¹⁶ The “Panopticon” was the prison designed by Bentham with a central watch tower to observe the surrounding ring of cells. The idea was that anyone—or even no one—could occupy this tower and provide the illusion of continual surveillance to the prisoners in the surrounding cells. Foucault made the Panopticon famous in his text, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*.

¹⁷ See Jennifer Fronc’s *New York Undercover* for a detailed account of the role of undercover detectives in the Progressive Era.

article lays out their defense of what they saw as an individual's right to control the extent of one's own public exposure. Brandeis and Warren's article has since become highly influential in arguments about privacy laws, but perhaps as significant is what it reveals about the urgency of this issue to this specific historical moment. Their article evokes the sense of the imminent threat these values of privacy were facing from technological pressures, like the rise of photography, as well as environmental stresses, with urbanization forcing together large numbers of people into small regions of space. Although the exact circumstances that prompted them to write the article are unknown—the long-held belief that Warren was reacting to unwanted publicity about his daughter's engagement has been disproved—it seems likely that a combination of these new cultural, technological, and entrepreneurial factors emerging in society led them to their argument that a fundamental right to privacy was being increasingly violated. Both the appearance of this article as well as its widespread circulation suggests the topicality of these privacy issues and the extent to which these concerns were widespread at the end of the nineteenth century.

After outlining the development of older laws similarly designed to protect the individual, Brandeis and Warren write that new laws must be enacted to protect the individual from “instantaneous photographs and newspaper enterprise [that] have invaded the sacred precincts of private and domestic life” (8). The press appears particularly to blame for the breakdown of privacy, as “to satisfy a prurient taste the details of sexual relations are spread broadcast in the columns of the daily papers” (8). Although it may seem obvious, it is important to note that implicit in Brandeis and Warren's argument is that “private and domestic life”—and the “sexual relations” which presumably occur in that domain—are private and should remain so, and yet the press desires to violate these privacies. Brandeis and Warren write that “the intensity

and complexity of life, attendant upon advancing civilization, have rendered necessary some retreat from the world, and man, under the refining influence of culture, has become more sensitive to publicity, so that solitude and privacy have become more essential to the individual,” and yet “modern enterprise and invention have, through invasions upon his privacy, subjected him to mental pain and distress, far greater than could be inflicted by mere bodily injury” (8-9). This statement articulates the paradox at the center of this debate over privacy: privacy becomes most desired only when it is most threatened. Indeed, near the end of the nineteenth century, “more and more of people’s personal ‘business’ found its way into public records and into the gossip columns of an enterprising ‘yellow press’” (*Harvard Law Review* 1904).¹⁸ Whether the press was to blame for this trend or was simply taking economic advantage of their consumers’ “prurient taste,” the result was that private information could no longer be expected to remain private.

Henri Lefebvre proposes that “(*social*) *space is a (social) product*” (26), and with this in mind, any consideration of the composition of a social space such as private space reveals how a society attempts to produce itself. Because of changing social and material conditions in the late nineteenth century and the pressures of increased visibility, the articulations of public and private space were undergoing a continuing process of redefinition. The belief in a division between public and private space is an ancient one, even if where the lines are drawn between them continually changes: “throughout the Western tradition, private and public have been commonly and sensibly understood as distinct zones. The boundary between bedroom and market, home and meetinghouse can be challenged or violated, but it is clear enough to be spatially distinct”

¹⁸ This was—and is—especially true for the wealthy and famous; in 1886, for example, President Grover Cleveland was hounded by reporters on his honeymoon, as they “crowded a nearby platform to spy on his honeymoon cottage with binoculars; they counted the letters delivered to him, and they even lifted the covers of the dishes sent to the couple at mealtime” (*Ben Franklin’s Website* 117).

(Warner 26-7). Where and how these divisions are drawn, however, has always been historically contingent upon a variety of social, cultural, and political forces.¹⁹

In particular, the growth and transformation of cities, as discussed in chapter one, made these issues impossible to ignore. The division of public from private space has played an important role in architectural design, and, as David Brain emphasizes, “the discipline of design has had to confront not only the requirements of configuring space to meet expectations for privacy or visibility, but also the question of the appropriate visual representation of the relationship of interior spaces to exterior façades, of relatively hidden spaces to those open to movement or sight” (248). Even as definitions and distinctions became more imperative, public and private space became increasingly difficult to differentiate, especially with the rapid rise of apartment buildings in response to the urban population growth of the second half of the nineteenth century. Whereas previously “houses constituted the private architecture of the city” and “civic, religious, and commercial buildings made up the public world,” now apartment buildings “challenged clear boundaries between the home as a private house and the civic and commercial, even the street, as the public realm” (Cromley 2). Although this tension was most acute in the tenements, where large numbers of a city’s poorer residents were crammed into multi-family and multi-generational single apartments, the boundaries between public and private space were also at stake in the upper and middle-class apartment buildings that proliferated during this time:

¹⁹ Ian Watt rather succinctly explains this historical trajectory: “in the mediaeval period nearly all the life of the household went on in the common hall. Then gradually the private bedroom and separate dining quarters for masters and servants became current; by the eighteenth century the final refinements of domestic privacy had fully established themselves” (188). Whether or not these eighteenth-century changes were the “final” refinements is, I think, debatable, but more important is the impermanent nature of the ideas of privacy, and the reciprocal nature between culture and spatial definitions.

The city's wealthiest residents displayed their status in public but also enjoyed access to walled courtyards and private clubs. For the middle class, questions of privacy and visibility had led to the nineteenth-century debate over the possibility of maintaining a proper home in the new form of the apartment house, where neighbors could watch one another's movements, and later informed some of the broad critique of public spectacle launched by the 'party of reticence,' who condemned the impropriety of enforced intimacy associated with the modern culture of exposure. (Zurier 52)

The "relations between the apartment house and the street raised questions about what were the public, what the private elements of apartment buildings" (Cromley 149), and as a consequence the tenants of these buildings "had to deal with the paradox that home was private yet apartment houses had public spaces within" (Cromley 151). Unlike a house, where the doors and windows served as the immediate barriers between the private domestic space and the public street, the apartment building, with its public entrance and communal hallways and courtyards, troubled these clear distinctions. This is not to say that private houses were not also subject to a blurring of distinctions, as semi-public spaces like the drawing room attest, although in major cities like New York the very existence of single occupancy homes was quickly dwindling due to a shortage of land and an influx of residents. In this increasingly public and visible world, one could potentially see or be seen by anyone.

As much as these new living arrangements and huge population surges that disrupted the boundaries between public and private space caused residents anxiety, concerns over the right to privacy were accompanied by the paradoxical desire to be seen: "to be a spectator in the modern city was to be cast in a role, filling at least a bit part or even taking a star turn. This issue was

understood by architects who designed elaborate public spaces to let hotel, restaurant, and theater patrons see and be seen” (Weinberg, Bolger, and Curry 201). The issues of visibility inform these articulations of public and private space, because in “turn-of-the-century New York, the distinction between private and public was also a question of vision and access to space” such that “what you saw and who saw you were matters of class and real estate as well as cultural tradition” (Zurier 52). Contradictorily, the desire for privacy was inextricably linked to the desire to make public, and here can be seen the troubling of these boundaries.

Several architectural developments in the second half of the nineteenth century changed the way people saw and were seen. One was the widespread use of large plate glass windows: “before about 1850, glass made rather a limited contribution to the appearance of buildings because it could only be made in rather small sizes, was of limited variety, and rather expensive,” (*Oxford Companion to Architecture*) but because of new technological improvements, plate glass could be manufactured cheaply and in large sheets. Consequently, “from the 1880s, the wider openings of steel and concrete buildings required increasingly large sizes of glass sheet to cover the wide openings, not only in offices, but also in shops and stores, literally making ‘window shopping’ possible” (*Oxford Companion to Architecture*). These plate glass windows were often used by department stores to display their wares, thus creating a new form of consumer spectacle, as well as in restaurants, allowing diners to both see and be seen. The inside of a building was now suddenly made public: “the window creates a polarized world of inside and outside, actor and spectator, rich and poor that would not occur if what were going on inside were simply unknown. All scenes become opportunities for self-classification in that they seem to invite you in and invite you to imagine being in while strongly reminding you that you are out” (Fisher 261). The window becomes an opportunity for seeing and being seen, but

accompanying it are also issues of power and fantasy: who seems whom, what is seen, and where it is witnessed are brought into relief by these new windows. Likewise an emphasis on the creation of public parks intensified these issues as well, beginning with Frederick Olmsted and Calvert Vaux's design of Central Park in New York City in 1857 and their subsequent work on parks throughout the country (*Oxford Companion to the Garden*). Similarly to restaurants with their plate glass windows, the park became a site of seeing and being seen, a site designated as public and where one could go to intentionally be visible.

"Our society is one not of spectacle," proposes Foucault, "but of surveillance" (217), suggesting then that this total supervision may be less innocuous than it appears. Consequently, one issue that inevitably arises from these increases in visibility is the extent to which this vision has the potential to become a form of surveillance. Indeed, in addition to the way that the possibilities of being watched in the city made continual observation a risk, citizens had other reasons to believe they were being observed. Emerging in the late nineteenth century were different forms of institutionalized surveillance, in particular multiple kinds of undercover observation. This ranged from private detectives working to undermine labor strikes to the newspaper reporters going "undercover" to report on social issues (Fronc 12-13). As a consequence, by the turn of the century people had begun to believe in the possibility that they were the subject of surveillance. Although Foucault's model of panoptic surveillance imperfectly represents the kind of visibility I am arguing was enacted in the turn-of-the-century city, it does provide a way of conceptualizing the effects of this constant visibility. For this particular historical moment, it might be more accurate to think of the Panopticon as inverted and endlessly mirrored: instead of the inmates being watched by the all-seeing tower, it is the one in the tower who is observed by all those around him or her; and yet every inmate also exists at the center of

their own ring of observation, being observed by those surrounding him or her, and so on indefinitely. This obviously deviates substantially from Foucault's model, but it does not invalidate his argument regarding how surveillance has entered into our very consciousness, effecting our internal behavior: "he who is subjected to a field of visibility, and who knows it, assumes responsibility for the constraints of power; he makes them play spontaneously upon himself; he inscribes in himself the power relation in which he simultaneously plays both roles; he becomes the principle of his own subjection" (203). For Foucault this becomes an issue of discipline, but in naturalism the "playing of both roles" that results from this pervasive visibility makes voyeuristic fantasy a possibility as never before.

Underlying this urban supervision does not seem to be a desire to regulate the behavior of others; it is instead based entirely in the pleasure of the one who gazes. Foucault argues that "it does not matter what motive animates" the operator of the Panopticon, whether it is "the curiosity of the indiscreet, the malice of the child, the thirst for knowledge of the philosopher who wishes to visit this museum of human nature, or the perversity of those who take pleasure in spying and punishing" (202). Yet that is if the operator is fundamentally unknowable, if the machinery hides his or her identity and transforms the individual's gaze into an all-seeing eye, which is not the case for the type of urban supervision that, perhaps contradictorily, disperses the panoptic gaze. The viewer in the tower becomes implicated, and consequently the significance of how we consider the transpersonal gaze becomes inverted; instead of contemplating the effects of surveillance on our own bodies, we become the viewer watching in the Panopticon and so must consider the effects of our surveilling the bodies of others.

What at first glance might appear to be surveillance is more accurately thought of as a collective, transpersonal voyeurism, as this indicates both the widespread nature of this

phenomenon as well as the pleasure that motivates this form of vision. Psychoanalysis has provided the most thorough accounts of the pathologies underlying this pleasure in vision, be it through voyeurism or its clinical counterpart, scopophilia. Lacan argues that the voyeur attempts to see “the object as absence” because “what the voyeur is looking for and finds is merely a shadow, a shadow behind the curtain. There he will phantasize any magic of presence, the most graceful of girls, for example, even if on the other side there is only a hairy athlete “(182). Instead of desiring to be who they watch, voyeurs desire *imagining* themselves being who they watch; these private spaces therefore open an imaginative realm to carry out these voyeuristic fantasies. Additionally, Otto Fenichel suggests that the goal of scopophilia “is *to look at* the sexual object” (377), but how we define the “sexual object” is of course very open to debate; it is evident that voyeurism is more than just an interest in watching sexual behavior, or at least sexual behavior traditionally defined, and most attempts by psychoanalysts and psychologists to define it have recognized the unstable nature of this desire.

Similarly to the voyeur’s gaze, the naturalist’s gaze goes beyond mere perception, but to suggest that either exclusively focus on sexual gratification would be inaccurate. The psychoanalyst Wilhelm Stekel, an early colleague of Freud’s, defined voyeurism as both the “erotic gratification experienced on looking at another person’s sexual organs” and the “morbid desire to peep into secrets” (341). The first half of his definition seems in line with Fenichel’s, recalling as it does Freud’s discussion of the same subject in *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*, but the second part, which only abstractly follows from this first, remains much more interesting and elusive. Stekel’s definition suggests that the voyeur desires to see that which is hidden or private, be it related to sexuality or the more general idea of “secrets.” The desire to know secrets, to know what is supposed to be private, is the desire to know what one is not

supposed to know *because* one is not supposed to know; it is an endless loop, as we want to know secrets because they are secrets, and as secrets they are not supposed to be known, and indeed cannot be known if they are to remain secret. The “desire to peep into secrets,” then, is not the desire to disclose secrets, because once revealed, a secret no longer holds any power. To take pleasure in knowing secrets requires that the secret remain as intact as possible, and this pleasure arises from the latent power that a secret holds in its untold state. Yet this is a paradoxical power, as it dissipates the moment the secret is revealed. The same obviously holds true for that which is supposed to be private, because the private must remain so in order to have its power, but this potential can never be redeemed without becoming public. But because the voyeur watches without being seen what he or she is not supposed to see, the voyeur maintains that tension between knowing the secret and not revealing it, between being private and being public. It is in this liminal state that the voyeur finds pleasure, a pleasure in the power of the unrevealed, and it is this desire that artistic representations of voyeurism attempt to capture.

The Private Made Public in Naturalism

To see how privacy was being defined against and through the voyeuristic gaze emerging at this historical moment, I want to consider several of Ashcan School painter John Sloan’s works to see how this voyeurism becomes thematized in artistic representations. Like many Ashcan paintings, these works frequently call attention to the very act of spectatorship, and in doing so both describe and limit the possibilities of urban visibility. As discussed in chapter one, the group of artists known as the Ashcan School—including George Bellows, Robert Henri, William Glackens, George Luks, Everett Shinn, and Sloan—were some of the first to realistically represent urban life, frequently thematizing visibility. Many of the paintings feature highly public spaces, such as the bustling market or the public park, spaces that both allow



Figure 16. John Sloan, *Sunday Afternoon in Union Square*, 1912.

people to see and be seen. But these scenes also have the capacity to unsettle the clear distinctions between public and private space. For example, in Sloan's *Sunday Afternoon in Union Square* (1912, fig. 16), two colorfully dressed young women walk side-by-side through the park, drawing the stares of both the men and women surrounding them. The women on the bench behind them gossip, presumably about the other women's exaggerated fashion, while the men gaze with unabashed interest, perhaps desire. Nearly everyone in the painting is both looking *at* and being seen *by* someone else in the park, and yet despite the publicity of the space,

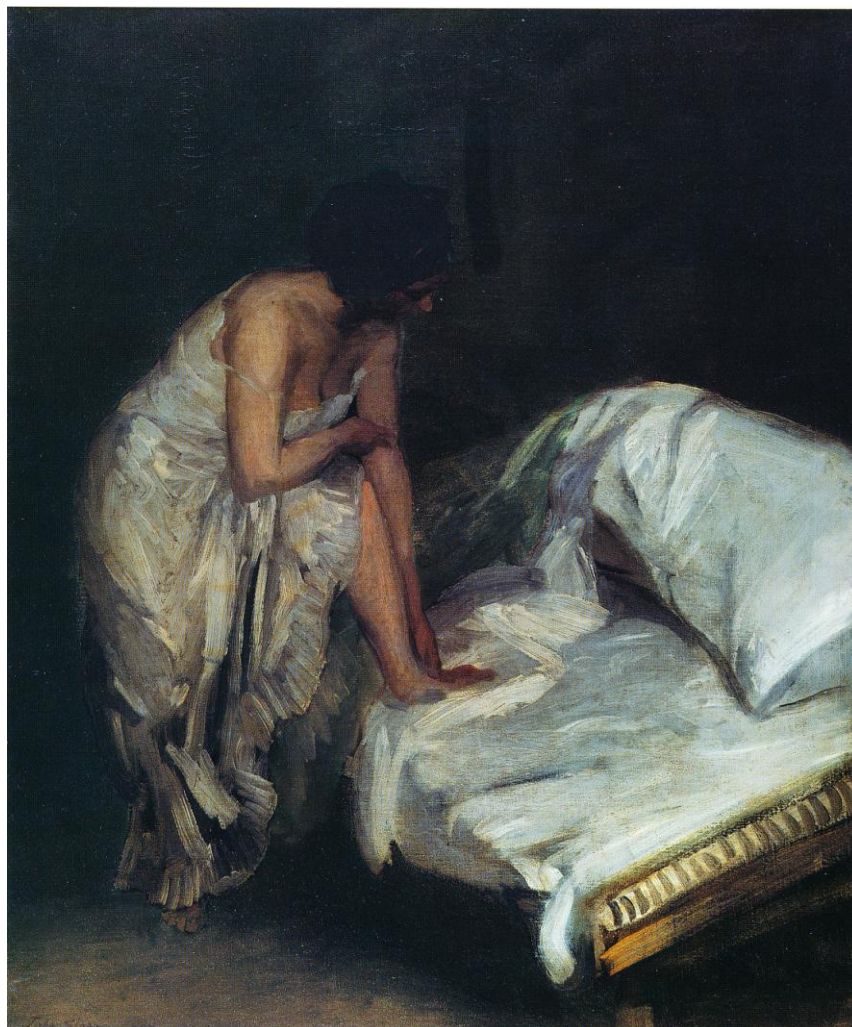


Figure 17. John Sloan, *The Cot*, 1907.

the women in particular seem isolated, even made private by the stares of others: the force of the others' gaze alienates the women, making them no longer even part of the same space.

Similarly to other paintings of the Ashcan School, Sloan's meditations on urban vision inevitably and dramatically represent the complexities of articulating the public and private space of the turn-of-the-century city. Along with the more public displays of modern life, Sloan often turned his attention to depicting private moments as well, and almost invariably women—partially clothed or naked—were the focal point of these works. A striking example of this is Sloan's *The Cot* (1907, fig. 17), which reveals a woman alone in her apartment, dressed only in

her nightgown and standing with one foot on her disheveled bed, massaging her foot. Her head is turned away from the viewer, but her body is positioned with her shoulders open, giving a slight glance down her nightgown as the straps slide off her shoulders. The clearly invasive nature of the viewer's gaze works to construct the meaning of the painting: this is not a public scene meant for anyone to be witnessing, and the viewer's illicit gaze paradoxically creates the image because only through the voyeur's gaze can such a scene be witnessed. The sense of the painting as a private show intended only for the viewer imparts the work its power and also suggests the complex psychological issues at work in voyeurism; even if we are disgusted by the intrusion of the gaze into this woman's privacy, it is inescapably our own public gaze which makes the moment possible.

Sloan warrants particular consideration because in addition to his highly voyeuristic paintings and etchings—"peeping Tom and related characters, or voyeuristic situations for the spectator, are present in over one-quarter of Sloan's genre pictures" (Baker 382)—he also kept a diary that includes numerous entries detailing his own scopophilia that provide insight into how he conceived as well as interpreted his voyeuristic art. Sloan's diary divulges his intense interest in the lives of others, particularly those who lived within view of his New York City apartment window. Janice Coco suggests that Sloan used windows "as vehicles of observation, as controlled spaces where his fascination for women could be explored safely" and that "the window's very presence connotes a wish to examine the interior space, to understand and to know, while still acknowledging the boundaries between public and private" (74). The window allows private space to still be maintained even while simultaneously being disrupted by the voyeuristic gaze. In his work Sloan seems to capture this original voyeuristic moment of gazing into someone else's life, a moment that challenges the limits of public and private space; as

Sloan himself reveals, many of his paintings and etchings had their origins in “night vigils at the back window of a Twenty-third Street Studio” (*Gist* 220). In a relatively typical entry of his diary, Sloan records his observations as he watches out the window:

I watched a suffering woman—a girl in front room opposite who has been there for about three weeks, young man who comes in the evening—not there this afternoon. She went out and got a big tin of dark beer or stout and drank six large tumblers of it! Jibbering and weeping with a rage she nursed-maybe he has left her. Finally about 7:30 she shut the window, which seemed strange. She was in her petticoat when I saw her a few moments before—saw her take off her skirt. I wondered if she turned off the gas to die! None of my business? Dolly came, cooked spaghetti for dinner. (*John Sloan's New York Scene* 564)

Sloan's voyeuristic peering leads him to speculate wildly as to the causes behind her behavior—“maybe he has left her”—as well as the results—“I wondered if she turned off the gas to die!”—but to also ultimately resume his own life unaffected—“Dolly came, cooked spaghetti for dinner.” A few days after this September 24th, 1911 entry, Sloan witnesses the incident reach its climax, as the young man angrily departs with a suitcase, only to later return while the woman sleeps: “Then he came back—sat at window, looked at girl on bed disordered, her thigh bared as she restlessly turned in her sleep. Then he took off his coat and turned out the light” (*John Sloan's New York Scene* 565). On the third day, “the couple opposite seem to have patched up differences and are happy over a can of dark brew of some sort” (*John Sloan's New York Scene* 565), marking the end of their drama in Sloan's diary, but the sequence illustrates Sloan's intense, speculative, and ultimately voyeuristic interest in the lives transpiring behind each adjacent window. Sloan's interest in the scene abates when the drama ends and imaginative

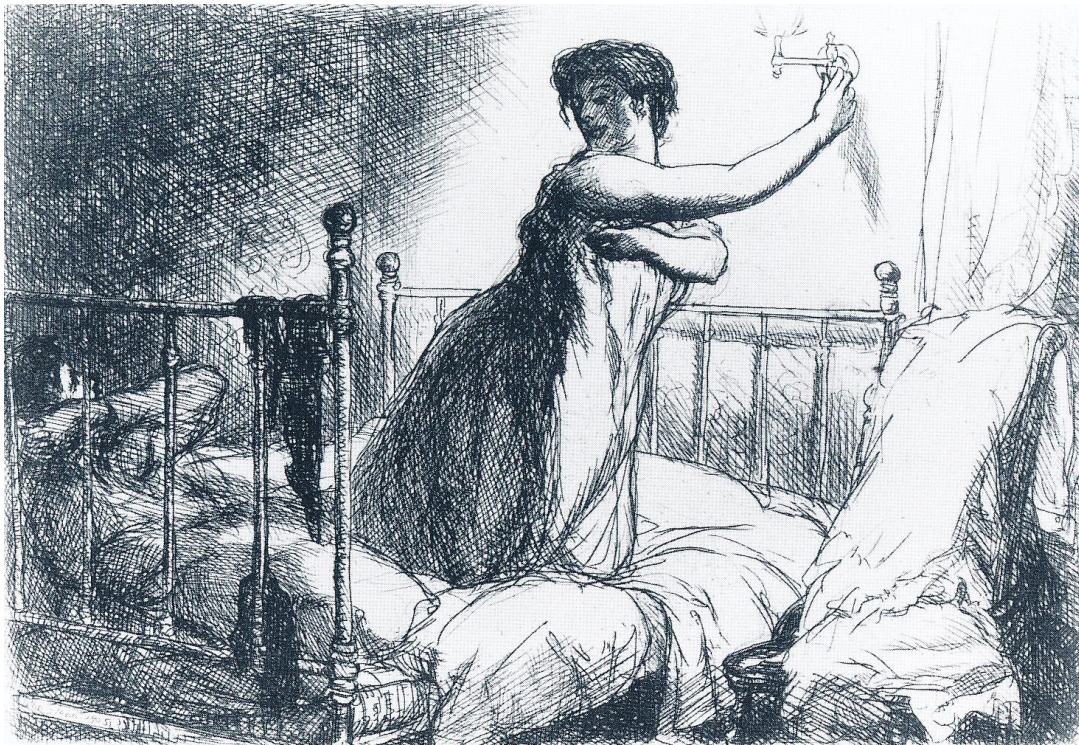


Figure 18. John Sloan, *Turning Out the Light*, 1905-6.

speculation loses its prurient potential; the girl's excessive drinking, furious weeping, and suggestive undressing legitimize Sloan's peering because they represent a spectacle, a sordid fantasy of private life, but the happy reconciliation offers none of the same allure, thus ending his clandestine observation.

The results of these observations and speculations can be seen throughout his work. In his etching *Turning Out the Light* (1905-6, fig. 18), a woman kneeling on her bed reaches to turn the lights out while a man lies beside her with his hands behind his head. The room is disheveled, with clothes lying on the bed frame and the woman wearing only her nightgown. That the couple is preparing to sleep seems unlikely, but it is also ultimately up to the imagination of the viewer to decide what comes next. Similarly, *Three A.M.* (1909, fig. 19) features two women in their kitchen, both in nightgowns. One smokes and prepares something on the stove, while the other



Figure 19. John Sloan, *Three A.M.*, 1909.

sits talking and drinking. Sloan wrote in his journal of this painting that “I have been watching a curious two room household, two women and, I think, two men, their day begins after midnight, they cook at 3 A.M. (*John Sloan’s New York Scene* 308-9). This April 1909 entry reveals that Sloan does not know their occupation, but given the hours prostitution has often been inferred. Both scenes provide voyeuristic access to these private moments which otherwise would have remained unwitnessed. But Sloan seems intent on maintaining the illusion of privacy that these people feel, and that consequently privacy exists when one *believes* it exists; he does not, for example, include in his paintings the windows through which he assumedly peers, thus allowing both the viewer and the viewed to maintain an indeterminate relationship. Coco argues that Sloan

used voyeurism as a way of accessing his subjects' authentic experience because he "knew that self-conscious subjects always strike poses, no matter how hard they try to follow an artist's request to be natural—to be themselves" (90-1) and consequently to see their true selves he had to watch them unobserved; privacy needed to be both invaded and maintained in order to capture for the public what only existed in private.

But who is the voyeur of Sloan's paintings? In other words, through whose eyes do we see these private worlds? The obvious answer would be Sloan himself, and his diaries support this reading because of his clear penchant for voyeurism. In his July 6, 1911 entry, Sloan acknowledges this interest in peeping through other people's windows, although he dismisses the irregularity of such behavior: "I am in the habit of *watching every bit* of human life I can see about my windows, but I do it so that I am not observed at it. I 'peep' through real interest, not being observed myself. I feel that it is no insult to the people you are watching to do so unseen, but that to do it openly and with great expression of amusement is an evidence of *real vulgarity*" (*John Sloan's New York Scene* 549). Sloan's theory of clandestine observation is certainly unique, and it is difficult to determine whether it is simply justification for his own voyeurism or suggestive of a larger theory of urban vision. Based on these diary entries, Sloan himself certainly had voyeuristic impulses, although whether his are unusual or he is just unusually honest might be debated. In another entry from the summer of 1908 he writes that "there are so many lovely women in New York and they dress so charmingly, I'd like to spend hours watching them" (*John Sloan's New York Scene* 231). Coco observes that for the most part "scholars have resisted the word 'voyeurism' which, in its narrowest sense, precludes normal, healthy looking" both because it would "diminish the man" and "the term itself polarizes the issue: one is either perverted, or not" (60). However, when critics do consider the voyeurism of his paintings, it is in

relation to *Sloan* as voyeur and his paintings as representations of his *own* voyeurism. One critic even writes that his voyeuristic paintings “are the products of subjective sexual fantasy rather than an ‘objective’ impulse to record the American scene, and the art-historical framework that categorizes these painters as Realists must be modified to reflect more accurately the processes by which they created” (Baker 395). Another notes that “no one has examined the artist’s professed fear of women in relation to his recurring motifs of spectatorship, even though his paintings and etchings of the city proclaim an avid interest in people—particularly women” (Coco 13). These readings of Sloan’s work locate his impulses—understood as deviant or not—firmly at the center of his paintings and in doing so position him as the possessor of the voyeur’s gaze that grants the viewer access to these scenes.

But when we remove the artist from the position of the implied viewer and replace him with the actual viewer—those who strolled past his paintings in the gallery or even those who gaze at these images presented in this chapter—these issues become much more complicated. To simply align Sloan with the implied viewer critically diminishes both the power and message of these works. Trying to understand any individual’s response to these paintings is of course problematic, and, as discussed in the previous chapter, questions of the complex gendered responses which accompany the gaze underlie any analysis of paintings like Sloan’s which deal with such sexualized subject matter. But at the same time, recognizing the sexuality of the object of the gaze does not necessarily mean that one needs to be sexually interested in order to engage in this kind of vision. In Sloan’s etching, *Fun, One Cent* (1905-6, fig. 20) three young women are shown giggling and taking turns looking through the viewer at a penny arcade at risqué images, as the signs above them attest: “Girls in their Night Gowns—Spicy,” “Those Naughty Chorus Girls,” and “Trying on Her Stocking.” These signs read like a catalog of Sloan’s own work, but



Figure 20. John Sloan, *Fun, One Cent*, 1905-6.

they also suggest the pervasive, sexualized nature of the gaze in this modern, urban world. The etching indicates the multiple and varied character of the audience who engages in this erotic gaze. Indeed, the picture acts as a kind of analogous representation for all of Sloan's work: the erotic images are viewed not by some unique deviant but by the very same city dwellers who also constitute these pictures. In other words, this etching suggests, and the rest of Sloan's work demonstrates, that these viewers are looking at themselves, but that they do so through the lens of their own voyeuristic fantasies. These paintings consequently implicate the individual viewer in this voyeurism, making him or her complicit in this collapse of private space for personal fantasy.

The Private in Fiction, Fiction in Private

The conditions of the art gallery make this complicity manifest in especially pressing and transparent ways; the viewers of the painting look publically and en masse, in a way approximating the very conditions of the urban scene that works such as Sloan's attempt to

replicate. So while the social and cultural tensions between private and public space that emerge at this historical moment are represented thematically in art from this period, just as important are the ways that these tensions are enacted through the very processes of producing and consuming art, as we have seen in the example of Sloan's work. Although this process operates more straightforwardly in the public consumption of the visual arts, it is no less present in the seemingly private world of reading fiction. Superficially, writing and reading would both seem to dwell wholly in the private realm: a profession carried out by an author in private, consumed by the reader in private. But if we consider the way that private and public "space" are not merely physical spaces, and that these terms involve a wide array of conceptual concerns in addition to spatial ones, then it becomes clear that the actual relays between author and reader are considerably more layered and vexed than this private author/private reader dynamic initially suggests.

As a medium, print occupies a curious space as a private activity that can link the individual to a larger public. On the one hand, the experience of reading is intensely private, both physically and psychologically, as the individual reads and engages with the material privately. Ian Watt suggests that print secures "a complete penetration of the reader's subjective life" by becoming "a kind of extension of our personal life—a private possession that we keep with us in our pocket or under the pillow, and that tells of an intimate world of which no one speaks out loud in ordinary life, a world which had previously found utterance only in the diary, the confession or the familiar letter, forms of expression exclusively addressed to one person, whether the writer himself, the priest or the close friend" (198). As Watt explains it, fiction becomes a personal object to the reader that tells of the personal lives of the characters. However, despite the intimacy, the access granted to the private reader to observe the private

lives of these fictional characters is voyeuristic because the conventions of privacy do not work in both directions. Writing specifically of Samuel Richardson, Watt argues that the novel form in particular allowed for more detailed descriptions of private—usually sexual—relationships than previous public arts, such as theater: “*Clarissa* is an extreme example of this. Richardson’s impersonal and anonymous role allowed him to project his own secret fantasies into a mysterious next room: and the privacy and anonymity of print placed the reader behind a keyhole where he, too, could peep unobserved and witness rape being prepared, attempted and eventually carried out. Neither the reader nor the author were violating any decorum” (199). Despite feeling a personal connection to these characters and their private lives, the reader also feels justified in his or her voyeurism because “the privacy and anonymity of print” allow the reader to simultaneously remain at a distance; private readers find themselves personally involved in the lives of these characters even while being able to take a kind of perverse pleasure in voyeuristic observation.

However, even as the reader participates in this complex tangle of shifting private relationships, he or she also engages in a much wider, more public act. Through reading, one imaginatively connects to all those who are similarly engaged, thus becoming, in Benedict Anderson’s famous phrase, part of an “imagined community.” Anderson identifies the emergence of print capitalism as one of the crucial methods by which disparate peoples began to conceptualize themselves as a single collective community and, eventually, a nation. According to Anderson, one of the most important effects wrought by the printing press was the newspaper: “each communicant is well aware that the ceremony he performs is being replicated simultaneously by thousands (or millions) of others of whose existence he is confident, yet of whose identity he has not the slightest notion” (35). Although this sense of an “imagined

community” of readers is strongest for a text like the newspaper because of its restricted window of relevance—and therefore more focused readership—it is no less true of the audience for fiction. The difference, it seems, is in how often the reader of fiction considers those others performing this “ceremony”; it is most likely that someone reading a novel has occasional flashes of awareness rather than the sustained recognition that Anderson seems to imply. Consequently, the private reader, reading of these private lives, can become suddenly conscious of his or her very public engagement in these works; to continue Watt’s metaphor, the “reader behind a keyhole” can glance back over his or her shoulder and discover Anderson’s “imagined community” of other readers also gathered to “peer unobserved.” This recreates both the urban experience and the experience of the art gallery, where the viewer engages in a private act and yet does so as part of collective.

Literary naturalism amplifies these tensions between public and private that underlie all fiction through its strange amalgamation of formal characteristics and thematic concerns. As discussed in chapters two and three, the narrators of naturalist texts frequently assume a theoretically neutral, objective viewpoint from which to relate the narratives of characters’ private and public lives in intimate, sometimes salacious detail, and through this detached point of view the reader could safely observe the lives of these characters. However, despite this supposed distance, as Donna Campbell asserts, “naturalistic works threaten to include readers in the uncertain and frequently miserable world they depict, deliberately undercutting the safe position traditionally enjoyed by the reader” by revealing the unstable nature of class hierarchies in the United States, thus forcing “readers into an anxious identification with characters they might otherwise disregard” (110). By threatening to engulf its readers, naturalism makes the audience always nervous that they, too, might become the spectacle being voyeuristically

consumed by other readers, that they will, in a sense, fall through the keyhole and become just another actor in the fantasies of those peeping in. The sense of privacy that these naturalist texts create is such that it could at any moment be ruptured; individuals may remain private only so long as they can retain their privileged perspective, but this vantage point might be lost at any moment, sending the private individual sprawling into the public eye.

The (Super)Vision of the City: Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*

The precarious fluidity of public and private space that literary naturalism articulates can be seen in Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900), a novel that continually undermines its characters' attempts to maintain their privacy as it leaves no action left unnoticed by some other character. The novel follows a small-town girl, Caroline Meeber, who travels to Chicago seeking the opportunities afforded by the big cities of the late nineteenth century. After briefly working in a shoe factory while living with her penny-pinching sister and her husband, Carrie moves into an apartment paid for by Charlie Drouet, a traveling salesman she met on the train into the city. Drouet introduces Carrie to George Hurstwood, a married saloon manager who falls in love with her. After "accidentally" closing the safe after taking out \$10,000, he abducts Carrie and they run off, eventually arriving in New York City. Hurstwood then begins a long decline into poverty, homelessness, and, ultimately, suicide, while Carrie begins her ascendancy to theatrical stardom and the wealth she craves. However, she remains unhappy, partially because she has seen another possible avenue to happiness through Bob Ames, an engineer who represents the possibilities of a life devoted to intellectual rather than monetary pursuits.

As with much of Dreiser's fiction, and indeed many other naturalist works of literature and art, the novel thematically and formally celebrates both the spectacle of the big city as well as the specular nature of urban life. When Carrie first arrives in Chicago, she continually turns her

own gaze on the city, as “the life of the streets continued for a long time to interest” her as a space for specular and speculative fantasy: “she never wearied of wondering where the people in the cars were going or what their enjoyments were. Her imagination trod a very narrow round, always winding up at points which concerned money, looks, clothes, or enjoyment” (39).

Published only a year after Thorstein Veblen’s *Theory of the Leisure Class* (1899), one can sense in this passage Veblen’s famous definition of “conspicuous consumption,” as Carrie understands her world through the visual manifestation of wealth and status.

As discussed in previous chapters, visibility occupies an integral role in naturalism, and throughout *Sister Carrie* the gaze of one character or group repeatedly fixes and constructs the identity of another individual or set; the specular nature of the city foregrounds vision such that every unknown stranger is judged immediately “on sight,” and this also becomes how characters ultimately understand their own identity. The nature of this vision becomes complicated by its multi-directional nature, as Shawn Michelle Smith explains: “while the anonymity of the city encouraged new forms of social surveillance . . . that same anonymity invited new performances of identity and shows of distinction. For if surveillance proposed that one could read the faces and bodies of others, it also reminded viewers that their own bodies were constantly on exhibit for a scrutinizing gaze” (208). A particularly representative example of this can be found in Carrie and Mrs. Vance’s walk down Broadway, where “there gathered, before the matinee and afterwards, not only all the pretty women who love a showy parade, but the men who love to gaze upon and admire them” (226), a description that reveals the centrality of scopophilia to the urban experience, as it complexly mixes voyeurism and exhibitionism:

Carrie stepped along easily enough after they got out of the car at Thirty-fourth Street, but soon fixed her eyes upon the lovely company which swarmed by and

with them as they proceeded. She noticed suddenly that Mrs. Vance's manner had rather stiffened under the gaze of handsome men and elegantly dressed ladies, whose glances were not modified by any rules of propriety. To stare seemed the proper and natural thing. Carrie found herself stared at and ogled. Men in flawless top-coats, high hats, and silver-headed walking sticks elbowed near and looked too often into conscious eyes. (227)

This passage indicates the rules, or lack thereof, that govern the gaze in public spaces: “to stare seemed the proper and natural thing,” and no one challenges this notion. In fact, men and women purposefully gather on Broadway in order to either see or be seen. However, there remains here a sense of the invasiveness of this gaze, even from the veteran Mrs. Vance, who had “stiffened under the gaze of handsome men and elegantly dressed ladies.” Although it makes sense that Carrie would be bewildered and seemingly slightly offended by these looks, Mrs. Vance's reaction seems to suggest that she, too, feels uncomfortable. There is a way that even the public self—as Mrs. Vance articulates herself—acting in a public space can be disrupted and, in a sense, made private; this scene suggests a voyeuristic invasion of privacy that would seem incongruous with the public nature of the event. Here the gaze has the power to turn a public moment into an intimate one, as the staring and ogling of these men *transforms* the women into private subjects. This is evident near the end of the novel as well, when Hurstwood confronts the now wildly successful Carrie on the street: “Carrie looked at him, while pedestrians stared at her. She felt the strain of publicity. So did Hurstwood” (352). The gaze moves in many directions simultaneously, transforming a private meeting into a public one, but even that moment of heightened publicity merely reinforces the private nature of the encounter between the two former lovers; a voyeuristic invasion of privacy underlies this moment, despite its publicity.

Because the city in the novel operates as such a visual spectacle, the line between street and stage becomes continually distorted, obscuring along with it the distinction between public and private space. The city and the theater exist in an unexpectedly reciprocal relationship, as the metropolis as spectacle transforms “life” into “drama,” which in turn makes it difficult, if not impossible, to differentiate between the fantasy of the stage and the reality of the city. Philip Fisher argues that consequently Carrie’s theatrical roles in which she is situated as the romantic love interest allow for the audience to indulge in their own fantasies: “the audience’s obvious fantasy of being in love with the actress whom they pay to watch display her feelings is the relocated eroticism that has disappeared from their actual lives” (268). The fantasies of *Sister Carrie* are consequently enacted through very controlled voyeurism as constructed by the fantasy of the stage. The reader does not see Carrie exhibit her sexuality while in her private apartment, instead glimpsing it only while she takes the stage; when actually in private, she sits in a rocking chair, an image that calls forth pictures of old women or mothers with their babies more than passionate young women. Because the actual scenes of intimacy between Carrie and her lovers are not described, they must exist only in the fantasies of the audience—both within and outside the text. The stage, though, acts as just the clearest manifestation of these fantasies; one need only recall the ogling of Broadway’s “handsome men” to see how this operates on the street. As the interests of the theater audience and the reader begin to merge, these personal fantasies project outward onto the audience of the novel.

The line between theatrical and urban worlds becomes increasingly indefinite, leading to a disintegration of the divisions between “fantasy” and “reality” that complicates conceptions of public and private space. In other words, if the world is viewed as a drama, then invasions of privacy become harder to even identify because private space itself seems less easily definable or

sustainable. Windows play a key role in this breakdown, Fisher observes, because they enable “one to see the street as a spectacle, a performance” as a “window theatricalizes experience both for the one rocking on the inside as well as for the passerby who glances up and sees the ‘pretty scene’ of a young lady wistfully rocking at her window in the evening light” (261). We often find Carrie, for example, looking out on the streets from her private apartment: she “drew the one small rocking-chair up to the open window, and sat looking out upon the night and streets in silent wonder” (11). The private space of the apartment becomes a space for watching and fantasizing about the public world, but as Fisher notes the process of standing at the window and watching the world implicitly opens someone like Carrie to being *herself* observed. And in a way of course, she is, although only by the reader’s gaze. Even when Carrie stands on the other side of the glass, the speculative fantasizing continues: “through the open windows she could see the figures of men and women in working aprons, moving busily about. The great streets were wall-lined mysteries to her; the vast offices, strange mazes, which concerned far-off individuals of importance. She could only think of people connected with them as counting money, dressing magnificently, and riding in carriages” (13). Carrie fantasizes about the world she witnesses through these windows, speculating about the realities of wealth and believing these to encompass everything that she does not possess. These are the secrets that obsess Carrie, as she wants to peer into her fellow city-dwellers private lives in order to romanticize these worlds that she can only watch from the outside.

But when Carrie and Hurstwood initiate their liaison, she soon finds that everywhere *they*, too, are watched, and before long the couple confronts a lack of spaces to which to retreat from the public eye and, in Brandeis and Warren’s phrase, its “prurient tastes.” This can be seen when, after meeting in the park, the couple decides to take a drive in a carriage. However,

“Hurstwood could not help feeling nervous over the publicity of it” and so instead of taking Carrie down a main street he decides that “he would take her to drive along the new Boulevard” (94), and thus out of the public eye. Hurstwood, perhaps more than any other character, seems to exist differently in his private life than in his public. His managerial job at the hotel makes him a conspicuously public figure, which makes his desired affair with Carrie all the more complicated. But despite his conscious attempt to avoid the “publicity” of his outing with Carrie, Hurstwood is witnessed by Doctor Beale, “the handsome resident physician of the neighborhood,” who, “coming east on the same drive, had recognized Hurstwood, but not before he was quite past him. He was not so sure of Carrie—did not know whether it was Hurstwood’s wife or daughter” (153). Doctor Beale’s observation of Hurstwood and Carrie, and his casual mentioning of it to Mrs. Hurstwood, are the catalyst for the chain of events that lead to the escalation of Hurstwood’s relationship with Carrie, the stealing of the money, and all of the attendant consequences; the fact that these characters are constantly watching or being watched effects their actions, as privacy is no longer a possibility. Carrie, too, is covertly seen while with Hurstwood: “Mrs. Hale, from her upper window, saw her coming in. ‘Um,’ she thought to herself, ‘she goes riding with another man when her husband is out of the city. He had better keep an eye on her’” (97). And the chambermaid, herself interested in Drouet, has also been watching Carrie and notifies the salesman of Hurstwood’s visits, thus sparking Drouet’s suspicions. It seems that everyone in the apartment building has been watching Carrie, deducing—correctly—her private behavior from what they witness in public.

Dreiser’s novel depicts the inescapable quality of this transpersonal urban gaze, and consequently public and private divisions become increasingly unstable as they are routinely disrupted by these invasive gazes. Paradoxically however, the gaze itself participates both in

making and unmaking these divisions, creating a vortex wherein the gaze creates boundaries even while it destroys them. This becomes evident when Hurstwood finds the safe open and contemplates whether or not to steal the money. The narrator remarks that “no one had observed” Hurstwood, that “he was quite alone. No one could tell what he wished to do. He could work this thing out for himself” (192). Hurstwood’s desire for and understanding of privacy stem from his conception of its opposite, as the fact that his first thoughts are of the gaze of others suggests the pervasiveness of this transpersonal urban vision. In fact, despite his attempt to escape to Canada with Carrie and the money by quickly leaving town on the night train and using an assumed name, he is caught within days. Private detectives see Hurstwood almost as soon as he arrives, justifying his concerns that he might be seen. Making matters worse, the events are soon publically reconstructed by the newspapers, turning his private indiscretion into an extremely public one.

Throughout the scene of the robbery Hurstwood appears acutely conscious of his privacy, with his thoughts always of the gaze of others. Indeed, his first actions involve drawing the curtains and checking the door, and he continually looks “fearfully around” (192) to see if he has been observed. A bizarre but insistent erotic undertone also pervades the entire sequence, as the reader watches Hurstwood in private repeatedly withdraw the money from the safe and then inserts it again. He repeatedly “puts his hand on the knob” (192) of the safe, and he hesitates on the threshold of an action which will degrade him in the eyes of the public thereafter; this scene shares parallels with an earlier moment wherein Carrie wavers regarding her sexual relationship with Drouet. Hurstwood also fetishizes the piles of money he finds inside, as this monetary fortune represents the possibility of attaining his sexual treasure in Carrie.

But while the physical motions and underlying intentions evoke a bizarre eroticism, this alone is not enough to address the charged tone of the scene. More than anything, the deviancy of this scene arises out of the fact that the reader watches an intensely private moment, strangely one of the most private moments in the text. Voyeurism does not only apply to sexual situations, and indeed given the novel's oft-commented upon open attitude towards sex it makes a certain sense that somehow the most invasive scene would not be about sex at all. Both the narrator and the readers have indeed observed him throughout this whole scene, and their presence signals the instability of this private space: the reader watches Hurstwood engage in acts he wishes to keep private, and whatever perversity arises from the scene derives from the sense of *the reader's* invasion of his privacy.

What emerges in *Sister Carrie*, and naturalist texts more generally, is a voyeuristic fantasy of participating in these private moments that is kept in unresolved tension, as the voyeur does not actually want to participate but instead wants to fantasize *about* participating. To return to Lacan, in voyeurism "what one looks at is what cannot be seen" (182), so when the subject looks through the window, he or she does not see the actual Other as object but instead sees the representation of the *fantasy* of the Other. In *Sister Carrie*, then, the reader-voyeur looks through the window and does not see a man robbing from a safe, or does not *only* see a man robbing a safe, but a man locked in an anguishing struggle with his own desires, an internal struggle we know he will not win but is nevertheless perversely pleasurable to witness. And it is this psychological battle that we wish to witness, as it exposes more of Hurstwood's naked self than any actual nudity might. "One looks at an object in order *to share in* its experience," suggests Fenichel, and "exhibitionists, too (who unconsciously are always active scopophiliacs as well), enter by empathy, during their perverse activities, into what is actually, or what in their magical

fantasy they conceive to be, the experience of their objects” (377). The reader-voyeurs share in this private moment through their fantasy, but this voyeuristic transpersonal gaze allows them to maintain their distance and not fall wholly into this perverse world.

The problem, of course, lies with maintaining this critical distance, because even while suggesting this gap the voyeur’s gaze depends upon the possibilities of a transgression. As we shall see in the next section, this issue manifests itself in the formal structure of the novel, but it also appears dramatized within the text. For example, Hurstwood’s ill-fated foray into the world of trolleyman begins with his speculative reading of accounts of the strike in the newspaper. Acting as a part of Anderson’s “imagined community,” Hurstwood joins the world of newspaper readers to peer into the lives of these strikers from the safety of his own apartment. The strike offers a violent spectacle of class conflict, one that newspapers readers such as Hurstwood can witness imaginatively and from afar. And in a strange way this private consumption of public affairs can at times undermine the “imagined community” by emphasizing the distance from these events. As Hurstwood reads these newspaper stories he simultaneously joins an “imagined community” *and* is forced into a voyeuristic position through the solitary peering into this spectacle: his privacy in fact makes the reading perverse. But when material circumstances force Hurstwood to actually enter into this world that has heretofore only existed in his imagination, he beats a hasty retreat back to his rocking chair and newspaper. Tumbling into the world he only voyeuristically entered before, Hurstwood finds himself not only separated from the transpersonal gaze that once protected him but now at the center of the public spectacle as well.

The Narrator at the Window

Thematically, *Sister Carrie* represents privacy as vanishing every time the characters desire it most; the borders of private space cannot be relied upon to remain a constant. Vision

plays a crucial role in disrupting any sense of a stable understanding of privacy, as the gaze might at any instant trespass across one of the thresholds which moments before separated the private from the public. The repeated sexualization of the gaze further problematizes vision in the novel, as the characters take great pleasure in this peering into other people's lives. The role of the narrator and the way that his positioning affects the reader in *Sister Carrie* escalates these issues of privacy, visibility, and eroticism by incorporating these concerns into the actual narrative structure of the text.²⁰ This can be seen from the opening passages of the novel, when we find Carrie on a train to Chicago in August of 1889. We are told about her luggage ("a cheap imitation alligator-skin satchel" [1]), her looks ("pretty with the insipid prettiness of the formative period, possessed of a figure promising eventual shapeliness" [2]), and her illusions (those of "ignorance and youth" [1]); and so when we are also told, as the train pulls out of Waukesha, that "for some time she had been conscious of a man behind" and that "she felt him observing her mass of hair" (2), it does not require much of an interpretative leap to equate this man with the narrator, at least so far as they both enjoy gazing on pretty women. The reader soon learn that this man is Drouet, the womanizing traveling salesman, whose motives for observation therefore are far from an objective cataloguing of information, such as the narrator might claim his intentions to be.

Because of the narrative slippage between the narrator and Drouet at this moment, it is worthwhile to seek a better understanding the nature of this traveling salesman in order to get a sense of the identity of the narrator. The novel describes Drouet as having "had a habit, characteristic of his kind, of looking after stylishly dressed or pretty women on the street and remarking upon them" (76), which culminates in a rather invasive evaluation of these women:

²⁰ As with the narrator in Norris's *McTeague*, I am designating the narrator in *Sister Carrie* as male both for clarity sake and because since no evidence exists to prove the narrator's gender one way or the other, it seems much more likely that Dreiser would have defaulted to a masculine narrator.

“he saw how they set their little feet, how they carried their chins, with what grace and sinuosity they swung their bodies. A dainty, self-conscious swaying of the hips by a woman was to him as alluring as the glint of rare wine to a toper. He would turn and follow the disappearing vision with his eyes” (76). Although he performs these observations publically, the sexual nature of this gaze suggests a private intimacy at odds with the public nature of the act. Irene Gammel argues that in *Sister Carrie* “moments of male specular pleasure are a synecdoche for masculine sexual pleasure; the male gaze is the first step in a sexual ritual that culminates in phallic penetration and ‘possession’” (72-3). This linking of the pleasure of the gaze to actual sexual pleasure draws out more clearly the latent deviancy of Drouet and “his kind’s” gaze, but the connection between “specular” and “sexual” pleasure seems to be less of a situation in which the latter is the culmination of the former, than the *same thing*: specular and sexual pleasure are indistinguishable. Drouet seems to take a sexual pleasure *in* the specular, and while sexual conquests seem to be part of his agenda there appears to be genuine erotic pleasure in, to use Rachel Bowlby’s phrase, “*just looking*” (6). With the example of Drouet’s vision in mind, two alternatives regarding the role of vision seem to be suggested by the novel’s opening: vision as used to objectively construct and catalog knowledge, as in, presumably, the case of the narrator; and vision as erotic and sexualized, as Drouet represents with his unabashedly lurid eyeing of Carrie.

But despite seeming to be radically different, these two roles of vision are intimately intertwined in the novel; even while constructing knowledge, vision and the gaze are always corrupted by erotic suggestion. This can be seen when we start to identify the characteristics of the novel’s narrator. The question of narration in *Sister Carrie* is more complex than it might initially appear, for who tells this story of Carrie’s rise and Hurstwood’s fall is not altogether

clear. As argued in the previous chapters, naturalism repeatedly problematizes narration, with the central characters often providing focalization, and yet the novels are rarely told exclusively from their perspective. As narrative theorist Gérard Genette famously argues in *Narrative Discourse: An Essay in Method*, there is often a “confusion between the question *who is the character whose points of view orients the narrative perspective?* and the very question *who is the narrator?*—or, more simply, the question *who sees?* and the question *who speaks?*” (186). In *Sister Carrie* the narrator is pointedly not Carrie, Hurstwood, Drouet, or any other of the characters in the story, despite the narrative often taking their perspective, so despite intimate access to both these characters’ private lives and their private thoughts, the narrator must be a separate figure. The narrator clearly stands apart from the characters themselves, but determining how far apart remains difficult. Mark Seltzer argues that “perhaps the most powerful tactic of supervision achieved by the traditional realist novel inheres in its dominant technique of narration—the style of ‘omniscient narration’ which grants the narrative voice an unlimited authority over the novel’s ‘world,’ a world thoroughly known and thoroughly mastered by the panoptic ‘eye’ of the narration” (534). That this narrative technique acts as a potential form of surveillance is a compelling claim, and indisputably the narrator in realist and naturalist texts plays a significant role in the formal and thematic shape of these novels. But despite the temptation to claim omniscience, the novel provides no indication that the narrator actually knows all, or really that he knows anything beyond what he hypothesizes about the characters; he seems more of a nosey fellow traveler watching the couple across the aisle flirt than an omniscient presence, and although he knows enough to say that “neither [Carrie or Drouet] was wise enough to be sure of the working of the mind of the other” (6), this sort of insight only requires pseudo-philosophical musings, not omniscience.

These quasi-philosophical observations that the narrator interjects seem to replace the image of the narrator-as-omniscient-god with the narrator-as-objective-scientist. He suggests, for example, that “untutored man is but a wisp in the wind” and “our civilisation is still in a middle stage, scarcely beast, in that it is no longer wholly guided by instinct; scarcely human, in that it is not yet wholly guided by reason” (56). He even invokes other scientists and philosophers, arguing that “for all the liberal analysis of Spencer and our modern naturalistic philosophers, we have but an infantile perception of morals,” and he goes on to challenge these naturalistic philosophers’ view that morality involves the “mere conformity to a law of evolution,” suggesting instead that “it is more involved than we, as yet, perceive” (68). And yet at other times the narrator also loses even the veneer of scientific objectivity, as in the final paragraph of the published text he cries, “Oh, Carrie, Carrie! Oh, blind strivings of the human heart! Onward, onward, it saith, and where beauty leads, there it follows” (369). The narrator seems overcome with emotion in the final lines of the novel, pitying Carrie’s plight despite all of the detached pseudo-philosophical observations made previously.

In his role as narrator-philosopher or narrator-scientist, the narrator does cultivate a distinct narrative voice in the novel, intermittently interjecting to comment on the private events witnessed. But if we can determine that the narrator is an individual and not an abstraction, that he possesses a personality along with a voice, then depending on his intentions his role becomes much more questionable. To put it another way, if the narrator watches through the window, does he watch as an anthropologist or a deviant? Other critics seem to take it for granted that the narrator at least attempts scientific observation. Richard Lehan, for example, suggests that “Dreiser’s narrative is controlled by an observer—not the scientific observer of the experimental novel, nor the whimsical, cosmic observer of Hardy, but more the philosophical observer—a

kind of Herbert Spencer telling a Balzacian story about life in urban America near the end of the nineteenth century” (74), while William Handy argues that the narrator is the “looming presence of Dreiser” (522) himself, which consequently “enables him, not merely to depict the world through the eyes of this or that character, but to infuse the novel with his own unseen presence” (523). Alan Trachtenberg proposes more of a middle ground, suggesting that

although he seems to want to employ a signified authorial discourse—direct intervention in his own person—in a manner closer to that of Fielding than to that of, say, Howells, Dreiser remains essentially within the classical mode of ‘objective narration.’ He attempts to keep narrative and discourse separate, though his discursive appearances often also narrate or ‘recount’ . . . that is, they can narrate from within the mode of discourse, in *someone’s* voice (this identity of the speaker distinguishing discursive narration from objective narration proper). (“Who Narrates?” 98)

As Trachtenberg indicates, the narration strives to preserve a distance between the narrator and the action he narrates, but the novel does not quite succeed in maintaining this separation. Michael Davitt Bell argues that in *Sister Carrie* “the omniscient narrator, the narrator who supposedly understands the characters as they cannot understand themselves, nevertheless speaks to us in a language seemingly as limited as the language and sensibilities of these characters” (157); he exists on the same cultural plane and in the same historical moment as the characters he observes.

None of these positions, however, seem to fully describe the characteristics of the narration. The narrator may share traits with Dreiser—an interest in Spencer, for example—but he is not Dreiser, nor is he truly an objective narrator or mere philosophical observer, as the

character of his commentary too often reveals a distinctive personality that is not entirely detached. After all, like any narrative about fallen women, on the most fundamental level *Sister Carrie* is about illicit sex, and the fact that the narrator chooses to watch this particular drama unfold suggests that he more accurately engages in voyeurism than practices objective documentation. That the narrator's pseudo-philosophical musings mask the presence of his deviant nature does not alter the fact that he observes a story primarily concerned with the multiple sexual relationships of a young woman as she navigates her way through the mysterious metropolis.

Because of the presence of these idiosyncratic personality traits, several critics have alternately aligned the narrator with different characters within the text. "Although most of the time the narrator sympathetically approves of what Carrie does," suggests Gammel, "he is really Drouet's better double, sharing his male character's feminized, sartorial desire by helping him 'dress' Carrie" (73). This observation reinforces the extent to which the narrator possesses some of the same sexual interests of Drouet; he may be a "better double," but he nevertheless is preoccupied, even obsessed, with Carrie, the woman he compulsively watches. The other character some have aligned with the narrator is Ames, who June Howard argues is closest to the reader and narrator because he shares the perspective "of the reader of realist and naturalist novels" (108). However, writing of Ames's larger role in the original manuscript, Howard notices that in the "first version of the novel Ames is attracted to Carrie as a woman" but that "when this respectable representative of the narrator and reader yields to or even acknowledges a sexual interest in a 'fallen' woman, he not only offends conventional morality but makes himself vulnerable within the novel's own system of meanings" (109). The differences between the first and published versions of the text are quite suggestive, and taking into account Ames's initial

sexual interest magnifies his lack thereof in the final text. The very fact that Ames does not express any desire for Carrie, when she is above all represented as desirable to every male character in the novel, seems unaccountable, and when compared to the earlier version that *does* include these feelings the lack becomes even more noticeable. In a way the final lack of sexual feeling by Ames draws attention to itself because of its absence; it has to be effaced from the novel—and indeed it was—because the similarity between Ames and the narrator might draw attention to that fact the *narrator* views the events in the novel with equally lurid intentions.

The narrator, despite attempting to maintain an objective distance, seems to be intimately involved in his object of study. Bell argues that “Dreiser begins, again and again, on the outside, but he always moves inward—even and maybe especially when he seems to *mean* to keep his distance—toward an affective stylistic identification with the sensibilities of his characters” (162). Although Bell perilously conflates the author with the narrator, his general point is sound, and there does seem to be the sense of a *lack* of remove for the narrator, rather than naturalism’s traditionally defined distance. And if the narrator cannot retain his distance than his own privacy becomes suddenly fragile, as he is drawn inevitably into the story he wishes only to observe. Indeed, the preceding analysis all but destroys the private subjectivity that the narrator once maintained, and if we decide to carry the implications of this to the author, as Bell does, than Dreiser too, and all of his own intimate thoughts that can be gleaned from the narrator’s interests, stands exposed. And the reader, aligned throughout literary naturalism with the figure of the narrator, now stands potentially vulnerable as well, complicit in a voyeuristic gaze that seems justified when collectivized but always precariously close to being publically revealed as intimately private.

Subjectivity and the Transpersonal Gaze

As discussed in the previous chapters, voyeurism is an essentially imaginative the act, with the voyeur projecting him or herself into these private scenes and occupying both the subject and object role simultaneously. In other words, the voyeur sees and is seen at the same instant, disrupting the clear distinction between private and public space as well as constructions of the self as subject or object. In one of the most oft-cited passages of *Being and Nothingness*, Sartre explains how the experience of seeing another man in a public park allows him to understand his own subjectivity. As the subject, when Sartre first sees the man he sees that Other as an object, but once he recognizes that the Other also sees *him* as an object, his own subjectivity becomes clearer:

If the Other-as-object is defined in connection with the world as the object which sees what I see, then my fundamental connection with the Other-as-subject must be able to be referred back to my permanent possibility of *being seen* by the Other. It is in and through the revelation of my being-as-object for the Other that I must be able to apprehend the presence of his being-as-subject. For just as the Other is a probable object for me-as-subject, so I can discover myself in the process of becoming a probable object for only a certain subject. (344-5)

Sartre recognizes not only the other's subjectivity but indeed the very nature of his *own* subjectivity. Although the encounter Sartre describes occurs in a public park, a public space does not necessarily imply that one's private self cannot be exposed, as was seen in the examples of Sloan's *Sunday Afternoon in Union Square* and Carrie and Mrs. Vance's walk down Broadway in *Sister Carrie*. One must see and be seen in order to fully comprehend the self, so that the voyeuristic gaze which peers into the lives of others does not only expose the Other, but the self as well. The potential reciprocity of the voyeur's gaze makes possible the recognition of one's

self; only by falling through the narrative keyhole and being *seen* by others does the self finally become visible.

Naturalist texts invite the reader to take pleasure in watching the secret lives of his or her (fictional) fellow city dwellers, but in doing so the reader finds his or her own privacy at risk. These texts make manifest the instability of configurations of publicity and privacy at the turn of the century, with the lines dividing the private from the public remaining in perpetual motion. The women in Sloan's paintings, for example, are only private until they turn their heads to see the spectators watching, and the viewers, too, are only private in their observation of them until someone else catches them in the act. The voyeur in some ways demands these divisions, as private space—even if it is an abstract, conceptual space—needs to be violated for voyeurism to exist, even while it disrupts this space through the illicit gaze. Similarly to the naturalist author or painter, the voyeur controls who and what is made public by having the power to turn public the lives of other private individuals; the private individual's control over personal identity becomes compromised, with the authority to define the boundaries of public and private life ceded to the voyeur. In one way, then, literary naturalism disregards these divisions altogether in its uncompromisingly realistic portrayal of modern life: nothing is private for the naturalist, as all can and should be represented in order to more fully depict reality. In another way, however, naturalism seems acutely aware of these boundaries and of its own transgressions of them because of the presence of this narrator-voyeur who calls attention to the very act of spectatorship. Indeed, in the very act of reading these texts readers must confront these issues, as they both join the transpersonal gaze of the "imagined community" to peep into these characters' lives as well as find themselves perilously close to being exposed in this act of voyeurism, even if it is only through a brief, sudden recognition of the perversity of their own actions.

Sloan's paintings and Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* demonstrate that naturalism both thematizes the constantly shifting boundaries of public and private space through the voyeuristic characters and situations, as well as engenders these unstable divisions through the voyeuristic relationship between the reader and narrator to the lives of these characters. By considering these works as both representing and representations of this voyeuristic fantasy, the threatening nature of turn-of-the-century visual culture becomes apparent: this is a city of eyes, a city that is always watching and being watched. The perverse thrill of reading these texts derives from the tenuous position of the readers, who watch the intimate lives of everyone else even while knowing that at any moment they, too, could become the object of the city's transpersonal gaze. The privileged position of the reader-voyeur might at any moment evaporate, engendering literary naturalism's terrifying but thrilling tension between seeing and being seen.

Chapter Five: The Emasculation of the Masculine Gaze

This chapter examines how literary naturalism's voyeuristic gaze undermines the rhetoric of masculinity traditionally associated with the movement. Although often considered a masculine, even hypermasculine genre, in actuality naturalist texts frequently undermine such readings through the perverse and deviant gaze often deployed by the men therein. Whereas the previous chapter argued that the tension between seeing and being seen in literary naturalism lead to a breakdown in stable configurations of private and public space, this chapter considers the way the constructions of gender were similarly destabilized by literary naturalism's voyeurism, as ideas of masculinity, and the image of the masculine author in particular, are troubled by the deviancy and passivity of the voyeur's gaze.

As discussed in previous chapters, literary naturalism holds an unstable position between the fantasy of the romance and the objectivity of science, and this inability to maintain a stable position between the two both defines and undermines the naturalist's project. In conjunction with the aesthetic implications of this tension—evident, for example, in the texts' form with the presence of the voyeuristic third-person narrator—this friction between the romance and objectivity also has repercussions for naturalism's rhetoric of masculinity. Although the romantic vision of the artist allows the author certain imaginative flights of metaphysical inspiration, the professionalized naturalist author draws not from the imagination but from the supposedly brutal and harsh truths of reality for his or her fiction. In the terms used by the naturalists, these are highly gendered distinctions; critics such as Donna Campbell and John Dudley have noted that these authors wanted to distinguish themselves from the “feminized” discourse of the sentimental, domestic, and/or regional novel and the “effeminate” image of the artist embodied most (in)famously by Oscar Wilde. Critics have noted that this led to an excessively masculine

rhetoric pervading much of naturalism, as the authors eschewed literary beauty and subtlety for the raw facts of modern life. Naturalism's masculine ethic, though, was never wholly successful, because the artist as a professional man of the world was continually undermined by the spectatorial role he or she was inevitably forced to assume.

Although most of the authors now considered naturalists were men, there were exceptions, most notably Edith Wharton. As both Campbell and Amy Kaplan have argued, however, Wharton too fought against the feminized discourse of sentimental and regional fiction and sought the professionalization of authorship. Consequently her novels feature that strange thematic and aesthetic mix of objective, scientific professionalism and romantic fantasy that characterizes the naturalism of her male counterparts and that emerges, in part, out of this conflict between a masculine ethos in a feminized profession. However, Wharton's status as a female artist problematizes her participation in this masculine discourse, as her commentary on this tension does not simply attempt a reversal of these gendered distinctions but simultaneously enacts and challenges them. This can be seen in the way that voyeurism is deployed and altered in subtle but distinct ways in her fiction. Other critics such as Kaplan and Lori Merish have noted the voyeuristic elements of Wharton's work, particularly in *The House of Mirth* (1905), but in doing so they frequently draw on Mark Seltzer's argument that links the realist gaze with forms of social control and commodity culture at the turn of the century. What distinguishes Wharton's voyeurism, though, especially in the context of naturalism's complex negotiations of gender, are the instances in which the voyeur's fantasy and the novel's reality do *not* match: at key moments in her texts the voyeur loses control of his or her fantasy, often with disastrous results. Wharton's male voyeurs become surrogates for her male-naturalist counterparts, suggesting that her fictional voyeurs' loss of control mirrors the failures of these other authors. The repercussions of

the naturalists' inability to control the terms of the fantasy, however, suggest more than aesthetic confusion; this failure undermines the naturalists' very attempt to maintain their professional distance and their masculinity.

I begin this chapter by examining the historical contexts of these debates over gender at the turn of the century. This period was marked by changing definitions of masculinity and femininity, as gender identity began a process of transformation that would continue well into the twentieth century. Changing economic conditions altered perceptions of male and female identity, as the entrance of women into the workplace, combined with the shift of men away from farm and manual labor and into professional jobs, redefined social, cultural, and economic roles. Additionally, the coinciding rise of consumer culture created an "urban culture of looking" (Zurier 4) that had profound implications for both gender identity and visibility, which become entangled in important ways. Everything from shop window displays to the emergence of the strip club altered representations of femininity, as they commodified women and provided men with authority via the gaze, an authority that they otherwise felt slipping away as the century came to a close.

After this discussion of the changing historical dimensions of late-nineteenth-century gender and visibility, I consider the literary naturalists' response to these cultural transformations. Confronted with what some thought was the "feminization of American culture," as Ann Douglass describes it, the naturalists sought to masculinize authorship, to make the artist a virile man of action in opposition to the passive, feminine figure many felt the author had come to represent. However, the naturalist's attempts to masculinize writing were disrupted by the peculiarly passive, spectatorial role that the artist inevitably assumes; despite striving for manly adventure, the writer can only ever observe the action, forever relegated to the sidelines.

To consider how these conflicts frequently are expressed in naturalism, I examine two very different works by artists contemporary to Wharton: Jack London's novella, *The Game* (1905) and the painter Mary Cassatt's *At the Opera* (1879). These works provide a sense of how other contemporary artists were articulating issues of gender, visibility, and art that Wharton similarly confronted.

Finally, I turn to Wharton's fiction to see how she reveals the instability and potential danger of associating the naturalist's gaze with this rhetoric of masculinity. In other naturalist texts, the loss of control over fantasy is often associated with characters who are *themselves* the object of the narrator's voyeuristic gaze—Frank Norris's Vandover in *Vandover and the Brute* (1914) or Theodore Dreiser's Hurstwood in *Sister Carrie* (1900) are obvious examples. However, in Wharton's *House of Mirth*, Lawrence Selden, the one who deploys the voyeur's gaze and acts as a surrogate for both the author and the reader in the novel, loses control; in this way Wharton challenges the authority of the gaze that the naturalist novelist seeks to employ. Although Wharton sought the same kind of professionalization of authorship that the other naturalists desired, as a female author she was in a position to critique the privileging of the male gaze as the primary organizing perspective of naturalism. The male naturalists' very attempt to maintain their professional distance and their masculinity becomes undermined by a voyeuristic gaze that fantasizes too often about the private lives of beautiful women. Naturalists desired to reveal the "truth" about their world, but Wharton's fiction suggests the limitations of an art that seeks to be reflective when the only thing it reflects is the spectator's fantasy.

Gender and Vision in the Late Nineteenth Century

Historically, the late nineteenth century saw an increasing preoccupation with masculine and feminine gender roles. Although concerns emerged particularly over the state of masculinity,

these anxieties arose in response to preceding developments that had altered women's roles over the course of the nineteenth century. As Ann Douglass influentially argued in *The Feminization of American Culture*, during the nineteenth century, American values were increasingly influenced by women occupying a larger role in public life, especially through mass media outlets such as novels and journals. Because women constituted a significant portion of both the writers and readers of literature in the nineteenth century, their role in shaping public discourse increased proportionally; Douglass argues that women believed that they “had a genuine redemptive mission in their society: to propagate the potentially matriarchal virtues of nurture, generosity, and acceptance; to create the ‘culture of the feelings’” (10-11). A corresponding “separate spheres” theory argues that in the cultivation of this “culture of feelings” women established the foundation of civilization in the domestic sphere whereas men enacted their duties in the civic life of the public sphere.

Although the rigid division of roles in the nineteenth century between the private, domestic sphere of women and the public space of men has recently been the subject of critical reevaluation, the notion of overlapping and complementing values remains an important feature of the period.²¹ There was a feeling during the close of the nineteenth century that these “feminine” values, of “nurture, generosity, and acceptance” for example, had become the standard by which everyone, including men, was to be judged. Men may have had different economic and political roles to play, but so-called “feminine” virtues still triumphed in these alternate spheres. John Higham suggests that these were the hallmarks of a country acceding to the “restrictions of a highly industrialized society,” in which Americans “learned to live in cities, to sit in rooms cluttered with bric-a-brac, to limit the size of their families, to accept the authority

²¹ For a discussion of this reevaluation of the “separate spheres” theory, see the collection of essays edited by Monika Elbert, *Separate Spheres No More: Gender Convergence in American Literature, 1830-1930* and Alison Piepmeier's *Out in Public: Configuration of Women's Bodies in Nineteenth-Century America*.

of the professional elites, to mask their aggression behind a thickening façade of respectability, and to comfort themselves with a faith in automatic material progress” (79). This version of civilized culture may not have been intrinsically feminine, but it would be cast in those terms when the opposition began arguing against its regulation of national life.

At the end of the century, however, this began to change. The “feminization of culture,” in conjunction with socio-economic changes wrought by more men leaving the manual labor of farms to work white collar jobs in cities—and consequently often working alongside women in these new jobs—led to an anxiety over the state of masculinity and a rethinking of the terms of manhood. “When changes in the workplace caused men to feel uncertain of their manhood,” writes Anthony Rotundo in *American Manhood: Transformations in Masculinity from the Revolution to the Modern Era*, “their primary response was to seek new forms of reassurance about it. Strenuous recreation, spectator sports, adventure novels, and a growing cult of the wilderness all served this need” (250-1). Men’s anxiety about their masculinity led not only to new recreational pursuits but to the reevaluation of the fundamental traits and characteristics of manhood:

Ambition and combativeness became virtues for men; competitiveness and aggression were exalted as ends in themselves. Toughness was now admired, while tenderness was a cause for scorn. Even sexual desire, an especially worrisome male passion in the nineteenth century, slowly gathered legitimacy. Indeed, the body itself became a vital component of manhood: strength, appearance, and athletic skill mattered more than in previous centuries. (Rotundo 5-6)

Masculinity was now being defined *against* these feminine values rather than in conjunction with or as complementing virtues. Ideas of manhood pitted masculinity against femininity, even against civilization itself; to be a man meant, fundamentally, to *not* be a woman. New formations of masculinity arose at the turn of the century to supplant the older conceptions. As critics such as John Dudley have observed, this is perhaps most famously articulated in Theodore Roosevelt's book, *The Strenuous Life* (1900). In this treatise, he preaches "not the doctrine of ignoble ease, but the doctrine of the strenuous life, the life of toil and effort, of labor and strife," and that "splendid ultimate triumph" will come to the "man who does not shrink from danger, from hardship, or from bitter toil" (3). He argues that in the settlement of the West there has been "scant room for the coward and the weakling in the ranks of the adventurous frontiersman" (208), but now "we live in softer times" (210). Roosevelt argues for the need of the "iron qualities that must go with true manhood" (212). While these include "moral and mental strength" (213), these traits are still articulated in physical terms, as he warns that "flabbiness" or "unhealthy softness" (213) would corrupt these virtues. He cautions against becoming a nation of "weaklings" (7), of becoming, interestingly, "over-civilized" (9); Roosevelt instead values adjectives such as "virile" (4), "vigorous" (5), and "iron" (212). Roosevelt's hyperbolic call for a kind of hypermasculinity, as well as for a hyperfemininity that emphasizes women's "natural" role as "the wise and fearless mother of many healthy children" (5), reflects the anxiety of the age; his speech reflects a growing sense that modernity had corrupted natural gender roles and that a recalibration must occur.

These anxieties over masculinity and femininity manifest themselves in material, if radically different, ways throughout society, often in spectacles that exaggerate the type of gendered roles that Roosevelt outlines. One example was the emergence of the modern strip club

in a late nineteenth-century Parisian music hall, when a woman named Blanche Cavelli strode on stage and performed what would be subsequently identified as the first contemporary strip show. Like most early incarnations of an art form, this first performance would seem a long way from its more mature variations. Although modern performances usually consist of a mostly naked woman becoming even more naked, in 1894 the first strip show provided at least the intimation of a story, albeit a rather prosaic one:

When the curtain rose, a chair and a bed were onstage to represent an ordinary room. Piano music began to play, and Cavelli entered, wearing everyday clothes. She took off her gloves, her hat, and a corsage and threw them on the chair. She took off her skirt and then she removed her petticoat, her corset, her stockings, and finally her chemise, leaving her in some sort of nightgown. Finally, she climbed into bed and the lights went out. (Shteir 38)

The show was a sensation, as it “swept through Paris and inspired at least thirty similar ‘tales’ of undressing” (Shteir 38), suggesting that audiences were fascinated by this scene. The title of the show, *Le Coucher d’Yvette* (*Yvette’s Going to Bed*), sums up rather completely the narrative arc of the performance, but despite the simplicity of the story there was more occurring on the stage than just a comically tame—by contemporary standards—strip tease.

The emergence of the strip club stands as an important dramatization of the cultural transformations and gender anxieties of the late nineteenth century. Lucinda Jarrett argues that the “censorious nature of Christianity meant that sexual dance flourished in the East long before it emerged in Europe and America” (2), and it was the nineteenth-century World Fairs that “introduced foreign social dances to the West” (2). These factors no doubt set the stage, as it were, for the somewhat late appearance of a business that would otherwise seem as old as the

theater, but other important shifts that were occurring simultaneously at the end of the century—a new emphasis on and articulations of masculinity and femininity, a rapidly developing culture of consumerism, and the increasingly visual nature of modern life—certainly contributed to the strip’s club appearance. The result of these factors was the strip show’s dramatic visual representation of hyper-realized gender roles that sought, in part, to address the anxieties over changing gender roles by reaffirming the masculinity of the spectator.

Dudley contends that another response to this crisis over masculinity was the rise of spectator sports: “as a public performance of manhood, spectator sports began to demand the attention of the American public in the late nineteenth century and contributed to the promotion of hypermasculine virtues in increasingly sedentary and thus feminized realm of popular entertainment” (9). Despite being superficially radically different, I would position strip clubs in this same trend, as they also perform a type masculinity through their display of female sexuality; both types of performances target male virility, with men being made to feel as though watching spectacles that remind them of their physical or “natural” selves, the self that wages physical battle against other men or has sex with beautiful women, somehow heightens their *own* masculinity. The problem, as we shall see, is that despite being suggestive of masculinity these performances nevertheless relegate men to the role of mere spectator, an observer that can only passively watch the actions of others unfold.

Occurring in tandem with these anxieties over masculinity were changes in the role of vision in the later nineteenth century. Because of an increasing emphasis in the nineteenth century on scientific observation and phenomenological explanations as a way of uncovering the truth about the world, optical perception assumed a critical role throughout society, but it was typically men alone who were endowed with the power of the observing gaze. Linda Nochlin

argues that sight “is the sense most closely allied with mental activity, associated with (usually, but not always) masculine power in the nineteenth century” (193). John Berger famously articulated this division as it appears in western art: “*men act and women appear*. Men look at women. Women watch themselves being looked at. This determines not only most relations between men and women but also the relation of women to themselves. The surveyor of woman in herself is male: the surveyed female. Thus she turns herself into an object—and most particularly an object of vision: a sight” (47). As discussed in chapter three, this can also be dramatically witnessed in the clinic, a space in which the scientific, neutral gaze mixed awkwardly with the sexual gaze of the male doctor, who often tried and failed to look objectively on the female body. Vision held a new authority in the nineteenth century, but it was men who were granted the power to deploy it. Feminist film critics have suggested that, as the subject, men possess an “active” gaze, while women always remain the “passive” object of that gaze. As Laura Mulvey argues in relation to film,

the man controls the film fantasy and also emerges as the representative of power in a further sense: as the bearer of the look of the spectator, transferring it behind the screen to neutralize the extradiegetic tendencies represented by woman as spectacle. This is made possible through the processes set in motion by structuring the film around a main controlling figure with whom the spectator can identify. As the spectator identifies with the main male protagonist, he projects his look onto that of his like, his screen surrogate, so that the power of the male protagonist as he controls events coincides with the active power of the erotic look, both giving a satisfying sense of omnipotence. (20-1)

Although Mulvey's argument focus on film, these theories can apply to any situation in which the male gaze plays an integral role, which is certainly true of the strip club and, as we shall see, naturalism.

But while presenting an undeniably powerful way for the subject to possess and control the object of the gaze, vision does not simply reinscribe the masculine/feminine divisions as one might initially expect. Ann Kaplan qualifies Mulvey's formation by arguing that "the gaze is not necessarily male (literally), but to own and activate the gaze, given our language and the structure of the unconscious, is to be in the 'masculine' position" (30), but this does not make the situation for the naturalists any less problematic, and in fact it only reentrenches these anxieties: if the gaze is part of a masculine identity, than losses to its authority are doubly felt. In the position of spectator, though, can a man ever be masculine, particularly in the terms of the late-nineteenth-century constructions of masculinity? This is clearly the quandary in which men find themselves when watching a women undress on the stage before them. Unlike in the film example, men *are* the male protagonist in the strip club, but do they actually possess a "satisfying sense of omnipotence," or might it instead be an angst-ridden sense of impotence? As the spectator, the man can do nothing *but* look—there are now even laws which prevent men from having any physical contact with a stripper—which creates a complex dynamic of heightened masculine virility being eroded and undermined by helplessness and passivity, traits that would have traditionally been associated with femininity.

Finally, out of these gender anxieties and changes in vision emerged a consumer culture that commodified women. In his 1899 treatise *The Theory of the Leisure Class* Thorstein Veblen identified this as the emergence of "conspicuous consumption," wherein wealth and status were displayed through one's purchases. Rachel Bowlby suggests that this consumer culture is

therefore intimately tied with the visual spectacle: “modern consumption is a matter not of basic items bought for definite needs, but of visual fascination and remarkable sights of things not found at home” (1). She goes on to identify many of the commercial and industrial developments of the late nineteenth century, from the department store and its display windows to advertising and, ultimately, the cinema, and she argues that this represented a shift from “production to selling and from the satisfaction of stable needs to the invention of new desires” (2). Bowlby suggests that the cinema, in particular, allowed for “the transformation of merchandise into a spectacle,” highlighting that the “pleasure of looking, *just* looking, is itself the commodity for which money is paid” (6). Perhaps even more importantly, this commodity culture has often been linked to the commodification of women. Summarizing this tradition of the gaze in commodity culture, Shawn Michelle Smith writes that “while consumption has been both associated with women and denigrated as a feminine practice that objectifies and commodifies women, the power of the gaze that watches those feminine objects has typically been deemed masculine” (209). Smith argues that this is not necessarily always the case, citing Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie* as an example that “shifts the locus of power and privilege from the position of the gazer to that of the gazed upon” such that “feminized objects of view are invested with a kind of agency that escapes or supersedes a mesmerized masculine gaze” (210). Mary Ann Doane argues along similar lines that these power dynamics are far from stable, suggesting, for example, that although the woman is often cast into the role of the consumer, this is “indissociable from her positioning *as* a commodity and results in the blurring of the subject/object dichotomy” (13). So although commodifying women as spectacles was a continuation of the dominance of the male gaze, I would argue that this commodification arose at least in part in reaction to the threat to authority of this male gaze. In other words, transforming women into spectacles to be consumed,

as can be seen everywhere from the department store window to the strip club, emerged in order to try and reassert the authority of the male gaze.

To return to the Parisian music hall, if the man finds himself bereft of agency in the strip club, then to a certain extent the stripper possesses the power in this situation. Men can do nothing but watch while the women control the men's gaze, and yet at the same time it would be a gross misstatement to claim that women are granted full authority in a situation such as this. In these cases the power rests in the object of vision, and yet the subject still has the power of fantasy. Instead we have a situation—mirrored, as we shall see, in literary naturalism—in which anxieties over masculinity and femininity are dramatically enacted in visual terms and then left dangerously unsettled, creating a contentious space in which these opposing forces can—and do—collide.

The Gendering of Literary Naturalism

In the middle of the nineteenth century, Nathaniel Hawthorne rather infamously bemoaned that “America is now wholly given over to a damned mob of scribbling women, and I shall have no chance of success while the public taste is occupied with their trash—and should be ashamed of myself if I did succeed” (“To William D. Ticknor” 685). Although David Reynolds has pointed out that women did not dominate the literary market to the degree that has commonly been assumed (337-8), as Hawthorne's letter suggests there was a persistent belief that this was the case, and at the end of the century this conviction led to the same reaction against the perceived femininity of the literary arts that was unfolding in the broader social contexts described above. In *Resisting Regionalism: Gender and Naturalism in American Fiction, 1885-1915*, Donna Campbell emphasizes that naturalists believed that “for too long a predominantly female audience, or a coterie of cowed, timid editors, had created authors,

particularly local colorists, in their own small, pale, tactful image, either restraining or refusing to sanction altogether fiction about real life by red-blooded male authors” (63). Because the arts were seen as feminine and therefore, in the language of the time, “effeminate,” both male and female authors struggled to masculinize literature; as Campbell argues, “the conflict being waged in these works [by Dreiser, London, Crane] is clearly the one against what these authors perceived as the excessive feminine discourse controlling masculine literature in particular and male lives in general” (145). Along similar lines Dudley writes in *A Man’s Game: Masculinity and the Anti-Aesthetics of American Literary Naturalism* that “American naturalist writers saw themselves in direct opposition to the ‘artists’—both British and American—whose aesthetic principles helped define the ‘mauve decade’ of the 1890s” (21-2), embodied most famously by Oscar Wilde. Consequently, as Michael Davitt Bell observes, “to claim to be a ‘realist,’ in late nineteenth- and early twentieth-century America, was among other things to suppress worries about one’s sexuality and sexual status and to proclaim oneself a man” (37). Realism and naturalism were seen as more masculine than the sentimental or local color fiction of the day for several reasons. One factor was their focus on more “realistic” and brutal subject matter, as realists and especially naturalists depicted in explicit detail the lives of the poor or the atavistic, often including illicit sex without moral consequences. Another reason was that these new movements were supposedly less concerned with artistry and more committed to a workman-like professionalism, so that the author was to be thought of alongside other professionals such as newspaper reporters and doctors. Indeed, many of these authors began their careers writing for newspapers, and therefore they often considered the writing process as professional work rather than the product of isolated genius or any of the other more romantic images of bohemian artistry that circulated at the start of the nineteenth century.

As men felt their masculinity threatened at the turn of the century, the authority of the male gaze was also at risk. Because of their engagement with both questions of masculinity and visibility, the naturalists were particularly entangled in these issues. Dudley analogizes the naturalists' role as "intermediary" between the spectacle and the audience to the way that spectator sports at the turn of the century positioned the spectacle and the spectator; however, "as a mediator between violent events and middle-class audience, the naturalists' conception of the author occupies an uneasy position between the 'masculine' spectacle and the 'feminine' onlookers" (15). The naturalists wanted to masculinize authorship, but they were confronted by an uncomfortable paradox: if masculinity meant action and aggression, then how could any art be manly since it ultimately required passive observation? In other words, as Dudley writes, the literary naturalists were forced to ask "is writing a form of action or not? Does the transformation of 'life' into 'literature' merely recapitulate the passivity of the spectator, or does it, in the hands of the naturalist, break free from the emasculating intimations of 'art?'" (54). This issue recalls the active/masculine, passive/feminine split discussed in the previous section. In the case of spectator sports, strip clubs, and writing—an admittedly unlikely grouping, but one that reveals illuminating connections—the observer is relegated to a passive role, no matter how "masculine" the spectacle itself might be. And in an important way, the virility of these types of affairs—men fighting, women undressing, or, as in the case of some of the naturalist texts, some perverse combination of these—only *increases* the distance between the spectator and the spectacle by reinforcing the passivity of the audience's role through the presence of a hypermasculine event just feet away: spectators might imagine themselves participating, but they also experience their own *lack* of participation, their own absence from these events and consequently feel their own insufficient masculinity. "The voyeur is very careful to maintain a

gulf, an empty space, between the object and the eye, the object and his own body,” argues film theorist Christian Metz, who goes on to write that “if it is true of all desire that it depends on the infinite pursuit of its absent object, voyeuristic desire, along with certain forms of sadism, is the only desire whose principle of distance symbolically and spatially evokes this fundamental rent” (60). The literary naturalists feel the absence of their own masculinity and so seek it through these voyeuristic acts, yet precisely because of their investment in these gender roles the deviancy of voyeurism problematizes the masculinity that they ultimately end up constructing.

Dudley’s analogy of the author as intermediary between spectacle and spectator accurately articulates the difficult spectatorial position the writer must occupy, but it also fails to fully account for the author’s role in imagining the spectacle, of conjuring the fantasy which he or she then will watch. While fantasy must be, to some degree, a perquisite for all fiction, the role of fantasy in literary naturalism has long been ignored or, when it has been noticed, criticized for undermining the movement’s commitment to realism. Although there are significant connections between realism and naturalism, and logical reasons for highlighting these relationships, recent critical work has suggested that the long-held genealogy that places naturalism as a subset or derivative of realism fails to accurately describe either the fiction itself or the artists’ intentional aesthetic project. Keith Newlin, for example, suggests that literary naturalism most closely resembles the melodrama with its deployment of “sensational effects, sentimental scenes, stilted dialogue, and improbable coincidences” (5). Citing Michael Booth, who writes that the melodrama is “a dream world inhabited by dream people and dream justice, offering audiences the fulfillment and satisfaction found only in dreams” because it is “an idealization and simplification of the world of reality, it is in fact the world its audiences want but cannot get” (Booth 14), Newlin argues that the “naturalistic imagination does not intend to

offer an ‘objective’ depiction of the world but an interpretation or recreation of the forces that control that world” (Newlin 9-10). Similarly emphasizing the role of the imagination in literary naturalism, Eric Carl Link argues that naturalism most closely aligns to the romance. Like Newlin, Link suggests that naturalism’s perceived failures are due to a fundamental misinterpretation of the genre, and that when one considers its relationship to the romance, then the fact that naturalism frequently “blends the techniques of literary realism with symbol, allegory, myth, the marvelous, the improbably, and often the epic and poetic” (40) is no longer troubling or even surprising. Frank Norris, one of the few naturalists to explicitly attempt an expression of the aesthetics of the genre, even argued as much, writing that “naturalism is a form of romanticism, not an inner circle of realism” (72). Link suggests that this “free reign of the creative imagination” (67) attracted Norris to the romance and away from the more restricting conventions of realism. The importance of the creativity of the romance can be found clearly articulated in Hawthorne’s prefaces, which most famously explain the meaning and purpose of the romance. In *The Scarlet Letter*’s (1850) “Custom House” preface, Hawthorne explains that the romance exists “somewhere between the real world and fairy-land, where the Actual and the Imaginary may meet, and each imbue itself with the nature of the other” (35). In both the melodramatic and the romantic versions of naturalism, the texts can be seen as intentionally breaking with the mimetic project of the realists in order to present a fantasy of reality. Unlike Hawthorne’s vision, this world is not *between* the “real” and the “fairy-land,” but instead features the “Imaginary” that is *in* the “Actual.”

When the crisis of masculinity—and all of its attendant unsettling of gender, visual, and economic dynamics—intersects with the aesthetic blurring of the boundary between reality and fantasy, the unusual characteristics of literary naturalism begin to become clearer. In particular,

the much-analyzed role of the third-person narrator who watches the action of the text unfold suddenly takes on an even more central, but now increasingly precarious, role. In naturalist texts the implied third-person narrator recounts events, acting as a stand-in for both the author and the reader. Although no definitive evidence proves their gender, these narrators examined in previous chapters are almost all certainly men, and their masculine fantasies control the narratives; consequently they dramatize their anxieties over masculinity by essentially eliminating any female perspectives.

To understand the complexities of the naturalist's masculine gaze, though, it is necessary to compare it to representations of the feminine gaze. Interestingly, Jack London, identified most often as naturalism's *most* masculine author, represents the female perspective in his novella, *The Game*. Published in 1905, the same year as Wharton's *The House of Mirth*, it tells the story of a woman who watches as her boxer fiancé fights in one last bout before they marry. However, because women are not allowed in the audience, she must instead watch through a small peephole in a dressing room adjacent to the ring. The woman, Genevieve, watches through the hole as her fiancé, Joe, enters the ring:

The announcer came over to Joe. He stood up. His bath robe fell away from him, and he stepped forth to the centre of the ring, naked save for the low canvas shoes and a narrow hip-cloth of white. Genevieve's eyes dropped. She sat alone, with none to see, but her face was burning with shame at sight of the beautiful nakedness of her lover. But she looked again, guiltily, for the joy that was hers in beholding what she knew must be sinful to behold. The leap of something within her and the stir of her being toward him must be sinful. But it was delicious sin, and she did not deny her eyes. (61)

Genevieve's voyeurism is unusual for several reasons. For one, the object of her gaze knows that he is being watched; consequently, calling this "voyeurism" rather than "exhibitionism" initially appears inaccurate. But although Joe might not be the object of voyeurism, Genevieve still seems to deploy a voyeuristic gaze; in other words, as her reaction indicates, Genevieve's status as a voyeur is not dependent on Joe, the object, at all. She feels the illicit and shameful nature of her gaze, indicating that she sees more of Joe than she feels she ought to, but yet she does not "deny her eyes" as she derives an obvious pleasure from seeing his naked body. Adding to the unusualness of this voyeurism is that joining Genevieve in her gazing on Joe is a crowd of onlookers who perform the same action as she does, but they do it in plain sight. Yet they do not know that Genevieve also watches them, as her peep-hole allows her a partial view of the crowd. So although only a thin partition separates Genevieve from the audience, the way they look remains fundamentally different.

Finally, and most significantly, she is a woman, and as such her voyeurism stands out as rather unique in naturalism. Dudley does a particularly good job explicating the erotic tone of these passages in *The Game*, suggesting that these boxing scenes and others like them in London's work—especially Van Humphrey's idolization of Wolf Larsen's body in *The Sea-Wolf* (1904)—imply a "feminization of the artist and the audience" (39): "the masculine power belongs to the object" such that "the fighter's masculinity attracts the audience's gaze, and the 'unmanly' status of the spectators ironically inverts the usual subject-object relationship" (38). That the reader's gaze appears to be aligned with a woman's pushes this inversion even further, although it both justifies this inversion as well as calls attention to the usual formation. Still, Genevieve's voyeurism seems markedly different than the kind found with many of the male

characters in naturalism. For example, Genevieve seems limited in her ability to fantasize about the opposite sex:

She had never dreamed that this lurked beneath [his clothes]. It dazzled her. His skin was fair as a woman's, far more satiny, and no rudimentary hair-growth marred its white lustre. This she perceived, but all the rest, the perfection of line and strength and development, gave pleasure without her knowing why. There was a cleanness and grace about it. (62-4)

Because she had “never dreamed” of the man beneath the clothes, Genevieve’s revelation of his body—seemingly of sex itself—takes place on the page for the reader to witness; it is an epiphany of sexuality, a visual loss of virginity. Her status as a woman draws our attention to *her*, not Joe, even as we theoretically assume her perspective while reading: instead, her erotic gaze itself becomes the focus of our gaze. As much as we watch *with* Genevieve, we also watch Genevieve watching, particularly because her clearly sexual response diverges from the reactions of the typical male voyeur in naturalism, either as a character or a third-person narrator. To put it another way, at the very moment the readers are supposed to look through Genevieve’s eyes they instead find themselves looking *at*, not *with*, her. The fantasy is not Genevieve’s of Joe, but the readers’—or the narrator’s, or the author’s—fantasy of Genevieve’s fantasy about Joe. Even in London’s portrayal of the feminine gaze, we nevertheless find a masculine sensibility struggling to take over.

As London’s novella demonstrates, even in a naturalist text that seems poised to represent the feminine gaze, the masculine gaze nevertheless reasserts itself in an unanticipated manner. Mary Cassatt’s 1879 painting *At the Opera* (fig. 21) represents another rare attempt to portray the feminine gaze, although plaguing even it are crosscurrents that threaten to drown an active



Figure 21. Mary Cassatt, *At the Opera*, 1879.

feminine gaze. A study of vision and visibility, the painting portrays a woman in black who fills the foreground as she looks out from her opera box through a pair of tiny theater glasses.

Although much of the painting has the rough, quickly-sketched quality that characterizes the later work of the Ashcan School painters, the woman's face is carefully composed, with her eye just visible as it gazes through the glasses. The focused intensity of her gaze provides much of the painting's drama. However, the presence of a roughly painted man in the upper left corner of the painting compounds the significance of her gaze, as stares at *her* with his opera glasses. The fact that the woman, like the man, "uses tilted-up binoculars to scrutinize not the stage but the

unknown, unseen occupant of a loge box outside the picture frame” (Weinberg, Bolger, Curry 206) further complicates the painting’s visuality. Watching *and* creating these multiple gazes is Cassatt, the female painter, and several critics have pointed out the way that this painting undermines traditional notion of feminine/masculine gaze. Linda Nochlin explains that Cassatt actually “associated femininity and the active gaze,” with the image of the woman with her opera glasses, “those prototypical instruments of masculine specular power,” representing “the concentrated energy of her assertive visual thrust into space” (194). Nochlin concludes that “the spaces of femininity might also, for some women, actually serve as sites of intellectual and creative production” (194), an opinion held by H. Barbara Weinberg, Doreen Bolger, and David Park Curry, who write in *American Impressionism and Realism: The Painting of Modern Life, 1885-1915* that “just as Cassatt was active in a male-dominated avant-garde artistic milieu, her subject is an active spectator, not merely the target of male scrutiny like most women in theater images contemporary with this one” (207). The phallic nature of both the opera glasses and the closed fan she holds at her waist further positions her as a masculinized spectator.

Although these critics are correct to emphasize the active gaze of the woman, particularly because it was so historically unusual to depict the feminine gaze in this way, the woman is nevertheless the object of both the man’s gaze as well as the artist’s and the viewer’s. Although unquestionably an active spectator, she is equally the object of others’ active gaze; what is unusual is that the painting does not transform her into a fully passive subject despite being under this scrutiny. In part, the woman controls her identity because she seems aware of the gaze of others; like Blanche Cavelli in that Parisian music hall or Joe in *The Game*, she acts as an exhibitionist, placing herself in a position to be seen. And yet unlike those other figures, she also sees, and it is her concurrent occupation of these two roles that makes her unique: she is both

consumer and consumable, voyeur and exhibitionist simultaneously. It has been noted that the woman resembles Cassatt herself (Herbert 99), implying an underlying commentary about the role of the female artist. The implication is that the woman artist sees *and* is seen, which is radically different than the typical male artist who only deploys the active gaze. By occupying both roles simultaneously, the female artist engages with the same specular fantasies of the male naturalists, but she does so as both an observer *and* a participant, a dual role that alters how we understand the interdependency of reality and fantasy in naturalism.

Gendered Fantasy in Edith Wharton's Fiction

Because the male naturalists deployed a hypermasculine gaze, any feminine intervention was made extremely difficult, as the example of Cassatt's painting makes clear. The masculine construction of vision, even if highly problematic and tenuous, nevertheless posed significant obstacles for any woman attempting to challenge its dominance because it appeared to leave no room for alternatives. However, Edith Wharton's fiction successfully questions the authority of the naturalist's gaze because of her investment in simultaneously critiquing the tenets of naturalism even while enacting them; she succeeds in challenging the literary naturalists because she was one herself. Her fiction reveals how the naturalist's masculine gaze was itself highly tenuous, based as it was on a problematic spectatorial role that made men into passive, deviant observers despite the naturalists' call for a Roosevelt-ian "strenuous life." And although the other naturalists were aware of the unstable nature of vision when it relied too heavily upon fantasy, they nevertheless deployed it in their fiction; Wharton's work, however, makes clear the implications of unwittingly mapping a fantasy world onto reality.

It would be a mistake, however, to position Wharton as wholly in opposition to her fellow naturalists. Amy Kaplan aligns Wharton with the other male naturalists, arguing that the

professionalization of authorship was of crucial concern for all of these writers. Although this had the potential to become a gendered argument, it also persisted aside from those concerns: “for Wharton and her contemporaries, professionalization involved the rejection and revision of older genteel models of authorship, which treated writing as the leisurely activity of the man of letters rather than as disciplined work” (68). And, like the male naturalists, she “sought and borrowed the ‘objective’ tone and jargon of the male scientific discourse of her day” (Joslin 39) in order to differentiate herself from other women writers of sentimental and local color fiction. For Wharton, the issue of separating the professionalization of authorship from its masculine ethos would prove complicated because the naturalists were always implicitly linking these two concepts. “Although Wharton clearly believed that, as a woman, she might produce works of aesthetic value,” writes Dudley, “she could do so only by adhering to the conventions of ‘masculine’ writing—by writing, as it were, like a man” (90). In order to succeed as a novelist, Wharton would seem to have to simultaneously reject not only older models of authorship but those that dictated conventions of gender, as well. This would make her path doubly difficult, because the path to professionalization being blazed by the male naturalists did not provide a space for women with its implicit project of masculinization.

However, even while embracing some of the aesthetic principles of naturalism, Wharton also counteracted, or at least questioned, these masculinizing trends. Kaplan suggests that “many of Wharton’s early works focus on the ways in which artists prey on their material and trade their intimate knowledge of others for their own success; her short fiction explores the fine line between disinterested realism and a more aggressive voyeurism” (84), with Wharton supplying an implicit critique of the male naturalists’ willingness to peer into the lives of other people. In *Edith Wharton and the Visual Arts*, Emily J. Orlando extends this argument, asserting that

Wharton's "fiction voices a dissatisfaction with the objectification and sexualization of women as objects and not agents—as representations rather than representers" (3). Specifically, Orlando suggests that "Wharton's use of an untrustworthy, condescending male narrator, whose perspective is never neutral, is less a device that reflects the writer's male identification than it is Wharton's method of delivering her social commentary" (9). Because these narrators are so often unreliable, "Wharton compels us to question what she repeatedly calls their 'unseeing' gazes'" (10). Although Wharton may deploy the voyeuristic gaze associated with the male naturalists, both Kaplan and Orlando note that a powerful critique runs parallel to this throughout her work, frequently calling into question the limits of the masculine gaze. Ultimately the question centers on who controls the fantasy of the fiction, the narrator or the author? This is an important question for both realist and naturalist authors because of their ostensible role as mere recorder of events. As Orlando notes, Wharton has a particular investment in this question, because it was often women—as well as other marginalized groups—that became the object of the gaze. But this uncertainty over control of the fantasy ultimately overwhelms even issues of gender to become a question of who controls any fiction, the story itself or the artist? If the author merely acts as an observer, then he or she is powerless over that observed world; but if the artist controls these representations, then can the work really be claiming any realistic depiction of life?

In order to address these questions, Wharton interrogates this division between, as Orlando describes it, "representation" and "representer," and a depiction of this intimate connection between visibility and gender emerges in her first published story, "Mrs. Manstey's View" (1891). In this short story an old woman spends her time watching the world through the window of her backroom on the third-story of a boarding house. A widower, her only pleasure comes from compulsively and intensely watching the world that she can observe from her

window. Although she ponders at length the blooming foliage, her interest lies primarily in the lives of the people she can observe, ranging from the boarding house yards in states of “chronic untidiness” to the bullying mistresses and their noisy servants (2-3). Campbell points out that this is a “landscape of naturalism” (153), with its “ash-barrels” lining the sidewalks (1), but she argues that because Mrs. Manstey’s possesses “deficiencies of vision Wharton’s narrator does not share” (153), the title character does not realize that she essentially acts the part of a local color character living in a naturalist world. Campbell’s argument focuses on the ways in which Mrs. Manstey, like the local color writers, “practices rigid selectivity in the pictures she both composes and views” (153). The fact that she omits or avoids certain sights can be contrasted to the naturalists, who attempt to see everything; Campbell argues that consequently the story critiques the limitations of vision posed by a more feminine genre of writing from which Wharton wishes to distance herself.

Campbell’s argument is true, to a point, but she too readily dismisses Mrs. Manstey’s willingness to participate in her limited world. Although Campbell contests that “as a spectator,” Mrs. Manstey “loses the capacity for meaningful intervention in the world she sees but will not join” (154), the main plot hinges in fact on her decision *to* act in her world. After a new development project threatens Mrs. Manstey’s view, she first appeals to the owner of the building to ask her to stop, even offering half of her life’s savings to prevent the project. When this fails, Mrs. Manstey takes the rather drastic step of setting fire to the new building, sneaking with a box of matches into the windy night in only her dressing gown and night-dress. Unfortunately for Mrs. Manstey, not only is the building not destroyed but she becomes the “chief sufferer” (10) of the fire, as she catches pneumonia and dies shortly thereafter; the only consolation is that work on the building only resumes after her death, and so she dies smiling.

Whether or not arson is “meaningful” intervention is debatable, but it is certainly significant, and perhaps more importantly it represents a rather radical departure from the passive watching that typically consumes the male observers in naturalism.

To draw this point out a little further, what is interesting about Mrs. Manstey’s intervention is that she so forcefully acts to preserve her fantasy. Although her sacrifice is only part of an attempt to keep her cherished view, this active intervention seems unusual, particularly when compared with the other observers in naturalism. This is even demonstrated by the representative of naturalism in the story, the third-person narrator. Campbell argues that the distance of the narrator from the character demonstrates the text’s critique of Mrs. Manstey’s limited vision, but the criticism may be running both ways; after all, Mrs. Manstey actively intervenes in her world, while the narrator just passively observes. Wharton essentially presents two choices: a limited but active vision, as in the case of Mrs. Manstey; or a total vision that remains passive, as represented by the narrator. Although the latter choice articulates the dominant naturalist position, this does not seem to be the stance with which Wharton agrees. The story ends with the narrator relaying the bitter irony that Mrs. Manstey was not successful, and yet Mrs. Manstey dies happily, so from a certain perspective success *was* hers (i.e. she wanted to be able to maintain her view until she died, and she did, even if it meant cutting her life short rather than preventing the project). Both positions obviously entail certain problems—such as that active and happy vision also means death—as well as certain advantages, and Wharton’s story does not suggest either as the answer; in the presentation of both choices she instead represents both the difficulties and the potentials of these alternatives.

Like “Mrs. Manstey’s View,” Wharton’s *The House of Mirth* (1905) confronts the problematic nature of vision at the turn of the century. The novel traces Lily Bart’s fall from the

upper echelon of New York high society to the poverty of boarding houses and is, in many ways, the classic fin de siècle narrative of the failed attempt to transcend class boundaries. Wharton tells a by-now familiar story of degeneration—albeit one that begins at a much higher class elevation than other naturalist novels—and she also deploys one of the other signature features of naturalist fiction: the spectator who dispassionately watches the events unfold. June Howard most famously delineates this spectator-spectacle relationship in *Form and History in American Naturalism*, where she writes that “one cannot appreciate the significance of naturalism’s philosophical determinism without also recognizing the perspective from which those characters are viewed, that of the observant and articulate naturalist in close conference with his reader” (x). She explains that “the author and reader and the characters who represent them inhabit a privileged location, assuming a kind of control over forces and events through their power to comprehend them” (x). In *The House of Mirth*, the textual surrogate for the author and reader is Lawrence Selden, the lawyer who is the perfect match for heroine Lily Bart in everything but finances, as his relative poverty conflicts with her desire to marry rich. Merish argues that Selden is “Lily’s most interested spectator” and that his “voyeuristic interest in Lily is indulged throughout the novel” (239). It is through Selden, writes Merish, that “naturalism’s structure of masculine voyeurism is thus itself placed under scrutiny in Wharton’s novel, through a productive disjuncture between the narrative inscription of male visual desire and its anthropomorphized embodiment in the character of Selden” (260). On the other side of this relationship is Lily, the object of everyone’s gaze, from Selden in the text to the reader and author peering into her life as she spirals downward from the fringes of “society” to poverty. But despite breaking along traditional gender lines, this dynamic between the male spectator and the

female spectacle becomes not simply the way that Wharton tells her story in the naturalist style but instead a central question that the author studies throughout the novel.

The novel begins with Selden looking, as the sight of Lily in the train station catches him off guard: “Selden paused in surprise. In the afternoon rush of the Grand Central Station his eyes had been refreshed by the sight of Miss Lily Bart. It was a Monday in early September, and he was returning to his work from a hurried dip into the country; but what was Miss Bart doing in town?” (2). The question that concludes this passage is presented as though it was Selden’s own thought, and yet the text gives no indication that this is the case; instead it appears without quotations as though it was the narrator who asked. Consequently, an immediate, implicit aligning of Selden and the narrator occurs: their points of view, if not their consciousnesses, are one. As Selden watches her at the train station, both his and the reader’s relationship to Lily are established, setting up a pattern that will be developed over the course of the novel. There is, on the one hand, a detached interest in Lily, with Selden positioned as the classic naturalist observer: “as a spectator, he had always enjoyed Lily Bart” (3). The novel emphasizes this position throughout, and his status as observer is a fundamental part of his character. Later in the novel, for example, after he travels to Monte Carlo subsequent to being shocked by Lily’s perceived indiscretions with Gus Treanor, “he began to feel the renewed zest of spectatorship that is the solace of those who take an objective interest in life” (174), and he begins once more his life of quiet observation, never deviating from it again until perhaps the final moments of the novel.

Even in this opening sequence, however, it becomes clear that Selden’s interest goes beyond merely watching her movements: “There was nothing new about Lily Bart, yet he could never see her without a faint movement of interest; it was characteristic of her that she always

roused speculation, that her simplest acts seemed the result of far-reaching intentions” (2). This passage has recently attracted critical attention because of the economic implications of “speculation,” as it suggests Lily’s commodification, one of the other major themes of the novel.²² As discussed previously, the turn of the century saw the emergence of a commodity culture that frequently turned women into consumable spectacles. Merish argues that Selden represents the “proprietary male ‘look’” (239) in the novel: “it is precisely because he *can’t* afford (but *appreciates*) Lily that Selden best enacts the dynamics of visual desire in consumer culture. In her characterization of Selden, Wharton dramatizes the compelling, apparently irresistible nature of the commodity spectacle and the new pleasures of ‘just looking’ in a specularized social milieu” (239). And “it is because Selden remains *just* a spectator—in a suspended state of visual desire—that he best evinces the fantasies of proprietorship engendered by modern consumerism” (240). This “suspended state of visual desire” suggests Selden’s passivity, as he “just looks” without any willingness to “buy,” so to speak. Although like the audience at the strip club, looking is, in a way, exactly what he *has* purchased, as it is both the extent and culmination of his commitment. But apart from the economic implications, there is also another meaning of “speculation” present in this passage: the study and contemplation of a subject, which is ultimately an imaginative act for one who ostensibly only observes. Unlike a camera recording the event, Selden’s “speculation” indicates that it is not only what he sees that interests him but what he does not see, as well. Similarly to the audience at the strip club, Selden is content to only watch, but this grossly understates the imaginative work that engages the audience. Speculating over Lily’s “far-reaching intentions” appears to interest Selden more than her actual objectives, and this fantasizing even seems to fascinate him more than Lily herself

²² See also Walter Benn Michaels’s *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism* for an extended discussion of the economic implications of both Wharton’s novel and naturalism more generally.

does. Lily's closest friend, Mrs. Fisher, even remarks that Lily is "such an interesting study" (180) because of her potential for contemplation.

Finally, the allure of Lily goes beyond either observation or pure speculation, even if Selden attempts to hide these ulterior motives behind his supposed detachment: "he noted, with a purely impersonal enjoyment, how evenly the black lashes were set in her smooth white lids, and how the purplish shade beneath them melted into the pure pallor of the cheek" (8). Selden's "impersonal enjoyment" hardly seems convincing, given its intent focus on Lily's beauty, a topic on which he continually remarks throughout the opening pages. Poised as he is between objective contemplation and sexual desire, Selden is in a precarious position, and other critics have also noted this perilous tension. Howard observes, for example, that the privileged position of a spectator like Selden "is necessarily vulnerable; fear and desire—sexual passion and violence, the fatal spell of the commodity, the fascination of the Other—constantly disrupt the design of safety" (x) and thus the spectator always remains at risk of becoming involved, willingly or not, in the spectacle. Dudley argues along these same lines, speculating that "Selden's objectification and idealization of women . . . represents something in between the typically male gaze of desire and possession and the disinterested scrutiny of a detached observer" (127). Merish echoes this claim, writing that "the two poles of Selden's visual interest—esthetic valorization and a desire for possession of intimate knowledge, or what feminist psychoanalytic and film critics term 'fetishism' and 'voyeurism'—structure his desire throughout the novel" (241). Selden appears to have a rather precarious hold on his spectator position, as demonstrated by his wavering throughout the novel between remaining detached and becoming romantically involved with Lily.

Although Selden's gaze figures prominently as a representative for both the naturalist author and the reader, the gaze within the text also emanates from the masses of people who hover around the fringes of these elite New Yorkers' lives. This abstract conception of "society" plays a substantial role in Wharton's work, becoming, as Richard Poirier describes it, an "expression of impersonal power," a power derived largely from vision. Kaplan describes how the novel implies that everyone wants a peek into society life, as "packs of onlookers lurk around its edges to peer inside" (89), and that, more problematically, "the gaping mob in *The House of Mirth* threatens the power of the elite by entrapping them in its gaze, in their own dependence upon publicity" (90). Examples appear throughout the novel, ranging from innocuous to treacherous. In the opening scene in which Selden watches Lily in the crowded Grand Central Station, the crowd *creates* her, with the multitudes setting off her "vivid head," a head that would not be vivid if not for the "dull dint of the crowd"; as Kaplan argues, "throughout the novel, the gaping mob both defines and threatens the upper class" (102). And Lily feels the pressure of these gazes, such as when she leaves Selden's apartment after sharing an impromptu cup of tea and "paused to look about her" (11) to make sure that she would not be witnessed leaving a bachelor's flat; as discussed in chapter four in relation to Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, a sense of total visibility pervades the turn-of-the-century city, with everyone both watching and have the feeling of being watched. Despite her precautions, she encounters a charwoman on the stairway who stares intently at her: "Lily felt herself flushing under the look. What did the creature suppose? Could one never do the simplest, the most harmless thing, without subjecting one's self to some odious conjecture?" (12). This encounter with a "creature" of the lower classes will later haunt Lily, as the woman attempts to blackmail her with a packet of stolen letters.

Representing the wider public in a tangible way is the society reporter, Dabham, who writes about the private lives of the rich and famous. “Dabham is a subject for scorn not simply because of his sordid voyeurism,” writes Kaplan, noting the negative tone in which the narrative describes him, “but more importantly because of the similarity between his role and that of the author. Like the gossip columnist, the novelist takes us ‘behind the scenes’ into the interior of *The House of Mirth* to reveal the nuances and intimations of an otherwise inaccessible elite circle” (97). Kaplan compares Selden to Dabham, suggesting that their two types of vision offer competing artistic models, with Wharton herself uncomfortable with “capitalizing on such privileged knowledge” (97) in her own work. Although “throughout her career, Wharton was sensitive to the charge that she practiced class tourism in the upper ranks of society” (84), Kaplan also argues that this was often a selling point for her novels:

When *The House of Mirth* was first published, she was furious at Scribner’s advertisement on the wrapper that said: “for the first time the veil has been lifted from New York society.” The ad was removed at her insistence, but the novel’s appeal to a mass-produced voyeurism does help explain why it became a best-seller. This appeal is both embedded and denied in the narrative itself. (84-5)

In order to distinguish between their different types of vision, “Wharton poses Selden as a model for the realist who has one foot in the gilded cage but still seems to keep the other outside by the power of detached, objective observation” (97). In this role, suggests Kaplan, Selden also watches Dabham watching, “yet precisely in this position as spectator of the spectator—watching over Dabham—Selden loses his objective status and participates in the same game of publicity and spectatorship that everyone else takes part in” (97). Wharton’s text dramatizes the immensely significant but extremely unstable role of vision in naturalism through these

competing models, and the gaze becomes how characters understand both each other and themselves.

Unlike the other characters, though, Lily appears aware of the both the powers and dangers of vision. As a woman in the novel, Lily is more frequently positioned as the object of the gaze, so her attention to its impact is especially heightened. Although we frequently find Selden watching the events of the novel, “leaned against the window, a detached observer of the scene” (91), Lily understands that the repercussions of his gaze are not so neutral: “under the spell of his observation Lily felt herself powerless to exert her usual arts” (91). Lily experiences and recognizes the power the gaze has to disrupt the very events it observes. As part of the spectator’s fantasy, Lily becomes an exhibitionist, staging her life for the pleasure of the onlookers, of which, it is clear, there are many. In one of the novel’s more light-hearted commentaries on this otherwise troubling situation, Lily finds herself alone in a beautiful setting, “and the combination of a handsome girl and a romantic scene struck her as too good to be wasted,” but unfortunately no one happened upon her there “to profit by the opportunity; and after a half hour of fruitless waiting she rose and wandered on” (57). Barbara Hochman comments that Lily’s exhibitionism and her “craving for a responsive audience is one of her defining characteristics from the outset; nothing gives her more pleasure than to see aspects of herself reflected back to her in Selden’s eyes” (76). Merish similarly writes that “Lily Bart would seem to require the presence of the erotically engaged male spectator to constitute her identity as a (‘desirable’) woman” (249). This is perhaps nowhere more evident than when Lily participates in the tableaux vivant, where live actors—or really just actresses, it seems—stage famous paintings. Lily’s painting is particularly revealing, as she wears just a thin piece of cloth in her recreation of Sir Joshua Reynold’s painting, *Mrs. Richard Bennett*. Although society’s gaze was

always firmly directed toward Lily, her willingness to be literally displayed as an object for viewing indicates both her recognition of that fact as well as her attempt to exploit it. By intentionally embodying the work of art, she calls attention to her own objectified status, her role as a literal commodity, even while simultaneously seeming to overcome it, as she controls the gaze of all those who watch her by dictating their fantasies. Is this real power or merely an illusion? It may, in fact, be real while Lily performs her role, but she cannot maintain the distance between the spectator and the spectacle necessary for her to capitalize on this situation: the power only exists when she can hold herself apart as the object of everyone's gaze, but she cannot deploy her influence unless she steps off of her stage.

The tension between remaining detached and becoming involved is a central theme of the novel, and through this discourse on visibility the novel attacks the broader implications of vision in naturalism. Arguably the climax of the novel is a visual one, and this crisis of vision occurs at the very moment Selden stands poised to move from the spectatorial periphery and onto the main stage of the spectacle. The night after Lily and Selden declare their love for one another following the tableaux vivant, Selden goes in search of her at a party at Mrs. Fisher's. Distraught at finding her already gone—for now he has realized he is indeed in love—he leaves the party, and soon finds himself accompanied by Van Alstyne as they walk through the late night streets of New York City. And it is then that they are surprised by the sight of Lily emerging from the house of Gus Trenor, whose wife they know is out of town:

The walking-stick which Van Alstyne swung in demonstration dropped to a startled 'Hallo!' as the door opened and two figures were seen silhouetted against the hall-light. At the same moment a hansom halted at the curb-stone, and one of

the figures floated down to it in a haze of evening draperies; while the other, black and bulky, remained persistently projected against the light.

For an immeasurable second the two spectators of the incident were silent; then the house-door closed, the hansom rolled off, and the whole scene slipped by as if the turn of the stereopticon.

Van Alstyne dropped his eye-glass with a low whistle.

‘A—hem—nothing of this, eh, Selden? As one of the family, I know I may count on you—appearances are deceptive—and Fifth Avenue is so imperfectly lighted—’ (154-5)

Selden’s clandestine witnessing of Lily’s departure from Gus’s marks the turning point of the novel. Up to this point, the movement of Selden’s character has slowly been from detached observation to active player, as represented by his changing relationship with Lily, but from this moment onward Selden will remain firmly on the periphery. However, the significance of this scene echoes well beyond the turn it marks in the narrative.

As the detached observer, Selden has heretofore seemed content to watch whatever scene unfolded before him. But this is somewhat misleading, because Selden’s voyeurism has always found a match between the world he sees and the world about which he speculates and fantasizes. Even when he has seen something unexpected, these glimpses have merely furthered ideas he already possessed. For example, when he comes upon Lily unexpectedly—noting with certain voyeuristic glee “*That is how she looks when she is alone!*” (65)—he observes an “emotional weakness” he had not detected before. But instead of concern over finding her in this “moment of disarray” with a “pale and altered” face, Selden worries about whether this would negatively affect the “aesthetic amusement which a reflective man is apt to seek in desultory

intercourse with pretty women” (65). Thankfully for Selden, he quickly resolves the problem of Lily’s emotional disarray: “this weakness had become the most interesting thing about her” (65), as the “diminution of her beauty had lent to her a poignant charm” (65). So when Selden’s unexpected glimpse of Lily’s frailty threatens to undermine this spectatorial enjoyment, he simply reimagines the troublesome reality so that it fits smoothly with his preconceived fantasy of Lily’s beauty.

However, when Selden witnesses Lily leaving Gus’s house, he cannot reconcile this fact with the voyeuristic fantasy in which he has been engaging. In his fantasy, Lily is simply a beautiful spectacle, and while he enjoys speculating about her, he seems to have no interest in knowing the truth about a girl in Lily’s precarious position, a girl who relies on only her beauty and the mere *prospect* of a favorable marriage to sustain her position in society. This is connected to and compounded by his tentative position on the threshold between spectating and participating, because despite enjoying his role as observer he was nearly about to step into the action of the novel. He has *imagined* himself into her life, like the voyeur who imaginatively projects him or herself into the room of those under observation. Although he instantly imagines another fictive version of Lily’s life—one in which she and Gus have an illicit relationship—this one does not include Selden, so he immediately flees from New York, unable to regain control of his fantasy.

In Mulvey’s criticism of the male gaze in film, she contends that the men control the fantasy through their active gaze, and to a degree this is certainly true, but the measure of control hinges to a large extent on how we understand fantasy. Returning to the instance of Yvette undressing, for example, what the audience watched and what they seemed to find so enticing was the actualization of a fantasy. However, it is important to note what a prosaic and predictable

fantasy the strip show represents. People pay to see an act that they know transpires behind every closed door, every night, and in which everyone in the city engages: they pay for not the extraordinariness of the act, then, but its very ordinariness. And in part it is this very ordinariness which makes it so fascinating; there is nothing particular exotic or even all that erotic about a woman preparing for bed. Underlying the ordinariness this first strip show's narrative, then, like all strip show "narratives," is its predictability: a performer wearing clothes removes these items of clothing, increasingly revealing his or her naked body. Excepting perhaps the audience of that first performance in 1894, every other spectator has known exactly how this particular story would end, and yet audiences have kept returning for over a century to see it happen. The lure of nudity is obviously real and undeniable, but if the only impetus for attending was to see a naked body, why even strip? Why not begin naked and end naked? Although they may not start the show in gloves, hats, and corsages like Yvette, even modern strippers wear some clothing, however negligible, that must be removed.

The answer that can be found in that first strip show—and one which weighs heavily on the interpretations of literary naturalism that I have been arguing for—is that it is the fantasy of being able to see what one is not supposed to see, but at the same time to see exactly what one *expects* to see. The audience becomes a voyeur, witnessing a private scene of a woman undressing for bed, but for all the titillation it provides nothing really surprises in this performance or in any strip show; indeed, surprise is not the point and would somehow run counter to the whole project. The spectator-voyeur, like all voyeurs, wants to see a specific something, wants to see what he or she fantasizes about seeing. Jarrett explains that "erotic dancers and striptease artists rely on creating an intimate distance between artist and audience: each member of the audience must feel that the performance is for his sole enjoyment and that

the fantasy being enacted is his own” (3). Like the audience of the strip show, the voyeur brings his or her own fantasy to the performance. In this way, the act of voyeurism is a creative one, but that same creativity also limits it: the voyeur sees only what he or she can imagine seeing. The audience in that Parisian hall wanted to see a woman undress, and because their fantasy matched the reality they were satisfied. The strip club fulfills the desires of the audience to see into the private lives of other people, but it does so in an accepted, controlled manner; it is, in a paradoxical way, a socially acceptably voyeurism.

But while the masculine gaze can dictate the terms of the fantasy by seeing the naked bodies it desires, as Mulvey suggests, it is also equally true that fantasy cannot always be controlled. While the strip club may be the ideal of voyeurism—the audience sees exactly what they hoped to see—the “reality” of the act always brings risk. One risk, discussed in chapter four, is that the voyeur will him or herself become the object of society’s gaze; in a culture invested in visual spectacles, anyone could at anytime become the object of the gaze. But another risk is that the voyeur will not see what he or she wanted, or, worse, something he or she did not want to see. What happens, then, to these constructions of masculinity when the male gaze loses control of the fantasy?

In most naturalist texts, the *object* of the gaze loses control over the fantasy, not the subject, as is the case in *The House of Mirth*. In Frank Norris’s *Vandover*, for example, after fleeing San Francisco to escape the fallout from the suicide of his seduced mistress, Vandover the aspiring artist becomes shipwrecked as he attempts to return home. As he floats in the lifeboat, staring “listlessly about him, looking at the dark sky, the tumbling ocean, and the crowded groups in the plunging, rolling lifeboat,” he finds himself disappointed by the scene: “there was nothing picturesque about it all, nothing heroic. It was unlike any pictures he had seen

of lifeboat rescues, unlike anything he had ever imagined. It was all sordid, miserable, and the sight of the half-clad women, dirty, sodden, unkempt, stirred him rather to disgust than to pity” (143). For Vandover this tragic scene disappoints because it does not adhere to his aesthetic vision of reality, where suffering should be a heroic enterprise. For example, while previously in the repose of his studio, Vandover contemplated a painting that he intended to be his masterpiece, titled *The Last Enemy*. It was to be a melodramatic piece depicting a dying British cavalryman and his horse, “lost on a Soudanese desert, and in the middle distance on a ridge of sand a lion should be drawing in upon them, crouched on his belly, his tail stiff, his lower jaw hanging. . . . The effects he wished to produce were isolation and intense heat; as to the soldier, he was as yet undecided whether to represent him facing death resignedly, calmly, or grasping the barrel of his useless rifle, determined to fight to the last” (64). In Vandover’s imagination, the scene of one’s death should be dramatic and heroic, not “sordid” and “miserable.” Instead of a solitary man facing a hungry lion, Vandover and the crowded boats face only the indefinite and unknowable ocean. Vandover is not alone in his realization that “reality” does not conform to his imagined version, as many other naturalist characters encounter similar experiences; Hurstwood’s foray into the world of the trolleyman discussed in the previous chapter stands as another example. Vandover attempts to project the imagined realities of his mind onto the real world, but he fails. But where the characters fail, the literary naturalists do not, or at least they do not in any perceivable way. That is because their surrogates—sometimes a character within the text such, as Ames in *Sister Carrie*, but most often the implied third-person narrator—never lose control, and only the characters whom they observe cannot maintain their fictional realities.

But in *The House of Mirth*, it is the subject—Selden—who loses control. If one reads Selden as a representative of the naturalist author, as Kaplan posits, then the rupture between his

fantasy and the actual material reality, such as it is in a work of fiction, poses a significant threat to naturalism's aesthetic project.²³ Naturalism takes as its basic premise that, as Howard describes it, the "narrative can and does refer to a 'real world' with a material existence somewhere outside the literary text" (11), but it refuses to acknowledge that this "real" world is a fictive creation of the author. Orlando suggests that "Wharton, as author, is also a watcher, an orchestrator, a director of the scene she stages. . . . So Wharton watches Lily watching men (and women) watch her. Evidently the 'ideal spectator' is not always male. There is power in both spectating and speculating" (71). Selden demonstrates the problematic relationship that the naturalist author has with reality: he wishes to stand on the periphery as the spectator, and yet his masculine desire always nudges him toward the action, even if this activity only manifests itself through imaginative fantasy. In other words, he tries to objectively observe while simultaneously imagining himself in the scene he observes. It is an impossible position—akin to watching the strip show dispassionately—and one that ultimately undermines the naturalists' project even while becoming its defining characteristic.

The implications of these sudden, unwanted revelations indict not only the typical naturalist author but the reader as well. The readers want to see into these forbidden spaces as much as Selden does, and yet the expectation is that they will find exactly what they fantasized would be occurring behind closed doors. Instead, Wharton interrupts the reader's voyeuristic fantasy; in the case of *The House of Mirth*, she does this by upending the typical marriage plot and concluding with Lily's death. Many naturalist novels end badly for their characters, but

²³ As a point of clarification, Kaplan asserts that Selden is a "model for the realist" (97) writer, not the naturalist as I am suggesting. However, throughout her book, *The Social Construction of American Realism*, she uses the term "realism" to label texts that are frequently considered naturalist, such as *The House of Mirth* and *Sister Carrie*. Because her critical project is more concerned with the historical implications of the movement than its aesthetic goals, she uses "realism" to encompass both movements, whereas my own interest in the aesthetics of naturalism lead me to differentiate the two.

Lily's is not a case of atavism or degeneration like McTeague's or Hurstwood's; she *should* succeed, and yet she does not. Wharton disrupts the reader's fantasy, and in doing so she makes it suddenly clear that the reality of naturalism was not a reality at all; by revealing the shock of the fantasy unfulfilled, the fact that other naturalist texts do *not* shock the reader, at least not in unexpected ways, reveals how unreal they actually are. As Wharton's fiction makes clear, the fantasy of naturalism is that it is *not* a fantasy. And once it becomes clear that these worlds are all fictive, then the role of the artist's vision takes on an entirely new significance.

So although Selden represents the particularly masculine vision that the naturalists deploy, through his juxtaposition with Lily and her feminine gaze Wharton charts a different artistic path. Unlike Selden, Lily uses her moments of voyeurism to actively engage in her world and, like Mrs. Manstey, to affect change. For instance, when she unexpectedly sees Selden and Bertha Dorset, Lily's rival, engaged in a secretive talk, "for a moment she seemed about to withdraw, but thinking better of this, she announced her approach by a slight shake of her skirts which made the couple raise their heads, Mrs. Dorset with a look of frank displeasure, and Selden with his usual quiet smile" (56). And later, when the same charwoman who saw Lily leave Selden's apartment attempts to blackmail her, she does not collapse under the weight of the surprising revelation that Selden had an affair with Bertha. Instead, she purchases the letters both to protect Selden and to potentially serve as blackmail material of her own (which, somewhat unfortunately, she never uses). Although these letters provide a window through which Lily can voyeuristically peer into the illicit relationship between Selden and Bertha, she claims that she "had no idea of reading the letters" (102), insisting that the letter's words "had leapt into her brain before she was conscious of reading them" and that they "told a long history—a history over which, for the last four years, the friends of the writer had smiled and shrugged, viewing it

merely as one among the countless ‘good situations’ of the mundane comedy” (99). Although it is somewhat difficult to take Lily’s claims entirely at face value—she seems to have gleaned an awful lot of information from a mere glance—she *acts* on the information, actively engaging in the events rather than maintaining her voyeuristic position. As with Mrs. Manstey, this ability, or perhaps just willingness, to step on the stage becomes an important and radical distinction between the way Wharton portrays her male and female voyeurs.

This is in part because Lily feels the pressure of both seeing *and* being seen, and unlike Selden she inserts herself in the fantasy in a way he does not or cannot. When given the opportunity to play the spectator, Lily, contemplating Selden’s unique societal role, moves beyond mere observation in her speculation:

he had preserved a certain social detachment, a happy air of viewing the show objectively, of having points of contact outside the great gilt cage in which they were all huddled for the mob to gape at. . . . That was the secret of his way of readjusting her vision. Lily, turning her eyes from him, found herself scanning her little world through his retina: it was as though the pink lamps had been shut off and the dusty daylight let in. (51-2)

Instead of Lily simply watching Selden, trying to understand his point of view, she assumes his vision, “scanning her little world through his retina.” Although Lily believes that Selden is the one who has the greatest mobility, with his “points of contact outside the great gilt cage,” his mobility rests solely with his ability to turn his head this way or that; he cannot imagine moving between consciousness, like Lily can, and indeed like the *novel* does.

Envisioning Subjectivity

And this is ultimately what distinguishes Wharton's *The House of Mirth* from the texts written by male naturalists. While other naturalist texts—intentionally or not—frequently call attention to their own voyeuristic gaze, this masculine voyeuristic gaze still moves along a single line, usually from the narrator and reader to the characters but, in some cases, from the text back towards the readers. As is characteristic of voyeurism, the spectators—author, narrator, and/or reader—typically stand on the periphery of the action, watching the sordid but titillating spectacle of the characters' lives unfold; in this model, the unidirectional gaze begins with the spectator and ends with the spectacle. Naturalist texts do occasionally challenge the direction of this gaze, providing moments such as the grotesque fat man in Crane's *Maggie* (discussed in chapter two) or the cat in Norris's *McTeague* (discussed in chapter three) that, if not reversing the direction of the gaze, at least draw attention to the spectator's voyeuristic position and in the process make the voyeur at least momentarily recognize his or her status as object rather than subject. But in dismantling the naturalist's masculine gaze, Wharton replaces the unidirectional gaze with a multidirectional vision that has the potential to move in several directions simultaneously: one can stand on the stage even while watching. Instead of depicting a conflict between the "representation" and the "representer," between the spectacle and the spectator, through Lily the novel offers another alternative that allows the artist to embody both roles simultaneously. In the process, this conflation eliminates the possibility of objectivity altogether, because no one can truly stand far enough apart to see the truth: there is no periphery, no sideline on which to stand.

The naturalists wrested vision from the comfortable plurality suggested by the romance and sensational novels' insistent "we," and in so doing rooted the gaze to a single narrator's body. The purpose was to become *more* objective by creating a distance between the spectator

and the spectacle, but this singularity of perspective instead highlighted subjectivity, primarily the subjectivity of their white male narrators. Wharton's move is to break this even further, giving agency of the gaze to women and, in doing so, gesturing towards the fracturing of vision that would characterize literature in the twentieth century. Fundamentally these issues of perspective and subjectivity are neither masculine nor feminine, but because the male naturalists entangled their otherwise gender-neutral project with a distinctly masculine voyeurism, Wharton necessarily responded along similarly gendered terms.

By revealing the limitations of the naturalist's masculine voyeurism, Wharton suggests the possibility of visuality as embodiment, and in doing so provides a glimpse of how vision and subjectivity would be radically redefined in modernist literature. Instead of seeking the impossible separation between the observer and the observed, of striving to stand apart and narrating objectively these stories of the perverse tragedy of modern life, modernists would accept and even embrace the impossibility of objectivity. Depicting the reality of modern life is arguably the goal of realists, naturalists, and modernists alike, but only by abandoning the belief in the possibility of objectivity could the modernists finally succeed in representing reality in the only truthful way possible: as a subjective experience.

Conclusion: Literary Naturalism's Epistemological Crisis and its Modernist Legacy

Nearly thirty years after John Sloan etched his *Night Windows*, Edward Hopper painted a response to Sloan's work, borrowing both Sloan's title as well as the earlier work's theme: urban voyeurism (fig. 22). Like Sloan's picture, Hopper's 1928 painting depicts a woman in her apartment at night, partially visible through her open window shade, and again we find the voyeuristic gaze both thematized and dramatized, a continuation of the erotic gaze characteristic of artists at the turn of the century. Although similar in subject matter, however, Hopper's revisions suggest the ways in which vision has subtly but fundamentally shifted over the course of the first decades of the twentieth century. Sloan's etching depicts an entire nighttime scene, from the woman hanging her laundry in the foreground to the distant skyscrapers fading into the background, but Hopper's work extremely limits the scope of the urban scene: other than the three windows of the woman's apartment, only an indecipherable street sign and the top of the building's door are visible. In providing a broad snapshot of urban life, Sloan's work also gives some hint of these people's lives, from their impoverished economic status to the breakdown of public and private space that these new urban conditions created. In contrast, Hopper's *Night Windows* is devoid of context: virtually nothing can be deduced about the scene from the painting itself, except that there is a woman, she is alone, and it is night.

Having studied with Robert Henri, the influential Ashcan School artist, Hopper can be understood as one of the inheritors of the Ashcan tradition, continuing their project of representing the many complexities of urban visuality. His paintings consistently emphasize vision and the erotics of sight in the cities of the first half of the twentieth century, and in *Night Windows* Hopper makes an explicit link to his Ashcan predecessors, drawing on their influence while also complicating their legacy. As argued throughout my dissertation, the Ashcan



Figure 22. Edward Hopper, *Night Windows*, 1928.

paintings, specifically, and naturalism, generally, present a gaze that compulsively turns toward highly sexual and erotic subject matter. But whereas Sloan's *Night Windows* used the window to perfectly frame the woman in a negligee, in Hopper's version barely half of a woman is visible, and yet nevertheless the latter's iteration possesses an even stronger erotic undertone. Despite the limited glimpse—or perhaps even because of it—the painting presents the woman as an erotic figure, with a bed just visible beside her and the far left window wide open, seemingly beckoning the viewer into her apartment. Even the figure's gender is somewhat indefinite, with the bared shoulder and shapely figure only providing clues, not indisputable truths. And as with much of

Hopper's work, his "realist" style is nevertheless strangely unrealistic; his people look more like mannequins, his settings more like stages. Ultimately the painting provides unsettling insinuations rather than definitive facts, which in turn forces the viewer to develop the narrative for him or herself; more than any of the Ashcan School paintings or indeed any of the works of literary naturalism, Hopper's painting forces the viewer to do the heavy imaginative lifting.

In following the trajectory begun by earlier artists such as Sloan, Hopper reaches a conclusion about vision that seems to run entirely counter to what the Ashcan artists set out to demonstrate. Rather than achieving a realistic representation of urban life through a detached spectator, Hopper recognizes and then intentionally manipulates the subjectivity of vision. This highly subjective perspective is made manifest in the most important difference between Sloan's and Hopper's *Night Windows*: the absence of the rooftop voyeur. Although Sloan's etching allows the viewer to peer into a woman's bedroom, the man's presence on the roof provides a crucial mediation; viewers also peeked into the private bedroom, but they could at least justify the decision because the etching dramatized its voyeurism. But without the rooftop voyeur, the viewer cannot escape being indisputably assigned the voyeuristic gaze. In those Ashcan paintings that depict private scenes but do not posit a viewer within the work, the perspective is either distant enough to plausibly deny voyeuristic intent—viewers could argue they were focused on the woman hanging laundry, not the woman undressing—or so close as to suggest the possibilities of intimacy—no window frames appear in William Glackens's *Nude Arranging Her Hair* or Sloan's *Turning Out the Light*, so we are not entirely sure of the relationship between spectator and spectacle. Ashcan works suggest a subjective, voyeuristic perspective, but Hopper's painting makes it unavoidable.

Superficially, these changes appear to simply be the intensification of the voyeurism I have tracked throughout this dissertation, an increasingly subjective perspective that undermines realism and naturalism's claims to objectivity. But Hopper's painting reveals not only a further shift towards a subjective vision but a very rethinking of ideas about the subject, about how to define the self. Writing about Hopper's paintings, Rebecca Zurier argues that "the elements of mutuality and recognition—the give-and-take between observing artist and viewed subject and between viewer and viewed within the works themselves, so characteristic of Ashcan art—no longer seems possible in these paintings of the 1920s and 1930s" (308). Hopper's *Night Windows* dramatically demonstrates this lack of even the possibilities of recognition, as the woman's head is obscured behind the wall: she can never return our gaze, for she does not even have eyes with which to do so. The relationship between the "viewer" and the "viewed" no longer even counts as a relationship, and the intensity of the imaginative work which the viewer undertakes essentially makes the "viewed" secondary, if not irrelevant. In other words, the distance between spectacle and spectator which naturalism problematized through the voyeur's projective, imaginative gaze—but nevertheless still posited as existing—has not just diminished, it has all but disappeared.

One way to read the rooftop voyeur in Sloan's *Night Windows* is as representative of the naturalist artist, in which case his position above the city can be interpreted as affording him a level of neutrality that the other figures inside the apartment building do not possess. Yet as I have argued throughout my dissertation, the tension between objectivity and fantasy defines naturalism, and so even while striving for an increased objectivity, the literary naturalists simultaneously were enticed by the creative allure of the imagination; the man on the roof cannot be truly objective, as his interest lies also with fantasizing about a woman undressing. The

voyeur's fantasy is of imaginative participation in whatever scene he or she watches, with the actual glimpse inside the room just the occasion for speculative fantasy. To put it another way, the man on the roof is both on the roof *and* inside the room, both detached observer and imaginary participant.

To differing degrees, the artists examined throughout this dissertation have believed in the basic proposition that these two distinct spaces existed, that the man on the roof was separate from the woman in the apartment, that the spectator was distinct from the spectacle, and that the author and his or her surrogate was separate from the narrative action, even *if* this space could be imaginatively transgressed through the voyeuristic gaze. They believed, too, that a knowable world exists and that this world could be understood through observation, a basic principle of scientific thought since at least the Enlightenment. The naturalists' works that I have analyzed implicitly argue that the spectacle of modern life could be viewed by a spectator, and in order to try and be as objective as possible in their representation of this knowable world these artists positioned the spectator *separate* from the spectacle, supposing that this would create the distance necessary to truthfully represent reality. In Sloan's work, for example, representation is a possibility, and even total representation appears to be achievable if one can just stand far enough back. In contrast, the claustrophobia of Hopper's painting provides very few clues about what exists beyond the edges of the work, suggesting an imaginative fantasy that is largely disassociated from the surrounding environment. If in Sloan's *Night Windows* the spectator's fantasy collapsed the distance between himself and his erotic spectacle, Hopper's painting demonstrates that the spectacle *is* the spectator, the spectator *is* the spectacle.

Throughout my dissertation I have been interested in developing a more complete, stable definition of literary naturalism, but perhaps what remains continually fascinating about artistic

movements is the way in which they resist these definitions, so often bleeding into one another, changing in minute, subtle ways until new literary forms emerge. My interest in naturalism necessitated a (mostly) synchronic view of the form, but when traced out diachronically it is evident that naturalism owes much to its predecessors such as romanticism and sensationalism, as demonstrated by its insistent, compulsive return to fantasy. In the comparison of Sloan's and Hopper's different *Night Windows*, however, the legacy of the naturalist's voyeuristic gaze for subsequent artistic movements can be seen as well. In particular, a clear genealogy emerges between naturalism and modernism, a connection not always readily apparent. Most versions of modernism use realism and/or naturalism as the movements from which modernists sought a deliberate and definitive representational break, and it is easy to see how this assertion could be made when one compares the relatively straight-forward narrative of a naturalist text such as Frank Norris's *McTeague* (1899) to a radical, stream-of-consciousness modernist work such as William Faulkner's *Sound and the Fury* (1929), or the representational realism of Thomas Eakins's *The Gross Clinic* (1875) to the abstract cubism of Pablo Picasso's *Les demoiselles d'Avignon* (1907). However, when we emphasize the gaze of these texts, and consider the epistemological and ontological significance of visibility for both the naturalists and the modernists, then the latter seems less like a break from the former than an extension, albeit a radical one, of that earlier movement's project of representation. Pericles Lewis describes modernism as embodying a "crisis of representation" (xviii), and although the naturalists were not entirely aware of the significance of this crisis nor its implications, their work clearly engages with a similar representational dilemma: how can vision ever be truly objective if it is rooted in a subjective, human subject?

The naturalists do confront this problem, and their insistent inclusion of the third-person narrator, detachedly viewing the narrative action presents both their response and their problem: these narrators draw attention to the problem even while trying to solve it. The narrator of Norris's *McTeague*, for example, establishes a distance between himself and the degenerate characters he watches, a distance which initially appears to allow him a clinical neutrality. But he cannot separate the man from the scientist, and his own status as subject ultimately distorts the very objects of his gaze. All of the naturalists seem to be at least partially aware of the problematic nature of vision, and although the gaze that the naturalists deploy is not intentionally subjective, there does seem to be a recognition of its limitations. Philip Weinstein argues that in realism, "the world must be objectively knowable but (to the questing subject) not yet known" (24), and that "*coming to know*" (2) this world is the basic narrative of realist texts. Although these artists do not overcome these limitations, there is a sense that surmounting these problems remains a possibility, that "*coming to know*" is an achievable goal, and that accomplishing this task is crucial if one is to understand one's own status as subject.

The modernists, however, utilize these limitations to ask epistemological questions, troubling the very possibilities of knowing. Modernists texts no longer take for granted a stable, knowable external world, instead positing a reality that depends upon the individual's perspective for meaning. Virginia Woolf's *Mrs. Dalloway* (1925) dramatically depicts this epistemological crisis, with the narrative shifting so frequently and effortlessly between consciousnesses that the drama of the novel essentially becomes how these characters know their world; their extreme subjectivity reveals an external world that only exists in the perspectives of the characters. In Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury*, readers pass through the different characters' consciousnesses, struggling to understand even the most basic truths about the

Compson family. This indeterminacy is not just a formal innovation; it is the whole essence of the text. Stephen Kern asserts that “modernists questioned the under-examined conviction of their realist predecessors who wrote as though they knew precisely what their characters did and said” and thereby “clarified and magnified the possibilities of knowing by side-stepping scientific stands of certitude and expanding their sources to include speculation and imagination” (200). What my dissertation demonstrates is that these “sources” of “speculation and imagination” were present in naturalism all along, as revealed through my focus on naturalism’s voyeuristic gaze, but it was not until modernism that artists stopped unsuccessfully fighting these contradictory impulses and instead embraced the potentiality of this tension.

Ultimately the naturalists faced an epistemological crisis: they could not reconcile their belief in an objective gaze with the fact that this gaze must be rooted in a subjective self. And if this tension could not be reconciled, then knowledge of the external world, a knowledge thought to be achievable through observation, must be impossible. Perhaps even more importantly, if the spectacle was no longer knowable, neither was the spectator. Weinstein suggests that, “thanks to the lawfulness of time and space, a subject learns to map the outer world accurately and, thereby, to achieve inner orientation as well” (2), and so with this epistemological uncertainty understandings of subjectivity and how the self is defined are undermined. Realism’s “insistence on free-standing subjectivity is precisely what modernist fiction subverts,” argues Weinstein, and modernism consequently reveals “the human subject as situational, space/time dependent, capable of coming to know *only* if the props that enable knowing are already in place” (2). In other words, the self is not a fixed concept, but always contextually and situationally constructed; there cannot be a clear differentiation between spectator and spectacle because both are in continual movement, with their relationship to one another always changing. Although the

narrators in naturalism observe an often unstable and dynamic external world, their own subjectivity appears to be secure. The voyeuristic gaze of literary naturalism reveals, however, not only the epistemological crisis these authors faced but that the stability of the subject is an illusion, as well.

I want to conclude with an example of this epistemological crisis from Henry James, the rare author who straddled both movements, as he was arguably as much a realist author as a protomodernist. James's stories often include voyeuristic scenes that occupy central narrative roles in his fiction, but they do so in a different way than most naturalist novels because these moments undermine the epistemological certainty that the naturalists typical sought. In *The Ambassadors* (1903), Lewis Lambert Strether, a middle-aged magazine editor and the reader's surrogate voyeur, travels to Europe to retrieve his wealthy fiancée's wayward son, Chad, and in the process finds his own hold on reality radically destabilized. One of James's "late" novels—along with *Wings of the Dove* (1902) and *The Golden Bowl* (1904)—*The Ambassadors* demonstrates the culmination of a career's worth of exploring the form of fiction, and despite its relatively straightforward and typically Jamesian American-in-Europe plot, the novel is formally innovative; it takes Strether as the focalizer, using his character's perspective but through a third-person narration, in order to guide the reader through a narrative middle ground, somewhere between realism and naturalism's classic third-person narrator and later modernist stream-of-consciousness narration.²⁴ This narrative perspective results in the novel's foregrounding of the relationship between vision and epistemology, as the reader sees *with*, if not *through*, Strether. Indeed, the narrative's gravitational center is a moment of visual recognition, as Strether observes Chad and Madame Marie de Vionnet floating on the river, and he subsequently realizes they have recognized him: Strether "too had within the minute taken in something, taken in that

²⁴ For more on focalization see Mieke Bal.

he knew the lady whose parasol, shifting as if to hide her face, made so fine a pink point in the shining scene. . . . and she had been the first at recognition, the first to feel, across the water, the shock—for it appeared to come to that—of their wonderful accident” (462). In this recognition of the couple drifting serenely down the river, Strether realizes the truth about the intimacy of Chad and Madame de Vionnet’s relationship, an intimacy repeatedly denied throughout the novel by all of the characters.

Superficially this moment would seem akin to Selden’s chance observation of Lily emerging from Gus’s house in Edith Wharton’s *The House of Mirth* (1905), as discussed in chapter five, as the reader’s surrogate in both cases finds his knowledge of his world destabilized by a voyeuristic glimpse of a scene he thought he understood but in fact did not. But in Selden’s case, the reader already knew the truth behind Lily’s midnight pursuits, making his misunderstanding of the situation primarily a commentary on the limitations of the naturalist’s voyeuristic gaze. In *The Ambassadors*, however, Strether’s recognition of the actual dynamics of Chad and Madame de Vionnet’s relationship does not just undermine his own grasp of the truth, it unravels every truth that the *reader* had imagined, as well. Everything that Strether thought he knew about his world is wrong, but so is everything that the reader thought as well. For Strether this revelation of his own epistemological uncertainty shakes the foundations of his own identity, forcing him to reconsider his own beliefs and understanding of the world. Readers, too, experience this cognitive vertigo, realizing that the self that existed in the moment prior to reading this passage, the self that believed in these characters’ fundamental honesty, no longer exists; like Strether, readers are no longer who they were.

As a protomodernist text, *The Ambassadors* does not deploy the extreme subjective narrative techniques such as stream-of-consciousness or free indirect discourse that would

become such a central feature of high modernist texts such as James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) or Woolf's *The Waves* (1933), but as a transitional work it reveals the way in which epistemological instability has begun to supplant rational certainty. Naturalism's voyeurism begins by supposing the subject and the other, the spectator and the spectacle, and that the two are distinct from one another but also knowable *by* one another: the voyeur can peer through the woman's window but does not lose his or her essential identity. But voyeurism is of course different than other types of the gaze because of its projective, imaginative qualities, and without likely realizing the full implications of this fact, the naturalist's deployed a voyeuristic gaze that begun the process of eroding the firm boundary between self and other, a boundary that, once eliminated, undermines firm constructions of subjectivity. Modernism eliminates the narrator-voyeur that allowed mediation between the spectacle and the reader, forcing readers to be part of these highly subjective experiences in order to recognize their *own* subjectivity. The voyeuristic gaze of naturalism therefore demonstrates the emergence of a skepticism about the knowability of the world before these artists were perhaps even aware of their own doubt about this possibility; it reveals an art struggling to make sense of changes both to the world and to the *experience* of that world. Ultimately naturalism could not sustain this tension between objectivity and subjectivity, but its collapse signaled not a failure but the revelation of the fundamental crisis of representation that would stimulate and define art for the next century.

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Curriculum Vitae

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 Leroy Searle

M.A., English Literature, University of Montana, 2005
 Thesis: *The Center Field Cannot Hold: Examining the Failure of the American Pastoral in Postwar Baseball Literature*
 Thesis Committee: Christopher J. Knight (Chair), Paul Dietrich, Brady Harrison

B.A., American Literature and Culture, University of California, Los Angeles, 2003

EMPLOYMENT

English Department Teaching Assistant, University of Washington, 2008-2012

Liaison, University of Washington English in the High Schools Program, 2009-2011

FELLOWSHIPS, AWARDS, AND HONORS

Robert Heilman Graduate Endowment Travel Award, University of Washington, 2012

Graduate School Fund for Excellence and Innovation Graduate Student Travel Award, University of Washington, 2011

Allan and Mary Kollar Endowed Fellowship, University of Washington, 2010-2011

Honorable Mention Award for the Webber Prize for Outstanding Teaching for 100-Level Teaching Assistant, University of Washington, 2010

Cum Laude, University of California, Los Angeles, 2003

PUBLICATIONS

Articles

“‘A strange and ecstatic pleasure’: The Voyeurism of the Naturalist’s Gaze in Frank Norris’s *Vandover and the Brute* and *McTeague*.” *Studies in American Naturalism* 6.1 (2011): 49-68.

with Melanie Hernandez. “‘We’ll start over like Adam and Eve’: The Subversion of Classic American Mythology.” *Analyzing Mad Men: Critical Essays on the Television Series*. Ed. Scott F. Stoddart. Jefferson, N.C.: McFarland, 2011. 15-44.

“‘In a time before nomenclature was and each was all’: *Blood Meridian*’s Neomythic West and the Heterotopian Zone.” *Western American Literature* 44.2 (2009): 141-156.

“Introduction: From the Weight of Gold to the Weight of History in HBO’s *Deadwood*.” *Great Plains Quarterly* 27.4 (2007): 235-238.

with Kyle Wiggins. “‘Gold is every man’s opportunity’: Castration Anxiety and the Economic Venture in *Deadwood*.” *Great Plains Quarterly*, 27.4 (2007): 283-295.

Reviews

Review of “*The Sun Field: A Novel* by Heywood Broun.” *NINE: A Journal of Baseball History and Culture* 18.2 (2010): 164-166.

Review of “*Cosmos* by Witold Gombrowicz.” *The Rocky Mountain Review of Language and Literature* 61.1 (2007): 145-147.

CONFERENCE PRESENTATIONS

“‘To stare seemed the proper and natural thing’: Voyeurism in Theodore Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie*,” American Literature Association Conference, Boston, MA. 2011.

“‘There will be time, there will be time’: An Account of Time in American Modernism,” Graduate Conference for Interdisciplinary Studies, University of Washington, Seattle, WA. 2009.

“‘He seated himself gloomily on the ground with his flag between his knees’: The Eroticization of War and Myth in Stephen Crane’s *The Red Badge of Courage*,” Graduate Conference for Interdisciplinary Studies, University of Washington, Seattle, WA. 2008.

“‘The Giants win the pennant and they’re going crazy’: Nuclear Annihilation and the National Pastime in DeLillo’s *Underworld*,” Cooperstown Symposium on Baseball and American Culture, Cooperstown, NY. 2007.

with Kyle Wiggins. "Amalgamation and Capital in *Deadwood*: Issues of annexation and autonomy," Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association Convention, Tuscon, AZ. 2006.

"*Deadwood*: Critical Responses." Special Topics Panel Co-Chair. Rocky Mountain Modern Language Association Convention, Tuscon, AZ. 2006.

EDITING

Acts of Inquiry: A Guide to Reading, Research, and Writing at the University of Washington. Edited with Allison Gross, Annie Dwyer, and Anis Bawarshi. Boston: Bedford/St. Martin's, 2010.

University of Washington in the High Schools Expository Writing Program, English 131 Instructors' Manual, 2009-2010 and 2010-2011. Edited with Annie Dwyer, Elizabeth Brown, and Gianna Craig.

University of Washington in the High Schools Expository Writing Program, English 111 Instructors' Manual, 2009-2010 and 2010-2011. Edited with Annie Dwyer, Elizabeth Brown, and Gianna Craig.

Great Plains Quarterly, 27. 4 (2007). Consulting editor for a special topics issue.

TEACHING

Courses Taught, *University of Washington*, Seattle, WA

English 200: Reading Literary Forms: Old, Weird America: American Literature, 1820-1865; Fall 2011

English 213: Modern and Postmodern Literature: The Transient, the Fleeting, the Contingent: The Idea of Modernity in Transatlantic Modernist and Postmodernist Literature; Winter 2011

English 250: Introduction to American Literature: A Crisis of Representation: Imagining the American Experience in Nineteenth- and Early-Twentieth-Century American Literature; Fall 2010

English 281: Intermediate Composition: Disciplinary Discourse: A Case Study in English; Summer 2011, Spring 2012

English 111: Composition: Literature.

Theme: Narrating the Supernatural: Narrative Theory in Late-Nineteenth-Century American and British Literature; Winter 2012

Theme: The Uncanny in Nineteenth-Century American Literature; Winter 2010

Theme: The Idea of Authorship in Nineteenth-Century American Literature; Fall 2009

English 131: Composition: Exposition.

Theme: Applying Critical Theory to Fairy Tales; Spring 2009

Theme: Applying Critical Theory to Popular Culture; Winter 2009

Theme: Representation and the Construction of Interpretative Communities; Fall 2008

Courses Taught, *Highline Community College*, Des Moines, WA

Writing 101: Principles of Writing; Spring 2008

Courses Taught, *Tacoma Community College*, Tacoma, WA

English 75: Pre-College Writing; Fall 2007, Winter 2008, Spring 2008

English 101: College Freshman Composition; Winter 2008

English 95: Composition; Fall 2007

PROFESSIONAL SERVICE

Editorial Committee, e.g., University of Washington's Online Journal for 100-Level Writing, 2009-2012

Committee Co-Chair, 2010-2012

Expository Writing Program Textbook Committee, University of Washington, 2009-2010