James Dorson

The Aesthetics of Mastery: American Literary Naturalism and the Cultural Foundations of Bureaucracy

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The Aesthetics of Mastery:

American Literary Naturalism and the Cultural Foundations of Bureaucracy

James Dorson

Abstract

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This paper aims to examine the cultural foundations of the modern bureaucratic order around the turn of the twentieth century in the United States. In response to both the breakup of Victorian norms and the social crisis precipitated by the rapid expansion of free market industrial capitalism at the end of the nineteenth century, American naturalist writers experimented with new ways to represent and make sense of the social and cultural turmoil of their times. Rejecting a normative order based on Victorian morality as unable to address the problems of economic inequality and exploitation, this paper will explore how their art promoted a vision of rational management that ultimately helped to reorientate their culture toward the dawning bureaucratic ethos of the Progressive Era.

About the Author

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Introduction

"What precipitates breaks and interruptions in social argument are not raw changes in social experience, which never translate automatically into mind", writes Daniel T. Rodgers. "What matters are the processes by which the flux and tensions of experience are shaped into mental frames and pictures that, in the end, come to seem themselves natural and inevitable: ingrained in the very logic of things".[1] Put differently, it is not changing social reality as such that produces new constellations of meaning and action but the cultural processes of mediation used to make sense of that reality. Whether intentionally or not, literature plays a role in the revision of social norms. Such revisions may be sought directly in literature on a discursive level through the dramatic representation of ideas or social problems, or on a more emotive level through affective manipulation, like the sentimental novel. They may also take a less direct form when using experimental narrative styles to alter the way reality is perceived. In this working paper, my aim is to examine the "mental frames and pictures" that American naturalist writers around the turn of the last century created in response to the major economic and cultural upheavals of their times.

In 1914, two decades after naturalism had arrived in the United States with the publication of Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of the Streets* in 1893, Walter Lipp-

[1] Daniel T. Rodgers, *Age of Fracture* (2011; Cambridge, MA, and London: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2012), pp. 9-10.

mann articulated a very Nietzschean sentiment that would have resonated with the naturalists who came before him. In the complexity of modern life, one could no longer look backwards for guidance – one had to look to the future:

> To do this men have to substitute purpose for tradition [...] We can no longer treat life as something that has trickled down to us. We have to deal with it deliberately, devise its social organization, alter its tools, formulate its method, educate and control it. In endless ways we put intention where custom has reigned. We break up routines, make decisions, choose our ends, select means.[2]

This, he concluded, "is what mastery means: the substitution of conscious intention for unconscious striving".[3] And "conscious intention" meant scientific rationality: "The scientific spirit is the discipline of democracy, the escape from drift, the outlook of a free man".[4] Lippmann's book *Drift and Mastery* in which these ideas first appeared was immensely popular and established him as one of the leading intellectuals of the Progressive movement. Yet by 1914, this vision of mastery and freedom based on a "scientific spirit" was nothing new to the American public. In this paper, I will argue that through the naturalist fiction of writers such as Stephen Crane, Frank Norris, Jack London, and Theodore Dreiser, the public had already served what Lyotard would call a protracted "apprenticeship" in mastery.[5] What I wish to examine here is what could be described as the aesthetics of mastery in American literary naturalism, its concerns and styles that reflected Émile Zola's idea in his naturalist manifesto of "a literature governed by science", and which shared his formative credo that "[t]o be master of

[2] Walter Lippmann. *Drift and Mastery: An Attempt to Diagnose the Current Unrest*. (1914; Madison, WI: The University of Wisconsin Press, 1987), p. 147.

[3] Ibid., p. 148.

[4] Ibid., p. 151.

[5] See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979; trans. Geoff Bennington and Brian Massumi. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984). Lyotard argued that popular stories "recount what could be called positive and negative apprenticeships", because they "allow the society in which they are told, on the one hand, to define its criteria of competence and, on the other, to evaluate according to those criteria what is performed or can be performed within it" (19-20).

good and evil, to regulate life, to regulate society [...] is not that the most useful and moral aim of human endeavor”.[6]

This ethos of mastery in naturalism manifested itself in different and often contradictory ways in American naturalism depending on the function it served in the text. But whether it was expressed through the management of point of view, of characters, of affect, or dramatized as the good or bad management of society, the search for mastery plays a key role in the naturalist response to crisis. The view held by the proletarian hero of Jack London's *The Iron Heel* – with the suggestive name of Ernest Everhard – is indicative. As Everhard tells a room full of outraged capitalists, the problem with society was that the ruling class had “mismanaged” it.[7] Economic inequality, poverty, labor exploitation, the destructive business cycle, the dehumanization of the workforce: the answer to all of these problems that ravaged the Gilded Age was the proper management of society. The key to social and economic justice was held not by the working class, whose members were presented as barely human in the novel, reduced to “brutish apathy”, nor by the members of the establishment who were but “well-fed beasts”, but by the small group of revolutionary “artists, scientists, scholars, musicians, and poets” able to take a disinterested stance – “a star-cool attitude” – toward the rational amelioration of society.[8] London’s revolutionaries sound remarkably like Lippmann’s “specialized class whose interests reach beyond the locality”, if only with a more bohemian twist.[9] Indeed, despite *The Iron Heel*’s revolutionary rhetoric, mirrored in many of London’s autobiographical essays, the novel’s dismissal of the working class as possible revolutionary subjects, as well as its cataclysmic rep-

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[6] Émile Zola, “The Experimental Novel” (1880; in *The Experimental Novel and Other Essays*. Trans. Belle M. Sherman. New York: The Cassell Publishing Co., 1893. 1-54), p. 1. The second quote here is also from “The Experimental Novel” (p. 26), but since the translation of this passage is so unclear in this translation of the essay, I have quoted from Charles Child Walcutt's translation in *American Literary Naturalism: A Divided Stream* (1956; Minneapolis: University Minnesota Press, 1976), p. 33.

[7] Jack London. *The Iron Heel* (1907; Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2009), p. 48.

[8] Ibid., pp. 168, 139, 161, 181.

[9] Walter Lippmann, *Public Opinion* (1922). Online: <www.gutenberg.org/cache/epub/6456/pg6456.html>.

resentation of revolt, presented a convincing case against revolution and for social reforms that would prevent class resentment from exploding into open violence.

Such a sentiment had already been vividly articulated at the end of Zola's *Germinal*, when the protagonist Étienne Lantier, an engineer and "self-styled scientist", comes to the following realization after several hundred pages of failed coalmining strikes, anarchist terrorism, and horrific revolutionary violence:

> And now he began to wonder whether violence really helped things on at all. Cut cables, torn-up rails, broken lamps – how futile! Rushing about, three thousand strong, in an orgy of destruction – what a waste of energy! It was dawning on him that some day legal methods would be much more terrible, for now that his blind hatreds had had their fling his intelligence was coming of age. Yes, Maheude was right when she said in her sensible way that that would be the big day, when they could legally band together, know what they were doing and work through their unions. Then, one morning, confident in their solidarity, millions of workers against a few thousand idlers, they would take over power and be the masters. Ah, then indeed truth and justice would awake! Then that crouching, sated god, that monstrous idol hidden away in his secret tabernacle, gorged with the flesh of poor creatures who never even saw him, would instantly perish.[10]

It was this posture of rational awakening, social evolution, and scientific detachment – violence not as ethically wrong but as "a waste of energy", not a question of morality but of efficient management – which prompted Raymond Williams to call naturalism a "theory of administered reform".[11] Occasionally, critics on the Left in the United States have raised analogous concerns about American naturalist fiction, in particular in response to Frank Norris's *The Octopus*, which ends on a note similar to that of *Germinal*.[12] Yet crucial as the reform impulse is in naturalism, little has been done in

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[10] Émile Zola, *Germinal* (1885; trans. Leonard Tancock. Harmondsworth, UK: Penguin, 1982.), p. 496, 498.

[11] Raymond Williams, *Modern Tragedy* (1966; Ontario: Broadview Press, 1967), p. 70.

[12] For two important Progressive critiques of *The Octopus*, see Granville Hicks in *The Great Tradition: An Interpretation of American Literature Since the Civil War* (1933; Chicago: Quadrangle Books, 1969), p. 173, and Vernon Louis Parrington in *The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America, 1860-1920* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and Company, 1930), pp. 333-334.

way of attempts to analyze the managerial spirit that underlies this impulse in American literary naturalism, a managerial spirit which pervades its form as much as its content.[13]

The examination of the first cultural manifestations of a managerial outlook in the United States seems all the more pressing today at a time when this outlook has been radically transformed from its early "scientific" rationale in the late nineteenth century to more recent attempts at disassociating it from its bureaucratic legacy. The spread of a managerial business ethic throughout all sectors of society the past three decades has, ironically, gone hand in hand with strong anti-bureaucratic sentiments. In fact, the managerial quest for "mastery" has now been reformulated in popular management guides as the ability to successfully "drift" afloat in the whirling rapids of market trends. By exploring the first literary manifestations of a managerial ethos in the United States, it is my aim to historicize a phenomenon that has radically changed the way we think about and practice control and efficiency at work and in social institutions, but which for a number of reasons has only begun to receive the critical attention it deserves in literary and cultural studies following the 2008 financial crisis.

My contention here is that the texts associated with the naturalist movement in the United States at once helped produce a crisis of legitimation in the cultural (Victorian) and economic (*laissez-faire*) narratives that prevailed around the turn of the twentieth century, *and* to reorientate the public toward the dawning managerial outlook of the Progressive Era. It is my hope that a rereading of American literary naturalism in the historical context of the "managerial revolution"[14] in the United States – that is, the late nineteenth-century emergence of not only a professional-managerial class but also a distinct managerial outlook and approach to social prob-

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[13] One significant exception is chapter four of June Howard's *Form and History in American Literary Naturalism* (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press, 1985).

[14] James Burnham, *The Managerial Revolution: What is Happening in the World* (New York: The John Day Company, 1941).

lems – will be productive on at least three levels: 1) that a reframing of American naturalist fiction as to its relationship with the bureaucratic ethos of the Progressive Era will help provide a missing cultural link between the Victorian moral order and modern rationalization processes; 2) that it will shed light on the cultural foundations of bureaucracy in the United States, understood as the ways in which cultural productions may work not only to produce a crisis but to overcome one by offering new ways of perceiving and engaging with social experience; and 3) that it will provide a cultural basis for understanding the perpetual "revolution" of management thought in the course of the past century. While these three goals call for a book-length study and can be little more than adumbrated within the scope of this paper, it should serve as a first productive step toward realizing them further.

Context: Bureaucracy, Anti-Bureaucracy, "Post-Bureaucracy"

Considering the fervent anti-bureaucratic rhetoric in the business sector and in new forms of "flexible" management popular today, there is a certain historical irony in the fact that bureaucracy in the United States originated with the corporation and not the state.[15] With the rapid expansion in the size of companies during the last three decades of the nineteenth century came a growing need to organize business practices that formerly had been worked out on an ad hoc basis or according to tradition. The Wall Street crash of 1873 and the economic depression that followed it further produced the need to insulate businesses from the fluctuations of the market. As Alan Trachtenberg observes in *The Incorporation of America*, the unreliability of the market was countered by the reliance on new methods for maximizing profits: "Unsettled economic conditions made manufacturers obsessed with efficiency, with the breaking

[15] Oliver Zunz, *Making America Corporate, 1870-1920* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1990), p. 39. For a classic account and the to date most extensive history of the active corporate role in the late nineteenth-century shift to managerial capitalism in the United States, see Alfred D. Chandler, *The Visible Hand: The Managerial Revolution in American Business* (1977; Cambridge, MA: The Belknap Press of Harvard University Press, 2002).

of bottlenecks, the logistics of workflow, the standardization of parts, measurements, and human effort".[16] This was the era in which "mathematical considerations entered the business world in a major way".[17] Both their scale and their quest for efficiency meant that the practical control of large businesses was ceded to salaried managers given charge of semi-autonomous units within a corporate hierarchy consisting of multiple layers of management, from the top executive to the foremen and supervisors in direct contact with workers.

The volatile social and economic conditions of the Gilded Age, largely the result of the change from traditional family-owned enterprises to finance capital with its far greater destabilizing effects, provided a fertile ground for the type of "scientific management" spearheaded by Frederick W. Taylor. Central to Taylor's vision of management, as it was set forth in *The Principles of Scientific Management*, was the systematization of knowledge. This was achieved by scientifically discovering the "laws" of work, the so-called "One Best Way" of carrying out a specific task. While this entailed close supervision of workers, who Taylor (like *The Iron Heel*) viewed as brutes "not sufficiently intelligent" to grasp the principles of scientific management, it also required a planning department (or several) in which managers could coordinate the minute subdivision of labor into specialized tasks.[18] But while much of the rhetoric in *The Principles of Scientific Management* tended toward the mechanistically arid, there are passages in which the bland engineering voice yields to undertones of inevitability and even messianic deliverance. Not only would those companies which adopted Tay-

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[16] Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America: Culture and Society in the Gilded Age* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1982), p. 52.

[17] Ibid., p. 62.

[18] Frederick W. Taylor, *The Principles of Scientific Management* (1911; New York: W. W. Norton and Company, 1967), p. 62. In Taylor's own words, the development of management as a science "involves the establishment of many rules, laws, and formulae which replace the judgment of the individual workman and which can be effectively used only after having been systematically recorded, indexed, etc. The practical use of scientific data also calls for a room in which to keep the books, records, etc., and a desk for the planner to work at" (37-38).

lorist management become more efficient by increased production and reduced labor costs (the increase of wages for workers would be more than balanced out by the increase in production), but would solve the old problem of the clash of interests between capitalists and workers by interposing a neutral class of managers between them. The rational management of work meant that employees and employers would receive the maximum economic return for their efforts in terms of higher wages and greater productivity, which would result in "the elimination of almost all causes for dispute and disagreement between them".[19] No longer would there be a need for strikes – which by the late nineteenth century had become not merely a threat to productivity but to society as a whole – because labor would no longer be exploited but remunerated according to scientific principles extrapolated from the discovery of the "true" capacity of each worker. While this system might at first encounter resistance, since capitalists would have to pay higher wages and workers quit their "soldiering", "in the end the people through enlightened public opinion will force the new order of things upon both employer and employé".[20] Not only would those who had been converted to Taylor's principles put them to good use in their own companies, they would spread the new gospel, they would proselytize. The first book on the "science" of management thus concluded in true missionary fashion: "And is it not the duty of those who are acquainted with these facts, to exert themselves to make the whole community realize this importance?".[21]

By the 1920s, Taylorism in the workplace was giving way to new conceptions of incentive as not only material but also psychological. Taylor's brand of emotionally insensitive micromanagement, based on a firm belief in workers as rational *homines oeconomici* caring only for higher wages, was challenged by a greater focus on the

[19] Taylor, p. 142.
[20] Ibid., p. 139.
[21] Ibid., p. 144.

psychological needs of workers in studies such as Mary Parker Follett's participatory approach to leadership and Elton Mayo's Hawthorne Studies, both of which called the attention of management to the immaterial problems of work, a turn in management that would lay the foundations for the interest in industrial psychology and personnel management that came to characterize the human relations movement. But even as Taylor's influence waned in the business community, which then was becoming less concerned with questions of production than with questions of sales and marketing in the modern consumer economy, scientific management had had a considerable impact on the Progressive reform movement: the rational amelioration of conditions in the workplace had spread to the rational amelioration of society itself.[22] Although Taylorism today is largely associated with repetitive factory work in huge impersonal corporations, scientific management from its beginning contained a social ethos of "uplift" often at odds with market economics and the unapologetic profit motive.[23] Samuel Haber describes the early twentieth-century understanding of scientific management in distinct anti-market terms:

> The word 'management' could stand alongside 'control', 'regulation', and, later, Walter Lippmann's 'mastery', in the vocabulary of those whose first principle was the inadequacy of laissez faire. Like those other terms, management implied guidance and constraint, both of which were thought necessary to achieve social harmony. The adjective 'science' strengthened its appeal further by suggesting disinterestedness, rigor, and a method employing the power of laws of nature which would make the appeal to conscience of the old-style uplifters unnecessary.[24]

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[22] Samuel Haber, *Efficiency and Uplift: Scientific Management in the Progressive Era, 1890-1920* (Chicago and London: The University of Chicago Press, 1964). As Haber writes: "The trend away from old-fashioned reform, which had relied upon an appeal to conscience, and toward newer styles of reform, which looked to social control and manipulation, had found corroboration in scientific management" (167).

[23] The term "scientific management" itself was only settled upon as the official name for Taylor's methods during a meeting between his followers and Louis D. Brandeis, who at the time represented eastern business associations in the Eastern Rate Case against the corporate power of railroads. See Haber, p. 55.

[24] Haber, p. 55.

In other words, one of the earliest functions of management was to perform a public service of regulating and controlling markets, not to serve them. Management during the first couple of decades of the twentieth century also became synonymous with bureaucracy, as it implied the necessity of specialized labor arranged within a formal hierarchical organization managed by professionals, whose "scientific" credentials provided them with the type of "rational legal authority" that for Max Weber was the cornerstone of modern bureaucracy.[25] While the reasons of corporate bureaucracies obviously differed from the rationale for the expansion of a vast state bureaucracy during the Progressive Era, both government and businesses were in pursuit of "efficiency" – the mantra of the era – and this pursuit was inseparable from a credo of rational order and control that to a great extent was defined against a *laissez-faire* faith in rational market behavior.[26] It is of no little significance that the French eighteenth-century economist Vincent de Gournay, who is said to have coined the derisive term "bureaucracy", has also been credited with the slogan "*Laissez faire, laissez passer*": the two concepts were antagonistic from the start.[27]

This antagonism partly explains why neoliberal business management today seeks to disassociate itself – at least rhetorically – from bureaucracy. Other reasons include the redefinition of "efficiency" in terms of networks and flexibility instead of highly formalized and hierarchized structures, and the development toward worker self-management first initiated by the human relations movement. But one explanation that at the same time is related to the above reasons and which cuts deeper is to be found in changes in what Weber described as the "spirit" of capitalism. As the direct coercion of workers is neither very efficient nor permissible within a liberal demo-

[25] Max Weber, *Max Weber: The Theory of Social and Economic Organization* (1947; trans. A. M. Henderson and Talcott Parsons. Ed. Talcott Parsons. New York: The Free Press, 1964), p. 330.
[26] See especially the classics of modernist theory, Richard Hofstadter's *The Age of Reform* (New York: Vintage Books, 1955) and Robert H. Wiebe's *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967).
[27] See Martin Albrow, *Bureaucracy* (1970; London: Macmillan, 1989), p. 4.

cratic tradition, and if economic reward is neither sufficient to secure worker commitment nor the most economical solution for business owners, worker motivation must be secured by other means. The Protestant work ethic for Weber had inadvertently served this purpose. Economic acquisition was not the result of a rational pursuit of self-interest, as it had been for Adam Smith, but the product of a religious sense of predestination, and "a feeling of unprecedented inner loneliness of the single individual" to which the only answer provided by Protestantism was to heed a worldly "calling", and by worldly success prove that one was chosen for salvation.[28] In this doctrine, economic gain became not an instrument for self-interested enjoyment, but a goal in its own right. If at the time of Weber's writing religious asceticism had long subsided, its "spirit", he argued, "the idea of duty in one's calling", still "prowls about in our lives like the ghost of dead religious beliefs", and provides a tacit moral incentive for work.[29]

The result of this spirit for Weber was not a happy one. "A man does not 'by nature' wish to earn more and more money, but simply to live as he is accustomed to live and to earn as much as is necessary for that purpose".[30] But with this "natural" harmony thrown off balance by the Protestant calling to work for its own sake, the expansion of capitalist enterprises and the necessary countermeasures taken by government to harness their destructive forces entailed an ever-greater bureaucratization of society, the development of an instrumental rationality that by the turn of the twentieth century had turned society into an "iron cage" from which Weber saw no viable escape.[31] The only answer was "to keep a portion of mankind free from this par-

[28] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* (1904-5; trans. Talcott Parsons. London and New York: Routledge, 1992), p. 104.

[29] Ibid., pp. 181-82.

[30] Ibid., p. 6.

[31] Ibid., p.181.

celing-out of the soul, from this supreme mastery of the bureaucratic way of life".[32] Yet if the function of a "spirit" is to legitimate and motivate, it should perhaps have been apparent to Weber that the moral rigidity and bleakness of the Protestant work ethic would not be the best way to mobilize the workforce, even granted that people could be turned into "[s]pecialists without spirit, sensualists without heart".[33] The quest for "supreme mastery" might still be the end, but "the bureaucratic way of life", meaning "the strict avoidance of all spontaneous enjoyment of life", was not necessarily the most effective means.[34]

As Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello seek to demonstrate in *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, this has in fact been the case of management in the twentieth century, the history of which can "be conceived as involving constant refinement of methods for controlling what occurs in the firm and its environment".[35] For Boltanski and Chiapello, a decisive turn in the history of management occurred when in the 1970s the crisis of Fordist capitalism was framed as a crisis of Taylorism. In this view, the social unrest at the time was "not rooted in a demand for higher wages, still less in demands for greater job security. It was the expression of *rebellion against working conditions*, and especially Taylorism", meaning a rebellion against "the everyday oppression and sterilization of each person's creative, unique powers produced by industrial, bourgeois society".[36] In Boltanski and Chiapello's account, this frame of crisis distinguished what they called the "artistic critique" from the "social critique", which had been concerned with economic questions of equality and exploitation rather than the cultural ones of alienation and conformity that occupied the artistic critique. But

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[32] This quote is from a speech that Max Weber delivered to the Verein fur Sozialpolitik in 1909. Online: <http://www.faculty.rsu.edu/users/f/felwell/www/Theorists/Weber/Max1909.html>.

[33] Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, p. 182.

[34] Ibid., p. 53.

[35] Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism* (1999; trans. Gregory Elliott. London and New York: Verso, 2007), p. 79.

[36] Ibid., pp. 185, 199.

capitalist legitimacy is intimately tied to the critique of capitalism. In attempts to re-mobilize the workforce, the spirit of capitalism seeks to accommodate critique. This continuous adaption to critique means that the spirit of capitalism, if not the objective of wealth accumulation itself, is under constant revision. This is what for Boltanski and Chiapello starting in the 1970s led to a new regime of management that distanced itself from the bureaucratic order to which the counterculture's discontent was ascribed. Since neo-management has clearly not divested itself of the profit motive, however, the accommodation of the artistic critique has not meant the abandonment of instrumental rationality, but, as critiques of new forms of management have shown, to a "tightening" of the "iron cage".[37] Boltanski and Chiapello summarize the difference between modes of control in bureaucracy and more recent forms of management thus:

> The Taylorization of work does indeed consist in treating human beings like machines. But precisely because they pertain to an automation of human beings, the rudimentary character of the methods employed does not allow the more human properties of human beings – their emotions, their moral sense, their honour, their inventive capacity – to be placed directly in the service of the pursuit of profit. Conversely, the new mechanisms, which demand greater commitment and rely on a more sophisticated ergonomics, integrating the contributions of post-behaviorist psychology and the cognitive sciences, precisely because they are more human in a way, also penetrate more deeply into people's inner selves – people are expected to 'give' themselves to their work – and facilitate an instrumentalization of human beings in their most specifically human dimensions.[38]

If the 1970s proved the tipping point for the shift from bureaucratic rationality to new ways of instrumentalizing the psyche, there is a long prehistory of alienation critique from *fin-de-siècle* bohemianism to the *Partisan Review* and C. Wright Mills that falls to

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[37] James R. Barker, "Tightening the Iron Cage: Concertive Control in Self-Managing Teams" (*Administrative Science Quarterly* 38.3 [Sep. 1993]: 408-437).

[38] Boltanski and Chiapello, p. 98.

the side of Boltanski and Chiapello's narrative. Nevertheless, it was not before the 1970s that the particular spirit of capitalism which had prevailed from the first decades of the twentieth century to Lyndon B. Johnson's vision for a Great Society was decisively transformed by the anti-bureaucracy critique. And hand in hand with this critique went new and more subtle types of mastery.

Since the 1990s, new organizational forms of control have been described in management literature as "flexible", "soft", or "post-bureaucratic".[39] While the latter is clearly a misnomer if we take bureaucracy as a synonym for administration, which seems ever to be increasing, it is perhaps not so ill-advised when bureaucracy is defined in terms of its social ethos of uplift and attempts to limit the risks of the market, as it was until the late 1960s. While the classical bureaucratic organization is associated with Taylorist routinization and formal hierarchies of control, the "post-bureaucratic" organization is characterized by flexibility, informal structures, and decentralized authority. One of the consequences of this reversal is a rearrangement of time and space at work that has been criticized by sociologists such as Richard Sennett, who somewhat nostalgically recalls that "the 'iron cage' was both prison and home".[40] Whereas the bureaucratic organization provided the framework for linear career advancement, the task-oriented network organization today is increasingly a transitory shelter for "temps" and "portfolio workers", with "transferable skills" instead of specialized knowledge.[41] Just as the "arrow" of time has been broken "in a continually reengineered, routine-hating, short-term political economy", we are also

[39] See especially David Courpasson's critical study of new management in "Managerial Strategies of Domination: Power in Soft Bureaucracies" (*Organization Studies* 21.1 [2000]: 141-61), and Charles Heckscher and Anne Donnellon's more celebratory volume, *The Post-Bureaucratic Organization: New Perspectives on Organizational Change* (Thousand Oaks, CA: Sage Publications, 1994), which popularized the term "post-bureaucracy".

[40] Richard Sennett, *The Culture of the New Capitalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006), p. 180.

[41] Chris Grey and Christina Garsten, "Trust, Control and Post-Bureaucracy". (*Organization Studies* 22.2 [2001]: 229-50), p. 240.

experiencing a return of nomadic work patterns enabled by advances in information technology and enforced by the need for mobility in a globalized economy.[42]

This trajectory from security and routine to risk and uncertainty has been further augmented by a general breakup of the demarcation lines so rigidly drawn in bureaucratic organizations between work and leisure. Prefiguring Boltanski and Chiapello's quote above, C. Wright Mills had already noticed the rationalization of intimacy in *White Collar*, which extended Weber's critique of the "iron cage":

> When white-collar people get jobs, they sell not only their time and energy but their personalities as well. They sell by the week or month their smiles and their kindly gestures, and they must practice the prompt repression of resentment and aggression. For these intimate traits are of commercial relevance and required for the more efficient and profitable distribution of goods and services.[43]

With the new management regime and in a neoliberal age of endemic job insecurity, this type of salesmanship has left the sales floor and become a basic requirement of most forms of middle class work. Private life and intimate personal qualities are no longer viewed as obstacles to efficiency at work, but as important ingredients in the self-branding and self-optimization required in today's job market. If bureaucracy used to function "according to *calculable rules* and 'without regard for persons'", as Weber held, the new managerialism operates by entering people – their emotions and personal goals – into the calculation.[44] Indeed, what Daniel Bell in 1976 famously identified as *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, meaning a sharp disjunction between the growing leisure ethic of private life and the old work ethic of public life,

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[42] Richard Sennett, *The Corrosion of Character: The Personal Consequences of Work in the New Capitalism* (1998; London and New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1999), p. 98.

[43] C. Wright Mills, *White Collar: The American Middle Classes* (1951; New York: Oxford University Press, 1956), p. xvii. Mills' analysis of the affective dimensions of white collar was precocious in light of how the economic uses of affect have later been mapped by critics such as Arlie Hochschild, Eva Illouz, and Viviana A. Zelizer.

[44] Max Weber, *From Max Weber: Essays in Sociology*, p. 215.

have largely been resolved in the new work order. It would be unwise to dismiss this cultural reconciliation with capitalism *a priori* as ideology, considering that even if the mix of work and play has a number of negative side-effects (like stress and loss of privacy), it also has many appeals (like more interesting work and autonomy) that account for its success. To sum up the development of management thought over the course of the last century, however, the most crucial and consequential change has been the relocation of agency from institutions back to the market, which has warranted frequent comparisons between the economic values of the Gilded Age and today. The rationalizing process no longer follows a bureaucratic logic of increased "efficiency" through mastering the market, but now abides by a "market rationality" that subordinates all concerns to the exigencies of global competition.[45] Under the guise of worker empowerment, the new management regime has relocated authority from the "rule of the desk" – the literal meaning of bureaucracy – to the rule of the marketplace.

The Managerial Point of View in Naturalism

In the above, I have gone at some lengths to describe not only the emergence of a managerial spirit in the United States but also its more recent transformation. I have found this necessary because the reframing of American literary naturalism in the context of management thought requires that management or bureaucracy are not viewed as ahistorical constants but seen in a constant process of redefinition and development. Not to be cognizant of the changes in managerial theory and practice during the last century is tantamount to ignoring the implications of critique, to assuming that systems of control are either impervious to or insulate from social processes. In short, any critique of control that ignores how it is continually redefined and trans-

[45] Wendy Brown, "Neoliberalism and the End of Liberal Democracy" (2003; in *Edgework: Critical Essays on Knowledge and Politics*. Princeton and Oxford: Princeton University Press, 2005).

formed runs the danger of criticizing an outmoded system of control, one that has already met the type of critique offered and evolved beyond it – one which may even be nourished by it, as recent management discourse is nourished by emancipatory, anti-bureaucratic rhetoric.

The question to answer now is how does the emergence and transformation of management thought relate to a literary movement at the turn of the twentieth century? The year of 1895 serves as an interesting starting point. It marked two events that were to have a monumental impact on American culture and society for decades to come. The first event was the publication of Frederick W. Taylor's first article on shop management, "A Piece-Rate System", printed in *Transactions of the American Society of Mechanical Engineers*. It put forth both his technocratic ideas for efficiency and his ideological beliefs in reform, as indicated by the article's subtitle: "A Step toward Partial Solution to the Labor Problem". That same year, two years after his self-published novella *Maggie* had flopped, Stephen Crane published *The Red Badge of Courage* to instant popular and critical acclaim – it was greeted on both sides of the Atlantic by an "orgy of praise", to cite H. G. Wells.[46] Its success has been ascribed to different factors, among them its sensationalist representation of war, its unorthodox portrayal of character, and its impressionistic prose. At first glance, it would seem difficult to find two more dissimilar texts than Taylor's article and Crane's novel. While the former was concerned with engineering order, the latter was concerned with chaos and confusion. At the same time, however, both texts were experimental. Taylor sought to discover the "One Best Way" through careful scientific measurement and experiments in the workplace. *The Red Badge of Courage* was an experiment in the psychology of war: how do we react under severe pressure from the environment. Like his earlier essays, "An Experiment in Misery" and "An Experiment in Luxury", and

[46] Quoted in Lee Clark Mitchell, ed., *New Essays on The Red Badge of Courage* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1986), p. 5.

like his journalistic impulse to see things with his own eyes, whether the Eastern factory system or the war in Cuba, Crane's method was to throw convention to the wind and set out to discover new standards based on facts gathered from his own observations. For Taylor, the "rule of thumb" method of yore was unscientific and inefficient. For Crane, the pieties of Howellsian realism and Victorian morality had outlasted their usefulness in the increasingly warlike social climate of the 1890s.

Moreover, the experimental method used by both required the attainment of a dual perspective. It is only possible to obtain new knowledge through experiment if the experiment is observed as it is carried out. On the one hand, the experimenter must be present to carry out the experiment; on the other, the person carrying out the experiment must be detached from it in order to record its results. Both engagement and disengagement are necessary at the same time. For Taylor this meant the active involvement of scientists and managers in the work process at the same time as they kept a clear distance to the workers, who themselves lacked a sufficiently detached view of their work to learn anything from it. For Crane's experimental fiction things were more complex, as they tend to be in matters of aesthetics. *The Red Badge of Courage* is an experiment on two levels. On the first level, we have the protagonist Henry Fleming's experiment as he finds himself on unfamiliar grounds – on the brink of battle in the Civil War – in which his acquired knowledge so far is of no use: "He felt that in this crisis his laws of life were useless. Whatever he had learned of himself was here of no avail. He was an unknown quantity. He saw that he would again be obliged to experiment as he had in early youth. He must accumulate information of himself."[47] The accumulation of data on his mental state and the derivation of new laws based on his observations, however, proves a difficult task for Fleming. Crane called the novel "a psychological portrayal of fear",[48] but the dominant emo-

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[47] Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage* (1895; New York: Simon & Schuster, 2009), p. 13.

[48] Quoted in an obituary titled "Stephen Crane: Letters to a Friend About His Ambition, His Art, and His

tions in the story are bewilderment, astonishment, amazement, and wonder, both directly stated in the narrative and conveyed through the text's formal defamiliarizing strategies. In the heat of battle, Fleming becomes "a driven beast" reacting to his environment without volition or thought – it all becomes just an "automatic affair".[49] In battle, "where there was red of blood and black of passion", he is unable to reflect upon his actions, and in hindsight, when "his brain emerged from the clogged clouds" and he was once more able "to study his deeds", the recollection of his deeds is obscured by "gilded images of memory" and made unreliable.[50] Much controversy surrounds the novel's ending, whether Fleming actually reaches a state of maturity in which he is capable of seeing himself clearly. But the pervasive ironic tone of the narrative and its constant undercutting of Fleming's own wavering conclusions, like when it qualifies them with patronizing double markers ("Once he thought he had concluded that …", "He now thought that he wished …"), strongly suggest that Fleming is incapable of seeing clearly.[51] When he acts he cannot think, and when he thinks his actions become twisted by his memory. In short, he lacks a dual perspective, the capacity of the experimenter for being present and detached at the same time.

This capacity is the privilege of the narrative voice in the novel, the second level on which an experiment is conducted. This time the object of the experiment is also Fleming, but now from a perspective with recourse to a larger view outside of his subjectivity. In contrast to Fleming, the narrator is able to be present with and observe him at the same time. This is achieved primarily through locating the narrative center of consciousness not within the protagonist, as Henry James was famous for doing, nor within a Victorian moral framework, as was the practice of William Dean

Views of Life" (John N. Hilliard, *The New York Times*, July 14, 1900). Online: <http://query.nytimes.com/gst/abstract.html?res=F10614F63D5B11738DDDAD0994DF405B808CF1D3>.

[49] Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage*, pp. 47, 46.

[50] Ibid., pp. 183, 184.

[51] Ibid., pp., 37, 85.

Howells, but within a new conception of nature. The novel's view of nature differed from pre-Darwinian conceptions in that nature was divested of moral significance. It existed at once on a plane anterior to human civilization and one underlying and determining it. But its antecedence and indifference gave it an objective quality, which, because it was not conditioned by human meaning, made it a superior locus of truth. By investing the narrative voice in *The Red Badge of Courage* with the authority of "Nature" (always capitalized in the novel), the narrator was provided with a vantage point exterior not only to Fleming's subjectivity, but to human subjectivity as such. Even as the narrator recounted Fleming's psychic travails in battle, it was able to maintain a distance to him by keeping one narrative foot placed firmly in a sense of natural reality of far greater import than his own subjective confusion and limited point of view.[52]

The result alternated between cool irony (narrator and reader know better) and sympathetic pathos (the limited knowledge of characters is pathetic). The following paragraph demonstrates the interplay between irony and pathos, as well as the superior authority held by the narrative voice:

> The command went painfully forward until an open space interposed between them and the lurid lines. Here, crouching and cowering behind some trees, the men clung with desperation, as if threatened by a wave. They looked wild-eyed, and as if amazed at this furious disturbance they had stirred. *In the storm there was an ironical expression of their importance*. The faces of the men, too, showed a lack of certain feeling of responsibility for their being there. It was as if they had been driven. *It was the dominant animal failing to remember in the*

[52] This naturalist perspective was achieved through various means, the most important of which in *The Red Badge of Courage* included the narrator's ability to "zoom out" from a concern with characters to representations of nature in which individuals are dwarfed by their surroundings. Another important method in the novel was the simultaneous personification of nature (fog, trees, stones, the sun) and depersonalization of characters, deprived not only of autonomous will but of their names (we only learn the names of characters when used by each other – the narrator only refers to them by their outward characteristics, like the "youth", the "tall soldier", the "tattered man").

> *supreme moments the forceful causes of various superficial qualities*. The whole affair seemed incomprehensible to many of them (emphasis added).[53]

Most of the passage is "impressionistic" in the sense that the battle situation the soldiers find themselves in is neither focalized through them nor recounted by an omniscient narrator – both strategies of which might give readers access to their thoughts and feelings – but is recounted as from a distance, only giving readers an impression of how the soldiers think and feel from how they look. We don't actually know if they are amazed, but it is "as if" they are. We can only surmise that they feel a lack of responsibility by the looks on their faces. We don't know if the affair is incomprehensible to them, but it "seemed" so. However, if what is going on is incomprehensible to the soldiers, it is not incomprehensible to the narrator. The two sentences emphasized in the passage interrupt the dominant impressionistic style by providing an authoritative analysis of the scene. The reader is not left to guess at the meaning of the stormy battle scene. The meaning is asserted by the narrative voice in the italicized sentences: their apparent desperation and disorientation in battle reveals their insignificance and demonstrates their inability to comprehend the larger reasons for their being there and feeling as they do. From the objective observation of how the soldiers look and must feel, the narrator takes their panicky reaction to war as evidence of certain facts they themselves are unable to see, but which are shared with the reader. In the second emphasized sentence, the inductive method is applied to the observed reactions of the soldiers, and their particular confusion is generalized into a "dominant animal failing". The "forceful causes" that drive men's actions are not specified. After all, Crane did not believe in "preaching".[54] Yet the evidence is clear enough even without authorial intervention: by at once dramatically showing and closely observing the animal-like reactions of Fleming and his brothers in arms, it is evident that the

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[53] Ibid., pp. 147-48.

[54] See "Stephen Crane: Letters to a Friend About His Ambition, His Art, and His Views of Life".

moral bonds of civilization melt away in the heat of battle and give way to instinctive reactions and irrational emotions. The result of the experiment is to refute the Victorian hypothesis of moral autonomy, and to reveal a new set of causal laws that provide a more accurate understanding of human behavior.

If Crane's experimental fiction on the whole was reluctant to exercise its authority through authorial commentary as it does above, this was not the case with other naturalist writers who shared his view of civilization as superficial and nature as an underlying force. In a passage that is worth quoting at length, Winfried Fluck describes the naturalist perspective by contrasting it with that of realism:

> The theory of effect of classical American realism is based on the premise that literature should help readers develop a sense of observation, so that experience can lead to knowledge. In order to achieve this, realists replace the omniscient authorial voice of the historical novel by a more dramatic form of representation, in which the narrator retreats or becomes even invisible, while the reader is elevated to the position of an independent observer and a conversational equal. In contrast, the naturalist theory of effect is much harder to grasp […] The only claim that might be safely made is that the dialogic goals of the realist novel do no longer apply. The 'primitive' characters of naturalism do not possess sufficient self-awareness to function as conversational equals. In their often complete lack of self-consciousness, naturalist characters cannot provide models of social apprenticeship. Instead, the authorial voice becomes important again to explain to the reader what the characters themselves cannot understand. The characteristic narrative strategy of naturalism is therefore that of a double structure of representation. At times, the narrator presents the perspective of his main characters, while at other moments he keeps ironic distance to them.[55]

The loss of faith in characters as conversational equals and hence the possibility of a dialogue between characters and the reader without authorial mediation implies a loss of faith in human reason. In reference to Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, in which

[55] Winfried Fluck, "Beast/Superman/Consumer: American Literary Naturalism as an Experimental Literature" (2002; in *Romance With America? Essays on Culture, Literature, and American Studies*. Eds. Laura Bieger and Johannes Voelz, Heidelberg: Universitätsverlag Winter, 2009. 199-217), p. 215.

the authorial voice exerts far greater control than in any of Crane's work, Fluck writes that the interaction of perspectives between the point of view of characters and the narrator places the reader "in a position from which he can study the events as an experiment and thus protect himself from being overwhelmed by the forces that drive the characters in the novel".[56] But the function of the dual perspective in *Sister Carrie* is more than the negative one of protecting readers from the "blind strivings of the human heart" that make playthings of Dreiser's characters.[57] The narrative voice in *Sister Carrie* does not only take up the conversational part with the reader that Carrie lacks the reflexive capacity for, but functions as a scientific counselor to readers.

Dreiser's authorial voice has a long history of ridicule behind it. Both his detractors and defenders consider the problem to be its sentimental style, which is read as incongruous with the realistic style of the rest of the narrative.[58] Yet Dreiser's authorial voice consists of far more than its sentimental sighs and exclamations. While *Sister Carrie* does contain a substantial amount of melodramatic prose like "Oh, the tangle of human life! How dimly as yet we see", its sentimental flavor is constantly mixed up with analytical language.[59] Much of the authorial commentary does not draw on sentimental prose but sounds as if it had been transcribed directly from a scholarly textbook.[60] One chapter starts: "The true meaning of money yet remains to be popularly explained and comprehended". Another begins: "In the light of the world's attitude toward woman and her duties, the nature of Carrie's mental state deserves consideration". The narrator interrupts with toe-curling sincerity: "This majesty of passion is possessed by nearly every man once in his life, but it is usually an attribute of

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[56] Ibid., p. 215.

[57] Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie* (1900; Mineola, NY: Dover Publications, 2004), p. 352.

[58] See especially Sandra Petrey, "The Language of Realism, The Language of False Consciousness: A Reading of *Sister Carrie*" (*NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 10.2 [Winter 1977]: 101-113).

[59] Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie*, p. 351.

[60] This is not altogether accidental. Naturalist writers like Dreiser and London were known to include long passages from their philosophical essays and tracts in their novels.

youth and conduces to the first successful mating".[61] This is not the style of sentimental fiction. It is not even the style of fiction, but of the scientific and philosophical writings of a Charles Darwin, a Herbert Spencer, or a Jacques Loeb.

In contrast to the sentimental tradition, nowhere do the authorial intrusions in Dreiser's work appeal to morality. Their main function is to understand the causes that move characters, "the natural law which governs all effort".[62] This function is manifested in a veritable taxonomic mania, casting the narrator of *Sister Carrie* as a sort of Carl Linnaeus of the 1890s.[63] Many of the authorial comments are meant to categorize the "type", "class", or "order" of characters. By establishing a scientific distance to characters through the analysis of what motivates them, the authorial voice works to inculcate a rational perspective in readers. As readers of *Sister Carrie*, we learn not to moralize or to reason abstractly, but to identify causes and effects and to organize human types and events into a classificatory system. It is impossible to deny the crucial role of desire in the novel, the forceful pathos of the characters' "blind strivings", and the infectious pull of Carrie's yearning as her fortunes rise and fall in the new urban consumer economies of Chicago and New York. Walter Benn Michaels has read the novel's valorization of desire as a symptom of its backhanded endorsement of the free market economics that naturalists like Dreiser strongly opposed.[64]

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[61] Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie*, pp. 45, 64, 154.

[62] Ibid., 101.

[63] June Howard in *Form and History in American Literary Naturalism* describes the naturalist writer as a kind of scientist: "Like the anthropologist, the naturalist ventures into an exotic land to bring back reports on the savage inhabitants. Like the sociologist, he provides a portrait of society in which causal processes are visible, comprehensible, potentially open to intervention" (140).

[64] See Walter Benn Michaels' *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987):"Carrie's economy of desire involves an unequivocal endorsement of what many of Dreiser's contemporaries, most of his successors, and finally Dreiser himself regarded as the greatest of all social and economic evils, the unrestrained capitalism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. The power of *Sister Carrie*, then, arguably the greatest American realist novel, derives not from its scathing 'picture' of capitalist 'conditions' but from its unabashed and extraordinarily literal acceptance of the economy that produced those conditions" (35).

But the authorial voice's blend of sentimental and analytical language mixes affect with rationality in a way not found in characters, for whom reason only serves to obtain ends dictated by unconscious desires. In the authorial voice, it is not reason that is instrumentalized by desire but the other way around: by discovering the laws of desire, desire itself may be used for rational purposes. Moreover, while desire to some degree exists as the desire for desire itself in the novel – considering that, as Michaels writes, "in *Sister Carrie*, satisfaction itself is never desirable; it is instead the sign of incipient failure, decay, and finally death"[65] – the pathos of the characters' unconscious trajectories in life creates a strong desire for discovering and controlling the causes that drive them. This is the desire for rational mastery, not for the unwitting drift of its characters. The function of the authorial voice in *Sister Carrie* is not to give in to desire (and become a brute) nor to repress it (for Dreiser, the function of Victorian morality), but, like Nietzsche's "Will to Power", to master it by facing and knowing it. This perspective is at the same time emotional, filled with the pathos of yearning, and sufficiently detached from that yearning to provide readers with a clear picture of the forceful causes and effects that make up the laws of the world that the text brings into being. If the novel was merely one or the other – emotionally involved or scientifically detached – the reader would be either too engaged to learn something from the vagaries of desire or too detached to be properly motivated. It is the combination of the two that moves readers into a position committed to master the laws of the world presented to us in the novel, and which the characters themselves are unable to discover.

Noting the wordy nature of Dreiser's narrator, Vernon Louis Parrington wrote, "instead of suffering his portrayal to stand on its own feet he props it up with argument and interminable debate".[66] But the story of *Sister Carrie* would not have been

[65] Ibid., p. 42.

[66] Vernon Louis Parrington, *The Beginnings of Critical Realism in America, 1860-1920*, p. 354.

able to stand on its own feet. If by 1900 the urban consumer world and its denizens like Carrie, whose identity was less informed by Victorian culture than the attractions of Broadway and department stores, had become the new normal for millions of urban Americans, the literary imagination in the United States was still in the thrall of the "genteel tradition". "Realism is nothing more and nothing less than the truthful treatment of material," Howells said.[67] But in order to appear "truthful", literary representations must build on preestablished conventions and codes. Howells drew on the tacit knowledge of Victorian moral culture. His novels were realistic to his contemporaries to the extent that the moral codes of his work corresponded with those of his culture. The familiarity of his worlds was based on the social experience that he shared with his middle-class readers. In 1885, *A Modern Instance* presented a new event (a divorce case) from the perspective of the old world. *Sister Carrie*, on the other hand, presented a new event (the success of a "fallen woman") from a new perspective, which Dreiser could not assume that readers would accept as "realistic". The profusion of authorial commentary in the novel accomplishes a familiarizing task that mostly remained tacit in Howells' realism. If the role of Howells' fiction was to scrutinize the moral standards of his society in order to either reassert or refine them, the role of *Sister Carrie* was to set new standards: it could not merely depict a familiar world; it had to first create the terms of its familiarity. Gérard Genette calls this kind of literary strategy "motivation". When the representation of events and characters runs counter to the norms and expectations of society, in order to appear plausible they must be motivated. When a fictional text chooses neither to rely on the "natural silence" of realism nor the disturbing "deep silence" of modernism – two types of representation that do not require authorial guidance – a third option is to create one's own terms:

[67] William Dean Howells, *Criticism and Fiction and Other Essays* (1891; eds. Clara Marburg Kirk and Rudolf Kirk. New York: New York University Press, 1959), p. 38.

> one can situate in the middle region a type of narrative too different from the conventions of the *vraisembable* to base itself upon the consensus of vulgar opinion, but at the same time too attached to the consent of opinion to impose upon itself without commentary any actions the reasons for which would then run the danger of escaping it: a narrative still too original (perhaps too 'true') to be transparent to its public, but still too timid, or too compliant, to assume its opacity. Such a narrative ought then to seek to give itself the transparency that it lacks by multiplying its explications, by supplying for every purpose the maxims, unfamiliar to the public, capable of accounting for the actions of its characters and the interconnections of its plot, in short of inventing its own conventions and in simulating in every work and for the needs of its purpose an 'artificial *vraisemblance*' that would be the theory – this time, and perforce, explicit and declared – of its own practice.[68]

Although Genette here has Balzac's "powerful clumsiness" in mind, the same type of "artificial *vraisemblance*" seems to be at work in Dreiser's clumsiness.[69]

Like in *The Iron Heel*, the underlying cause for the chaos in *The Red Badge of Courage* is not so much war itself but its mismanagement by those supposedly in charge of it. War is not presented as a moral dilemma, but as a problem issuing from "the commanding general's mismanagement of the army".[70] Both novels address a crisis of authority. They both seek to deepen that crisis by showing the inadequacy of the cultural bonds and social structures that until then had ordered society, and to generate a new paradigm for the organization of society, whether discursively in *The Iron Heel* through Everhard's polemics, or dramatically in *The Red Badge of Courage* through its narrative perspective. In this sense, *Sister Carrie* follows Crane's example. It is not *about* management: it manages through its perspective. This method is more subtle and more effective than any direct account of the need for management could be. The reader is bound to be more skeptical of Everhard's overt claims to authority

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[68] Gérard Genette, "*Vraisemblance* and Motivation" (1968; trans. David Gorman. *Narrative* 9.3 [Oct. 2001]: 239-258), p. 243.

[69] Ibid., p. 243.

[70] Stephen Crane, *The Red Badge of Courage*, p. 70.

than the imperceptible authority of Crane's narrator, although in Dreiser's case, as we have seen, the narrative voice tends to overplay its authority and thus create resistance in the reader. It is the dual perspective in naturalism, its experimental stance toward characters and its search for the "laws" that govern them, which helped provided the American public with the tools – a new managerial perspective and attitude – for understanding and ordering a social reality that could no longer be contained by the Victorian moral outlook. If naturalist writers were critical of the profit motive that Taylorist efficiency in factories helped optimize, the naturalist perspective was nevertheless instrumental in reorienting its culture to a modern managerial approach to social organization.

Naturalism's Management of Emotions

"One possible reaction to a fragmented society may be to retreat to a private world of values", Wayne Booth observed, "but another might well be to build works of art that themselves help to mold a new consensus."[71] For Booth, the molding of a new consensus requires the active guidance of the narrator, "the successful ordering of your reader's view of a fictional world".[72] In contrast to the aesthetic ideology of impersonal narration from Flaubert to Henry James, and later reduplicated with a vengeance in modernist minimalism, naturalist writers did not shy away from such hands-on management of the fictional world, but "felt free to intrude their rhetorical comments whenever necessary".[73] As I have suggested above, this was the main contribution of American naturalist fiction in the way of moving its readers "into a new order of perception and experience" that had at its core a managerial ethos.[74] In this section, however, I would like to suggest that it was not the only contribution. "Naturalism an-

[71] Wayne C. Booth, *The Rhetoric of Fiction* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1961), p. 393.

[72] Ibid., p. 388.

[73] Ibid., p. 55.

[74] Ibid., p. 398.

ticipates progressivism", June Howard argued.[75] But naturalism also anticipated the twentieth-century makeover of management that has contributed to the dismantling of progressive reforms.

The detached perspective of naturalist fiction – together with its deterministic plots – has been criticized for its denial of human agency, for turning both narrators and readers into passive spectators and characters into helpless victims of forces beyond their control. While June Howard recognized the "gesture of control" that underlies naturalism's experimental aesthetic, she also read the detached "author-voyeur" in naturalist texts as compromising the agency implied by its controlling gesture through the creation of an opposition between acting and observing.[76] Since its publication, this critical point has been raised repeatedly against the ending of Frank Norris' *The Octopus*. On one level, the novel is about Presley's attempt to achieve a synthesizing view of his age. He is a writer who comes to California with dreams of writing an epic, where everything would be "gathered together, swept together, welded and riven together in one single, mighty song, the Song of the West".[77] This totalizing vision is attained in the end when his perspective is finally aligned with "the larger view", which sees not the particular struggles of his friends but the universal struggle of humanity for survival, one which is concerned not with individuals but with "what contributed the greatest good to the greatest numbers".[78] Because the larger view is identical to evolutionary progress, the "larger view always and through all shams, all wickedness, discovers the Truth that will, in the end, prevail, and all things, surely, inevitably, resistlessly work together for good".[79] Howard sums up a prevalent opinion about this point of view when she writes that its "philosophical optimism, affirming

[75] June Howard, *Form and History in American Literary Naturalism*, p. 127.

[76] Ibid., pp. 134, 116.

[77] Frank Norris, *The Octopus: A Story of California* (1901; New York: Penguin, 1994), p. 10.

[78] Ibid., p. 651.

[79] Ibid., p. 652.

that a benevolent order is immanent in nature, assures the spectator that there is indeed no *need* for action".[80] On another level, however, the novel is deeply concerned with the fates of those who are trundled by "the railroad – that great monster, iron-hearted, relentless, infinitely powerful".[81] These fates, including death, insanity, starvation, and prostitution, are narrated with a muckraking sensibility for injustice and suffering. As critics point out, they do not fit neatly within the utilitarian/evolutionary frame of the novel's ending.[82]

Critics of *The Octopus*' ending are correct in noting that it rules out individual agency. What they rarely observe is that individual agency has an ideological basis in liberalism and assumes an innate proclivity for reasoning and rational behavior that was not shared by naturalist texts.[83] In response to the feeling that by the 1890s the kind of moral autonomy epitomized by the Victorian notion of "character" had been curtailed by the larger social forces of the corporation and the marketplace, and in the sciences had been undermined by a new biological and psychological focus on instinctive and subconscious drives, naturalism was less interested in salvaging the vestiges of individual agency than in putting them to rest for good and exploring new forms of agency. Jack London's *White Fang* is a case in point. It opens by delivering a fierce blow to human autonomy and agency. Showing two men traveling by dog sled across the icy expanses of Yukon Territory in Canada, the cold silence of "the Wild" diminishes and robs them of their civilized delusions:

> It crushed them into the remotest recesses of their own minds, pressing out of them, like juices from the grape, all the false ardors and exaltations and undue self-values of the human soul, until they perceived themselves finite and small,

[80] June Howard, *Form and History in American Literary Naturalism*, p. 125.
[81] Ibid., p. 179.
[82] Walter Fuller Taylor in *The Economic Novel in America* (1942; New York: Octagon Books, 1973), for instance, writes that the ending of *The Octopus* is "a verdict given against the evidence" (299).
[83] Lee Clark Mitchell's argument in *Determined Fictions: American Literary Naturalism* (New York, Columbia University Press, 1989) is a convincing exception.

> specks and motes, moving with weak cunning and little wisdom amidst the play and interplay of the great blind elements and forces.[84]

It is a poignant image of people having their Victorian selves crushed out of them. A few pages on, the men are literally reduced to "meat" – and realize it – when a pack of wolves outsmarts them. Yet later in the story, agency is recuperated by the use of a new method: not by reason or tradition but through trial and error. As a cub, White Fang learns the laws of the wild by experience:

> the gray cub was not given to thinking – at least, to the kind of thinking customary of men. His brain worked in dim ways. Yet his conclusions were as sharp and distinct as those achieved by men. He had a method of accepting things, without questioning the why and wherefore. In reality, this was the act of classification. He was never disturbed over *why* a thing happened. *How* it happened was sufficient for him.[85]

The grounds for his agency are not abstract reasoning but scientific experimentation that allows him to discover the most efficient way to survive and thrive under the present conditions. His mastery is based on a purely formal rationality, its only value being functional: the efficiency of his methods to achieve his material needs. In a description of his fighting skills that bears a striking resemblance to the sort of time-motion studies carried out at the time by Frank Gilbreth, the reason he fights better than the other dogs was that it "was all automatic": "When his eyes conveyed to his brain the moving image of an action, his brain, without conscious effort, knew the space that limited that action and the time required for its completion".[86]

If whatever moral autonomy the two men in the beginning of the story may have had proved useless in a wolfish environment, White Fang's empirical acquisition of knowledge and discovery of laws through experience and observation is a far more

[84] Jack London, *White Fang* (1906; in *The Call of the Wild, White Fang, and Other Stories*. Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009. 89-291), p. 94.
[85] Ibid., p. 141.
[86] Ibid., p. 208.

promising path to mastery. While the locus of Victorian agency was the autonomous self, agency here becomes a question of impersonal knowledge acquisition. The more objective the method, the more accurate and the more successful was the basis for action. Ideally, this form of mastery would not require a master but would be embodied in the scientific system itself. The erasure of the autonomous individual would clear the ground for the erection of planning departments and institutions in which scientific knowledge could be gathered and channeled into rational action.[87] In short, acting in naturalism is not opposed to observing but contingent upon it. While the dubious optimism of the "larger view" in *The Octopus* suggests that action is futile, it is nevertheless only the attainment of such a detached view that enables action in the first place. Spectatorship in naturalism is not passive, but the prerequisite for more efficient management.

In writing about the bureaucratic outlook of the Progressive Era, Robert H. Wiebe notes: "The bureaucratic orientation did more than sweep away faculty psychology and its Christian dualism; it obliterated the inner man".[88] In theory, the emptying of subjects in naturalism made them easier to manage. If one's needs are only material, then Taylor's incentive system based on higher wages and a shorter (if more intense) workday would be the perfect means to solving both problems of how to increase productivity and worker contentment. This sort of corporate bureaucratic incentive system was epitomized by the Ford Motor Company where the mechanization and control of labor was rewarded by unheard of wage increases. Relocating agency from the individual to the system further entailed a type of impersonal subjectivity in which individual aims were subsumed by the greater good of the organization or society at large. This was the social ethos of bureaucracy, one which naturalists like Dreiser

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[87] This is why Hannah Arendt famously called bureaucracy a "rule by Nobody". See Arendt's *On Violence* (1969; New York: Harcourt, 1970), p. 38.

[88] Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order, 1877-1920* (New York: Hill and Wang, 1967), p. 148.

shared: "To do anything which is to be of benefit to the individual it requires the mind that sees the individual *en masse* rather than in particular".[89] Society and the organization came before individual needs because they provided "the greatest good to the greatest numbers". By the middle of the twentieth century, however, the bureaucratization of society designed to master social and natural forces that had undermined human agency had itself come to be regarded as the greatest obstacle to agency. It was no longer market forces or instinctive drives that posed a threat, but the institutions that had been put in place to control them. For C. Wright Mills, the white-collar professional had now become the "new Little Man",

> pushed by forces beyond his control, pulled into movements he does not understand; he gets into situations in which his is the most helpless position. The white-collar man is the hero as victim, the small creature who is acted upon but who does not act, who works along unnoticed in somebody's office or store, never talking loud, never talking back, never taking a stand.[90]

In other words, too much "juice" had been squeezed out of the human subject. If the unruly Gilded Age had been defined by material hardship, the over-bureaucratized twentieth century was now one of psychological hardship: "We need to characterize American society of the mid-twentieth century in more psychological terms, for now the problems that concern us most border on the psychiatric".[91]

As already noted, the psychologization of the workforce had begun in the 1920s with the Hawthorne Studies and the human relations movement. Jackson Lears shows how a therapeutic outlook was nascent already in the late nineteenth century as the inadvertent result of the "antimodern" quest for authentic experience against the growing rationalization of society. Longing for emotional intensity as an antidote to

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[89] Theodore Dreiser, *Hey, Rub-A-Dub-Dub! A Book of the Mystery and Wonder and Terror of Life* (1920; London: Constable & Co., 1931), p. 84.

[90] C. Wright Mills, *White Collar*, pp. xvi, xii.

[91] Ibid., p. xx.

"the barrenness of a bureaucratic civilization", yet without being able to reconnect with or recreate values outside of the self, the focus of turn-of-the-century artists and intellectuals on psychic health ended up as a therapeutic quest for self-fulfillment, which ultimately "promoted a new and subtler rationalization of the inner life".[92] Naturalist writers fit only obliquely within Lears' framework of antimodernism, as they responded directly to the industrial and corporate rationalization of society with a rationality of their own. Like Boltanski and Chiapello's distinction between the artistic and social critique, Lears distinguishes between the critique of "wealth and power" and that of "the modern ethic of instrumental rationality that desanctified the outer world of nature and the inner world of the self, reducing both to manipulable objects".[93] It was this latter that antimodernism was concerned with. In contrast, naturalists were clearly not opposed to instrumental rationality as such, even if they were critical of its corporate uses for "wealth and power". The self-interested cunning of S. Behrman in Norris' *The Octopus* is a typically damning caricature of business rationality. *Sister Carrie* likewise exposes the "cold, calculating, and unpoetic world" of the profit-seeking metropolis.[94] But the answer to cold calculation was not to replace it with hot emotions, which proved the downfall and descent into brutishness of many naturalist characters, but to meet cold with cold. The naturalist hero was someone with Everhard's rational mind, not McTeague's love of comfort.

Yet if naturalist texts helped to obliterate the "inner man" by reducing him to his material needs, the definition of these needs in terms of primordial instincts and emotions in turn contributed to the same kind of rationalistic interest in unconscious drives that Lears saw as the unintended consequence of antimodernism. Once inner life was severed from moral life, it became subject to rational analysis. Mastering the

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[92] Jackson Lears, *No Place for Grace: Antimodernism and the Transformation of American Culture, 1880-1920* (New York: Pantheon Books, 1981.), pp. 65, 302.

[93] Ibid., p. xi.

[94] Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie*, p. 16.

laws of nature also meant mastering the laws of the psyche. But the materiality of the psyche did not make it any easier to manage. Defining it in terms of natural instincts and emotions instead of morality or a capacity for reason meant that human desires were perennial and inexhaustible. No naturalist character's desire could ever be assuaged by a wage increase or the alluring consumer products Carrie dreams of, since desire is not extrinsic to the naturalist self but what constitutes it. Whether it is the call of the wild or the call of Broadway, naturalist characters are always heeding a call arising from the depths of their natural selves, just as the naturalist writer is heeding a call to understand it. But exploring the primordial depths of human nature does not only map those depths, it creates them by digging deeper, imagining further. After all, the bureaucratic obliteration of "inner man" was not the result of a concerted effort to erase inner life but only that of an obsession with outer life. In other words, it was the product of neglect, because "[t]he focus had shifted from essences to actions".[95] As a result, actions were objectified, quantified, rationalized, and instrumentalized, while the psyche was left alone, having to suffer only the stress of automatized work and strict supervision. Once we become used to routine work, Antonio Gramsci noted, "what really happens is that the brain of the worker, far from being mummified, reaches a state of complete freedom".[96] By shifting the focus back to mental processes, this type of psychic freedom would be threatened.

If American literary naturalism could be defined by its experimental aesthetics of mastery and its erasure of individual subjectivity, both of which contributed to a bureaucratic outlook in terms of scientific management and a utilitarian social ethos that saw "the individual *en masse* rather than in particular", what then was the implication of the simultaneous representation in naturalism of the material depths of the psyche? The shift that Warren Susman argued took place in the first decade of the

[95] Robert H. Wiebe, *The Search for Order*, p. 148.

[96] Antonio Gramsci, "Americanism and Fordism" (1934; in *The Antonio Gramsci Reader: Selected Writings 1916-1935*, ed. David Forgacs, London: Lawrence and Wishart, 1999. 275-99), pp. 295-96.

twentieth century from "character" to "personality" in popular ideas of selfhood was particularly evident in naturalist fiction.[97] While character was believed to be self-made, a matter of shaping and disciplining the self, personality was considered innate: it had to be discovered, not formed. The result was that the corrosion of character in naturalism, instead of making the psyche unworthy of attention, turned it into a most fascinating object of study. Human beings may be "meat", but they were meat controlled by mysterious inner forces that provided rich grounds for self-exploration in naturalist texts. In the later works of London and Dreiser, this search only became more outspoken. The eponymous protagonist of *Martin Eden* becomes fascinated with himself. Although attaining a "cosmic grasp of mastery" in both physical and intellectual labor, he increasingly begins to study himself, standing in front of the mirror in morose introspection and asking, "Who are you, Martin Eden?".[98] While White Fang may have been a sociologist mapping the external world, Martin Eden is also a psychologist seeking to unlock the secrets of his soul.

In Dreiser's Cowperwood trilogy – the Trilogy of Desire – there is a constant vacillation between the text's own desire for mastery and its fascination with the driving complexity of the psyche. On the one hand, the trilogy is about understanding the "financier" type, what drives and motivates him and how he achieves success. Like in *Sister Carrie*, at least the first two volumes of the trilogy published in 1912 and 1914 are pervaded by analytical commentary, making of Frank Cowperwood an experiment the same way he himself experimentally observes his surroundings with his "inquiring, examining eyes" and "cold philosophic logic".[99] Readers are never left alone with Cowperwood. The narrator is always there to analyze his behavior and views in the

[97] Susman, Warren. "'Personality' and the Making of Twentieth-Century Culture" (1979; in *Culture as History: The Transformation of American Society in the Twentieth Century*. New York: Pantheon, 1984. 271-85).

[98] Jack London. *Martin Eden* (1909; New York: Penguin, 1993), pp. 436, 145.

[99] Theodore Dreiser, *The Titan* (1914; New York: Thomas Y. Cromwell Company, 1974), pp. 460, 507. The third volume of the trilogy, *The Stoic*, was published posthumously in 1947.

attempt to dissect his cunning business mind. On the other hand, we are repeatedly told by the authorial voice that "[l]ife cannot be put in any mold, and the attempt might as well be abandoned at once", that "[t]he most futile thing in this world is any attempt, perhaps, at exact definition of character. All individuals are a bundle of contradictions – none more so than the most capable".[100] But if life cannot be fit into any mold, why then the constant effort to do so? The analytical style reveals a desire to rationalize and classify, yet if characters always elude classification, the desire to rationalize will be as insatiable as the desire of naturalist characters to fulfill themselves. The quest for mastery becomes a never-ending journey, the desire to rationalize and the rationalization of desire a self-perpetuating loop.

What did the objectification and rationalization of emotion in naturalism mean in terms of management? First of all, it paved the way for their instrumentalization. By divesting emotional life of moral values and severing it from moral ends, it turned emotions into neutral entities available for other ends. Much as the disciplining of the body in scientific management turned it into an effective machine, naturalist texts frequently represented the limits of this type of mastery. The most effective type of management did not only enslave the body, it captured the affections. Both White Fang and Buck in *The Call of the Wild* may be managed by brute force, but then it is only their bodies that are made subservient. They become far more efficient workers when they become emotionally attached to their owners. For Buck, John Thornton is the perfect manager:

> Other men saw to the welfare of their dogs from a sense of duty and business expediency; he saw to the welfare of his as if they were his own children, because he could not help it. And he saw further. He never forgot a kindly greeting

[100] Theodore Dreiser, *The Financier: The Critical Edition* (1912; ed. Roark Mulligan. Urbana, Chicago, and Springfield: University of Illinois Press, 2010), pp. 167, 101.

> or a cheering word, and to sit down for a long talk with them ('gas' he called it) was as much his delight as theirs.[101]

Similarly, White Fang is willing to do anything for Weedon Scott, his "love-master". Scott's management of White Fang helps him not only master his environment but also master his own instincts: "Meat, even meat itself, he would forego to be with his god, to receive a caress from him or to accompany him down into the town".[102] This theme of coercive management versus self-management was even more pronounced in *The Sea Wolf*. Here the protagonist Humphrey Van Weyden learns to submit to "the iron rule of Wolf Larsen", and, in spite of his effeminate background as a literary critic, to become an able sailor on the sealing vessel Wolf Larsen commands.[103] Yet he never ceases to resent his domination. In contrast, when Maud Brewster – a shipwrecked poet – is taken aboard, he quickly falls in love with her and becomes her "willing slave".[104] Maud's subtle way of manipulating Humphrey is far more effective than Larsen's "iron rule" type of management. She needs barely to express her wish and he happily falls into order. "'Please', she managed to whisper, and I could not but obey". And later: "You have already managed me with your eyes, commanded me with them".[105]

Both for Carrie and Cowperwood, desire is the key to success: not only their own, but their ability to procure the affections of others. Carrie achieves her success on Broadway by performing her "emotional greatness" on stage.[106] Her ability not to play the part but to *feel* the part – not just to act but to "act natural" – is what makes her such a star. Through the display of her own desire on the stage, she is able to be-

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[101] Jack London, *The Call of the Wild* (1903; in *The Call of the Wild, White Fang, and Other Stories*. Oxford, NY: Oxford University Press, 2009. 1-88), p. 61.
[102] Jack London, *White Fang*, p. 249.
[103] Jack London, *The Sea Wolf* (1904; New York: Bantam, 1981), p. 168.
[104] Ibid., p. 133.
[105] Ibid., pp. 142, 145.
[106] Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie*, p. 259.

come "the face representative of all desire".[107] In short, her private life is the condition of her public success. Desire is likewise the secret to Cowperwood's triumphs – both sexual and financial – but in a far more premeditated way due to his superior analytical skills: "*I satisfy myself* was his private law, but so to do he must assuage and control the prejudices of other men".[108] He is a "marvelous organizer", but more importantly, he has "a magnetic personality" and the ability to "fit himself in with the odd psychology of almost any individual".[109] If Carrie is capable of mobilizing her emotional reserves, Cowperwood is so accomplished in the art of management that he is able to instrumentalize emotions he does not have, "so shrewd that he had the ability to simulate an affection and practice a gallantry which he did not feel".[110] Cowperwood's managerial style is "scientific" in the sense that it is backed by an experimental logic of detached observation. The most famous scene of the trilogy is when as a boy he watches a lobster devour a squid, and from this derives an answer to the question, "'How is life organized?' Things lived on each other – that was it", a recognition which makes him the fittest competitor in the Darwinist struggle for economic survival.[111] But the demonstration of Cowperwood's "emotional intelligence" as a key ingredient to his success also anticipates the shift away from Taylorism to the emotionally sensitive management pioneered by Elton Mayo a decade later. Eva Illouz has coined the term "emotional capitalism" to describe the instrumentalization of emotions in the workplace and the concurrent emotionalization of capitalism, the transformation of work from a vehicle for material gain to a site of personal fulfillment. Referring to the Hawthorne Studies, she writes:

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[107] Ibid., p. 339.
[108] Theodore Dreiser, *The Titan*, p. 9.
[109] Ibid., pp. 11, 66, 21.
[110] Ibid., p. 199.
[111] Theodore Dreiser, *The Financier*, p. 9.

> their main finding was that productivity increased if work relationships were characterized by care and attention to workers' feelings. In place of the Victorian language of 'character', Mayo used the amoral and scientific language of psychology to conceive of human relations as technical problems to be alleviated by proper knowledge and understanding.[112]

As such, human relations management crosses the experimental style with a focus on emotions. The same combination in naturalist texts of detached observation and emotional introspection – from the study of Henry Fleming's instincts to the depths of Cowperwood's desires – prepared readers for the triumph of the psychoanalytical outlook in the decades to come, as well as demonstrated its advantages for management.

The advantages for employers of the transition from economic to emotional fulfillment were evident: "psychologists seemed to promise nothing less than to increase profits, fight labor unrest, organize manager-worker relationships in a non-confrontational way, and neutralize class struggles by casting them in the benign language of emotions and personality".[113] While the core of Taylor's incentive system had been economic gain, Mayo's was therapeutic. Both types of management were geared toward resolving the conflict between labor and capital, but Mayo shifted the terms of the conflict from a question of economics to one of emotional wellbeing. The logic of this shift is made clear in *White Fang*. White Fang serves his first master Gray Beaver because he rewards him with food, fire, and protection, but it is a relationship founded exclusively on material exchange and discipline, "a lordship based upon superior intelligence and brute strength".[114] In contrast, Weedon Scott lords over White Fang with soft words and caresses, in exchange for which the proud wolf not only

[112] Eva Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul: Therapy, Emotions, and the Culture of Self-Help* (Berkeley and Los Angeles: University of California Press, 2008), p. 69.
[113] Eva Illouz, *Cold Intimacies: The Making of Emotional Capitalism* (Cambridge, UK: Polity Press, 2007), p. 17.
[114] Jack London, *White Fang*, p. 192.

gives his physical labor but is placed in a position of "absolute self-surrender".[115] White Fang may be emotionally fulfilled, but the result for his master fulfills the greatest hope that any employer can harbor for employees: "he was on duty all the time, ever vigilant and faithful, the most valuable of all dogs".[116]

The instrumentalization of emotions for more efficient management, however, was not the only consequence of naturalism's objectification of emotional life. The greatest paradox of naturalism in terms of management was that at the same time as it relocated agency from the limited point of view of the individual to the "larger view" of the expert or system, it also implied a latent critique of the Progressive ethos of social uplift. The psychoanalytical outlook does not as such collide with the bureaucratic one. In many ways they are similar in that both rely on and inculcate a detached perspective on respectively inner and outer life. "Far from instilling an anti-institutional attitude," Illouz writes, "the therapeutic discourse represents a formidably powerful and quintessentially modern way to institutionalize the self".[117] Yet if the quest for emotional self-fulfillment initiated by the naturalist redefinition of the self in terms of desire only changed the means of socialization from discipline to liberation, this shift is in itself significant. If the emotionalization of society did not halt its institutionalization, it did change the rationale for that process. A self that is institutionalized through its quest for liberation from institutional restraints entails a rejection of the substance if not the form of institutional power. As Ulrich Beck has observed, "[t]he rationalization process no longer runs strictly *within* the industrial forms and course of wage labor, but increasingly, it runs *against* them".[118] In other words, at one point the rationalization process became separated from its original *telos*, the improvement

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[115] Ibid., p. 254.

[116] Ibid., p. 251.

[117] Eva Illouz, *Saving the Modern Soul*, p. 9.

[118] Ulrich Beck, *Risk Society: Towards a New Modernity* (1986; trans. Mark Ritter. London: SAGE, 1993), p. 149.

of material conditions through scientific reorganization and control. Instead of viewing this project of socioeconomic uplift as contributing to the overall welfare of the populace, it increasingly became regarded as an obstacle to its emotional welfare, necessitating a redirection of institutional energies from the uplift of the economic base of society to the uplift of its emotions. This is what for Beck characterizes "reflexive" modernity, a postwar development in which modernization effectively began to turn against itself. While the aim of "classical" modernization was the liberation from traditional forms of domination, the aim of "reflexive" modernization is the liberation from industrial forms of domination. In this way, the dissemination of the psychoanalytical outlook did not only contribute to the rationalization of society but also to its reflexive turn against bureaucratic rationality.

Reading naturalism in light of this later development, we may see how the naturalist aesthetic did not only legitimate the institutional logic of the Progressive Era, but also prefigured the turn against that logic with its construction of the self as a bundle of natural emotions and desires that defied classification and could not be contained by any system or government. What I would like to suggest here is not that the naturalist interest in the instincts and emotions that made up a personality replaced its managerial spirit, but that it implied a shift in the operational mode of that spirit. Bureaucracy functions as a stabilizing agent against what it considers to be destabilizing environmental factors – lazy workers, supply shortages, corruption, natural disasters, the business cycle, etc. This goal, integral to the project of classical modernity, was seen as both paternalistic and hubristic for its belief in our capacity for radically changing our environment and ourselves through rational means. But the naturalist redefinition of self from character to personality implied a different mode of control, one which could be seen as latent from the very start in the idea of mastery. "Personality" in Dreiser did not allow for self-transformation but only the recognition of one's inherent qualities, just as the assimilation of Herbert Spenser's concept of "force" in

naturalism did not allow for interference in natural processes.[119] Transformation of the environment or the self ceases to be the goal of rationality. We cannot be turned into automatons because our natural personality will always reassert itself, just as in *The Octopus*' "larger view" the environment cannot be reengineered to meet our needs, because it operates according to laws that we may discover (like Presley), but the nature of which we cannot change. This is a side of the naturalist search for mastery that radically conflicts with its bureaucratic ethos. Here the desire for rationality becomes separated from its Progressive, modernizing ends of dominating the environment, and instead becomes part of a project of optimization within the limits of a given environment. Rationality becomes not a matter of regaining agency after it had been lost in the social turmoil of the Gilded Age, but a question of making the best of present conditions, to ensure that the self and organization function optimally according to laws beyond their control.

Dreiser encapsulated this view in an essay entitled "Change", in which he gave expression to a belief which stood in dramatic contrast to the bureaucratic ideal of social engineering and control:

> Not to cling too pathetically to a religion or a system of government or a theory of morals or a method of living, but to be ready to abandon at a moment's notice is the apparent teaching of the ages – to be able to step out free and willing to accept new and radically different conditions […] To be always ready, if such a thing were possible, to meet the new and to know that it will be as valuable as the old – that is the great thing.[120]

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[119] Dreiser explicitly states as much in an essay from *Hey, Rub-A-Dub-Dub!* entitled "Personality", in which he observes the shift from character to personality: "Whatever else you do, believe nothing in regard to the individual's ability to develop an especial and remarkable capacity, unless it is already inherent in him at birth" (119). For the influence of Herbert Spenser's thought on American naturalists, see Ronald E. Martin's *American Literature and the Universe of Force* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1981).

[120] Theodore Dreiser, *Hey, Rub-A-Dub-Dub!*, p. 28.

If nothing can be fixed, we must adapt ourselves to perpetual change. If we cannot control our environment, we must learn to embrace its whims. This sentiment was evident in the mysticism that naturalists like Norris and Dreiser harbored from the beginning, where the aim was to accept with "Nirvanic calm" the changing fortunes of life.[121] As the enthusiastic adoption of New Age rhetoric in current management thought indicates, such a sentiment is a veritable manifesto for the "flexible" personality open to change needed in today's neoliberal labor market.

In 1925, five years after the publication of this essay, Dreiser published *An American Tragedy*. Conceived as a project to understand the psychopathology of a murderer, it presented Dreiser's most ambivalent view of drift and mastery yet. While the emotions and desires of Carrie and Cowperwood had been their key to wealth and fame, in *An American Tragedy* they become the reason for the failure of its main character, Clyde Griffith. Like Carrie and Cowperwood, Clyde is beset by "yearnings and ambitions [...] gnawing at his vitals".[122] By the 1920s, however, the incorporation of America has largely been completed, and instead of opening up the doors to success, Clyde's desires run up against the hard walls of bureaucratic order. Cowperwood's human comedy of desire had become a tragedy. On the one hand, without a moral compass, with no sense of obligation to kin or community, Clyde is adrift in the world, at the mercy of consumer society's elusive dreams. He is unable to instrumentalize his desires and thus succumbs to his innate "emotionalism".[123] On the other hand, it is precisely the mastery of desire now institutionalized in society that makes it impossible for him to advance. Having easy access to the upper layers of society through his rich relatives, it is not the barriers of class hierarchy but those of bureaucratic hierarchy that he cannot overcome. Success for Clyde is within sight, but only if

[121] Frank Norris, *The Octopus*, p. 651.

[122] Theodore Dreiser, *An American Tragedy* (1925; New York: Signet Classics, 2010), p. 25.

[123] Ibid., p. 8.

he can prove himself as an organization man. He needs to control his yearnings and crawl up the gruelingly slow career ladder of the company his uncle owns. But for this he is not suited: "it was not always possible for him to keep his mind on the mere mechanical routine of the work or off of this company of girls as girls".[124] While his cousin Gilbert is represented as a model bureaucrat, "trained in an executive sense, apparently authoritative and efficient", Clyde is "overawed and terrified" at the mere mention of the phrase "technically equipped", "for he scarcely understood what that meant".[125] The bureaucratic way does not only present an insurmountable obstacle to Clyde, it literally kills him. After he has been found guilty of murder, he finds himself incarcerated on death row within a vast prison system that mirrors the impersonal corporate structure of his uncle's successful company:

> There was a system – a horrible routine system – as long since he had come to feel it to be so. It was iron. It moved automatically like a machine without the aid or the hearts of men. These guards! They with their letters, their inquiries, their pleasant and yet really hollow words, their trips to do little favors, or to take the men in and out of the yard or to their baths – they were iron, too – mere machines, automatons, pushing and pushing and yet restraining and restraining one – within these walls, as ready to kill as to favor in case of opposition – but pushing, pushing, pushing – always toward that little door over there, from which there was no escape – no escape – just on and on – until at last they would push him through it never to return!

By 1925, the bureaucratic institution for Dreiser had literally become an "iron cage". If Clyde's drift was untenable, so too had become the rational quest for mastery.

Concluding Remarks

The balance in American naturalist texts between seeking to rationally control the environment, on the one side, and either stoically embracing change or emphasizing the

[124] Ibid., p. 243.
[125] Ibid., pp. 183, 235.

destabilizing forces of nature both within and without, on the other side, may be summed up as naturalism's dialectic of mastery. Critics have long recognized two conflicting tendencies in naturalism.[126] At the same time, however, the criticism of naturalist texts in the United States in the past three decades has been dominated by a New Historicist focus that has not been aimed at understanding the significance of these contradictions but at exploding them. Influenced by poststructuralism, the 1980s' New Historicism did not only shed light on race, gender, and class tensions previously ignored by formalist critics, it also entailed a methodological shift from a focus on aesthetic harmony to historical conflict. One problem with the New Critics' formalist focus on the organic "whole" of the text had been that it overruled tensions that did not contribute to its harmony, or else simply dismissed the text on aesthetic grounds if its tensions could not be made to harmonize with its "whole". The limitation of the New Historicist method, however, is that while a focus attuned to disharmony may be well-suited to identify conflicting parts of a text, it makes it difficult to grasp the significance of their interrelation. In other words, a conflict between diverse functions or meanings in the text may be identified, but they are read in oppositional rather than dialectical terms, in which meaning is considered greater than its parts. As such, while June Howard identified both naturalism's affinity with progressivism and its "disruptions and discontinuities" that undermined this affinity, she did not see this conflict as significant in itself other than making naturalism a less than perfect apology for Progressive reform.[127]

But the conflict in naturalism meant more than its being ideologically flawed. Reading its conflict between rationality and desire in dialectical terms means that naturalist texts did not function *either* to legitimate bureaucratic control through its aesthetic of mastery *or* to undermine it through its construction of a desirous self, but in

[126] See especially Charles Child Walcutt's *American Literary Naturalism: A Divided Stream*.

[127] June Howard, *Form and History in American Literary Naturalism*, p. 141.

effect did *both* at the same time. The question, then, becomes not whether naturalists texts were complicit with or resisted the bureaucratization of society, but to what extent they participated in both its legitimation and delegitimation at the same time. This raises large questions about the relationship between critique and social change. It suggests that social transformation is less a question of rupture due to outside pressures than a question of internal dynamics, that all social systems contain contradictions that over the course of time contribute to their transformation. But these are speculations that go beyond the aim of this paper. Let the tentative conclusion here only be that American literary naturalism contained both the cultural roots of the bureaucratic order in the United States and the rationale for its change later in the century into a far more personalized and subtle regime of management.

Über das Center for Area Studies

Das Center for Area Studies (CAS) dient der Profilierung der Freien Universität Berlin als Zentrum disziplinär basierter und interdisziplinär vernetzter Regionalforschung. Es bündelt die an der Freien Universität Berlin in unterschiedlichen Forschungsverbünden aktive geistes- und sozialwissenschaftliche Regionalkompetenz. Nordamerika, Lateinamerika, Osteuropa, Ostasien und der Vordere Orient sind traditionelle Forschungs- und Lehrschwerpunkte der Freien Universität. Im Blick sind heute aber auch die übrigen Weltregionen wie Westeuropa und Afrika. Wissenschaftliche Aufgabe des Zentrums für Regionalstudien ist die interdisziplinäre Erforschung transkultureller Phänomene und Prozesse.

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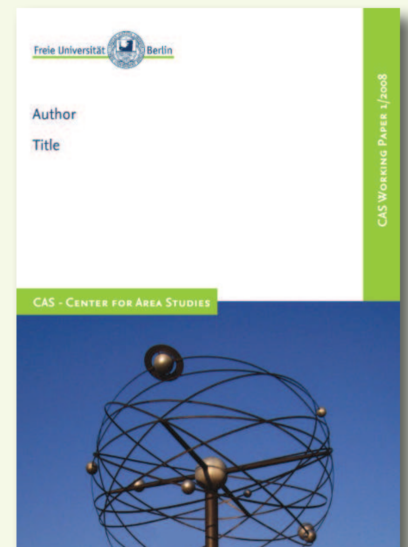

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