

OBJECT-ORIENTED REALISM FOR A SPECULATIVE REALITY

Jason Andrew Harvey

A thesis submitted in partial fulfillment of
the requirements for the degree of
Master of Arts

Department of English Language and Literature

Central Michigan University
Mount Pleasant, Michigan
October 2016

“The pieces in this volume were written under pressure and in tension. My first impulse on rereading them was to correct, to change, to smooth out ragged sentences and remove repetitions, but their very raggedness is, it seems to me, a parcel of their immediacy. They are as real as the wicked witch and the good fairy, as true and tested and edited as any other myth.”

—John Steinbeck (*Once There Was A War*, 9)

Copyright by
Jason Andrew Harvey
2016

To Nora
for coming to be.

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

I wish to thank my thesis committee, Dr. Jeffrey Weinstock, Dr. Matthew Roberson, and Dr. Ted Troxell. These faculty members have inspired me from the outset of my project and have encouraged throughout the process. I would especially like to thank Dr. Weinstock for more than a decade of influence and inspiration. I would also like to thank Dr. Cathy Hicks-Kennard for teaching me to question my certainties. Finally, I would like to thank my family for listening.

ABSTRACT

OBJECT-ORIENTED REALISM FOR A SPECULATIVE REALITY

by Jason Andrew Harvey

This thesis follows Frank Norris's influence on F. Scott Fitzgerald and John Steinbeck through a filter of Object-Oriented Ontology (OOO). As writers with a penchant for Naturalism, each of these authors represent cultural, industrial, and capitalistic elements as natural features due to humans' status as natural creatures. As Naturalistic works that denounce human sovereignty over nature, each text reveals its authors' dissatisfaction with teleological worldviews, which coincides with ontology superseding epistemology as a dominant intellectual paradigm during the early twentieth century. This shift in worldview is indebted to new understandings of the physical universe in the hard sciences at the time. To illustrate these authors' ontological perspectives, I will use actor-network theory to develop an ontographic depiction of the inexplicably active life of objects, wherein objects exhibit an irrepressible agency of their own that contends with perceptions of human sovereignty. For *McTeague*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *Of Mice and Men*, identity is shown as an assemblage of objects interacting with one another, with no single object presuming the total agency thereof. To illustrate this ontographically, an actor-network must be formed, which reveals that characters comprise more than mere bodies. This network of the interconnection of bodies is explored most deeply through a discussion of Stacy Alaimo's trans-corporeality in *Of Mice and Men*. Ultimately, each of the texts' respective protagonists' teleological plans fail due to their inability to recognize the agency of other objects in constructing identity.

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHAPTER

I.	OBJECT-ORIENTED REALISM FOR A SPECULATIVE REALITY	1
II.	AN ONTOGRAPHY OF CHANGE: MAPPING THE REAL IN FRANK NORRIS'S <i>McTEAGUE</i>	44
III.	THE TOTAL PERCEPTUAL OBJECT: GATSBY'S ATTEMPT TO GOLD-PLATE HIS BLUE COLLAR.....	76
IV.	STEINBECKIAN SUICIDE: AN ASSEMBLAGE OF MICE AND OF MEN	114
V.	LESSONS IN REALISM, LESSONS IN REALITY.....	147

CHAPTER I
OBJECT-ORIENTED REALISM FOR A SPECULATIVE REALITY

Introduction: Natural Realists

The shift from Romance to Realism in American Literature at the end of the Civil War points to a time when people were reminded that societal problems can have profound effects on individual lives. As Americans on both side of the Mason-Dixon line buried their relations, it became clear that Romantic notions of man's ability to triumph over adversity should be questioned. Forces beyond the individual's control—those of the natural world and those of the emerging cultural environment of industrial capitalism—would ultimately triumph over the plans of finite mortals. Those suffering at the end of the Civil War were no longer finding comfort in tales of impervious heroes, for Hercules and Noah were nowhere to be found in American life, only fellow mortals, citizens and friends, left to shoulder the burdens of reality.

Born in 1870, Frank Norris was part of the first generation of Americans born after the Civil War and into a literary culture transitioning from Romance to Realism. More than anything, it seems that Realism as a movement seeks to eliminate all things that seem contrived within a story, for a Realist author cannot come off as disingenuous. Creating Realistic fiction, then, proves to be a difficult task on account of the semiotic nature of language. It may be true that the Civil War catastrophe was sad, but a student of Realism sees the falsity within such a statement: it may be sad, but it infinitely more than that—ineffably so.

Norris spoke in contention of authors whose words were only superficially true; these were writers who Norris saw as profiting from writing words without expressing the deep truths of experience. It was not enough to describe the things of the experiential world and call it

Realism to Norris. He also spoke out against charlatan critics whose understanding of Realism seemed not to go further than recognizing imagery. In “The True Reward of the Novelist,” Norris writes:

Clothes, paraphernalia, panoply, pomp and circumstance, and the copyist’s public and the poor be-deviled, ink-corroded hack of an overdriven, underpaid reviewer on an inland paper speak of the “vivid coloring” and “the fine picture of a by-gone age”—it is easy to be vivid with a pot of vermillion at the elbow. Any one can scare a young dog with a false-face and roaring voice, but to be vivid and use grays and browns, to scare the puppy with the lifted finger, that’s something to the point. (1149)

Although Norris may come off condescending toward profitable professional writers, he does not simply chastise theirs as the work of charlatans, whom he refers to as “copyists.” He continues by providing insight on how to write in ways more in line with the Realist movement. Norris argues,

The difficult thing is to get at the life immediately around you, the very life in which you move. No romance in it? No romance in *you*, poor fool. As much romance on Michigan avenue [sic] as there is realism in King Arthur’s court. It is as you choose to see it. The important thing to decide is which formula is the best to help you grip the Real Life of this or any other age. ...

Romance and Realism are constant qualities of every age, day and hour. They are here today. They existed in the time of Job. They will continue to exist to the end of time, not so much in things as in the point of view of the people who see things. ...

The difficulty then is to get at the immediate life, immensely difficult, for you are not only close to the canvas, but you yourself part of the picture. (1149-1150)

This difficulty of separating oneself and one's perspective from reality serves the basis of the total perceptual object (TPO), which I will develop further while discussing *The Great Gatsby* in Chapter III.

One may be able to anticipate Naturalistic themes coinciding with the Realism movement, as nothing seems more natural to biological life than the certainty of death. Norris makes this connection clear by discussing the human being as an animal of nature, rather than its sovereign ruler:

Even this word "human" is misleading. Is it not even truer that so-called humanity still is, and for countless generations will be, three-quarters animal, living and dying, eating and sleeping, mating and reproducing even as the animals; passing the half of each day's life in the performance of purely animal functions? ... There is no prospect for betterment except in the gradual evolution of the type through infinitely vast periods of time. (1104)

This view of the human is clearly derived from a nineteenth-century understanding of Darwinian evolution. Object-oriented ontologist Timothy Morton's theory of the *hyperobject* hails directly from this insight of Darwinism: some objects are so large take so long to actualize (e.g., climates, K-Pg extinction boundary) that they can be real without being observed first-hand.

However, Norris's insight regarding the contemporary literary culture reveals more than a Darwinian influence on the Realist. It also reveals some far less obvious connections with twenty-first century changes in scientific knowledge. Embedded in Norris's theory of the literary

responsibilities of the Realist is the notion that the observer is part of the phenomenon that he or she seeks to describe in writing. This is a core principle of Quantum Mechanical theory, and an idea that Norris described as problematic for writing effective Realism in his time. Although Quantum Mechanics as a field of study did not emerge until about a quarter century after Norris's death, he was a literary contemporary of many famed physicists responsible for discoveries leading to this view of the universe—and many uncertain aspects of the so-called real world were appearing through a changing intellectual paradigm.

Although Norris died in 1902, we can observe his influence on American Realism through the early years of the twentieth century in the work of the authors he influenced, namely F. Scott Fitzgerald and John Steinbeck, who kept Norris's brand of Naturalism alive by discussing the different ways in which capitalism plays a role in constructing identity. In *McTeague*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *Of Mice and Men*, the authors describe capitalism as a type of natural environment that shapes the identity of the protagonists as human animals. More than simply professing the theme that nature will overcome human goals, this naturalism contests a teleological depiction of the world by emphasizing two laws of the physical universe which coincide with the advent of Relativity and Quantum Mechanics: 1) all objects assert their ontological existence as an interminable flow of real qualities, and this cannot be halted by human will; and 2) all objects maintain the ability to affect other objects in unexpected ways, and this also cannot be halted by an intentional will. Each of the chapters that follows will explore a protagonist whose reality is plagued by this ontological limitation to his power: objects exist and objects act, and this cannot be changed. As evident through the Naturalist works of the authors in question, a world whose reality is changing needs a realism that changes to account for new perspectives. In this discussion, object-oriented ontology provides an effective lens to express an

updated realist perspective (speculative realism) that recognizes the dynamic vitality of objects that these authors sought to capture.

Realist Need to End Epistemology

It has now been over a century since Einstein first shared his Theory of Relativity with the world, and we are still discovering its implications. Soon after Einstein, modernist and post-modernist authors began showing signs of a changing intellectual paradigm from epistemology to ontology. To put it simply, Einstein asserted to the world that time and space were not what we thought them to be and that energy and matter had less in distinction than our human minds could then comprehend. This led to a flood of novelists who strayed away from conventional writing styles to communicate more effectively with their evolving audiences. Look no further than William Faulkner or James Joyce to find multiple internal worlds and perspectives interplaying with real events to create new depictions of experiential reality.

To students of object-oriented ontology, epistemology has one major flaw as an academic lens: there is an implied rule that when no further conclusions can be considered due to insufficient evidence that one must cease further inquiry. An ontological stance, however, requires the student to speculate on that which is beyond knowing. This is the very nature of ontological inquiry.

Although the shift from Relativity to Quantum Mechanics may seem unexpected, it is actually a logical progression because a core principle of Relativity is that the very nature of the universe is not as binary as it appears to be—space and time being space-time, light and matter behaving as both waves and particles, for instance. To a curious student of Relativity, it becomes necessary to ask what an object is irrespective of its spatial and temporal parameters. At this

point, a student of Quantum Mechanics is born, whose purpose is to explore an unknowable reality.

As the paradigm shifts from epistemology to ontology, the leap from modernism to post-modernism seems much more likely. However, the influence of Quantum Mechanics and its role in shifting to an ontological perspective has been adequately explored by literary scholars. Instead, my curiosity lies in the early literati who inherited and propagated a change in cultural perspective and whose work show evidence of this shift. Norris was Einstein's literary contemporary, and his work reveals changes in human frame of reference concurrent with those Einstein was experiencing. Rather than seek out other contemporaries to Norris, such as William Dean Howells or Henry James, I will follow Norris's naturalist themes through the work of Fitzgerald and Steinbeck, who were both heavily influenced by their predecessor. In doing so, I will reveal the role non-teleological ideology plays within Naturalism and argue that object-oriented ontology is at present the best way to make sense of a Quantum world in which the human being has no access to reality. Although quantum ambiguity (i.e., location in time and space breaking down due to wave-particle duality) is apparent in every aspect of reality, the responsibility of the Realist to speak truth is not a futile effort.

By following Naturalist themes, I will explore how Norris, Fitzgerald, and Steinbeck portray a changing worldview consistent with the shift from epistemology to ontology. In addition to bearing thematic similarities, these texts are well suited for this discussion because, as Richard Allan Davison argues, *The Great Gatsby* and *Of Mice and Men* both pay homage to Norris by including textual similarities to *McTeague*. To capture the authors' attention to the ontological status of objects within the text, I will use sociologist Bruno Latour's actor-network theory as a means to develop an "ontographic" depiction of the inexplicably active life of

objects, which Norris perhaps presents best. Here, I use Ian Bogost's term "ontography" to mean the semiotic map of an ontological perspective necessary to conceive the unimaginable. In doing so, I will reveal the active lives of objects and how their agency to affect human subjects helps actualize our individual views of the world.

For all three texts, I analyze the authors' rhetorical choices to reveal a dissatisfaction with a teleological understanding of the world, which Jackson Benson claims hails from intellectual traditions of religious thought. Teleology can be understood through causation: if *x*, then *y*. In a less predictable world of *Quantum Ambiguity*, ends and means become derivative of the actualized matter of the encounter: what is. Benson points this out using Steinbeck's own words from *The Log from the Sea of Cortez*: "*Non-teleological thinking concerns itself primarily not with what should be, or what could be, or might be, but rather that actually 'is'—attempting at most to answer the already sufficiently difficult questions what or how, instead of why*" (255). Indicated here within *The Log*, this dissatisfaction coincides with ontology superseding epistemology and teleology as the dominant modes understandings in the early twentieth century.

In order to develop an ontographic depiction of objects within the Realist works of Norris, Fitzgerald, and Steinbeck, it is first necessary to understand what an object is through an ontological lens. This requires recognizing the distinction between two related but uncoupled dimensions of existence: the virtual and the actual. Drawing from object-oriented ontologists Graham Harman, Timothy Morton, and Brian Massumi, I will develop my unique view of ontology in a thorough literature review, through which I will intersperse logical additions necessary to the development of the ontology that I seek to describe. Among the most significant insights of this ontology are that 1) experiences in actuality *always* entail subjective interaction

between what Harman refers to as real objects and sensual qualities, 2) all understanding of experience must take place within the actual as filtered through subjective interaction (this is aesthetics according to Massumi), and 3) both actuality and virtuality are indeed infinitely productive in terms of the local manifestations they are capable of actualizing. Here, I take a stand where Levi Bryant ventures not to tread (Stergiou 277). In order to support these points, I argue in favor of objects not as inert bundles of inanimate matter but as unimaginably dynamic—objects that are revealed to be capable of incalculable manifestations, which continually increase as other objects appear within actuality. It is due to this creativity that objects are revealed to exhibit agency outside the control of a subject's intention. After revealing the nearly invisible activities of objects, I come to a major conclusion: all objects actualize other real objects when manifesting within actuality, and I attribute this to an unavoidable process of called affect.

Once the remarkable but invisible activities of objects have been addressed, I will delve into an understanding of affect that acknowledges its spectral behavior. Like objects, affect is invisible to human experience but produces local manifestations as evidence of its existence. These manifestations are then recognized by the human subject as objects themselves, and the affect or change that occurs is located between manifestations. Thus, I conclude that if we were to eliminate one of these objects, affect would not actualize. In other words, it would not exist because affect is like a volley between two paddles: removing a paddle eliminates the volley. In short, without objects, affect is impossible. Considering this, the ontology represented herein is based on the notion that ontology pre-conditions phenomenology.

Being an Object

Perhaps the most difficult aspect of object-oriented ontology to grasp is the difference between a perceivable object as such and its real, essential existence as an object. This conversation actually starts with Immanuel Kant as a predecessor to Norris. In a Kantian worldview, human subjects can only experience and interpret the world through basic human modalities: sight, smell, sound, taste, touch, and cognition. On account of this, a correlationist following Kant would argue that any cognitive practice resulting in thoughts regarding objects actually draws only from the sensual data afforded by them, rather than from the objects themselves. As objects with their own sensory perceptions, humans never have direct access to the essence of objects, and this includes one's own essence. For correlationists, the world exists as it does solely within the mind of the observer. Levi Bryant clearly articulates the difference between correlationism and the theory used herein: "As we use the term, object-oriented ontology (OOO) refers to any ontological position that affirms the mind-independent existence of substances, entities, or objects" (273). In addition, Bryant includes the following synonyms he uses mostly interchangeably: "'machine,' 'system,' 'object,' 'substance,' and 'process'" (qtd. in Stergiou 275).

OOO theorists hold that objects exist in reality prior to being actualized by other objects. To do so, we recognize the objects' intrinsic elusiveness, which humans can only ascertain by observing an object's emotive-like emission of qualities. The sensual experiences that allow this, however, do little to expose the essential nature of the object itself; instead, sensual experiences expose only the sensual qualities of the object. This causes the manifestation of a real object into actuality as information to be sensed. Sensual qualities are experienced by other objects, and that experience is understood to a conscious subject as a physical element of the actual universe. It is

only through the interaction of real objects and their qualities that actuality manifests for the subject. Bryant explains this relationship with a sound-wave as an example: “It is only when a perturbation [i.e., real quality] like a sound-wave interacts with a particular machine that constitutes the perturbation (in this case, sound-waves) as information, not the perturbation itself” (qtd. in Stergiou 275).

Bryant continues his discussion of how the capabilities of an individual object (i.e., machine) develop the experiential actuality of the real qualities of another object: “Machines are only selectively open to inputs. They don’t have access to all inputs in the world. Bees, for examples, can see ultra-violet [sic] electro-magnetic waves or light, whereas humans cannot. For this reason, bees are able to see patterns in flowers and give them informational value, whereas humans cannot” (Stergiou 275). In other words, different machines (i.e., objects) help actualize distinct realities by exposing sensual qualities that are invisible to humans. By nature of Harmon’s “withdrawal” of objects, neither the real object nor its real qualities can be sensed as such because only their sensual qualities are accessible through actualization. In other words, it is impossible to experience the core, absolute reality of an object because such an experience *always* entails subjective interaction between real objects and sensual qualities. Understanding this inability to access the real object reveals the ontological reason that all the protagonists fail in the sections to follow: every interaction between objects results in the construction of new realities over which the protagonists have no supreme control.

Here, there is an interesting correlation between Bryant’s idea of the selective nature of machines and Norris’s views on how the author as an artist operates. Both the machine and the artist seek to represent a new reality within actuality, which Norris ties directly to originality and therefore authentic generation of realism. Bryant argues, “To engage a machine effectively at the

political level, we need to know the ‘language’ that machine is capable of ‘speaking’ and ‘hearing’” (Stergiou 276). The language the machine hears is made up of the perturbations that it can register as actual components of the universe. The language it speaks is the results that the machine produces within actuality. For the Realist writer and the mosaicist, this is represented by the words or tiles they use to create their art. Norris argues, “He don’t [sic] make the blocks nor color them—the story writer does not invent nor imagine the parts of his story. Writer and mosaicist alike select and combine” (1116). He goes on to say, “There may be—in fact, there is—in the heap [of tiles or words] a hundred and one other combinations of forms and shapes already arranged, ‘actually existing,’ made to hand, as it were, but the designer over-passes them because these combinations have been used by designers before him, used so often that there is no longer any originality or freshness in them” (1116). The job of the Realist, it seems to Norris, is to create an original story that selects the real elements of the world and weaves them into a unique narrative perspective. This can be seen in *The Great Gatsby* by Fitzgerald’s use of Nick Carraway as a realist by unreliable narrator. According to Bryant, this constitutes the life of all objects on the ontological level.

Clearly interested in depicting life in a realist fashion, Norris seems to reject correlationist thought. In response to a critical objection about imagination’s role in artistic creation, Norris is emphatic: “Imagination! There is no such thing; you can’t imagine anything that you have not already seen and observed” (1117). Here, Norris objects to the mind’s creativity as a means of conceptualizing the world because he attests that forms and structures exist prior to being organized or selected by the artist. He refuses to deny the existence of objects on account of their being mere projections of sensual qualities conceptualized by human cognition. Fitzgerald and Steinbeck take this acceptance of an object’s existence even further by

incorporating real objects within their novels that fail to actualize but that are no less real than those that do.

Instead of thinking of sensual qualities as the ultimate reality, object-oriented ontologists consider them as adumbrations, cloaking mechanisms that obscure the ontological object. In this sense, adumbrations can be viewed as derivative of the object and thus *not* the object itself because as “Brentano had said ... all conscious acts are rooted in *presentations*. Something must be presented to the mind before it can be judged, hated, or loved” (qtd. in Harman 23). Bryant uses the word “perturb” to indicate the presentation of qualities that interact with a subject that manifest locally as actuality. Thus, we conclude that an object must exist autonomously of its qualities because something must be present (the real object) to perturb a subject through an emission of qualities that can then be sensed, judged, and interpreted by the mind. As we will see later, the rift between the object and its qualities is responsible for the birth of new objects within the universe and cross-dimensional transfers of information (“object-giving acts”) between these objects (Harman 26). This process is called “affect.”

Before moving on, it is necessary to note that a subject, whether human, chimpanzee, or pea plant, is in no way intrinsically different from any other object on an ontological level. The only distinction between object and subject afforded here is that the subject is merely an arbitrary point of perspective to aid in recognition; it is a “you are here” arrow on an ontographic map. According to Harman, all objects, be they subject or object, exist with a four-part structure: the real object (RO), sensual object (SO), real qualities (RQ), and sensual qualities (SQ) (50). The real object exists in what Brian Massumi refers to as the virtual proper, and its ontological status is herein referred to as virtual proper being. Bryant explains, “The virtual proper being of a machine refers to its powers or those things of which it is capable; its potential” (Stergiou 276).

This needs to be clarified: virtual proper being is not the measure of abilities an object is capable of actualizing. It is the existence of all an object's abilities and possible permutations conceived of instantaneously within any relationship to other things—without any considerations of limitations imposed by space or time.

The sensual object, however, exists not within the virtual proper but in actuality—the domain of actual, experiential life: the world we know. When real qualities of real objects perturb each other, a sensual object manifests within actuality on account of a subject experiencing alien sensual qualities. When a subject senses these qualities, which are then woven into a concept of understanding, the subject perceives this as an object in actuality. When a given real object experiences real qualities within the virtual proper, a qualitative experience results as a local manifestation within the actual, perceivable world. This interplay between real objects and real qualities is “ultimately [a non-temporal and] nonlocal aesthetic phenomenon. A phenomenon, moreover, that emanates from the objects themselves [sic]” (Morton 223). It is also the cause for issues of misidentification within the plots of the following novels: no perceived identity accurately conveys real identity.

When objects interact within the virtual proper, new objects are formed therein, which potentially could manifest within actuality if the necessary aesthetic sensors happen to be present; to Morton, this phenomenon emanates from the real objects themselves, which suggests a previously unrecognized agency within inanimate things. Here, it is important to note that Morton refers to aesthetics from a Kantian perspective pertaining to the senses, not as merely an artistic experience. However, in the previous passage, Morton refers to an alien form of sensual interaction for virtual (real) objects, one that cannot be presumed by humans to have one-to-one correlations with actual human sensual understanding. This is in part due to the virtual proper

existing outside space and time, as space-time is a property that emerges from objects interacting with one another within the actual, physical universe.

Thus, space and time must be removed from consideration when musing upon the virtual, because space-time is derived from actuality, not reality. What we sense as the present is actually a response to satisfying the contradiction that each image presented to consciousness is an entirely new manifestation and, therefore, a new object to the subject. A new local manifestation of a familiar object perturbs the subject with each actualization. If not for memory, every moment of life would be experienced as totally new in regard to previous actualizations. However, memory results from affective changes a given object undergoes through interaction with real qualities, and it is due to this ontological change that time is constructed for the subject: without recognition of change (which requires memory for comparative analysis) time does not exist within actuality.

To be more plain, within actuality the present is not concurrent with the non-temporal present of the virtual. This leads to a bold assertion: What we perceive as action, movement, or change is really a series of objects represented sequentially to the brain and then molded into comprehension as the phenomenon of life. Action is an object and thus does not operate according to our sensual understanding of it through time or space. This will be discussed later in greater detail as the total perceptual object in Chapter III.

At this point it is necessary to articulate a clear distinction between virtual proper being and life within the actual. First, the virtual proper is an unmarked, non-space that serves as the domain of real objects. Real objects, seen as autonomous of the qualities they emit, evade all perception because a subject only ever recognizes its interactions with a sensual object's qualities and not the real object itself. Sensual objects in actuality do interact with one another

according to the laws of the physical universe. However, the interaction of sensual objects at a microscopic level show the folly of asserting that direct contact between sensual objects is possible because there will always be space, even if infinitesimally small, between particles, and this suggests that although it seems that sensual objects interact, they only do so by proxy of their qualities.

On account of this ontological nature of objects, objects can be said to withdraw, which means *not* to hide from perception but to emit qualities to be sensed that seal the object off from interacting with the subject qua real object. If an object is actual, it can be sensed, considered, and manipulated by a cognizant subject. Although all objects are real, be they tangible, intangible, comprehensible, or unconscious, not all objects are actual because not all objects exist as local manifestations at a given time conditioned by interactions between objects. However, any object existing in actuality also exists in the virtual proper; otherwise, no local manifestation would be possible. As there is no way to determine positively which qualities of which real objects will actualize as local manifestations, each of the protagonists in the sections that follow will undergo major changes to his identity due this ontological limitation.

Now that a distinction between the real (virtual, ontological) and the actual (experiential, epistemological) has been made, the question of how the virtual interacts with actuality comes to the foreground. Most importantly, there is no one-to-one correspondence between objects within the virtual and the actual. For example, if a table exists in the actual world, it also exists within the virtual; otherwise, there would be no information presented to the mind that could be interpreted as a table in actuality. However, if virtual objects could be perceived in *any* way or *every* way (and OOO argues that they cannot), there would not be a one-to-one mirror image of the table on each side of the object rift, which occurs between the virtual proper and local

manifestation. Since the virtual is non-spatial and non-temporal, structural layouts cannot be reflected through the rift, and do not exist as we would understand them through Cartesian space or time. Instead, structures of all forms as we know them exist only within actuality. In other words, spatial or temporal structure exists within the virtual not as an order of parts that can be grasped through reductionism or by mereology. Instead, objects and structures must be considered as operationally total, as distinctions afforded by time space are no longer present. In this view, we can refer to such structures not as mechanisms but as Leibniz's monads, Bogost's units, or Latour's actors and actants. With such an understanding, we can now think of objects as quanta, individual units functioning as systems with the capacity to emerge as unpredictable manifestations, irrespective of their constituent parts. A quantum may be composed of a single quark or millions of stars within a single galaxy, but it is always operationally whole. Given this operational holism, each of the protagonists' attempts to handpick qualities for local manifestation fail—because even if one quality is prompted to actualize through teleological manipulation, all other qualities of said object are equally real and concurrently possible when considered virtually.

As for how the virtual and actual interact as quanta, take the writing of this paper for instance. In its completed form, there is no question as to whether this manuscript is an object. It has physical shape; it can be sensed in time, and it has the ability to affect other objects through interaction. For instance, my reader may encounter this material, contemplate it, and in some way move on with his or her life. In order for this paper to be actual, it must in some way pre-exist within the virtual proper, but since time is a component of the *actual* universe, a more appropriate term may be “extra-exist.” This is the quantum state, the virtual proper being of this paper irrespective of the words that actualize it. While I write these words, each of my

contemplations and sentences contiguously allows for multiple changes in content to emerge, and this helps reveal the alien-aesthetic occurrences of the virtual proper that allow for its unique localized manifestation. In short, although there is no direct mirror image of objects and their actions reflected between the virtual and the actual, the two do interact, though their interactions must be translated into perceivable sensual manifestations in order to bring about a particular understanding through cognition. We may call our actual understanding of an object a theory, which is an object itself. The virtual equivalent of the theory object is what Husserl refers to as *eidōs* (Harman 27).

Moreover, experiences in actuality as quanta reveal the infinite creative magnitude of virtual proper being, which can never be extinguished through sensual perception. Quantum theory has revealed that quanta, be they electrons or the Statue of Liberty, behave in inexplicable ways. Take the hydrogen atom, for example, which has only one electron. With hydrogen's nucleus bearing the vast percentage of the mass of the atom, the single electron is said to orbit the nucleus, but unlike the orbits of planets within our solar system, which have continuous, semi-circular trajectories, electron orbits seem to teleport around the nucleus, which can be observed by firing a single photon into the electron cloud. Physicists conclude that electron placement is non-spatial because the electron does not appear in any place until it has been measured by another real object (i.e., a subject, the photon), which in turn makes the electron a sensual object or an object-for the subject.

By firing a photon into an electron cloud, scientists actualize the sensual qualities as local manifestations; it is the firing of the photon that actively *localizes* the electron in actuality. In short, actuality provides the perspective that allows for recognition of real objects through sensual objects as a medium. If perspectives change, so do the perceivable qualities of the object,

among which are spatial and temporal location, as the photon experiments show. In fact, electrons can be made to actualize in more than one place at a given time when left unmeasured. When human beings are viewed as non-spatial entities existing in multiple places at once, even characters who do not appear to be present are vulnerable to environmental factors. This understanding of multi-positionality will be important for understanding the concept of trans-corporeal entities in Chapter IV.

An object's sensual qualities result from the interaction of real and actual objects over the object rift. As a result, all things in actuality will appear in some way distinctly different from all other previous and future local manifestations of the object—be it via appearance, affective potency, or any other perceptual variation—on account of the varying qualities of sensual objects. On account of this, both actuality and virtuality can be considered inexhaustibly creative or infinitely productive, which is based on the notion that parameters of an object do not correlate one-to-one with virtual proper being.

If actuality brings real objects into recognized existence and if actual experiences necessarily reveal different qualities of the object, one may initially suspect that any object observed is unique to every other observation of said object. Even though all perceived objects appear to be new objects on account of our perspective, this newness applies only to the sensual object that is constructed by interacting with other objects. The real object is fundamentally unchanged on the ontological level, whose essence is preserved irrespective of changes in actuality. If qualitative change in actuality were to render a commonplace object different from its virtual proper being, it would be impossible to become cognizant of what a thing is because memory could not manifest in a world of eternal newness. For example, how could we understand what an apple is if an apple is at all times novel within experience? Like the

unmeasured electron, an object is outside of space and *time* and can be thought of as at all times encompassing all of its variations simultaneously.

As for how the virtual interacts with the actual, the answer may be simpler than in the inverse example presented previously. As Harman notes, “As a rule, realist philosophers are satisfied to claim that there is more to things than our representations of them. Consciousness may be filled with manifest images, but these are not primary; instead, these images are generated or produced by realities that are not themselves manifest” (30). In other words, virtual objects permit the world of images in which we are immersed. Morton presses this point further by arguing that “perception is perception *of something*” (31). Semantically, this seems inarguable. In order for perception to take place in actuality, something must extra-exist as a real quality of a real object and be perceived by a receptive subject. He continues, “Even if we could strip away all the accidental features [localized sensual qualities emerging within actuality via subjective interaction] of horses, dogs, and chairs, these objects would still differ from each other. Each object has *eidetic* features no less than accidental ones” (32). The eidetic features refer to real qualities intrinsic to the object, and the accidental refers to those that result within the actual by means of two or more objects interacting and transmitting information to another. For example, my understanding of an apple is in part due to how I sense the way the apple feels, tastes, and so forth. By trying to enact accidental qualities and suppress more telling eidetic ones (i.e., produce intended actualization), Gatsby, for instance, makes his identity vulnerable to inspection because he disregards the qualities that objects emit if they do not fit well with his narrative.

In order to make sense, then, of how the virtual interacts with the actual, I will return to my discussion of the construction of this paper. All the ideas within this paper are actual objects

because they can be seen, read, experienced, witnessed in other works, and for a multitude of other reasons. These are all examples of *possible* local manifestations of the object. In other words, data must presuppose (extra-exist) interpretation, the latter being the responsibility of the brain, which is itself a confederation of innumerable objects (e.g., neurons, electric currents, apples that provide nourishment necessary to power cognition, etc.). If this were not the case, objects would be lost to the world. However, the ideas herein do not need to exist within this actual paper using the actual words that I am writing here. They could exist in other formats and media as thoughts or conversation or be written by somebody other than me. What this indicates is that it is only when there is concerted interaction between objects and qualities that objects can appear in actuality as local manifestations.

Although it may not be accurate to claim that the virtual creates the actual, the virtual does encompass the potentiality of all being not-yet-manifest. With such an understanding, actual life is revealed as a weaving of virtual and actual objects into a recognizable, aesthetic experience, and anything is indeed possible so long as the necessary objects from both the real and the actual are permitted to interact in a way that produces local manifestation. Although virtual proper being and actualized living may be infinitely creative or variable, neither is teleological: “there are no ultimate or final guarantees ... that capacities to affect and to be affected will yield an actualized next or new that is somehow better than ‘now’” (Seigworth & Gregg 9-10). Although Mac, Gatsby, and George and Lennie may make great strides in approaching the lives they would like to live, they inevitably fail due to Norris’s modernist teleology: nature tells its own story of which the human is only a mere part.

Real Objects' Animacy and The Total Perceptual Object

Basic physics tells us that objects do not often come into direct contact with one another, for there is space between atoms and between nuclei and electrons that occlude physical contact between particles. Taking this as granted, it is impossible to make objects come into flush contact with other objects on the subatomic level without advanced technology that supplies levels of heat and pressure beyond comprehension. When this happens, processes such as nuclear fusion occur. Thus, under ordinary circumstances, objects are never fully experienced by other objects because they are never sensed totally for what they really are, only by proxy of their qualities (e.g., gravity). Graham Harman refers to this characteristic as *withdrawal*. When a real object withdraws, this does not mean that it departs from view because it is a non-spatial entity. Instead, real objects are like radio transmitters emitting all of an object's real qualities into the sensual ether. Real objects seem to cloak themselves in a continuous overflow of emitting qualities. Since a hand, for instance, never actually comes into particle-to-particle contact with a wall, what a subject feels as hardness is actually an interpretation of gravity that cloaks the real surface behind sensation. In a sense, it is as if there is a wall between the sensing object and the wall itself, and this is typical of all objects: perception of an object creates an experiential object serving as a liaison between the real object and the observer. Only when the real qualities of an object perturb another real object (i.e., a receiver) will the object come into existence for the receiver, which means that objects express themselves as matter when confronting other objects. Put more accurately, matter forms when the real qualities of real objects transform into sensual qualities through affect, and with the emergence of matter comes the possibility of conceptualizing time and space. This is what is meant by discussing matter as creative (Morton's aesthetic) and which is represented in the graphic below.

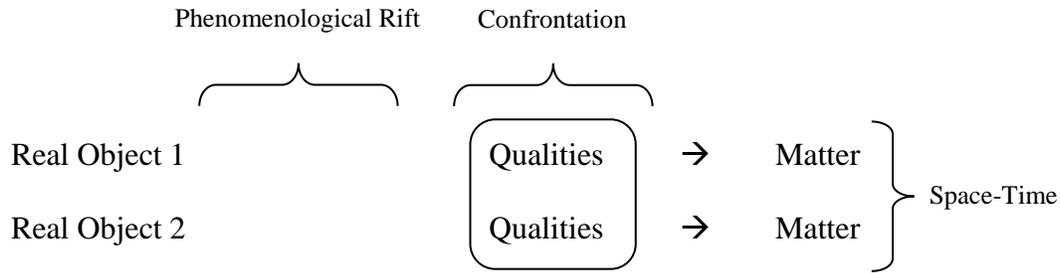


Figure 1. Creative Matter

As Bryant argues previously, the type of receiver, be it bumblebee, human being, or camera lens, determines which of the object's qualities can be perceived by the receiver. In other words, an object can only know another object by the ways in which its interactions are able to be experienced by the receiving object. At the ontological level, both objects are engaged in the same process of simultaneously emitting qualities and receiving alien qualities and, as a result, a world is constructed of objects whose qualities weave together to form the tapestry of experience. One must only look around a room at the vast array of objects to glimpse how intricately woven this tapestry is. In fact, it is so overwhelmingly complex to the brain that many objects may go unnoticed or are sensed only subconsciously. This is the complexity of nature that undermines teleology as a viable lens for understanding the human condition; this is the core of Norris's fatalistic naturalism that continues through Fitzgerald and Steinbeck: all objects actualize elements of reality regardless of whether humans want this to be the case.

When the qualities of objects are thoroughly imbricated within the perceptual frame of a subject, a world replete of sensual dimensionality manifests, and the actual world of experiential life becomes perceivable. Countless objects within the sensual field of the subject's perception combine and recombine in different orders and collaborations, which present themselves as an actuality ready for a subject to comprehend through an idiosyncratic perspective. What one

might see when looking out upon an open field, for instance, varies according to what objects manifest per the idiosyncrasies of the subject. He or she may see blue skies and white clouds, the location where a house no longer stands, individual shoots of grass, the ghostliness of a past battleground, or a future site for condominium development. My point is that objects are the basis of understanding experience in actuality and that every object brings forth countless additional objects into experience, some of which are the feelings associated with particular objects. Yet this says nothing of the appearance of the world due to variations in sightedness: colorblindness, nearsightedness, farsightedness, lack of three-dimensionality, etc. Thus, a foundational insight of object-oriented ontology emerges: the object itself must be in some way malleable because it allows for countless different permutations of itself to manifest yet all the while remaining totally unchanged at the ontological level.

Seeking to control this irrepressible ontological essence, the protagonists of each of the following novels will ultimately fail due to the concept of entropy, which is “the logarithm of the number of ways of arranging things in the system” (Schroeder 75). As the protagonists introduce new objects onto their lives’ stages, they lose control due to no fault of his own but because “a spontaneous process [i.e., an object manifesting] is always accompanied by an increase of entropy of the system and its surroundings” (Vince 92). As a measure of chaos possible in a given system, an increase in entropy results from objects asserting their own real qualities within actuality, regardless of a subject’s desire to suppress them. There is no way to predetermine what objects will actualize which qualities at any given time. Therefore, chaos is the unpredictable nature of reality, which results from objects asserting real qualities into the sensual ether; these qualities may or may not perturb other objects, thereby actualizing the world irrespective of any

plan or predictable structure. The consequence of this reality is that a seemingly minor change in actuality (e.g., an object manifesting) can have profound effects on life as we know it.

On this last point, I would like to provide a few examples to emphasize the magnitude of change that occurs merely by the emergence of a single object within actuality. For example, a dog may be introduced into a home as merely a dog, but with it may come companionship, responsibility, protection, and cross-species symbiosis—all of which are objects for each bears real qualities recognizable in actuality through interaction with a subject. For the mail carrier, perhaps with this dog comes great fear and a change in postal route. Or one day the dog may come home with fleas, and later a full-blown infestation occurs, which results in the house becoming a tented fumigation site replete of pesticides, applicators, and filtration units. This experience results in memories of those involved, and each memory may be associated with different qualities; some may be jovial, others cumbersome. With the addition of a single dog, new objects necessarily manifest in countless and varying forms depending on the how the subject perceives the objects' real qualities. In other words, objects always appear in concert with other objects, even when they appear to manifest individually because an object perturbs different subjects in different ways, which results in the construction of new objects, through new perspectives, and which therefore result as a construction of a new reality. Whether these objects appear within the heart, mind, or home of a given subject is of little concern here because, as Harman argues, “[the] point is not that all objects are equally real, but that they are equally *objects*” (5).

When two real objects interact with each other, at least four additional objects actualize: the two resulting objects as apprehended by the other and two sensed-selves that occur in distinguishing oneself from another. This is particularly problematic for each of the protagonists

yet to be discussed, because they each have a single identity that they wish to exhibit. As none of these objects (or identities) can be fully ascertained for what they are and what they are capable of actualizing, they exhibit ontological opposition to being fully controlled (as object's whose thing-power is completely subsumed by subjective intent). On account of persisting through time, every object produces innumerable manifestations of real and sensual qualities that affect other objects in observable and unobservable ways. This results in an explosive increase of factors (i.e., chaos) that would need to be controlled if a subject sought to influence others' perception of reality. Given that proliferation through time requires an object continually to actualize real qualities, existence through time necessarily entails increased disorder on account of the innumerable objects this persistence brings about as local manifestations.

In the following example, three objects are shown to be capable of manifesting many different experiential realities through the emission of real qualities. If three objects were present, twenty-seven additional objects would actualize, which can be represented by the equation as $x + x^3$, in which x is the number of objects present. With human objects, this explanation of entropy is too simple because many more objects can be realized. Here, a chart is helpful to show the potential identities of three objects existing concurrently:

In addition to any given number of objects, the total number of objects that may result as local manifestations is a power of three. Each of these objects is an object from the perspective of another object, and these phrases can be read as "Object A's conception of A" or "Object A's conception of B's A." Because A never has access to B's perception of A, A can never accurately determine what real qualities will manifest when this new object emerges, and this creates disorder that cannot be nullified by intent alone. This is precisely why Gatsby fails in his attempts to shape his reputation according to his ego.

Table 1. Idiosyncratic Identity

Point of View of Human Object	A	B	C
	A's A	A's B	A's C
	B's A	B's B	B's B
	C's A	C's B	C's C
	A's (B's A)	A's (B's B)	A's (B's C)
	B's (A's A)	B's (A's B)	B's (A's C)
	C's (A's A)	C's (B's B)	C's (B's C)
	A's (C's A)	A's (C's B)	A's (C's C)
	B's (C's A)	B's (C's B)	B's (C's C)
	C's (B's A)	C's (B's B)	C's (B's C)

Beyond Feeling: The Combinatory Prowess of Affect

Having thus emphasized the ontological nature of the object and mused upon the cross-dimensional communication between the virtual and the actual, it is now important to explore how this transmission of information operates and, therefore, how time is constructed through recognizing change, which I attribute to affect. According to Gregory J. Seigworth and Melissa Gregg, “Affect arises in the midst of *in-betweenness*: in the capacities to act and be acted upon,” which mandates the existence of at least two objects interacting in order for affect to take place (1). Furthermore, they argue,

Affect can be understood then as a gradient of bodily capacity—a supple incrementalism of ever-modulating force-relations—that rises and falls not only along various rhythms and modalities of encounter but also through the troughs and sieves of sensation and sensibility, an incrementalism that coincides with belonging to compartments of matter of virtually any and every sort. (2)

In other words, physical matter, which always exists as objects whether sensible or not, affects other objects via interaction. The primacy of an object within the virtual proper, or the endo-structure of the object to use Levi Bryant's term, necessarily entails change or affect when two or more objects interact.

In addition to an object's existence independent of the mind, objects affect other objects on an ontological level, and the human has no ability to suppress such interaction. When an object perturbs (affects) another object, a point of confrontation actualizes, upon which the laws of the physical universe manifest. For instance, when a photon is fired into an electron cloud to reveal its location, it perturbs (affects) the electron by allowing its sensual qualities to be perceived in actuality. The affective process, which occurs during the firing of the photon and the measurable existence it reveals, is lost within time, but evidence for which is available through the data received and recorded: position and time of confrontation, for instance. My point is that affect is an invisible process that cannot be directly observed. Instead, we receive evidence of affect by means of the local manifestations that come to be actualized. Affect is invisible because its only evidence for existence results in the creation of new, localized objects within actuality. In short, former objects disappear in actuality as they become new sensual objects. When memory allows for a new object to be recognized as a contemporaneous permutation of another object, the mind recognizes the change that occurs via new sensual qualities, and this accounts for the passing of time and our being able to record it. An ontological understanding of time via affective actualization is necessary for understanding the total perceptual object in Chapter III.

Although affect is often used as a synonym for emotion, herein I deploy a more general definition of the term: to affect is to cause change. If a thing could be isolated within the virtual

proper as a quantum totally isolated from other objects, including an imagined perceptive subject, it could not undergo any change whatsoever. In virtual proper being, if an object exists only by itself, no other factor would exist to modulate it because it would be cut off entirely from the existence of other objects, including itself. It would remain withdrawn and fail to actualize. Given that virtual proper being exists outside time and space, an object therein cannot be said to age or even experience the gravitational pull of other objects, which exist only within the actual. If this were to happen, the object would become an intermediary, to use Bruno Latour's term, which "is what transports meaning or force without transformation: defining its inputs is enough to determine its outputs" (39). By thinking of an object within the virtual proper as an intermediary, its "inputs" would be the non-enumerated, non-spatial, non-temporal substance of the object, and since we consider this object as a single quantum, its parts are unified and thus undifferentiated. Such an object would emit its real qualities into the sensual ether, but without another object with which to interact, no affect is possible. As an intermediary, this object would be totally withdrawn from all other objects. Such an intermediary within the virtual proper would completely defy human actualization, which is why it is more appropriate to discuss intermediaries within the actual than the virtual.

However, if a real object is considered to be a mediator, its sensual qualities can be received by another object and translated into information. In fact, its relationship with other objects is what makes it a mediator, whose "input is never a good predictor of [its] output; [its] specificity has to be taken into account every time. Mediators transform, translate, distort, and modify the meaning or the elements they are supposed to carry" (Latour 39). Even a simple igneous rock can translate or distort meaning. If one were to wear away a portion of a rock with a diamond-edged file, the affective process is signified as the file's interaction with rock, the act of

abrasion. Upon finishing, if one were to destroy the file and scatter the rock's sediment, leaving only the modified rock, evidence of informational translation will be visible via the rock's physical appearance. The new information regarding the physical nature of the object can be ascertained by sense data (e.g., sight or touch), which then must be translated by a mind into anthropocentric understanding. In actuality, although the file may be gone, the information from the act (i.e., filing away a portion of the rock's surface) remains imprinted upon the rock's surface; as a result, it becomes a new manifestation of the same real object but with additional qualities and capabilities. This will be most noticeable in the bodies of ranch workers discussed in Chapter IV. It may be better to speak of a real object's role as a mediator within the virtual proper rather than within actuality because objects within actuality, by nature are too extensively imbricated to extrapolate. In actuality, granted a large enough scope of objects, all objects could be described as mediators because conjectures can be made as to how a single atom in conjunction with other objects, for instance, can destroy all life in a given area (e.g., a nuclear weapon eradicating all life).

In a domain comprising at least two objects, affective change is unavoidable so long as the qualities of each object interact with one another and have the ability to transfer information to one another. Recall that the file and rock are able to transmit information to one another, which can then be recorded in the physical structure of the object as an apparent memory or history. This affective interaction appears intrinsic to all objects, for all things (even quarks and neutrinos), no matter how small and seemingly inconsequential, are capable of engaging with other elements, thus allowing for the transmission of information in some way. Thus, objects have an affective capacity that Jane Bennett refers to as "thing-power," which is the intrinsic ability to exist within all things—animate and inanimate, organic and inorganic alike. This

persistence to exist results in myriad local manifestations that often appear to be distinct from each other, a process by which objects perpetuate themselves in some variation of the original object. For instance, an aged oak may no longer be a seed, but the seed has indeed become the oak by means of interacting with countless other factors in the environment (e.g., water, sunlight, nutrients, etc.). As the seed begins to germinate by means of having been planted within fertile soil, information has been transmitted between the seed and these factors and has been recorded in the cracked structure of the seed's shell, its sprouts, and so forth. Here, it is important to acknowledge the trans-corporeal nature of objects and their environment: since there is a continuous flow of affective change between all objects within a given environment, the demarcated boundaries between bodies seems to dissolve. In different ways, Bennett's notion of thing-power will be addressed in each of the following chapters as the affective glue that combines seemingly distinct objects into assemblages.

According to Baruch Spinoza, "Any thing [sic] whatsoever, whether it be more perfect or less perfect, will always be able to persist in existing with that same force whereby it begins to exist, so that in this respect all things are equal" (qtd. in Bennett 2). Here, Spinoza describes "thing-power" to borrow Bennett's term, as an ontological capacity to exist and to maintain existence while possessing the agency to affect other things, as well as being able to be affected. This indicates that matter that goes through a transformation in physical or chemical form continues to exist in altered physical and chemical states. Although this applies foremost to actuality, virtual objects exhibit a similar thing-power, even if they fail to actualize. This visible thing-power of non-actualized objects will be a major focus of Chapter II.

By using a vague term such as "thing-power," we speak of an alien process of interaction that cannot be adequately grasped by anthropocentric observation. Thing-power, being an

immeasurable force within the object, can be considered the collected real qualities of an object. When this power perturbs another object, information is transmitted between the objects through local manifestation. As new objects materialize as local manifestations, there are immediate effects in actuality by the emergence of the matter of the encounter, as well as the time and space of its confrontation. It is only after these initial perturbations actualize certain sensual qualities of the subject in actuality, that a subject assumes shape and positionality in relation to these new local manifestations. According to Massumi, “Linear time, like position-gridded space, would be emergent qualities of the event of the world’s self-relating” (15).

Massumi’s term, self-relating, is similar to my understanding of self-othering as an ontological method of recognizing oneself as distinct from other objects. In a sense, I only recognize the physical termini of my body when they come into contact with other surfaces. For instance, my hand becomes a recognizably distinct thing when it is placed upon or viewed against a physical backdrop, such as a wall. Recognizing the presence of the wall seems to assert an environmental truth: *this* is *not* my hand and, therefore, my hand is *not this*. Massumi’s logic represents local manifestations of actuality as four-dimensional checkpoints that result from objects perturbing one another in the virtual proper. As such, any perceived depiction of actuality that may result is an artificial checkpoint to conceive the reality of a quantum object’s non-spatial, non-temporal active reality. Here, the electron analogy is helpful: dynamic quantum behavior presupposes latent stasis in actuality. Once an object manifests within actuality, its emergence as concrete matter serves as a metaphor for the reality of its existence.

With self-relating considered an ontological imperative to constructing a sense of self, Massumi emphasizes the dynamic nature of objects over concreteness as defining ontological features: “The issue, after sensation, perception, and memory, is affect ... For Spinoza, the body

was one with its transitions. Each transition is accompanied by a variation in capacity: a change in which powers to affect and be affected are addressable by a next event and how readily addressable they are ... as futurities” (15). In other words, things are not as they appear to be; in reality, their virtual proper being is presupposedly dynamic, not static. The real quality of the object appears to be in this transitional state, rather than the stasis imposed by an interloping object’s perturbation.

This breakdown of an object’s local and temporal positionality results in viewing transition as a real component of an object’s virtual proper being. Here, affect is the alien transitioning that occurs when dynamic objects perturb one another, whose contingent change presupposes depiction in actuality (e.g., self-relating). If affect, movement, and change were subordinate to position, movement within actuality would not be possible. Massumi explains this using Zeno’s arrow as an example, indicating that if space were concrete, it would have to be infinitesimally divisible, which would impose a literal impasse for all moving objects within actuality. “If the arrow occupies a first point along its path, it will never reach the next—unless it occupies each of the infinity of points between. Of course, it is the nature of infinity that you can never get to the end of it. The arrow gets swallowed up in the transitional infinity” (6).

Ultimately Massumi rejects that motion is secondary to positionality on account of Zeno’s logic. He implies that its path is real but abstract: “It doesn’t stop until it stops: when it hits the target. Then, and only then, is the arrow in position. It is only after the arrow hits it [sic] mark that its real trajectory may be plotted. The points or positions really appear retrospectively, working backward from the movement’s end” (6).

Although movement through space and time occurs in actuality, I argue that it does not exist as a continuous, fluid experience as we have grown to understand it. According to

physicists Tipler and Llewellyn, “[W]e can never precisely specify both the position and momentum (and therefore velocity) at the same time. We can therefore never specify the initial conditions precisely, and cannot assign a definite position and momentum to the particle” (255) because initial location could be considered a real quality that requires interaction with another real object to be translated into information. Position, then, is determined by translating how real qualities interact with other objects. Considering the limitations imposed by infinitesimally discrete space, I argue that all movement makes use of quantum leaps between positions, which has been informed by Massumi’s argument that movement can only be determined once it has ceased. In order for ontological movement to exist irrespective of actuality and therefore unfettered from the physical laws of the universe, movement must be considered non-spatial. Although an object’s trajectory may seem positioned in time and space, this results from perturbations that lead to actualization. When a quantum particle changes location, it teleports to another place, and movement can be inferred in terms of direction and speed by recording the data of the approximate points of origin and destination. In actual life, we do not observe visible objects as teleporting because our vision allows us to view only a small portion of the visible universe. For instance, objects smaller than a common period become nearly invisible to the naked eye. Concerning movement of particles, miniscule changes in location (i.e., quantum leaps) evade observation because they are too small to be registered empirically without the use of advanced technology. Even observable movement that appears to be continuous, the second hand on a Rolex for instance, proves to be composed of discrete ticks. To view this movement as non-continuous requires magnification. This understanding of movement is important for understanding how experience can be conceived of as an object in Chapter III. Returning to the electron as an example, it seems to be that all movement functions as quantum teleportation.

Finally, Massumi concludes, “The space of the crossing, the gaps between positions on the grid, falls into a theoretical no-body’s land. Also lacking is the notion that if there is a qualitative movement of the body, it as directly concerns sensings as significations” (4).

On this final point, I want to emphasize Massumi’s use of the words “sensings” and “significations,” which suggests that movement is captured for observation by sensual-graphics that are discrete in nature. In other words, movement is perceived in the same way we perceive a flipbook or hand-drawn cartoon: movement is a conceptual depiction of still images making quantum leaps. Each quantum leap takes place on such a small scale that we cannot view it with our eyes or with microscopes. As a result, motion is constructed within the mind in order to make sense of the traversing nature of real objects. Considering experiential reality as a flipbook is an essential component of understanding the total perceptual object and Gatsby’s attempt to control its actualization in Chapter III. Massumi seems to believe that the undeterminable nature of movement represents the virtual being of the object. In a sense, then, Massumi sees movement as presupposing position, whereas, I see movement as a phenomenological ambiguity taking place between actualizations. Whereas I describe local manifestation as actual objects, Massumi sees location manifestation as evidence of real objects. Although these understandings may appear to be at odds, they are not: each reading exposes a rift between the actual and the real that results from both space and time emerging as properties of objects. Only the subjective point of perspective is changed: to Massumi, movement better signifies reality because locality is suspect; to me, with positionality suspect from the start, both produce signifiers that are equally disingenuous depictions of reality.

By understanding movement outside the confines of space and time, we are now in a better position to understand the transmission of information from one object to another by

means of affect. Affect in the virtual proper is not continuous or continual. Affect does not occur piece by piece until ultimately a specified or anticipated change is made observable. Affect is not teleological. Instead, affect behaves as other quanta, making its changes instantaneously, irrespective of space and time. Affective changes within the virtual proper do not necessarily create recognizable changes in actuality. Whether significant or insignificant, affect within the virtual proper does not have a one-to-one correlation with that of actuality. Instead, affective changes are registered within objects and are then translated into sensual data, which materialize in some sort of local manifestation. This then leads to additional affective change as the world manifests for a subject. Depending on what objects are available to receive and record the data of encounter, the local manifestation changes. For example, if an affective change allows for a “good person” to become a “bad person,” this is only possible when the real object sensing this information is capable of making value judgments based on previously manifested actuality. For a mosquito, however, nothing about said human registers as a change in the object itself: man is prey, blood is food.

Affect occurs between two or more objects that serve as mediators, and always will occur on account of the nature of objects regardless of whether it is observed, both in reality and actuality. Alfred North Whitehead “holds that God harbors the ‘eternal objects,’ the universal qualities by which every entity objectifies every other” (qtd. in Harman 71). Monism suggests that every object interacts with every other object in actuality, but this does not hold in OOO ontology because for an object to be an object it must be observable by an object not within the collective whole. The universe as a monistic organism is not real because there are no objects to register its possible perturbations. This also applies to thoughts, which seem only to be perceived by the mind that thinks them but which actually register their existence in reality by perturbing

objects not within the subject's mind. For instance, the individual xenophobic thoughts of a politician perturb others when actualized through words and policy.

For the world to be a single monistic organism within reality, it would be necessary for a transcendent being that exists outside of our physical universe to observe the object, but if an object can only be viewed from another universe, it cannot be said to exist within its housing universe. René Descartes also believed that “only God can bridge the gap between” two substances or objects (Harman 71). Having been conceived about 400 years ago, these ideas use “God” as a suitable understanding of object-to-object interaction, but with the advent of quantum mechanics in the early twentieth century, we can attribute such bridges to affect and not God.

Having now come to understand affect as an act of transmitting information through change, I seek to distinguish affect more rigorously from emotional reaction and physiochemical impulse. If affect precedes the effects it produces, such as when I run (i.e., impulsive act) after being frightened (i.e., emotional state), emotions must be considered effects of an affective process. Granted that there are innumerable possible reactions to a given affect and that such reactions involve myriad other factors (e.g., mood, lunar cycle, historical context, etc.), emotions usually derive from experience and deliberation. For example, consider a person struck by an assailant. The accosted may momentarily pause to process the encounter. After recognizing pain and attack, it is not uncommon for an enraged reaction to take place after a moment of deliberation. In such a moment, we recognize the initial affect, the pre-cognitive change occurring after the blow in this case, as causing an enraged reaction to manifest. Morton argues, “A causal event is a set of relations between objects. All relations are aesthetic, not just ones between humans and objects ... ” because all objects *sense* change and transfer it into information (e.g., the rock and the file) (90). As Morton points out, “the one thing that cannot be

done to relations between objects is catch them ‘before’ or ‘during’ the event of their relating. As every good humanities scholar knows, meaning is *retroactive*. . . . If causality is aesthetic, then events only ‘take place’ after they have happened!” (90-91). Thus, if the assaulted becomes enraged after being struck, his reaction is secondary to affect, which has no direct correlation with local manifestation. Instead, objects emit qualities into the sensual ether. Once these qualities perturb a subject, the affective experience is translated into information: the literal conception of another object. However, what object emerges is contingent upon other related sensual qualities pervading the sensual ether. In other words, due to the innumerable qualities emitted from real objects, it is never absolutely predictable what set of circumstances (i.e., object) will emerge as a local manifestation.

Reactions and emotions as results of encounters between objects reveal a highly increased affective entropy, which allows for innumerable local manifestations to result that cannot be predetermined by total inputs to the system (i.e., objects within the TPO). Providing additional mitigating details, data, or objects within the situation at hand can result in a completely different reaction as a local manifestation of emotion. For instance, if the assaulted had begged the assailant to strike him or her on account of feeling guilty regarding a previous misdeed, the strike may have an alleviating effect on the assaulted.

Now, let us consider emotions as objects. If I were to paint a picture and successfully create a happy tone therein, a critic might discuss *happiness* within my work, despite there being no prescribed physical depiction of happiness and no recognizable artistic techniques necessary to capture it. Happiness exists as an idea, a concept, and a feeling. However, we can strive for happiness and make it a life’s goal, undeterminable as it may be. In doing so, because happiness is actualized (be it as an idea, an aspiration, an end goal, etc.), it must exist in the virtual proper

as an object for the reasons provided above. Although the constituent parts of happiness may vary upon its every local manifestation, happiness is a similar concept for all people, although individuals may assess happiness according to diametrically opposed criteria. Differences notwithstanding, lucid thinkers are able to differentiate between happiness and other emotions and recognize that emotions can manifest in unpredictable ways and situations (e.g., laughing during a time of sadness, being confused upon receiving a gift one had always wanted, etc.). What emotion results (read: what *object* results) depends on what objects are present during the moment of deliberation accompanying the affect. However, since not all present objects can be perceived and recorded as having been witnessed by a human subject, no collection of identical objects will necessarily manifest as the same new objects as a result, and this is due to the collective's entropy, which "is just the logarithm of the number of ways of arranging things in the system" (Schroeder 75). According to Schroeder,

Generally, the more particles there are in a system, the more energy it contains, the greater its multiplicity and its entropy. Besides adding particles and energy, you can increase the entropy of a system by letting it expand into a larger space, or breaking large molecules apart into smaller ones, or mixing together substances that were once separate.

In each of these cases, the total number of possible arrangements increases. (75)

My point is that any emotional response may be actualized on account of how the mind and body orders the objects within the totalized system. These may be predictable or unpredictable, but such affective processes *always* result in the construction of new objects that cannot be controlled according to idiosyncratic intent. This is what Morton means when he claims that "[t]he meaning of an object is another object" (90).

We have now rather deeply considered the vitality of objects, namely their irrepressible ontological existence and their affective agency called thing-power, which are the two major components of Norris's naturalism. However, this discussion is by no means exhausted. I am convinced that objects are far more dynamic than commonly thought in contemporary society, and this results in a more puzzling discussion of what constitutes reality in the twenty-first century. Aside from scientific investigation, which reveals molecular and atomic movement within apparently static objects, few disciplines accept the vital qualities of objects, and none, as far as I know, have done as much as object-oriented philosophy to reveal the productive force that all objects yield. We will now set aside our discussion of physics and philosophy in order to follow Frank Norris's non-teleological naturalism by creating an actor-network analysis of objects and the work they do within *McTeague*, *The Great Gatsby*, and *Of Mice and Men*.

Moving Forward

In Chapter II, I will discuss *McTeague* as Norris's warning of the dangers of possessive consumerism. Norris calls into question the static nature of inanimate objects and creates a world in which objects influence the conditions of reality. In order to do this, I will use a Latoulean actor-network to develop an ontographic depiction of characters as networks comprising objects that have their own thing-power per Bennett. By interacting with objects according to self-serving purposes and not recognizing the intrinsic value of things irrespective of their worth to himself, Mac becomes an animal rather than the man of high society that he would like to be. To contrast this way of life, Norris includes Mr. Grannis and Miss Baker, whose consideration for the role objects play in their lives helps enact a much happier fate.

In Chapter III, I will show how objects assert their own realities contrary to the protagonist's intention in *The Great Gatsby*. I will turn to the objects behind which Gatsby attempts to conceal the qualities of his real self, the vulnerable and pining paramour, but whose real qualities cannot be eradicated from actuality by human will alone. In order to emphasize the thing-power of inanimate objects, I will combine them in a Deleuzian assemblage, wherein each object asserts real qualities that expose Gatsby's secrets. This occurs on account of the irrepressible agency of objects to act in ontological ways. Although these objects, namely his wardrobe and physical appearance, automobile, and mansion, are intended to be monuments to Gatsby's ego that present an image of a man that he himself publicly authorizes, they actually defy the conman's purpose to use them as a disguise, and reveal real qualities that lead directly to his assassination.

In Chapter IV, I will reveal the real qualities of a real character that Steinbeck does not recognize within text of *Of Mice and Men*. To do so, I will deconstruct George and Lennie as individual characters to recognize them as a single trans-corporeal unit with virtual proper being. Here, I use Stacy Alaimo's term, trans-corporeal, to indicate a single body composed of many different bodies that only seem to be distinct in actuality. By considering Steinbeck's views on teleology and human progress and coupling these with his phalanx theory of the group-man, it is apparent that Steinbeck had a postmodern view of human subjectivity that is supported by object-oriented ontologists of today who recognize that objects in relation to other objects become new objects.

In Chapter V, I will explore what is at stake for literary realism as a genre in a world whose reality is inaccessible to the human and whose reality is increasing difficult to capture using conventional styles in literature. During his lifetime, Norris had argued that the novel was

the best medium for understanding the human condition. However, this no longer seems to be true. As new technologies reveal previously non-existent digital environments that human beings can only now enter, what we think of as reality has been augmented to include different levels of digital existence. Being unable to exhibit the qualities of digital media, for instance, is a major limitation of the novel as form. However, as the novel goes through twenty-first-century innovation, more of its vitality as an object will be revealed by crossing between numerous digital environments that contain numerous objects that perturb each other. Throughout the twenty-first century, the novel will be observed engaging in particular events across different platforms and as able to enact new realities. In a major reversal of roles, the text will be seen to give meaning to the readers' reality, instead of the reader's reality giving meaning to the text. This will have profound effects on rhetoric and storytelling.

Works Cited

- Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010. Print.
- Benson, Jackson J. "John Steinbeck: Novelist as Scientist." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 10.3 (1977): 248-264. Print. JSTOR.
- Bogost, Ian. *Alien Phenomenology: Or What It's Like to Be a Thing*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012. Print.
- Bryant, Levi. *The Democracy of Objects*. Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press, 2011. Print.
- Davison, Richard Allan. "Of *Mice and Men* and *McTeague*: Steinbeck, Fitzgerald, and Frank Norris." *Studies in American Fiction* 17:2 (1989): 219-226. Print. MLA.
- Harman, Graham. *The Quadruple Object*. Winchester: Zero Books, 2011. Print.
- Latour, Bruno. *Reassembling the Social: An Introduction to Actor-Network Theory*. New York: Oxford UP, 2005. Print.
- Massumi, Brian. *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Durham: Duke UP, 2002. Print.
- Morton, Timothy. *Realist Magic: Objects, Ontology, Causality*. Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press, 2013. Print.
- Norris, Frank. "Fiction Is Selection." *Norris: Novels and Essays*. Ed. Donald Pizer. New York: The Library of America, 1986. 1115-18. Print.
- Norris, Frank. "The True Reward of the Novelist." *Norris: Novels and Essays*. Ed. Donald Pizer. New York: The Library of America, 1986. 1147-51. Print.
- Norris, Frank. "Theory and Reality." *Norris: Novels and Essays*. Ed. Donald Pizer. New York: The Library of America, 1986. 1103-05. Print.

- Schroeder, Daniel V. *An Introduction to Thermal Physics*. San Francisco: Addison Wesley Longman, 2000. Print.
- Seigworth, Gregory J., and Melissa Gregg. "An Inventory of Shimmers." *The Affect Theory Reader*. Eds. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth. Durham: Duke UP, 2010. 1-25. Print.
- Steinbeck, John. *Once There Was A War*. 1958. New York: Penguin, 2007. Print.
- Stergiou, Christos. "An Interview with Levi Bryant." *Anarchist Developments in Cultural Studies* 2 (2013): 273-279. Print.
- Tipler, Paul A., and Ralph A. Llewellyn. *Modern Physics*. 4th ed. 1969. New York: Freeman & Co., 2003. Print.
- Vince, Raymond M. "'The Great Gatsby' and the Transformations of Space-Time: Fitzgerald's Modernist Narrative and the New Physics of Einstein." *The F. Scott Fitzgerald Review* 5.0 (2006): 86-108. Print. JSTOR.

CHAPTER II

AN ONTOGRAPHY OF CHANGE: MAPPING THE REAL IN FRANK NORRIS'S *MCTEAGUE*

In *McTeague*, Frank Norris writes of a dastardly dentist who is trapped between two interwoven environments, the natural and the cultural. Although this may initially appear to be a dichotomy, the natural environment actually contains the cultural environment; and, therefore, even the cultural environment can be said to be a natural manifestation of the world. On account of the cultural being relegated into the natural, the dominant theme of Naturalism, that the humans cannot overcome or control nature, will hold true within *McTeague*. However, Norris distinguishes the two environments for thematic development, namely that consumerist greed to acquire possessions leads to unanticipated character change. This occurs due to a character's inability to control the thing-power intrinsic to all objects. In a capitalist society of which Norris is critical, a person's identity is not solely based upon personal character but also upon ownership and the reputation that results from acquisition.

During the industrial revolution, objects produced as consumer goods became more accessible to the common citizen. Streamlined manufacturing processes and machinery decreased the costs of production, and this resulted in more affordable products for consumers to purchase. While this was happening with individuals on the personal front, American imperialism also shaped the identity of the American nation through the acquisition of new territory, which more abstractly illustrates how the consumerist role of ownership can act to construct physical dimensionality and therefore identity.

In order to warn of the dangers of possessive consumerism, Norris describes the roles that common objects play in the construction of abstract real objects that manifest locally in the

actual world. The most apparent example of this is the title character Mac, whose insatiable need to acquire items of monetary value signifies an unethical treatment of objects to build his ego and reputation. However, Mac is unable to transform into the man he imagines himself capable of becoming. Instead, it is due to his fatal flaw of insatiability that he becomes something very different, a beast. Consistent with Naturalistic themes, Norris presents a non-teleological view of the world that allows him to create a prime example of realism for this time period: despite the best laid plans one might have, as a creature of the natural world, a human is not sovereign and will ultimately succumb to death, the fate of all life.

In contrast to Mac's unethical treatment of objects that leads to his transformation into a beast, Norris presents a relationship between elderly Mr. Grannis and Miss Baker, who interact with objects without attempting to control them. On account of this, the thing-power of the objects involved combine to allow for a much more pleasant reality to actualize. When read in contrast to Mac's portrayal as a beast, this portion of the text promotes a non-teleological view that people can influence the qualities of their life through ethical behavior that recognizes the power of things to impact their reality. This starkly contrasts the title character whose impulse to control objects results in his ultimate fate, dying alone in the desert.

McTeague Objectified

Throughout the text, Mac is described as stupid and as transforming into an animal after consuming alcohol. However, alcohol is clearly not the only factor in this transformation, and it also seems to play a much less significant role than Norris claims. From the outset, Norris introduces other objects that help enable Mac's transformation: his "huge porcelain pipe" that when broken prompts Mac to engage in a fistfight, a "canary bird, in its gilt cage" that remains in

his possession until the final pages of the novel and that continually reminds the reader of Mac's self-imprisoning need to possess objects, and a "concertina," which seems to calm the beast within Mac but which is later sold against his wishes, prompting a fury (1, 2). For each of these objects, Norris attributes a literary quality: the porcelain pipe is a catalyst for plot change; the canary a symbol for the peoples' self-enslavement to capitalistic greed (i.e., being caged by gold, wealth, and power), and the concertina that activates a conflict between Mac and Trina reveals his capability to transform into a monster.

Rife with objects pertaining to American consumerism, *McTeague* undoubtedly is a critique of American capitalism during the industrial revolution. In addition to Mac, many characters are obsessed with acquisition: Trina (legal tender) and Zerkow and Maria (gold, saleable junk). In terms of contemporary history, the quest to acquire objects also extended to non-humans:

The year before *McTeague* was published was a watershed in terms of American expansion. As Walter Benn Michaels writes, 1898 was "the year in which the United States annexed Hawaii, went to war in Cuba, seized the Philippines from Spain, and emerged as an imperial power." (qtd in Quay 211).

Imperialism, of course, is a practice of issuing control over other peoples and territories. Considering themselves to be more cultivated than so-called lesser cultures, American imperialists sought to establish an American identity by eliminating differences within the country's borders and globally by imposing its culture in other places around the world. For Quay, "Cultivation . . . meant Westernization, and more particularly, Americanization—the effacement of ethnic difference" (211). By means of cultivation, it was hoped that there would be a "flattening out of difference in favor of a homogenous 'American' identity" (Quay 212). This

identity is predicated on territorial possession and annexation, and individuals shape their identity according to their interaction with objects similar to how nations do so, which I will now develop further.

At first, let us consider Mac as an object called “dentist” who ultimately transforms into “beast.” Norris attributes this transformation directly to alcohol: “Every Sunday he became an irresponsible animal, a beast, a brute, crazed with alcohol” (2). However, alcohol and its intoxicating effects are not solely responsible for his transformation, for Mac does not become violent until other objects are factored into his situation. For one, his profession itself and the objects thereof affect his transformation into a brute. Mac “had learnt [dentistry] after a fashion, mostly by watching [a] charlatan operate. He had read many of the necessary books, but he was too hopelessly stupid to get much benefit from them” (2-3). The interaction between his stupidity and his livelihood becomes apparent, and after a falling-out with his “one intimate friend,” Marcus Schouler. Marcus exploits Mac’s ineptitude and reports him for operating an unlicensed dental practice (9). The loss of his dental practice enrages Mac, and this is among the main reasons that Mac transforms into a beast.

In addition to alcohol and his non-lucrative profession, Mac’s transformation occurs in part due to a gilded tooth manifesting. “It was his ambition, his dream, to have projecting from that corner window a huge gilded tooth, a molar with enormous prongs, something gorgeous and attractive” (Norris 4). At first, this object is manifest only within Mac’s mind as his dream and aspiration, but it eventually appears within the novel in physical form. To Mac, the tooth as a marketing tool will advertise his practice and make him stand out among other dentists in the area. Having placed so much stock in the tooth as an object, it eventually comes to symbolize his practice and life on the whole: the tooth is only gilded—on the surface appearing to be attractive

but underneath far less valuable. When the gilded tooth finally does arrive, it causes a rift between Mac and Trina, both of whom desire objects whose possession embodies their identities. For Trina, this object is money, and for Mac, this object is the tooth and with it the possibility of success and reputation.

In addition to these inanimate objects, Norris introduces women as emerging objects, but this is not meant to say that he “objectifies” women in the common understanding of the word. Norris writes of Trina an embodiment of femininity, a conceptual object, a *perceived* object: “With her the feminine element suddenly entered his little world” (27). Eventually, Mac marries Trina, and it is this change in his identity as a married man that prompts his natural beast to actualize. When Trina enters his world as a feminine object, he assumes more opportunities to transform. Mac, whose stupidity is so detrimental to his interactions with others, is troubled by Trina from the start on account of his sexual attraction to her. After etherizing Trina for a dental procedure, Mac, anxious but hesitant, succumbs to temptation: “But as he drew near to her again, the charm of her innocence and helplessness came over him afresh. It was a final protest against his resolution. Suddenly he leaned over and kissed her, grossly, full on the mouth . . . [t]errified at his weakness” (31). Here, Norris’ use of the words *helplessness* and *protest* indicate that Mac considers Trina as an object that can be controlled according to his will. This is a man without equanimity in the face of perceived femininity: innocence and helplessness. Mac is an object in flux and affecting without conscience. This is a man transforming, which locally manifests new objects independent of his intention: an illicit kiss, a previously unobservable weakness, and terror. Furthermore, because Mac is “terrified,” this is a moment of intense emotion caused by powerful affects. As Massumi notes,

Intensity would seem to be associated with nonlinear processes: resonance and feedback that momentarily suspend the linear progress of the narrative present from past to future. Intensity is qualifiable as an emotional state, and that state is static—temporal and narrative noise. (26)

Here, resonance and feedback refer not only to sound but to all possible receptions of sensual quality transmission, which are experienced via sensing and decoded by the brain into understanding—often through language. The intensity of the situation terrifies Mac, which occurs not from the act of kissing, but from the circus of real qualities and qualitative states, such as desire, achievement, guilt, imprudence, *unrestraint*, and so on, that emerges irrespective of his influence. Given that every emotion requires converting some sort of aesthetic experience into information, Massumi states, “An emotional qualification breaks narrative continuity for a moment to register a state—actually to re-register an already felt state, for the skin is faster than the word” (25). Put more boldly, Mac is unsettled because he is experiencing a sensory overload of objects that momentarily overcomes him with self-doubt. Gilles Deleuze also describes the emergence of an emotion as follows: “(a) the perception of a situation; (b) the modification of the body; [and] (c) the emotion of consciousness or the mind” (qtd. in Probyn 77). He is terrified by his weakness, which is a new quality that manifests within his life on account of this interaction. His confusion is the narrative noise associated with the emergence of new objects and qualities. One such object is his expressive terror, which indicates a rift between what he thinks he is (i.e., a strong man) and what he seems to be (i.e., weak). This is a moment of affect, his transformation into a beast.

When Trina enters his life, Mac is overcome by desire to possess her. When he first kisses her, she is etherized, completely helpless and unaware of his actions. Although this

distresses Mac, he finds it thrilling to practice total control over Trina as if she were a possession. Later when she regains consciousness, he kisses her again, but she is afraid and tells him no. However, he presses, and “[t]he instant that Trina gave up, the instant she allowed him to kiss her, he thought less of her. She was not so desirable after all” (84). Surely Mac treats Trina as an object for his pleasure, but she is also objectified through conceptualization: at first she is the lovely, tempting woman before him but becomes lesser in his eyes by means of his polluting her with other objects (e.g., with his sexual advances and literally with ether), and his body upon hers is a type of territorialized occupation. Here, I could express that the sensual qualities that manifest during this scene of coercion are different from the sensual qualities of Trina-as-object within Mac’s mind. However, in doing so, I would neglect the issue really at hand here: Mac’s unethical treatment of Trina as an object, which denies her value as a person. Put more clearly, Mac procures sexual gratification from Trina against her will.

Although Norris presents this as a bit of a cat and mouse game, I cannot overlook that this is bodily imperialism. Mac must have her as a possession to bolster his ego: “But suddenly a great joy took possession of him. He had won her. Trina was to be for him, after all. An enormous smile distended his thick lips . . . exclaiming under his breath: ‘I got her, by God!’” (85). This is territorial behavior, annexation of a human being, which is evidence of his concurrent monstrous transformation. Considering Mac’s disinterest in consensual lovemaking a bestial characteristic, his transformation is revealed as already underway. Furthermore, neither of these incidents takes place on Sunday or under the influence of alcohol. Thus, it is fair to argue with the author: although it may have a tremendous effect on his behavior, it is not alcohol that makes Mac a monster. As Mac encounters other objects, he becomes increasingly more monstrous due to his inability to control how objects actualize to the world: innumerable realities

are possible, but his unethical interactions with objects allow less pleasant realities to actualize. In other words, when other objects are factored into the equation, more arrangements or versions of Mac-as-object become possible. Each arrangement manifests locally as a sensual object, but there is no way to predict which variation of the set will emerge, as this results not only from objects but from the affective interactions that take place among them. Here we have incremental affection in action, leading to Mac's animalization.

Although Mac's transformation is rather gradual, predicated upon the objects with which he engages himself, Norris shows a more expedient transformation when he writes of a challenge between Marcus and Mac to cram a billiard ball into their mouths. For Marcus, engulfing the billiard ball is a feat of human exceptionalism: "He caught up a billiard ball from the rack, *poised* it a moment in front of his face, then with a sudden, horrifying distension of his jaws crammed it into his mouth, and shut his lips over it" (emphasis mine; 57). However, Norris makes little attempt to humanize Mac during this scene, for his transformation is already in progress:

McTeague fell suddenly grave. The matter was serious. He parted his thick mustaches and opened his enormous jaws like an *anaconda*. The ball disappeared inside his mouth. . . . McTeague reached for the money and put it in his vest pocket, nodding his head with a knowing air. (emphasis mine; 58)

As the challenger, Marcus has the dexterity and cautious nature of a man who can "poise" a billiard ball before his face. For Mac, however, the situation is more abrupt and animal like, which Norris accomplishes by avoiding superfluous detail. The ball is not crammed into his mouth but rather disappears into his mouth. As a rhetorical strategy, Norris uses *fewer* words to show abruptness, which contribute to characterizing Mac as an opportunistic animal. Upon

accomplishing this feat, McTeague immediately reaches for his monetary prize, which is a non-meditative reaction—common of opportunistic animals.

In this section, Norris is able to link his critique of American consumerism to personal greed by showing Mac as insatiable in multiple ways simultaneously: he literally consumes an inanimate object in addition to receiving the wagered money. According to Mohamed Zayani, “Getting the money in the pocket is contingent on getting the ball in the mouth. What emerges is an ingenious quasi-simultaneity between openings. There is, in fact, a confluence between the distension of the jaws and the multiplication of value, between stuffing the mouth and filling the pocket” (209). Here, Mac profits from the bet, but subsequently, he is unable to remove the ball from his mouth by his will alone. Due to its presence alone, the billiard ball seems to assert its independence of human will simply by exhibiting the physical laws of the universe: an object at rest stays at rest until acted upon by an ample force. This is an example of how an object’s real qualities will continue to perturb an environment regardless of the intent of a would-be sovereign master. When it is extricated, however, it even seems to do so on its own accord: “All at once the ball slipped out of McTeague’s jaws as easily as it had gone in. What a relief!” (58). Here, Norris’ syntax suggests the ball has agency, as he uses the ball as the grammatical subject exhibiting engaging in physical action.

After this fantastic scene occurs, Norris continues to develop his campaign against irresponsible consumerism by having his characters consume more, but now he focuses on alcohol, the substance he blames for Mac’s beastly transformation into. Zayani argues, “Even the *denouement* of the billiard ball episode does not bring about an appeasement of desire but the stimulation of another oral exigency. The outcome of the excessive orality that McTeague experiences is an indulgence in drinking: ‘ . . . Marcus Schouler invited the entire group to drink

with him”” (qtd. 211). Here, it is important to note that Norris describes Mac as animalistic prior to his consumption of alcohol. Clearly it is not the alcohol that is responsible for this change, for this brutish behavior is evident in his interactions with objects of various sorts.

For Norris, eating and expelling are metaphors for consumerism, and, as a result, both culinary and pecuniary desires are one and the same for Zayani. *McTeague* is rife with images of mouths, mastication, and excretion, which help create “American consumerism” as a conceptual object for the reader. Thus, what one eats or places into one’s mouth becomes intrinsic to the construction of the character. Considering this, Mac biting Trina’s fingers is a disturbing issue to ponder because he is not simply biting like an animal, but trying to subsume her identity into his own. In real life for instance, consuming beans leads to metabolizing nutrients, which are then converted into energy or are used to create muscle. According to Mark Seltzer,

One of the most evident paradoxes of the insistently paradoxical notion of a “culture of consumption” is the manner in which a style of life is characterized by its excessiveness or gratuitousness—by exceeding or disavowing material and natural and bodily needs—is yet understood on the model of the natural body and its needs, that is, on the model of hunger and eating. (qtd. in Duvall 140) Concerning the billiard ball, Duvall states, “Not simply suggesting a profound individual psychopathology, [this scene] of what amounts to consuming without consuming also obliquely figure the paradox of the culture of consumption that Seltzer points out” (140).

Before concluding this section, it is important to note that Mac’s monstrous brutality cannot be justified by discussing the role that individual objects play in allowing inhumane acts to manifest. Instead of blaming objects as accessories to crime, the reader must focus on criticizing Mac’s manipulations of the objects, and not the objects themselves. For instance,

when the sensual qualities of Trina's greed interact with those of McTeague's perception of his poverty (as a conceptual object), he reacts aggressively and causes fights and misgivings to manifest within actuality. In this sense, two real objects interact and give rise to new objects, over which Mac has a choice regarding how he wants to incorporate them into his life: jealousy, injustice, dislike, and so forth. For instance, consider the lack of love that manifests in a late-night conversation between Mac and Trina:

"Mac, do you love me?"

"Huh? What? Go to sleep."

"Don't you love me any more, Mac?"

"Oh, go to sleep. Don't bother me."

"Well do you *love* me, Mac?"

"*I* guess so."

"Oh, Mac, I've only you now, and if *you* don't love me, what is going to become of me?"

"Shut up, an' let me go to sleep."

"Well, just tell me you love me."

The dentist would turn abruptly away from her, burying his big blond head in the pillow, and covering his ears with the blankets. Then Trina would sob herself to sleep. (323)

The repetition within these lines emphasizes Mac, Trina, and love as objects, despite the latter being used a verb and not a noun. However, the noun form of *love* does actualize when the reader realizes that Norris will not allow Mac to use the word. Therefore, the noun form is implied by the text because the text's real qualities exist irrespective of what is written. These real qualities actualize within this interpretation, yet paradoxically are not recorded in the text.

In addition to love, noise is represented as an object here, for Mac insists upon silence. Trina's questioning is a sensual object serving as an irritant to Mac; Levi Bryant may use the word perturb here, which indicates the interference of real qualities when they encounter one another in the virtual. Upon interacting with the sensual qualities of her protest, Mac becomes a new object, once again becoming less human and more animal, which Norris depicts with objects. When Mac buries his head in a pillow and covers his ears with a blanket, he plays the role of a frightened ostrich. But more interestingly, he uses other objects to stifle undesirable sensual qualities actualizing within the situation. This reveals his predisposed need for unethical control of environmental features. Here, Mac suppresses Trina's voice because her needs are unimportant to him. In doing so, he uses the pillow and blanket in an attempt to de-actualize her concerns. By blinding himself to her muffled protests, Mac ignores a problem that he knows exists. With self-concern as his only priority, he treats Trina unethically, thinking of her only as one to be won and not one to love. Also symbolizing the theme of cautious consumerism, Trina can be thought of as a one-use good: Mac procures her, takes what he wants to build his ego, and then discards her as waste.

After this occurs, Mac reduces the time he spends with Trina and begins taking long walks because he claims "[h]e liked to be alone" (333). Not wanting to see his wife more than necessary, Mac covers ground on foot as would a stray dog who only returns home to be fed: "Between breakfast and supper time Trina saw but little of him. Once the morning meal was over, McTeague bestirred himself . . . and went out" (332). Eventually, however, he is able to avoid going home for meals altogether:

All at once he developed a passion for fishing. . . . At noon he would retire to a bit of level turf around an angle of the shore and cook his fish, eating them

without salt or knife or fork. He thrust a pointed stick down the mouth of the perch, and turned it slowly over the blaze. When the grease stopped dripping, he knew that it was done, and would devour it slowly and with tremendous relish, picking the bones clean, eating even the head. (333-334)

Once again, Norris depicts Mac as animalistic: he finds his prey in nature; eats his fish without seasoning, utensils, or cooking apparatuses; and consumes the entire carcass—head included. According to Zayani, “The references to food and drink not only capture the grotesque character of McTeague in the most blatant way, but also discretely enhance the economic theme” (211). By having Mac revert to a more animalistic depiction of a human being, Norris distinguishes Mac from the overall economic culture of the United States and emphasizes him as a man who seeks to control the things of his world for selfish purposes.

At the end of *McTeague*, Mac finds himself in a death match with Marcus in the desert without water. In naturalistic fashion, Mac’s final opponent is the natural world. Here, Norris re-humanizes Mac to connect to a broader theme of misconceived human sovereignty over worldly objects. Norris achieves this by coupling Mac’s body to Marcus’ body and by focusing on the canary, which in this scene is remarkably non-human.

As McTeague rose to his feet, he felt a pull at his right wrist; something held it fast. Looking down, he saw that Marcus in that last struggle had found strength to handcuff their wrists together. Marcus was dead now; McTeague was locked to the body. All about him, vast, interminable, stretched the measureless leagues of Death Valley.

McTeague remained stupidly looking around him, now at the distant horizon, now at the ground, now at the half-dead canary chittering feebly in its little gilt prison. (442)

Like the canary, McTeague is encaged within Death Valley and sure to die. The gilt prison, the birdcage, is a symbol for natural life being controlled by the synthetic culture of consumption, represented in gold. As revealed through Mac's interactions with objects, it is not the alcohol that changes him into an animal. Instead, whether he would admit to it or not, Norris illustrates the power of additional everyday objects as catalysts for character change consistently throughout the novel. By focusing on tangible objects in a capitalist society, Norris indicates unmediated interaction with objects of value is capable of increasing greed, jealousy, and parsimony within society. An object-oriented analysis, however, perceives these concepts as objects themselves, and when uncovering the transformative acts that occur on account of the interactions between these objects, a network of non-teleological causation is revealed. Contrary to the author, I argue that alcohol is more than simply a metaphor for consumption and, therefore, the main impetus for Mac's transformation. It is but one object in an entire atmosphere of objects that gives life to the beast.

Object Liberation: Old Grannis and Miss Baker Relinquish Control

In contrast to Mac's monstrous treatment of objects, Norris introduces Old Grannis and Miss Baker who do not covet goods for their monetary value. Although the objects and artifacts of their relationship have a subtler influence on their behavior than gold does for the other characters, objects play as important of a role within their lives but with much more positive results. This is due to the couple's lack of need to control the objects of their daily lives.

The role of individual objects is important for Old Grannis and Miss Baker, two aging characters who have spent years living next to each other but who are initially unable to speak to one another due to crippling social apprehension. Within the text, things are shown to have an affective capacity that Jane Bennett refers to as “thing-power,” which “may be considered the affective quality of material things, which is “an ‘active impulsion’ or trending tendency to persist” (qtd. in Bennett 2). Persistence of an object is not the ability to resist changes to its being but the ability to continue to exist despite its local manifestations being in a state of constant flux. According to Baruch Spinoza, Bennett’s source, “Any thing [sic] whatsoever ... will always be able to persist in existing with that same force whereby it begins to exist, so that in this respect all things are equal” (qtd. in Bennett 2). Here, Spinoza describes “thing-power,” to borrow Bennett’s term, as an ontological capacity to exist and to maintain existence while possessing the agency to affect other things, as well as to be receptive to being affected. This will be apparent in the text, as objects introduced and removed from plot.

Before recognizing the power of objects to affect actuality, Norris introduces a relationship in which two characters have almost no interaction. According to Norris, “Miss Baker and Old Grannis were both over sixty, and yet it was current talk amongst the lodgers of the flat that the two were in love with each other. Singularly enough, they were not even acquaintances; never a word had passed between them” (15). However, upon the engagement of McTeague and Trina, the two wind up in each other’s presence, and their familiarity with one another is evident even though they do not interact directly. “For the first time their eyes met; Old Grannis trembled a little, putting his hand uncertainly to his chin. Miss Baker flushed ever so slightly . . .” (117). Here, both the stimuli and the effects are apparent: 1) Miss Baker’s and Mr. Grannis’s physical and emotional presence, and 2) Grannis’s trembling and Miss Baker’s

blushing. The affective process between the two and the objects that play a role in the process are not given. Although the process between the stimuli and effects defies explication, it is possible to discuss the objects of the process in a way that suggests why the characters' emotions are in flux, which is due to the emergence of new objects independent of their control or consciousness. On account of Old Grannis and Miss Baker's ethical treatment of objects, the two experience a much happier experience, which starkly contrasts to Mac's transformation into a monster.

When Old Grannis retires and sells the objects associated with his occupation, he finds the tacit relationship between Miss Baker and himself to have changed. This results from the absence of the items that had been previously been present, but whose thing-power continue to perturb the characters. Up until his retirement, Mr. Grannis spent his evenings binding pamphlets for a book-selling firm, and the items of this interaction formed the basis of their relationship:

They had come to know each other's habits. Old Grannis knew that at a quarter of five precisely Miss Baker made a *cup of tea* over the *oil stove* on the *stand* between the *bureau* and the *window*. Miss Baker felt instinctively the exact moment when Old Grannis took down his little *binding apparatus* from the *second shelf* of his *clothes closet* and began his favorite occupation of binding *pamphlets*—pamphlets that he never read, for all that. (emphasis mine; 16-17)

Although neither had been in the other's room, both are well aware of each other's schedules by being sensually receptive. They undoubtedly hear the sounds of moving objects making contact with other things through their thin walls, and they are able to build their understanding of one another on the behavior of these unseen objects. As Norris implies above, the two have based their relationship on the interactions of things and their resulting effects: cups clattering, stoves starting, the binding apparatus skidding along the shelf in the closet, and so forth. It is only when

these items are absent from Old Grannis's life that Miss Baker must alter her schedule to involve the unseen Mr. Grannis in her life again. In other words, when the objects change locations but still retain the thing-power to affect the environment of the relationship, the two must seek new ways of living in order to include one another. Here, it is the existence of objects themselves that predicate human activity, which contrasts to Mac's belief that human activity predicates the meaning of the object.

Here, Old Grannis and Miss Baker are shown to treat objects more ethically than the title character, which Norris develops through their willingness to change their interactions with objects, rather than control the objects as a means of controlling reality. As compared to Mac's authoritarian treatment of things, Old Grannis and Miss Baker show less hubris, and this allows them to come together with much more pleasant results. In the following excerpt, this lack of grandiosity is evident upon Old Grannis' retirement:

The absence of his accustomed work seemed to leave something out of his life. It did not appear to him that he could be the same to Miss Baker now; their little habits were disarranged, their customs broken up. He could no longer fancy himself so near to her. They would drift apart now, and she would no longer make herself a cup of tea and "keep company" with him when she knew that he would never again sit before his table binding uncut pamphlets. He had sold his happiness for money; he had bartered all his tardy romance for some miserable bank-notes. (323)

Here, readers recognize that thing-power is retained even in the absence of the objects in question. As Bennett points out, "[Robert] Sullivan reminds us that a vital materiality can never really be thrown 'away,' for it continues its activities even as a discarded or unwanted

commodity . . . [which is] *Thing-Power*: the curious ability of inanimate things to animate, to act, to produce effects dramatic and subtle” even in their absence (6).

Luckily for Mr. Grannis, his misgivings prove ill-founded when he is visited for the first time by Miss Baker, who is willing to take risks by shifting the orientations of the objects upon which the relationship rests:

He did not hear the timid rapping on his door, and it was not until the door itself opened that he looked up quickly and saw the little retired dressmaker standing on the threshold, carrying a cup of tea on a tiny Japanese tray. She held it toward him.

“I was making some tea,” she said, “and I thought you would like to have a cup.”

Never after could the little dressmaker understand how she had brought herself to do this thing. . . . [But i]t seemed to her the most natural thing in the world to make a steaming cup of tea and carry it in to Old Grannis next door.

(324)

Considering Norris’ characterization of Miss Baker, there is nothing “natural” about her decision to take a cup of tea to Old Grannis, for they had rarely spoken and had never entered the other’s apartment. Instead, one must acknowledge a force outside of Miss Baker’s control was responsible for her uncharacteristic behavior. This is the naturalness—the nature—of life, of which people play only a part, rather than control via human sovereignty. One might call this fate, as Norris does in regard to the incident in the stairwell. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, fate is “[t]he principle, power, or agency by which, according to certain philosophical and popular systems of belief, all events, or some events in particular, are

unalterably *predetermined* from eternity” (emphasis mine; n.p.). “Fate” may be an inappropriate word to describe this occurrence due to the notion of predetermination, which suggests that an ultimate source of agency is responsible for this happening. However, it is not the agency of a single entity such as God that has effected this action. Instead, Miss Baker’s courage and action, which undoubtedly are described as outside of her control, are effects from a *conatus* of interacting particles. Some concerted affect occurring between the non-action of Old Grannis’s previous occupation has manifested in her courageous deed. We can ascribe this action to fate or God, or we can utilize practices of affect theory to explain this emergence of uncharacteristic action. In this sense, what occurs is not necessarily an act of God, but what the Buddhists call the Dharma and the Taoists call the Tao—in short, the way of the world, the ability of things to enhance their power through concerted action and effected results regardless of human will. In this sense, this is an early example of non-teleological ideology embedded in Naturalistic work, which makes the relationship between this elderly couple particularly suitable for an object-oriented analysis.

As a result of this uncharacteristic behavior, “[Old Grannis] felt his awkwardness leaving him. He was almost certain that the little dressmaker loved him, and the thought gave him boldness” (326-327). When their ritual was disrupted, the conative body of their relationship in disarray, the assemblage of their interaction manifested and enacted its own agency to bring them together intimately. “It had come at last. After all these years they were together . . . They walked hand in hand in a delicious garden where it was always autumn” (329-330).

After a conversation with Maria Maracapa that precedes Mr. Grannis’s retirement, Miss Baker’s ability to relinquish sovereignty over objects is evident: “she went so far as to make tea for two, laying an extra place on the other side of her little tea-table, sitting out a cup and saucer

and one of the Gorham spoons. Close upon the other side of the partition [between their apartments] Old Grannis bound uncut numbers of the ‘Nation’” (248-249). Although nobody is present to take tea with Miss Baker, it is clear that she has Mr. Grannis in mind. In fact, her physical orientation in the room—sitting against the wall nearest to Mr. Grannis—is an effort to be closer to him. When Mr. Grannis retires and, thus, the objects of his profession are absent, he and Miss Baker must alter their daily routines to accommodate the other in new ways because the objects’ thing-power no longer affect the environment in their anticipated ways. In order to keep their relationship progressing, the two must incorporate objects in new ways. For instance, before Mr. Grannis retires,

between [four o’clock] and six Miss Baker would sit in her room, her *hands* idle in her lap, doing nothing, listening, waiting. Old Grannis did the same, drawing his *armchair* near to the *wall*, knowing that Miss Baker was upon the other *side*, conscious, perhaps, that she was thinking of him; and there the two would sit through the hours of the afternoon, listening and waiting, they did not know exactly for what, but near to each other, separated only by the thin *partition* of their *rooms*. (emphasis mine; 16)

Although these objects and their orientations may at first seem trivial, these are the enlivened agents upon which their relationship rests—agents engendered with the thing-power that creates their relationship. This is Bennett’s “vital materiality.” These unseen objects are to the relationship as queens and rooks are to chess. In this sense, these objects are imbued with a romantic quality—a binding affect that brings Old Grannis and Miss Baker together. Given the focus on thing-power here, it is fair to discuss this relationship in terms of the material as well as the immaterial. Indeed, their daily activities have been ritualized, and although one may not be in the presence of the other, there is a kind of dance going on, an affective, active coordination

between two individuals by means of manipulating the orientation of material objects, which also include their physical bodies. Although human intervention plays a significant role in enacting this dance, the objects (or missing objects) in question localize all the qualities necessary for this relationship to manifest in actuality.

In addition to the co-personal activities in which each character is involved, the everyday objects of their daily lives also exhibit thing-power that exhibit affective agency. When Maria arrives to collect secondhand items from Mr. Grannis to sell to Zerkow, Grannis becomes flustered as she asks about hundreds of copies of “Nation” and “Breeder and Sportsman,” which she would like to procure for sale. She tells Mr. Grannis, ““There’s just hundreds of ’em in here on yer shelves; they ain’t no good to you” (35). Now, it may be the case that these bound volumes are indeed no good to Old Grannis in terms of their content, for he “seldom read” ‘Nation’ (35). However, Grannis does not value his pamphlets as reading material even though “[h]e could not afford to subscribe regularly to either of the publications, but purchased their back numbers by the score, almost solely for the pleasure he took in binding them” (35). Up until this point, Mr. Grannis enjoys binding his pamphlets so much because he associates this work with Miss Baker taking tea; these are corresponding actions that serve to link them to one another on an intimate, albeit displaced, level. In this sense, by engaging in ritualized behaviors with things, Mr. Grannis and Miss Baker are actually being social in their own introverted, bashful ways, despite their bodies rarely coming into contact.

But ritualized behavior and the sacred objects thereof are not the only depictions of thing-power within the relationship of this aged couple. For instance, before asking Mr. Grannis about his pamphlets, Maria “presented herself at the door of Old Grannis’s room late in the afternoon. His door stood a little open. That of Miss Baker was ajar a few inches. The two old people were

‘keeping company’ after their fashion” (34). Although at this point in the novel, neither character has ever spoken to the other, this practice serves as their way of being as open as they feel comfortable being. Here, one might argue that the doors have no thing-power of their own, but they definitely play a major role in the way these two communicate. By leaving their doors ajar, the characters show that they have interest in one another’s lives, even if they cannot work up the courage to make inquiry. By transforming closed doors into open doors, they reveal the communicative power of the doors themselves. In other words, that a door is imbued with such power suggests that the object itself has the capacity to exhibit communicative properties. If a door is imbued with a message and actually communicates that message, it does in fact have thing-power that is rendered manifest, which “is both to receive and to participate in the shape given to that which is received. What is manifest [i.e., a communicative propensity] arrives through humans but not entirely because of them” (Bennett 17). This is surely the case for the door, which functions as an actant that “never really acts alone. Its efficacy or agency always depends on the collaboration, cooperation, or interactive interference of many bodies and forces” (Bennett 21).

To understand the collaborative agency of objects, it is helpful to understand orientation, which Sara Ahmed defines as “how the world acquires a certain shape through contact between bodies that are not in a relation of exteriority” (234). To clarify this point, these bodies exist and relate within a larger but inaccessible interior, bodies that coordinate as part of a larger whole. Furthermore, “[t]o sustain such an orientation would mean certain objects must be available to [the subject of the orientation]” (234-235). In *McTeague*, the shape that takes form is the relationship that results from the orientations of things within the characters’ lives. Ahmed recognizes the importance of the orientation of objects to substantiate a relationship. Using a

table as an example, she states, “If we do things on tables, then tables are effects of what we do” (235). In other words, it is the manipulation of the objects via a process that makes a table a table because “what we do with the table or what the table allows us to do is essential to the table” (244). This logic is identical to that of descriptivist linguistics: use determines meaning. Similarly in *McTeague*, it is the intentional manipulation objects’ orientation that allows the relationship between Old Grannis and Miss Baker to actualize. Norris uses these things (e.g., the tea, cups, binding apparatus, etc.) to create a larger body—that is, the relationship that manifests by the shifting orientations of tangible things. Thus using Ahmed’s logic, what Old Grannis and Miss Baker do with their things actualizes the relationship as an object. When these objects are manipulated, they reveal the dimension that defines the relationship. In other words, their relationship embodies all the things within their respective apartments and vice versa.

It may be helpful to consider the objects within this relationship not as commodities but as provided services. By shifting the orientations of their things, Old Grannis and Miss Baker appear to engage in a type of non-monetary commerce. This commerce, as an act without a central governing agent, denotes a sort of economy of things wherein more interaction must be made with fewer items. Each provides the other with a service, which allows for conceptual objects, such as happiness, contentment, communication, etc., to occur as actual things. For instance, Miss Baker may make herself a cup of tea, which is audible through the thin partition, and thus “trade” this action with Mr. Grannis. He receives this message and responds with one of his own by noisily sliding his binding apparatus off a shelf. In providing auditory services to the other, there is a kind of give-and-take occurring between the two, which allows their relationship to actualize. According to Karl Marx, “[C]ommodities are made up of two elements, ‘matter and labor,’ the latter being ‘changing the form of matter’” (qtd. in Ahmed 241). When Miss Baker

fills a tea kettle with water, heats it on the stove, allows it to steep in the tea cup, and then orients herself near Old Grannis, she has changed matter (e.g., the leaves, water, and cup) into a relationship by means of labor. In this sense, her labor changes matter to expose real qualities of their relationship. Likewise, Mr. Grannis does the same with his pamphlets, binding machine, and work table. Such as in the sale of commodities or stocks, these unseen trades are the evidentiary co-incidents of their relationship. In Ahmed's words, "To 'co-incide' suggests how different things happen at the same moment, a happening which brings things near to other things, whereby the nearness shapes the shape of the [relationship]" (240).

By exploring how the shifting orientations of objects reveal previously unactualized qualities of their relationship, I have conferred upon them a certain vitality—a lifelikeness attributed to what typically is considered inanimate. In doing so, I have argued that objects contribute to important actions that bring Old Grannis and Miss Baker together, despite the proximal displacement of their physical bodies. Considering the activeness of these objects, one can consider these seemingly inanimate objects to be what Bruno Latour has named "actants." Bennett defines this term as "a source of action that can be either human or nonhuman; it is that which has efficacy, can *do* things, has sufficient coherence to make a difference, produce effects, alter the course of events. It is 'any entity that modifies another entity in a trial,' something whose 'competence is deduced from [its] performance' rather than posited in advance of the action" (viii). Considered as such, these actants can be grouped together as a conative body, a body that (either by its own will or the will of the characters who interact with these bodies) "strive[s] to enhance [its] power of activity by forming alliance with other bodies" (x). In other words, on each side of the wall there is a conative confederacy of things that seeks to connect with its co-inciding opposite on the other side of the wall. On account of the vitality or thing-

power of the individual objects, there is “the tendency of matter to conglomerate or form heterogeneous groupings,” which forms the basis for each conative body (Bennett xvii). To be clear, I will refer to each of these conative bodies as such, but when these two bodies interact or co-incide, I will use the term “assemblage”; this assemblage is a conative body consisting of two individual conative bodies.

Before moving on to discuss the action of these conative bodies in forming an assemblage, it is important to stop to recognize how these actions occur. First, it is important to objectify the conative body as a single collection of unified things. According to Heideggerian thought, “[O]bjects *are* outside human consciousness, but their *being* exists only in human understanding” (Bogost 4). Thus, it is problematic to discuss the activity of things without recognizing how we humans perceive them: “All such moves consider being a problem of access, and human access at that. Quentin Meillassoux has coined the term *correlationism* to describe this view, one that holds that being exists only as a correlate between mind and world. ... In the correlationsist’s view, humans and the world are inextricably tied together, the one never existing without the other” (Bogost 4). Furthermore, the result is that the agency of things, their affectiveness, is only accessible through an anthropocentric lens, for the human cannot understand an abstraction such as the gestalt of myriad individual units without accepting that human sensory judgments create the perception thereof.

That said, when these two conative bodies interact with one another, anthropocentric perception makes sense out of an inexplicable affective collaboration. However, as Bogost makes clear, the engagement between these bodies exists regardless of human perception, but it is that perception that allows the human to recognize the existence of these actions. This non-anthropocentric existence is what can be considered an alien ontology, an existence that is

impossible to experience or recognize without an anthropomorphized perception. Thus, to anthropomorphize this experience is to describe it through metaphorization. If the co-inciding actions, rather than the units themselves, exist regardless of human perception and beyond human comprehension, these actions can be considered “alien phenomenology.” Bogost clarifies this point: “As tiny ontology demands, the character of the experience of something is not identical to the *characterization* of that experience by something else” 63).

However, the interaction between these units seems to have little meaning until regarded anthropocentrically. This is evident when Mr. Grannis and Miss Baker meet one another in the stairwell of their lodging: “It seemed as if a malicious fate persisted in bringing the two old people face to face at the most inopportune moments. . . . Old Grannis, hastening to pass, removing his hat in a hurried salutation, struck [Miss Baker’s basket] with his forearm, knocking it from her grasp, and sending it rolling and bumping down the stairs” (218). The malicious fate in question is the self-organization of the conative bodies: Miss Baker’s basket of groceries and Mr. Grannis’s movement through a corporeal world—the latter influenced by his orientation with multiple units that include the kennel from which he was coming, the stairwell of their encounter, and the disruption of their natural means of communication through their apartment walls. No doubt, this is a relationship that is predicated on the existence and interaction of things, and as Norris notes by his use of the term “fate,” this conative practice is one not entirely of the individuals’ own doing. By viewing these co-actions of multiple things through the filter of flat-ontology (Bogost’s term for the equal existence of all things), human agency is only part of the larger scheme of co-action. In a sense, human agency is similar to a single dial on a DaVinci-styled cryptex of worldly happenings. The agency of each material cog of a thing increases in regard to the agency of other parts of the whole.

In order to regain a sense of equanimity after their encounter in the stairwell, “Little Miss Baker hastened to her room and locked herself in. She was excited and upset during all the rest of the day, and listened eagerly for Old Grannis’s return that evening” (219). At this point, Miss Baker returns to apartment, which serves as one half of the sanctum of their relation. When Old Grannis returns from his travels later,

[h]e went instantly to work binding up “The breeder and Sportsman,” and back numbers of the “Nation.” She heard him softly draw his chair and the table on which he had placed his little binding apparatus close to the wall. At once she did the same, brewing herself a cup of tea. All through that evening the two old people “kept company” with each other, after their own peculiar fashion. “Setting out with each other” Miss Baker had begun to call it. That they had been presented, that they had even been forced to talk together, had made no change in their relative positions. Almost immediately they had fallen back into their old ways again. . . It was a sort of hypnotism, a thing stronger than themselves. . . . It was their little romance, their last, and they were living through it with supreme enjoyment and calm contentment. (219-220)

After this disruption to their ritualized relationship had passed and their typical non-present relationship had been restored, their interaction regains a sense of normalcy that causes Miss Baker, at least, to feel more at ease. As evident by their awkwardness, the orientation of their persons in the stairwell was alien to them, but when they were able reconstitute their conative bodies, the resulting assemblage of their relationship once again became something with which they were familiar and comfortable. The irony present is that the two are closer when they are apart. As the alien elements of these conative bodies (i.e., Miss Baker’s groceries and

the mess they undoubtedly create) dissipate into the past, the two elders are once again able to reform part of the assembled relationship of which they have comfortably been a part.

The success of old Grannis and Miss Baker's relationship results from their willingness to accept loss of control over the physical environment. As aged individuals with decreased physical abilities, these two welcome the thing-power of other objects into their lives in order to increase their combined potency as an assemblage, which is unlike Mac who seeks to lord of the things of his world. By welcoming other things into their life and recognizing the intrinsic value of worldly things, Grannis and Baker become stronger rather than weaker. This vitality allows for the objects of their lives to act with more positive results as agential "confederate bodies."

Conative substance turns itself into confederate bodies, that is, complex bodies that in turn congregate with each other in the pursuit of the enhancement of their power What is at work here is what Deleuze and [Felix] Guattari call an assemblage. [This is my] term of choice to describe this event-space and its style of structuration. (Bennett 22-23)

Conclusions

In *McTeague*, Frank Norris warns of the danger of acting upon one's consumerist greed in a way that seeks to control personal items to influence reality. Because objects issue their own thing-power regardless of human effort to suppress it, a human is not impenetrable to the affective prowess of the seemingly inanimate. For Norris, this was a major concern for American identity as the nation progressed through the industrial revolution. Norris illustrates a world in which object formation is continually in flux with unsuccessful characters trying to control these objects and successful characters accepting the thing-power of their physical world. This is a

world in which matter acts in many ways and can be seen as a self-governing, self-forming enterprise of impersonal matter, which is Melissa Orlie's term for a non-egoic entity that serves not as a unified, agentic self but as "a complex of competing drives, each with its own philosophy and each seeking to become master on its own terms" (119). The competing drives that express and impart their own existence within the world is the conative capacity of things to maintain their existence by aligning with other elements within a given environment—an assemblage that acts in regard to the other elements therein but with no centralized governing agency. As a result, the individual elements become indistinguishable from one another in terms of action. Each conative drive creates an affect that allows for myriad effects to result. In the case of Old Grannis and Miss Baker, by including or removing particular elements, certain effects become more likely. This is the reason that Miss Baker takes tea to a man whom she loves even though she is normally too trepid to do so on her own accord. It is due to the agency of things simultaneously and in concert that influence her behavior in ways that she could not will on her own accord.

Thus, one must recognize what is at play here: the economy of concerted action, which is not ordained by a single entity but by numerous elements seeking to maintain and bolster their existence through affective confederation. Within such a theory, no things operate with complete autonomy, and this includes Mac, which is why he fails: he must work ethically with things, not try to control objects to enact a given reality. Individual stuffs exist within their own right and seek to maintain their existence through affective connection and collaboration; again, Bogost's term for recognizing this is flat-ontology, which forms the basis for ethical behavior in a capitalist consumerist system. For Mac, who values goods for the sake of bolstering his personal reputation or ego, the combination of these uncontrollable elements leads to him becoming an

animal and ultimately his death. For Old Grannis and Miss Baker, who do not seek to control the inanimate world and who value things for the activity they create, happiness and fulfillment are the results.

In this essay, I have emphasized and advocated for the mysteriously productive life of objects for the sake of providing a fuller character analysis than afforded by many other common theoretical lenses. Although I may not have represented a truly flat ontology wherein all objects are afforded equal ontological presence, I have stressed the power of objects in everyday life to shape the realities of our world. In doing so, I have created an ontographic representation of character change based on speculations of interactions prior to perception. This is a relatively recent critical filter and deserves further attention, for in the words of Levi Bryant,

If it is the signifier that falls into the marked space of your distinction, you'll only ever be able to talk about talk and indicate signs and signifiers. The differences made by light bulbs, fiber optic cables, climate change, and cane toads will be invisible to you and you'll be awash in texts, believing that these things exhaust the really real" (qtd. in Bogost 90).

Works Cited

- Ahmed, Sara. "Orientations Matter." *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*. Eds. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost. Durham: Duke UP, 2010. 234-257. Print.
- Bennett, Jane. *Vibrant Matter: A Political Ecology of Things*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010. Print.
- Bogost, Ian. *Alien Phenomenology: Or What It's Like to Be a Thing*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2012. Print.
- Bryant, Levi. *The Democracy of Objects*. Ann Arbor: Open Humanities Press, 2011. Print.
- Duvall, J. Michael. "One Man's Junk: Material and Social Waste in Frank Norris's *McTeague*." *Studies in American Naturalism* 4.2 (2010): 132-151. Print.
- "fate." *Oxford English Dictionary*. Oxford: Oxford UP. 1989. Web. 6 Dec. 2013. <<http://0-www.oed.com.catalog.lib.cmich.edu/view/Entry/68488?rskey=hNnE9A&result=1&isAdvanced=false#eid>>
- Gregg, Melissa and Gregory J. Seigworth. "Introducing the New Materialisms." *The Affect Theory Reader*. By Gregg and Seigworth. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010. 1-43. Print.
- Massumi, Brian. *Parables for the Virtual: Movement, Affect, Sensation*. Durham: Duke UP, 2002. Print.
- Norris, Frank. *McTeague*. 1899. New York: Penguin, 1982. Print.
- Orlie, Melissa A. "Impersonal Matter." *New Materialisms: Ontology, Agency, and Politics*. Eds. Diana Coole and Samantha Frost. Durham: Duke UP, 2010. 116-136. Print.
- Probyn, Elspeth. "Writing Shame." *The Affect Theory Reader*. Eds. Melissa Gregg and Gregory J. Seigworth. Durham: Duke University Press, 2010. 71-90. Print.

Quay, Sara E. "American Imperialism and the Excess of Objects in *McTeague*." *American Literary Realism* 33.3 (2001): 209-234. Print. JSTOR.

Zayani, Mohamed. "When Culinary Desire Meets Pecuniary Desire: Passions for Drinks, Appetites for Food, and Orgies of Gold in Frank Norris' *McTeague*." *Excavatio* 12.0 (1999): 207-215. Print.

CHAPTER III

THE TOTAL PERCEPTUAL OBJECT: GATSBY'S ATTEMPT TO GOLD-PLATE HIS BLUE COLLAR

Introduction

We now travel eastward from Death Valley to the valley of ashes, from a gold tooth signifying future dreams to blue eyes that watch over the present reality, from mythical golden dinnerware to a gilded Rolls Royce, from manmade monsters to the self-made man. We leave Mac, a man whose nature reveals him to be beast, to meet Jay Gatsby, a man who seeks to control nature but whose treasured objects assert their own testament to his lack of sovereignty. As with Norris' *McTeague*, Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby* illustrates a Latoureaan network of active objects—both human and non-human—that construct simultaneous realities. Indeed, *The Great Gatsby* is arguably even more fully focused on objects and their ability to escape recognition than in *McTeague*, as Gatsby is shown to be obsessed with silencing the truth that some objects would reveal about him in order to influence perceptions of him by others. Despite Gatsby's attempts to control the objects with which he presents himself, they *act*, they cause manifestations of reality to appear in actuality per the idiosyncrasies of a subject. With such a focus on object-to-object interaction, this attention reveals perspective, the interpretation of the sensual qualities of things, to play an important thematic role within the novel. At the helm of an assemblage of objects intended to be used to procure Daisy's love, Gatsby is ultimately unable to enact his ideal life by controlling the objects at his disposal because these objects' thing-power assert real qualities of the environment without regard to Gatsby's intention.

As we shall now see, determining which of an object's qualities best represents an accurate depiction of reality is a constant struggle in *The Great Gatsby*. Indeed, the central

problem Fitzgerald poses to the reader is how one can ascertain truth in a world in which all things are introduced as part of a perspective: a pre-existing narrative. In order to construct a suitable presentation of his image, Gatsby puts great stock in the importance of his automobile, estate, and the green light symbolizing Daisy's love as the beacon guiding Gatsby's life goals. However, these monuments not only play into the narrative that Gatsby wishes them to be a part; they also reveal aspects of his history that he takes great pains to suppress. By employing Nick Carraway as an unreliable narrator—or better, a narrator of limited perspective—Fitzgerald calls into question the problem of perspective: accurate perception of information does not always lead to the truth.

Although Nick claims to be “one of the few honest people [he has] ever known,” as the fictive author of the manuscript, he is the purveyor of misinterpretation (59). In order for the reader to distinguish appearance from reality, which is a major theme of the novel, Fitzgerald constructs Nick as an unreliable narrator, and uses phrases related to vision to emphasize the subjective perspective necessary for sight to manifest locally within actuality. The central question the novel raises is does an accurate report of appearances indicate an accurate depiction of reality? As OOO theorists and Fitzgerald seem to suggest, the answer is no—never. To offer a hint as to Nick's ambiguous reliability, Fitzgerald includes a metafictional element by which Nick acknowledges the authorship of a manuscript that bears his perspective: “Only Gatsby, the man who gives his name to this book ... ” (2). After Nick acknowledges the text as a fictive manuscript, his epigraph comes under scrutiny, for Thomas Parke D'Invilliers is a poet whom Fitzgerald invented as an influence on Carraway (2). Recognizing this subtlety is to be in on the joke with Fitzgerald, and it allows for the first theme to manifest: perspective shapes reality. Using a fictive epigram as a structural element of the novel reveals two levels for analysis: that

which actually happens within the fictive reality of the novel and that which Nick reports from his distinct perspective. As elements of the whole work, both are actualized elements the plot comprises. To Nick, Thomas Parke is real, but to readers he is not.

Immediately after the epigraph, the first sentence of the narrative proper makes clear that perspective is of the foremost importance in the novel: “In my younger and more vulnerable years my father gave me some advice that I’ve been turning over in my mind ever since” (1). Nick Carraway’s manuscript is an elegy to James Gatz, but Fitzgerald’s masterpiece is a deep and intricate story that involves the reader as much as the characters in probing if we can ever actually know somebody for who they are. The theoretically viewed “real Gatsby” differs greatly from the form that actualizes to characters within the novel. However, try as he may to present an ideal version of himself to the world, he is unable to restrict his real qualities from manifesting in actuality. And it is due to Gatsby’s insatiable desire to control the perspectives of those around him to shape an agreeable personality and reputation that he engages in an unethical treatment of objects that ultimately results in his death.

Influenced by Norris, Fitzgerald writes of objects that are increasingly active and catalytic in *The Great Gatsby*, objects that assert their existence through interacting with other objects. As in *McTeague*, the objects within *The Great Gatsby* influence the lives of the characters therein by disrupting the sovereignty of human intention. According to Clare Eby, Fitzgerald modeled much of his novel after *McTeague*, providing key scenes with objects such as hairbrushes and clothing playing important roles as evidence:

Strolling through her one-time lover’s mansion, Daisy first picks up, as *McTeague* does, her devotee’s hairbrush. While in gestures less vulgar than the Polk Street dentist, Daisy recapitulates his actions by “smooth[ing] her hair” with

the talismanic brush “with delight.” As was the case with Mac and Trina, Gatsby and Daisy’s romance is then conveyed through, and indeed displaced onto, the fondling of clothing. (Eby 131)

Eby’s use of the word “talismanic” is no accident here, as Gatsby is indeed interested in the notion of “enchanted objects” for their incredible usefulness in constructing identities (Fitzgerald 93). According to political theorist Jane Bennett, “[E]nchantment entails a state of wonder, and one of the distinctions of this state is the temporary suspension of chronological time and bodily movement. To be enchanted, then, is to participate in a momentarily immobilizing encounter; it is to be transfixed, spellbound. Philip Fisher describes this as a “moment of pure presence” (*EML* 5). According to Bennett, all objects foster the ontological ability to enchant other objects, so to use the term “enchanted object” denotes a phenomenological reality of objects affecting one another through interactions within actuality. To reveal the inaccessible workings of the ontological world requires a symbolic representation of the unknowable, which to use the words of Ian Bogost would be an ontography.

For Gatsby, Daisy is one such enchanting object that causes him to be “consumed with wonder at her presence,” which is also why he experiences states of wonder while staring at the green light that symbolizes his longing for her (Fitzgerald 92). To Bennett, the world is “a lively and endless flow of molecular events, where matter is animate without necessarily being animated by divine will or intent,” which is precisely the world in which Gatsby resides (14). Although he has teleological goals for the objects with which he surrounds himself, ultimately the animacy of objects cannot be subsumed by his intention alone because despite his best efforts, his identity-bearing objects in some ways act upon their own agency. The result is that in a world wherein objects create other objects through ontological interaction, even great humans

cannot suppress the agency of inanimate objects. This is a world in which objects in concert with other objects in their environment create the reality of which the human is only a contingent part. As Bennett reports, “Lucretian physics described a universe of atoms forever falling in a void of space; these primordial, at unpredictable times and in unpredictable directions, swerve slightly from their downward paths, bump into each other, and so form the organisms and entities of the natural world” (70-71). Applying this understanding of primordial behavior as quanta to the activity of actualized objects in the novel is helpful to understanding the unpredictable changes in agency that objects can experience. For example, a light may be just a light, but when it comes into contact with other objects (both physically and conceptually), new qualities actualize, which affect the world in different ways. For instance, when the light and Gatsby’s body are oriented to one another, his loneliness and feelings of dispossession actualize for the reader. The ontological activity of the object as described by Bennett as “Lucretian physics” accounts for objects whose identities are in continual flux by interacting with other objects and therefore defy the oppression of their real qualities.

Having been enchanted while showing off his house to Daisy, Gatsby flaunts his wardrobe by flinging shirts around the room, which ultimately leads to her weeping because she has “never seen such—such beautiful shirts before” (92). At first, it may seem odd that Daisy would sob on account of viewing Gatsby’s flashy wardrobe, but Fitzgerald’s use of color is meticulous and purposeful. For Fitzgerald, white is symbol for pedigree of wealth. Daisy refers to growing up with Jordan Baker in Louisville and links the color white with a nostalgic depiction of their past: “Our white girlhood was passed together there. Our beautiful white—” (19). Furthermore, Jordan describes Daisy as “dress[ing] in white, and [having] had a little white roadster” (74). Gatsby dresses colorfully, and this is the real cause for Daisy’s sadness: Gatsby’s

self-made success comes from a proletariat culture much different from her own, the American aristocracy. For Gatsby, his wardrobe is the regalia of the fabulously wealthy, which he uses to project his identity as a successful person. For Daisy on the other hand, his wardrobe marks him as alien to her purebred genteel upbringing and thus unfit to be her partner.

In the following pages, I will explore Gatsby's identity by focusing on the objects with which he associates himself in an unethical manner. Although Gatsby may be able to influence the perspectives of other people in the novel, he is unable to issue total control over all the objects his life comprises. On account of this, Gatsby's failure is inevitable as a theme of literary naturalism because the human being cannot overcome the entirety of the universe that contains it. To illustrate the extent of Gatsby's exaggerated account of his own abilities, I will introduce a concept of the "total perceptual object," which encompasses the whole of a person's perspective and which Gatsby foolishly seeks to control, as a new way to analyze plot and character. Finally I will turn to the objects behind which Gatsby attempts to conceal the qualities of his real self, the vulnerable and pining paramour, but whose real qualities cannot be eradicated from actuality by human will alone. Although these objects, namely his wardrobe and physical appearance, automobile, and mansion, are intended to be monuments to Gatsby's ego that present an image of a man that Gatsby himself publicly authorizes, they actually defy the conman's purpose to use them as a disguise, and reveal real qualities that lead directly to his assassination.

Constructing an Image to Influence Reality

As Gatsby introduces new objects onto his life's stage, more and more potential permutations of actuality are made possible because there is no way to suppress an object's real qualities from perturbing others and, thus, manifesting within actuality. His inability to account

for how *all* objects manifest in actuality is an example of increased entropy, which indicates the level of chaos that interferes with his teleological plans also increases. As a result of overextending the limits of his own personal agency, he loses control of reality due to no fault of his own but because “a spontaneous process [i.e., an object manifesting] is always accompanied by an increase of entropy of the system and its surroundings . . . Some energy is inaccessible to us, and this inaccessible energy is presented by the new concept of entropy” (Vince 91-92).

When any two objects interact with each other, they perturb one another by ontologically emitting real qualities, which are then sensed by the other. This occurs in the virtual proper, specifically the sensual ether: the non-spatial, non-temporal event space of reality. Resulting from these perturbations, a new object actualizes: the object as it can be experienced by the other. With this comes a new understanding of that object’s role in the world. Depending on what real qualities perturb a subject, actuality takes shape. If Gatsby approves of the qualities that come to be, he will use them to his advantage, but if he does not approve of them (e.g., qualities that reveal his middle-class upbringing or his illegal means of acquiring wealth), he seeks to suppress these qualities.

Without interaction of any sort, neither object in question could be said to exist. This is the phenomenological aspect of identification that takes place merely by more than one object interacting with another. If these objects are people as I have indicated above, the identity of the object in question is in part determined by the observer. With the emergence of this object-for the subject, which exists most prominently within the mind of the subject, it is clear that new objects and the permutations they manifest increase the amount of chaos that Gatsby would have to control in order to shape his life into a suitable reality. With hundreds of party guests at his home each week, there is no wonder why everybody seems to have a different answer for “Who

is this Gatsby?" At first, Nick attends one of Gatsby's parties, having been invited by the host but not having yet made his acquaintance. A short time after Nick arrives, he hears several people gossiping about Gatsby, and he begins to construct his understanding through these rumors. In only a half of page, Fitzgerald provides the following rumors, all of which function as identity-influencing objects: "Somebody told me they thought he killed a man once . . ."; "he was a German spy during the war . . ."; "I heard that from a man who knew all about him, grew up with him in Germany . . ."; and ". . . it couldn't be that, because he was in the American army during the war" (44).

After Nick encounters these rumors, he is able to uncover more about Gatsby's mysterious identity when he and Jordan Baker traverse the grounds of the estate and come to Gatsby's "high Gothic library, paneled [sic] with carved English oak, and probably transported complete from some ruin overseas" (45). It is here that Nick meets Owl Eyes, "[a] stout, middle-aged man, with enormous owl-eyed spectacles . . . staring with unsteady concentration at the shelves of books" (45). In this scene, Fitzgerald emphasizes the importance of vision and its role in constructing appearances by focusing on Owl Eye's spectacles, which have allowed him to observe astutely that the books are "[a]bsolutely real—have pages and everything. I thought they'd be a nice durable cardboard. Matter of fact, they're absolutely real" (45). Although Owl Eyes may have poor eyesight, his eyeglasses are exceptional because he is able to see what so few people can: Gatsby's mansion is subterfuge—a house of cards meant to flaunt his wealth in spite of his being bereft of Daisy's love, which as Owl Eyes accurately proclaims makes him a "poor son-of-a-bitch" (175).

Furthermore, Owl Eyes recognizes that appearance is of the utmost importance to Gatsby, exclaiming, "It's a bona-fide piece of printed matter. It fooled me. This fella's a regular Belasco.

It's a triumph. What thoroughness! What realism! Knew when to stop, too—didn't cut the pages" (45-46). Owl Eyes knows that Gatsby has not read his books because the uncut pages would make the book unable to be opened. However, it is likely that Gatsby never had any intention of reading this material, for as Owl Eyes implies, the dual purpose of the library's multifaceted camouflage helps him stand out from the lower class, as well as blend in with the aristocracy. As Nick observes above, the English oak was "probably transported complete from some ruin overseas," which further indicates Gatsby's attempt to connect himself with past riches and by doing so, distance himself from prejudices against the *nouveaux-riches*. According to Pamela Bourgeois and John Clendenning, "Like Belasco's world, nothing in Gatsby's world is real, but it all is experienced as real. Jay Gatsby is 'a regular Belasco' in that his library—and, by extension, his imaginary universe—is theater" (105). Here the importance between Gatsby and any actor is clear: the real person behind the character must be able to hide his or her real qualities under the guise of an alter ego. Like Gatsby's public life, "In every detail, a Belasco production created the impression of reality, and everything on his stage was designed to produce that illusion" (Bourgeois and Clendenning 108).

Further evidence that Gatsby's library is for show and not utility occurs in the final chapter with the entrance of Mr. Gatz, Gatsby's father, and the return of Owl Eyes. Mr. Gatz brings a copy of *Hopalong Cassidy* that his son had annotated on September 12, 1906, sixteen years prior to the timeframe of the narrative (173). If Gatsby had intended to give the impression that he had read the volumes in his library, surely the omission of active reading strategies would suggest a change in behavior and personality. This would be unlikely, as Nick describes Gatsby as still exhibiting compulsive behavior much later in life: "He was never quite still; there was always a tapping foot somewhere or the impatient opening and closing of a hand" (64). On the

last fly-leaf of *Hopalong Cassidy*, the young Gatsby had written an entire daily schedule that accounts for all but a forty-five-minute period in the morning. Most important are the last two items on the schedule (“Practice elocution, poise and how to attain it” and “Study needed inventions”) because the former indicates the teenager’s understanding of personal presentation in order to attain success and the latter how to make the money that would lead to future fulfillment (173). Owl Eyes is correct in his assessment of Gatsby: Gatsby doesn’t want to give the impression that he is remarkably well read but that he has the financial capability to provide all the resources he could ever want. This is no idiosyncratic fancy; this is obsession.

Following this schedule, Gatsby includes six “General Resolves” that reveal the habits he believes will help him achieve distinction among the New York aristocracy, among which is a goal to “Read one improving book or magazine per week” (173). Considering Gatsby’s economic success, as well as his short-lived romance with Daisy, the object of his affection and the beacon of his longing, it is likely that Gatsby lives up to his resolutions and schedules. Although he may not read a book every week, he must be an avid reader because “his elaborate formality of speech just missed being absurd” (48). This is a man who spends a great deal of time with criminals, and as evidenced by Wolfsheim’s pronunciation of “business gonnegtion” (70) and “Oggsford” (71), it is likely that Gatsby’s speech patterns have been modeled after formal writing rather than the speech patterns of his associates. Eloquence, of course, is part of Gatsby’s image and he takes pains to fine tune it at every turn in order to influence the qualities of his existence. This is not to claim that the real Gatsby is different from the performance act that he presents, for this is a core understanding of object-oriented ontology. What becomes clear is that real qualities of the real Gatsby defy his intention to eradicate them.

Showing signs of the budding theory of quantum mechanics, notably that objects only become actualized within the experiential world by interacting with other objects, *The Great Gatsby* presents objects and identity as woven together and often indecipherable, and this results in Gatsby's murder due to misidentification. Discussing quantum mechanics in *The Great Gatsby*, Raymond Vince points out, "Roger Penrose shows us 'a picture of reality in which particles behave like waves and waves like particles, where our normal physical descriptions become subject to essential uncertainties, and where individual objects can manifest themselves in several places at the same time'" (qtd. in Vince 93). Such uncertainties pertain to quantum theory and the Heisenberg Uncertainty Principle, which deal with the impossibility of determining position and momentum concurrently. This is what is meant by quantum ambiguity or wave-particle duality. For instance, upon first viewing Gatsby from the vantage point of his yard, Nick speculates to having witnessed Gatsby "stretch[ing] out his arms toward the dark water. ... I could have sworn he was trembling" (20-21). However, Nick is then distracted by the green light at which Gatsby is staring, which he later correctly presumes to be the symbolic object of Gatsby's desire for Daisy Buchanan, but "[w]hen [he] looked once more for Gatsby he had vanished" (21). Gatsby the loveless is an image that is not made available to many, but here Nick is granted a rare chance to view Gatsby assuming such an existence. However, as soon as Nick allows his gaze to leave Gatsby and fall upon the green light that so captivated his subject, Gatsby has the chance to de-actualize and return to the privacy of his secret life masked by objects. As soon as Nick allows himself entrance into the romantic world catalyzed by the green light, Nick loses the ability to apprehend the totality of actuality and, when he returns, Gatsby is nowhere to be seen. Having been glimpsed for who he really was, a man fueled by desire, the self-made Gatsby the Great slips into the night, which is one of his habits when his secrets are on

display for others: Gatsby and Tom Buchanan “shook hands briefly, and a strained, unfamiliar look of embarrassment came over Gatsby’s face. . . . I turned toward Mr. Gatsby, but he was no longer there” (74). This scene reveals a Gatsby starkly different from the ostentatious persona that he seeks to present, and this will grant Nick the opportunity to probe the subject of Gatsby’s identity deeper than any other character within the novel, though no less tinted by perception.

When Gatsby disappears from Nick’s sight, this is not an example of Harman’s withdrawal. All objects, including Jay Gatsby, are real and by their nature already withdrawn because their essence is presented only by proxy of their qualities. However, there are also *disengaged* objects, which are real and withdrawn but whose qualities also elude perception and, thus, fail to appear as local manifestations. This realm of disengagement is the location Gatsby wishes to send all real qualities associated with his lack of aristocratic pedigree and his poverty in terms of love. In the examples above, this is what happens when Gatsby inexplicably exits the scene. Withdrawal takes place according to the ontological laws of the virtual proper, which are neither spatial or temporal, and disengagement takes place within actuality. For example, the sound of a tree falling in the forest without a sensor to register frequency is disengaged but no less real than if a receiver were present, for the virtual existence of this tree can be partially actualized here within this manuscript, which is phenomenological evidence for its ontological existence: at some place in some time an undefined tree fell in an undetermined forest—this is real and hardly worth arguing against. Since the virtual event in question occurs in reality, which is irrespective of space and time, its occurrence cannot be refuted by lack of empirical data based off spatial or temporal properties. Similarly, although nearly entirely unactualized, some of Gatsby’s real qualities present themselves when Nick is able to look upon Gatsby’s body without the preponderance of additional qualities he seeks to emanate as a conman—prosperity,

cordiality, determination, drive, success, formality, and so on. When such superfluities are removed and Nick is able to see the longing desire within Gatsby, Gatsby immediately disengages and presumably, like the Buchanans at the end of the novel, “retreat[s] back into [his] money” where the real qualities of his loveless pining can hide behind the qualities of his outrageous wealth (179). This happens because, like Gatsby’s drive for success, Nick is momentarily suspended in time via the transmission of wonder between him and the green light as an enchanted object. While Nick perceives some of the light’s thing-power, Gatsby no longer becomes enchanted and slinks into the night unobserved.

Total Perceptual Object

Having now discussed how different objects play roles in constructing Gatsby’s identity, I would like to introduce the concept of the “total perceptual object” as a way to enter his mind. By seeking to control as many aspects of other characters’ total perceptual objects in order to make himself into the man he wishes to be seen as, Gatsby ultimately fails because he does not realize that objects have agency of their own that cannot be restricted from actualizing by his intention alone.

Put directly, a total perceptual object (TPO) is the amalgamation of every aesthetic sensation that one experiences at a given moment and includes conscious and unconscious perceptions. Starting with vision, it is easy to reduce everything that appears within the visual field to (mostly) individual objects. As I look around me now, I see a table cloth, window, late ’90s hatchback, and a few trees, but if I reconstruct my lens, I might see outsourced industry, protection from high winds, a sixteen-year-old’s pride and joy, or nature’s respiratory system.

Less abstractly, I could also refocus my attention to conceive elements of the home, the automotive industry, the biosphere instead of trees, and so forth.

Once one recognizes the amorphous boundaries of objects within the visual field, the identity of an object can be understood by inserting an actual picture frame within the subject's frame of reference. That which falls outside the marked space of the frame becomes unobservable. That which falls within the frame can easily be seen as a single image, such as with a framed portrait. However, if one were to move the frame closer to the observer, much more of the world would fall within the frame, and if the observer were to move the frame so close to his or her eyes that it encompassed all that is seeable, the entire visual field could be considered a single object, called an assemblage, which composed of countless other objects. In concert with one another, the constituent parts of this assemblage interact with one another to actualize the world of which the observer conceives itself to be a part. Combining the total visual field with totalized auditory, olfactory, tactile, and gustatory ability, then, accounts for the emergence of the total perceptual object, which manifests locally to the subject as his or her existence within the physical universe. Thus, for each discrete moment in time, the total perceptual object represents an object existing uniquely in a single frame of experience (discussed herein as an "ontographic frame"). In each passing moment, entirely new objects appear as single frames occurring in a series too rapidly to be distinguished from one another. In short, the circuit of continuously regenerating TPO's is what one recognizes as "life" or the "world," viewed as a single object forever in spatial and temporal flux. In simple terms, each frame of the TPO combines with all others, past and present in actuality, to create a distinct perspective of the world.

Now that we have come to understand the total perceptual object as a mode of experience, it becomes necessary to explore how it fuels the thematic aspect of the novel. As I have suggested previously, objects' qualities change given the perspective of the observer, and so the only limit to the object's identity is subjective creativity, the ability to register an object's qualities according to the idiosyncratic sensory abilities and cogitative practices of the subject. That said, sometimes it is not clear how a person views an object, and this is a major concern for Gatsby because he is obsessed with making a favorable impression on those around him—Daisy being the pinnacle of these associates. For any two characters, A and B, there are at least six identities at play: A and B (real); A's concept of B, B's concept of A (sensual); and A's and B's concept of self (sensual). Since Gatsby cannot control real objects in the virtual proper, he can only attempt to influence the local manifestation of sensual qualities. This proves tremendously difficult for Gatsby to accomplish because influencing sensual projections of *thingness* necessarily includes manipulating the interaction between subject and object (i.e., object A and object B). Thus, in order to assert a projection of himself as true or real, Gatsby would have to be able to alter the perspectives of everyone (i.e., everything) whose existence he perturbed. Being unable to do this, there is no question as to why Gatsby fails: as Nick tells readers, "life is much more successfully looked at from a single window, after all" (Fitzgerald 4).

Objects (i.e., interpretations of reality) created within other characters' perspectives are especially problematic for Gatsby because he attempts to control as much of the total perceptual object as he can to gain a favorable reputation in the eyes of Daisy, but these objects are nearly impossible to manage because, as signifiers, they signify abstract principles rather than concrete items that can be manipulated spatially. For instance, A and B are tangible subjects, and (B's A) is an intangible object—B's concept of A per sensual qualities. Since A cannot manipulate an

object that only exists within the mind of B (i.e., B's concept of A), we consider perspective to be at least one step removed from reality. In order influence perspective then, Gatsby must introduce even more objects into a given TPO in the hope that his projection of self will be accepted, but in doing so, the system's total entropy increases, and more unpredictable phenomena would need to be controlled in order to avoid a collapse into chaos, and this makes success less likely.

Upon this last point, that perspective is often several steps removed from the objects they tend to explicate, Gatsby could attest, and he may even bemoan that this is unfair. As a man obsessed with controlling his image, Gatsby utilizes tangible objects for their capacity to be manipulated to shape his reputation, which is both helpful and potentially harmful because as Arnold Weinstein points out, "[T]he characters and setting in *The Great Gatsby* are oddly maneuverable, alterable. In this realm the World Series is quite naturally 'fixable' and alterable, rather than given. The dog bought by Tom for Myrtle Wilson is significantly both a boy and a bitch" (27). In the post-Newtonian world of physics, such ambiguity is possible because as entropy increases, objects necessarily manifest as different permutations of themselves. And on account of the phenomenological activity of objects, object location is ambiguous, as objects are able to exist in more than one place at a given moment in time. When objects emerge in the world, innumerable (perhaps infinite) objects actualize as local manifestations, and with this comes what appears to be disorder. However, I do not agree with physicists that this necessarily equates to chaos or disorder. Instead, I think of entropy as all the different possible arrangements of objects within a given system, which only become chaos in reference to an individual subject. From the vantage point of one viewing a totalized perceptual object, however, there is no disorder so long as the TPO can be conceptualized: the object represented by the collage of

sensual data that an observer perceives is not chaos; it's a remarkable depiction of the mind's ability to order millions of objects into four-dimensional consciousness. To consider all the objects within a totalized perceptual object and to attempt to fathom all the varieties of interpretations of that object according to the entropic collaborations possible is overwhelming. This is the chaos inherent in non-subjective permutation. To influence others' perception of his reputation totally, Gatsby would have to issue godlike power beyond that of his greatness. Although he may believe himself capable of this, ultimately he is unable to do so on account of humans' lack of control of nature. So instead of trying to affect every interpretation of a totalized perceptual object, Gatsby carefully selects the objects whose qualities he believes will overwhelm his associates, which he hopes will result in the disengagement of his more telling real qualities. Although able to present this parade of objects whose qualities are suitable for building his character, he is not able to control the reality that these objects allow to manifest in spite of his best effort.

Physical Appearance

To Gatsby, image is everything, and like a peacock displaying its plumage to attract a mate, Gatsby projects his self-image at every opportunity in order to be successful in illicit business practices, as well as and more intently to attract Daisy's attention. According to Nick, "If personality is an unbroken series of successful gestures, then there was something gorgeous about him, some heightened sensitivity to the promises of life" (2). Here, "successful gestures" implies that Gatsby's personality-bearing acts are premeditated, and that they occur in an "unbroken series" suggests practice and effort. Put more bluntly, Gatsby's life is a performance. Clearly, the compulsive Gatsby has taken great pains to hone his likable personality.

Personalities can be entirely contrived, and much of Gatsby's is. His ostentatious clothing, his flashy house, and his posh Rolls Royce all help Gatsby construct the public image of a fabulously rich, hardworking playboy. In other words, Gatsby is able to clothe his life in the fantastic wardrobe of his ego. His motivation to better himself (although the means by which he does so may not be honorable) is represented by the objects of his disposal. Gatsby's ego is not large because he loves himself; he does not, as evidenced by his finding fault in himself revealed in his self-improvement plans ("Be better to parents") (173). His ego is large because he has what appears to be an unrestricted budget and the desire to utilize it to further bolster his appeal to others, which he undoubtedly sees lacking.

When Nick first meets Gatsby at his party, the two strike up a conversation without Nick knowing to whom he was speaking because, until this time, he had not met the ostentatious Gatsby, the man with the hydroplane—only the longing lover version of him staring into the night. After Nick admits to the unrecognized Gatsby that he had not yet met the host, there is a moment of confusion:

For a moment he looked at me as if he failed to understand.

"I'm Gatsby," he said suddenly.

"What!" I exclaimed. "Oh, I beg your pardon."

"I thought you knew, old sport. I'm afraid I'm not a very good host."

He smiled understandingly—much more than understandingly. It was one of those rare smiles with a quality of eternal reassurance in it, that you may come across four or five times in life. ... [It] concentrated on *you* with an irresistible prejudice in your favor. It understood you just as far as you wanted to be understood, believed in you as you would like to believe in yourself, and assured

you that it had precisely the impression of you that, at your best, you hoped to convey. (48)

Ernest Lockridge refers to this as Gatsby's "con-man smile," in which Carraway can see himself (180). Although Gatsby's smile may help him while conducting illicit business, his smile in this scene is no con. He smiles because he is deeply embarrassed. When Gatsby apologizes for being a poor host, he is sincere, for he spends most of his time out of sight of his guests, as is part of his plan of self-perfection: never make apparent one's flaws. However, he then smiles "understandingly," even though he himself had spoken last. What he must understand, then, is the truth of his own words, that he has been a poor host, which is anathema to his intention. With fruit, booze, dancing, an orchestra, two meals, and unrestricted generosity, Gatsby's parties are meant to attract the East Egg elite because he believes that if everybody attends, Daisy will be among them. Since Gatsby's guests are aristocrats, poor hosting runs the risk of earning him a poor reputation among the upper class. Gatsby smiles sincerely because he realizes the flaw in his plan: even Nick, who receives one of very few hand-delivered invitations to the party, does not know who the host is. If Gatsby wants Daisy to take notice of him, he cannot continue hiding behind the monuments of his ego because even Nick, as neighbor and confidant, cannot see the man hidden by the shadows of his Norman castle.

Intent on influencing as much of the total perceptual object of his guests as possible, Gatsby retreats from view whenever the environment poses too much threat to his loss of control. If we isolate a single frame of the TPO and consider it a snapshot of experience, Laura Barrett's insights are enlightening: "Photography, which is generally associated with clarity and realism, is an instrument of instability in *The Great Gatsby*. A change of lighting and angle, a bit of suggestion here and illusion there, creates an entirely new person" (542). Try as he may, Gatsby

is not able to control all things and phenomena in his environment, which is due to the increased entropy associated with the emergence of uncountable objects within a seemingly closed system (i.e., TPO). On account of his lack of omnipotence, he must disengage from situations in which too much of his private business actualizes—thus, revealing him to be a man of questionable ethics at best. Gatsby must take his business calls in private, for certainly a change in “lighting” may illuminate aspects of his practice that could land him behind bars or sully his reputation. Although I concede that taking phone calls in 1922 did not allow for peripatetic conversation, Gatsby never corresponds by telephone within the novel in the presence of other characters or reader. In fact, readers are privy only to one nonverbal correspondence from Gatsby, which is Nick’s invitation to Gatsby’s party—“signed Jay Gatsby, in a majestic hand” (41). Gatsby’s signature must appear to be majestic because he strives to be valued according to his drives and passions. His autograph is as much of a façade as his name, and his image is grounded on these misrepresentations. His plan to attract Daisy’s love is predicated upon his being viewed as aristocratic, and Gatsby intends to allow no contrary impression of him to actualize by relentlessly seeking control of the objects his life comprises.

In addition to being unable to control the impressions of those around him, Gatsby is unable to quell the contradictions of his identity represented by his choice of wardrobe, which would at first seem to be totally under his control. However, even this proves untrue as he admits to having “a man in England who buys [him] clothes” (92). However, purchasing clothing is not the only way in which Gatsby relinquishes control of his image; even the appearance of his clothing appears to contain its own self-contradictions. For instance, when Nick arranges a tea party for Gatsby and Daisy to remake each other’s acquaintance, Gatsby wears “a white flannel suit, silver shirt, and gold-colored tie” (84). Whereas he could have worn a more traditional suit

of navy or charcoal, Gatsby chooses to be flashy. His selection, however, is an affront to the aristocracy who would prefer to conserve their way of life and position among the upper echelon of society by barring the intrusion of outsiders. As discussed previously, Fitzgerald associates the color white with Daisy, and by doing so, with purity and pedigree. Although Gatsby may not know this, Fitzgerald does, and so the title-bearer's suit is a false projection of the elite. Furthermore, Gatsby's shirt and tie are silver and gold, precious metals denoting great wealth and symbols for old money, but the pale man with "dark signs of sleeplessness beneath his eyes" under the suit is anything but the product of a privileged upbringing (84). This discrepancy between his meticulous attire and his strained physical body is evidence that who Gatsby really is and who he presents himself to be are fundamentally at odds with one another and written within his physical appearance. This will have catastrophic results at the end of the novel, leaving three characters dead.

By presenting particular aspects of his life as perceptual tableaux, Gatsby attempts to influence the possible interpretations of his image according to the perspective of whoever happens to be associating with him. However, as object-oriented ontology points out, appearance within actuality is not the same as virtual proper being. Likening one ontographic frame of the TPO to a photograph, Barrett's insight is helpful: "photographs provide the prototypes to which people and things conform, thereby reminding us that appearances are not just deceiving: they are predetermined by prior appearances" (542). This can be understood by considering the important role that a preceding page in a flipbook plays in presenting the action or movement of life. Considering this, it is clear that Gatsby's aristocratic appearance is not grounded on authenticity but on a prior appearance of himself that he presented to Daisy five years before in Louisville. Jordan confides to Nick of Daisy's erstwhile paramour: "His name was Jay Gatsby,

and I didn't lay eyes on him again for over four years—even after I'd met him on Long Island I didn't realize it was the same man" (75). Gatsby, however, insists that Daisy recognize him as the same man of her youth, and his wardrobe is a testament to his determination that this be so.

To Gatsby, Daisy is not only a woman, but the capstone to a life of limitless opportunity, and so his every action is intended to construct a man capable of winning her. According to Winifred Farrant Bevilacqua, "What this hero strives for originates outside himself; he chooses it, assimilates it into his consciousness and attempts to mold his life in accordance with it" (48). However, his wardrobe is mere subterfuge, a distraction from his self-made rise to eminence. And if Gatsby ever had Daisy, that time has passed. As Bevilacqua argues, "[Gatsby's] core characteristic is his sense of unlimited possibilities ... [but] this self-conception functions independent of the finite reality of concrete experience" (50). Here, "the finite reality of concrete experience" is the resilience of the TPO to avoid manifesting in ways other than that which can be immediately apparent, and this poses major complications to his achieving his dreams.

Automobile

In addition to his physical appearance, Gatsby's Rolls Royce is a self-contained parade of wealth that Tom Buchanan refers to as a "circus wagon" (121). Like his clothing, the vehicle is a sign of luxury, both according to its quality and the symbolic nature of its coloration. The body of the car is gold, blue-collar steel with a gilded finish, which Nick describes as "a rich cream color, bright with nickel, swollen here and there in its monstrous length ... with a labyrinth of wind-shields that mirrored a dozen suns" (64). The upholstery, however, is green, a symbol for new money and its utilization in acquiring Daisy (*vis-à-vis* the green light). Both his physical

form and vehicle embody notions of self-made newness cloaked with the subterfuge of old money.

To Gatsby, his vehicles are not only modes of transportation but also objects denoting his social status, and which are means to procuring Daisy's love. Fitzgerald notes, "On week-ends his Rolls-Royce became an omnibus, bearing parties to and from the city . . . , while his station wagon scampered like a brisk yellow bug to meet all trains" (39). Clearly, his vehicle is a sign of propagating his social prestige in contrast to Buchanan's personal blue coupé, and such a distinction sheds light on Gatsby's real qualities, which otherwise would not be available to Nick who claims,

I had talked with him perhaps six times in the past month and found, to my disappointment, that he had little to say. So my first impression, that he was a person of some undefined consequence, had gradually faded and he had become simply the proprietor of an elaborate road-house next door. (64)

As the proprietor of an elaborate roadhouse, Gatsby is nothing more than an ostentatious man flaunting his wealth in order to attract a mate, but the silence of which Nick speaks is not a sign of rudeness but instead provides an opportunity to look beyond actuality toward Gatsby's core. He has little to say because he calculates his image and what he says with great precision. For a man whose goal is to "[p]ractice elocution, poise and how to attain it," each word must be chosen carefully. Even his seemingly casual use of the phrase "old sport" is time-worn and practiced, despite the limited period of his acquaintanceship with Nick: "The familiar expression held no more familiarity than the hand which reassuringly brushed my shoulder" (53).

After gauging Nick's approval of his vehicle, distinctions between Gatsby and his car diminish, and Gatsby immediately transforms the object of inquiry from the car to himself.

Gatsby began leaving his elegant sentences unfinished and slapping himself indecisively on the knee of his caramel-colored suit.

“Look here, old sport,” he broke out surprisingly, “what’s your opinion of me, anyhow?” (64-65)

However, instead of Nick responding, the narrative skips directly to Gatsby’s account of himself, which is rife with half-truths. But like the gilded vehicle with green interior, his story is not entirely camouflaged. Nick’s incredulity fades away when he glimpses a modicum of truth embodied by a Montenegrin medal of valor: “My incredulity was submerged in fascination now; it was like skimming hastily through a dozen magazines” (66). Because Gatsby’s reputation is nearly always under scrutiny, he takes great pains to authorize elements of his identity in order to control the image he projects, and he does so with objects such as the medal. According to Arnold Weinstein, “Gatsby quite simply authenticates his performance: he produces signs of legitimacy, such as the military decoration from Montenegro and the Oxford photograph, and in the face of such evidence, Nick is ‘converted’” (31). In this scene, Gatsby’s need for control results in manipulation. After providing a photograph from his short tenure at Oxford, Nick accepts Gatsby’s story as truth even though Nick invents some of it in his imagination: “Then it was all true. I saw the skins of tigers flaming in his palace on the Grand Canal; I saw him opening a chest of rubies to ease, with their crimson-lighted depths, the gnawing of his broken heart” (67). Here, Gatsby masterfully manipulates Nick’s TPO by holding the photograph, which takes up nearly all of Nick’s visual field; quite literally, Gatsby attempts to hold all that Nick can see in his hands.

Providing only two pieces of evidence to authorize his story (i.e., the medal and photograph), Gatsby has enchanted Nick with visions of the fantastical. Nick is transfixed even

though Gatsby's account is sparse with details and provides little truthful insight into his life. However, Nick is able to extrapolate truth from nonsense because he can sense the "gnawing of his broken heart" even though Gatsby only fleetingly mentions "something very sad that had happened to [him] long ago" (66). Such a significant reversal is due not to the evidence Gatsby provides as it is but for its utility in summoning additional objects for authorization. In short, the medal and photograph change the perceptual lens through which Nick views Gatsby. On account of this, objects associated with these events (e.g., the past, journeys, successes, experience) take on new qualities that manifest in actuality and, thus, synthetically construct a version of Gatsby of which he himself approves—one that accommodates no room for Nick's suspicions: "For a moment I suspected that he was pulling my leg" (65) and "With an effort I managed to restrain my incredulous laughter" (66).

As I have already argued, understanding Gatsby's car is helpful in understanding the man because the two are structurally similar: both are camouflaged on the outside with gold but self-made by desire and industry on the interior. After a tense afternoon lunch, during which Tom's suspicions for Gatsby build, Gatsby offers to drive Jordan, Nick, and the Buchanans to New York on that hot summer day. Fitzgerald writes, "[Gatsby] felt the hot, green leather of the seat. 'I ought to have left it in the shade'" (120). Here, the metaphor linking Gatsby to the car is apparent: the car may look like money on the outside, but inside the color is redolent of Gatsby's desire to behold the green light. Furthermore, Tom is currently looking into Gatsby's history: "'I'd like to know who he is and what he does,' insisted Tom. 'And I think I'll make a point of finding out'" (108). The car's upholstery represents the internal reality that Gatsby attempts to suppress in actualizing: the man striving for Daisy's love and attempting to prove himself by acquiring great wealth and prestige. The hot leather is akin to the aggravated flush Gatsby must

be feeling. Allowing himself to be present in such a hostile environment is perhaps too enlightening of an occasion for Tom to scrutinize Gatsby's actions. Indeed, perhaps it would have been better if Gatsby and his car had been left in the shadows.

In addition to his clothing and his automobile, Gatsby also identifies with his estate, which Fitzgerald obfuscates by blending setting and body together. According to Weinstein, the altercation between Tom and Gatsby occurring at the climax reveals more of Gatsby's true intentions than the image he seeks to project. While at Wilson's garage prior to arriving in New York, Tom expresses his disbelief regarding Gatsby's identity: "An Oxford man! He was incredulous. 'Like hell he is! He wears a *pink* suit'" (emphasis mine; 122). Although thematically these lines indicate Gatsby's lack of pedigree, they also emphasize Tom's distrust of outsiders, and Gatsby tops the list. Clearly to Tom, Gatsby's clothing marks him as not belonging to the established gentry. Although his pink suit may mirror the red and white color scheme of the Buchanan's house, to Tom, Gatsby will always be a chameleon that never quite matches his appearance with the setting of East Egg as he plans.

Estate

Like his clothing, Gatsby's mansion marks him as an outsider in the East. Gatsby's home "was a colossal affair by any standard—it was a factual imitation of some Hôtel de Ville in Normandy, with a tower on one side, spanking new under a thin beard of raw ivy, and a marble swimming pool, and more than forty acres of lawn and garden" (5). There is no doubt that Gatsby seeks to build the life he aspires to live, and his house represents this notion well. As a "factual imitation of some Hôtel de Ville in Normandy," his estate may be an accurate depiction of wealth but lacks authenticity associated with pedigree: it is of a foreign design. According to

Norris from whom Fitzgerald drew inspiration for *The Great Gatsby*, “A story can be accurate and yet lamentably—even wickedly untrue. . . . Accuracy is the attainment of small minds, the achievement of the commonplace, a mere machine-made thing. . . . To be true is the all-important business” (qtd. in Eby 151). Not only does this appear to be the case with *Gatsby*; it also pertains to his home, which has been fabricated to impart an air of feudal superiority over West Egg. The newly constructed tower of white, a phallic symbol, dons a “beard of raw ivy,” which juxtaposes images of establishment with novelty, as the raw ivy summons cries of “green horn” or “novice.” Whether a symbol for achieved success or the means to construct a life only dreamed of, *Gatsby* intends for his mansion to be a representation of both who he is and of what he is capable. Indeed, his hope is that such capability will be construed as almighty because he himself believes it to be so: “‘Can’t repeat the past?’ he cried incredulously. ‘Why of course you can!’” (110). Even though the construction of his home may at first seem within his control, it also serves as a catalyst for more of *Gatsby*’s real qualities to actualize in the present. When Jordan and Nick discuss *Gatsby* without him being present to influence the situation, his lack of control over reality appears. Jordan confides to Nick regarding the truth behind *Gatsby*’s monuments: “But it wasn’t a coincidence at all. . . . *Gatsby* bought that house so that Daisy would be just across the bay” (78).

In addition to the physical edifice of the mansion, *Gatsby*’s estate embodies the powers of the object to help shape the identity of owner. According to Fitzgerald, “In his blue gardens men and girls came and went like moths among the whisperings and the champagne of the stars” (39). Here, *Gatsby*’s lawn is blue instead of green because a green lawn would provide thematic complications: green is a color representing a self-made man’s potential for success (i.e., acquiring Daisy as a lover as a symbol for achievement). Blue, on the other hand, is a color most

often associated with Tom Buchanan, who drives a blue coupé to visit his mistress Myrtle, who is first introduced as wearing a “dress of dark blue crêpe-de-chine” (25). Having been changed according to authorial intent, the blue lawn is not green because, like Daisy’s love, Nick’s description of the lawn is beyond Gatsby’s influence after his death. Like Gatsby, Tom is surrounded by colors beyond his control and that indicate that truth cannot be shaped according to will.

To emphasize the naturalistic fact that nature will not bend according to the will of the human, Fitzgerald positions Tom under the blue eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg that keep watch over Tom’s extramarital relations from the billboard outside Wilson’s shop:

Standing behind him, Michaelis saw with a shock that he was looking at the eyes of Doctor T. J. Eckleburg, which had just emerged, pale and enormous, from the dissolving night.

“God sees everything,” repeated Wilson. (159-160).

Here, Fitzgerald takes pains to connect these characters thematically by repeating colors. In doing so, he creates assemblages of objects that seek to express their combined qualities without regard to human intent. Most illuminating, however, is the focus on sight and perspective that stems from blue eyes. Like Doctor T. J. Eckleburg, the cuckolded George Wilson has blue eyes signifying his connection to Tom: “When he saw us a damp gleam of hope sprang into his light blue eyes” due to a business venture that would allow for him to purchase Tom’s blue coupé (25). Here, Fitzgerald employs the color blue as a rhetorical strategy to bind these objects together for the thematic lesson at hand: although objects may be manipulated for idiosyncratic purposes, ultimately truth (represented here in blue) cannot be controlled according to human

sovereignty. Here, Fitzgerald reveals a truth of the twentieth-century universe: teleological plans cannot successfully eradicate the actualized qualities of real objects.

The color blue poses several problems within the plot because it serves as a symbol for the antagonistic role Tom plays in keeping Gatsby away from Daisy. The more blue objects that appear within Gatsby's actuality, the more thing-power he must subsume in order to issue control of his image. As interference to Gatsby's plans, Fitzgerald connects the color blue with historically relevant information: "And as the moon rose higher the inessential houses began to melt away until gradually I became aware of the old island here that flowered once for Dutch sailors' eyes—a fresh, green breast of the new world" (180). For Gatsby, the green light at the end of Daisy's dock is a promise for potential happiness, for a life complete through acquisition—a life for which the Dutch were aspiring as well. However, a vast expanse of blue separates Gatsby's and Daisy's homes: his lawn and the harbor between East and West Egg. As with the Dutch sailors, in order for Gatsby to reside in the fertile valley of Daisy's love, a vast expanse of blue must be navigated. For the Dutch sailors, such an expanse was the Atlantic Ocean, but for Gatsby, although the expanse is also tangible, the blue gulf between Daisy and himself is Tom Buchanan's suspicion of their affair. Although Tom's levies and screens of interference may be able to be breached, they ultimately retain their restrictive integrity. Fitzgerald hints at this problem when Tom and Gatsby discuss the proximity of their houses: "Slowly the white wings of the boat moved against the blue cool limit of the sky" (118),

By associating Tom Buchanan with the color blue, Fitzgerald is able to weave Gatsby, Daisy, and Tom into an assemblage that proves unable to be untangled at the end of the novel. As with nearly every dimension of his character, to speak of Gatsby's blue lawn is to speak of Daisy. The parties, which take place upon his blue grounds and that are, thus, in some way

inextricable from the grounds upon which they take place, are beacons intended to draw Daisy to his home. Unfortunately, his lawn is blue, which denotes Tom interfering with Gatsby's allure. The expanse of blue, then, becomes an impenetrable force field between Gatsby and the object of his affection, for passage from desire to acquisition requires trespassing and control of Tom's property. But like the harbor that separates them, the ocean between them cannot be controlled, only tended to by other objects that ultimately prove impotent to bridge the gulf between them.

In addition to foreshadowing looming failure, according to Weinstein, Gatsby's estate is intended to "fashion a reality of his own that would correspond to the dream" (25). When Gatsby's father, Henry Gatz, arrives after receiving news that his son had been murdered, he shares a photograph of the house with Nick. According to Weinstein,

It is no accident that Henry Gatz so treasures the *photograph* of his son's house that it seems "more real to him now than the house itself." The so-called "real thing" can hardly compete with constructs of desire; hence, a green light on a dock can embody and figure forth all of Gatsby's longing, but such magic can have no truck with real people." (qtd. in Weinstein 25)

For Gatz, the photograph in his hand is an enchanted object because it harbors more portentousness than the house itself, which he had not previously visited. To him, the house only serves as evidence to the truth that the photo imparts: his son is fabulously successful. To Gatsby, on the other hand, the photograph is only documentation of his progress in achieving his dream and, thus, substantiation for his claims to success. Unfortunately, Gatsby intends to construct his own enchanted objects, but as Weinstein points out, the monuments that he builds to his ego "have no truck with real people." One such person is Daisy, who only ever returns to

Gatsby through his face-to-face manipulative practices, rather than as he intends for her to do so as an enchanted moth drawn to light.

According to Nick, Gatsby's reputation is so important to him that he finds rumors, even those that are untrue, to be satisfying (98). Rumors in some way denote notoriety or popularity, which Gatsby intends to use to allure Daisy to him, for it seems that if a man is worth talking about, he must stand out among his peers. Although Gatsby may seem to think that all publicity is good publicity, the stories that people tell of him and the monuments to his ego are beyond his control, and characters like Nick discuss these objects in ways that construct Gatsby's identity per the idiosyncrasies their perspectives. For instance, by connecting the yellow car with Gatsby as its rightful owner, George Wilson convinces himself that Gatsby killed his wife.

Although, objects serve to actualize the image that Gatsby seeks to project, while simultaneously allowing him to cloak as many of his real qualities as he can in their shadows, they also assert their own qualities irrespective of Gatsby's control. Because of this, Gatsby's real qualities and those of his contrived image often get muddled, and this proves to be especially problematic because the objects with which he seeks to identify also misidentify him as the driver of the car that strikes and kills Myrtle Wilson. Although Gatsby is not driving at the time of the accident, the identity-bearing objects with which he makes himself known (e.g., his yellow vehicle) implicate him in a web of trouble from which he cannot extricate himself. Unfortunately for Gatsby and for justice on the whole, the enchanted objects of his empire remain autonomous to his control because objects exist first for themselves and then for others through perception. No matter how much influence Gatsby may have over the total perceptual objects of his fellows, objects cannot be posited into a discourse of any kind without becoming new objects of inquiry and are, thus, ultimately unable to be controlled. As a result, objects tell their own stories,

irrespective of egoistic intent. Thus, in building his identity by constructing monuments, Gatsby relinquishes some personal control to the other actants of his environment because as entropy increases, it becomes difficult to control the configuration of the assemblages that emerge (i.e., TPO), and this leads directly to his death. Despite Gatsby's best efforts to control the assemblage of his persona by controlling the objects therein, Nick voices suspicions regarding the man's identity: "[A]s we wandered through Marie Antoinette music-rooms and Restoration salons, I felt that there were guests concealed behind every couch and table, under orders to be breathlessly silent until we had passed through" (91).

A Great Number of Gatsbys

The internal conflict Gatsby faces is that he is simultaneously two men at once, Jay Gatsby and James Gatz. However, these two identities, whether legitimate or contrived, are subject to the inquiry of other characters, and on account of this, multiple versions of Gatsby are presented according to the perceiving object's total perceptual object. To himself, there may first appear only to be two observable Gatsbys; however, this does not take into account who Jay Gatsby is to James Gatz: a powerful man capable of anything. Nor does this take into account who James Gatz is to Jay Gatsby: mere substance to be shaped and improved into an ideal man. As a collected whole, Gatsby appears to consider himself "a son of God," which "sprang from his Platonic conception of himself" (98). However, as the discussion of entropy previously suggests, even a self-made man is not entirely embodied by his selfhood. He is a different object to different people, as well as several different objects to himself, and such attention reveals loss of control and instability in his character that leads to his destruction. Considering perspective then, Gatsby's virtual multiplicity contributes the external conflict of his murder.

Due to Gatsby's inability to disengage objects from actuality, the objects he seeks to control assert their existence through an unfettered ontological release of real qualities into the sensual ether. As these real qualities interact with those of other real objects, actuality manifests for a given subject. For as much progress as Gatsby makes in presenting himself as an aristocrat, he cannot escape the ontological restrictions to his existence: objects speak "truths", irrespective of the narrative that a subject may attribute to it. As a result the reader, like Gatsby's party guests, is immersed in a perspective that blurs truth with conjecture. According to Weinstein, *The Great Gatsby* reveals a world in which "'fiction' and 'fact' shall be coerced into a new etymological unity as *made* things, subservient to human will. In this dream, as perhaps in all dreams, the word produces the deed, the desire forges the object, the imagination makes the world" (28). From a correlationist point-of-view, which is the mindset Gatsby models, this is indeed the case, for nothing manifests to a subject without being reconstructed as a comprehensible existence. However, to stop here would be to write off objects as constructions of the mind, and ontological concerns—questions of existence—are made secondary to phenomenology. However, Fitzgerald indicates that reality cannot be constructed according to will, seeming to hold a view within OOO that phenomenology (action) is not possible without there first being something to enact phenomena. These objects presuppose the events they embody and assert their own real qualities regardless of Gatsby's purposes. Thus, to say that fact and fiction can be constructed is undoubtedly true, but to claim that such objects are subservient to human will is inaccurate due to an object's persistence to emit real qualities, even when a subject seeks to de-actualize them. If Gatsby's identity is based on fact and fiction alike, both of which are affected by objects that he is capable of contriving, objects can only be said to be subservient to human will to a limited extent. As evident by Gatsby's murder, objects are not

wholly subordinate to one's will, for as hard as he might try to construct his identity with objects, his car is one such object that cannot be incorporated into the completion of his plan. Rather, it is Gatsby introducing these objects that allows for other characters, namely his murderer George Wilson, to enter the series of events that construct the narrative of his experience, which ultimately names Gatsby guilty of homicide and fit for execution.

Gatsby's unexpected murder may at first seem capricious, but Tom's blue coupé serves as a cog within Gatsby's death mechanism from early on in the novel. When Tom takes Nick to the valley of ashes to meet his mistress, Myrtle, they first encounter her husband, George, who owns the automotive repair shop that serves as the setting. Upon meeting, Tom is cordial to George:

“Hello, Wilson, old man,” said Tom, slapping him jovially on the shoulder. “How's business?”

“I can't complain,” answered Wilson unconvincingly. “When are you going to sell me that car?” (24)

As any good proprietor, Wilson has his business on his mind, and he wastes no time trying to set up a purchase with Tom. However, Tom keeps Wilson waiting on the vehicle while Wilson remains eager, even when Tom may be lying to him on account of resenting George's marriage to Myrtle:

“I didn't mean to interrupt your lunch,” he said. “But I need money pretty bad, and I was wondering what you were going to do with your old car.”

“How do you like this one?” inquired Tom. “I bought it last week.”

“It's a nice yellow one,” said Wilson, as he strained at the handle.

“Like to buy it?”

“Big chance,” Wilson smiled faintly. “No, but I could make some money on the other.” (123)

Although I cannot attest to Wilson’s competence as a businessman, he should know vehicles intimately, for his sign reads “*Repairs. George B. Wilson. Cars bought and sold*” (25). As the sign indicates, Wilson is in the business of repair, purchase, *and* sales, which requires a large scope of automotive literacy. As indicated in the discussion between Tom and Wilson above, Wilson knows enough about the vehicles and his clientele to reject Tom’s suggestion to buy Gatsby’s luxury car and maintain his interest in the less ostentatious coupé. In short, the yellow Rolls Royce does not fit well with the lower socioeconomic status of the denizens of the valley of ashes. Because of this, Gatsby’s vehicle becomes readily recognizable from this point forward, and there is no doubt concerning the legitimacy of George’s suspicion that Tom kills Myrtle on account of claiming ownership of the vehicle and traveling the same route through town as part of a roundtrip trek. This is only one such example of Gatsby’s plan backfiring on account of his not being able to control every aspect of an object with which he associates. Had he driven a more mundane vehicle that was more congruent with his middle-class upbringing, he may have been able to escape accusations of killing Myrtle.

After hearing the Wilsons’ plan to head west because Wilson “just got wised up to something funny the last two days,” Tom’s demeanor abruptly transitions from fury to generosity, likely in the hope that the Wilsons will remain in New York: “‘I’ll let you have that car,’ said Tom. ‘I’ll send it over tomorrow afternoon’” (124). Here, Tom and Gatsby share a similar trait: they both presume they can get what they want by purchasing it. On the one hand, Tom seems to believe that giving a car to Wilson could assure Myrtle’s residence in New York, thus prolonging their affair. On the other hand, Gatsby attempts to allure Daisy with his fabulous

riches. But the importance of this scene is Wilson's emphasis on the automobile. Within only a number of hours, Myrtle will lie dead on a worktable after having been struck by the same yellow luxury car that Tom fueled at the garage. After the accident, Wilson is in hysterics exclaiming, "You don't have to tell me what kind of car it was! I know what kind of car it was!" (140). Upon hearing this, Tom becomes defensive: "'Listen,' said Tom, shaking him a little. 'I just got here a minute ago, from New York. I was bringing you that coupé we've been talking about. That yellow car I was driving this afternoon wasn't mine—do you hear? I haven't seen it all afternoon'" (140).

When the entire party arrives in East Egg in separate vehicles, Nick finds Gatsby lurking on the Buchanans' estate, and it is here that Nick is able to make some sense out of the evening's happenings through Gatsby's explanation. "'I got to West Egg by a side road,' he went on, 'and left the car in my garage. I don't think anybody saw us, but of course I can't be sure'" (143). Here, Gatsby cloisters his car in order to hide evidence of the accident, but his effort is futile, for Wilson eventually discovers that Gatsby is the owner. Unbeknownst to Gatsby, his flashy lifestyle and his unerring display of wealth lead directly to his destruction. Had he not thrown such extravagant parties and carted around the New York elite in his personal automobile, he would have been able to keep a lower profile. But at this point in the novel, Gatsby has to make a dramatic change in his behavior in order to draw less attention to himself. Up until this point, his pizzazz has proved ineffectual, for it is not his wealth that momentarily attracts Daisy. Rather, the small rendezvous arranged by Gatsby and hosted by Nick is what brings the two together. Now, however, the attention that Gatsby has brought to himself is no longer ineffectual; it has become tantamount to his demise: Gatsby's involvement is destined to be discovered.

In one sense, *The Great Gatsby* ends where it begins with Jay Gatsby losing his greatness and slipping back into the ephemeral body of James Gatz. On the day of his death in late summer, Gatsby enters his swimming pool for the first time of the season, reminding the reader of his discussion with Nick early upon meeting: this will be his first and last dip in the novel (161). Instead of going out as Gatsby with his typical “formal gesture of farewell,” the title character dies as any mortal would in his position: that day, the lifeblood of James Gatz which fueled the edification of Gatsby simply drains out (55).

By trying to control objects in order to build his reputation, Gatsby manipulates objects for selfish purposes. Unfortunately, these objects defy subjugation, and the real qualities they allow to actualize serve as the basis for Wilson’s plan to murder Gatsby. By flaunting his wealth for the sake of attracting Daisy, Gatsby plays recklessly with allure and exploits the baser characteristics of his acquaintances, namely self-serving consumption that borders on hedonism. Fitzgerald constructs a world in which objects have a teleological purpose, namely to fulfill the wonderment of Gatsby’s dream, but warns of the foolishness of contriving one. It is as if Gatsby attempts to buy Daisy and her love, and so here she is treated as an object of desire and passion—and object to be beholden to Gatsby. Thus, this is not a display of a democracy of objects because there appears to be a hegemony of objects wherein objects are used as means to an end, and Gatsby as a human object lords over the entire hierarchy. However, such lordship is not reasonable in the naturalistic novel—and is indeed impossible in the real world—because objects do not exist only *for* Gatsby, as he seems to believe. Because Gatsby seeks so valiantly to control every aspect of his life, including the totality of others’ perceptions, he overextends himself to the point of impotency, and for this reason his plans go awry.

Works Cited

- Barrett, Laura. "Material without Being Real': Photography and the End of Reality in 'The Great Gatsby.'" *Studies in the Novel* 30.4 (1998): 540-57. Print. JSTOR.
- Bennett, Jane. *The Enchantment of Modern Life: Attachments, Crossings, and Ethics*. Princeton, Princeton UP, 2001. Print.
- Bevilacqua, Winifred Farrant. "... in ecstatic cahoots': Nick's Authoring of Gatsby / '...en extatico acurerdo': Gatsby inventado por Nick." *Atlantis* 32.1 (2010): 45-56. Print.
- Bourgeois, Pamela and John Clendenning. "Gatsby, Belasco, and Ethnic Ambiguity." *The F. Scott Fitzgerald Review* 6 (2007-2008): 105-120. Print. JSTOR.
- Eby, Clare. "Of Gold Molars and Golden Girls: Fitzgerald's Reading of Norris." *American Literary Realism* 35.2 (2003): 130-58. Print. JSTOR.
- Fitzgerald, F. Scott. *The Great Gatsby*. 1925. New York: Scribner, 2004. Print.
- Harman, Graham. *The Quadruple Object*. Winchester: Zero Books, 2011. Print.
- Lockridge, Ernest. "F. Scott Fitzgerald's 'Trompe l'Oeil' and 'The Great Gatsby's' Buried Plot." *Journal of Narrative Theory* 17.2 (1987): 163-83. Print. JSTOR.
- Vince, Raymond M. "'The Great Gatsby' and the Transformations of Space-Time: Fitzgerald's Modernist Narrative and the New Physics of Einstein." *The F. Scott Fitzgerald Review* 5.0 (2006): 86-108. Print. JSTOR.
- Weinstein, Arnold. "Fiction as Greatness: The Case of Gatsby." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 19.1 (1985): 22-38. Print. JSTOR.

CHAPTER IV

STEINBECKIAN SUICIDE: AN ASSEMBLAGE OF MICE AND OF MEN

I want to watch these group-men, for they seem to me to be a new individual, not at all like single men. A man in a group isn't himself at all; he's a cell in an organism that isn't like him any more than the cells in your body are like you. I want to watch the group, and see what it's like. People have said, "mobs are crazy, you can't tell what they'll do." Why don't people look at mobs not as men, but as mobs? A mob nearly always seems to act reasonably, for a mob. –John Steinbeck, In Dubious Battle (113-114)

Introduction

As with F. Scott Fitzgerald, John Steinbeck had a deep appreciation for the work of Frank Norris, and both modeled parts of their novels after key scenes and characterizations from *McTeague*. Perhaps their most poignant similarities are not the specific details of the texts but their overall attention to literary naturalism, a genre that emphasizes nature's indifference to human goals. In literary naturalism, the human is a product of nature, not master of it. This is evident in the case of Jay Gatsby, for whom the American Dream is in sight but unreachable due to his unethical treatment of objects. This is a world in which Gatsby attempts to master his environment and the objects that construct it, and as a result he is unable to succeed in winning the love of Daisy Buchanan, because, despite his efforts, he does not practice good character, both of which are important precepts of the American Dream. As I argued in the previous section, Gatsby's death is enacted in part by misrepresenting himself with objects as monuments to his ego.

In *Of Mice and Men*, on the other hand, Steinbeck seems to depict George's treatment of Lennie as unethical, ultimately resulting in Lennie's murder. However, this is an inadequate reading because George does not kill Lennie to regain a sense of control over his life or Lennie's life. Instead, George kills Lennie to liberate him from an illegal execution at the hands of Curley.

The compassion that the reader feels for George in the final scene, then, would not be warranted if Steinbeck intended to represent George as unethical. In order for tragedy of Lennie's death to be actualized, Steinbeck must blur boundaries between the natural environment and the creatures it comprises, notably George and Lennie. As a result of this conflation of elements, Lennie and George become a single non-corporeal entity, which in reality commits suicide. To put it boldly, this virtual character must have perturbed Steinbeck as author, influencing him to capture the secret death of this unspoken character within his tale of fratricide.

In order to discuss this unwritten suicide in *Of Mice and Men*, I will now outline Steinbeck's postmodern understanding of man and how groups of men become a single entity—or in the words of Bruno Latour, a collective. Although Steinbeck's views may at first seem fanciful, I will discuss the progressive scientific ideas that led him to a Deleuzian concept of subjectivity, which serves as a dominant ideology existing throughout his literary career. A year after establishing his view of group-man as a single collective subject in *In Dubious Battle*, Steinbeck further developed a trans-corporeal view of the subject in *Of Mice and Men*. By aligning Lennie with nature, particularly with rabbits, Steinbeck melds environmental objects and the human subject into a single, trans-corporeal body, a body defined by its “interconnections, interchanges, and transits between human bodies and non-human natures” (Alaimo 2).

Although Steinbeck could be labeled a modernist, his progressive thinking and non-teleological views, which he developed with marine biologist and friend Edward Ricketts while on expedition in the Sea of Cortez, are more aligned to the postmodern movement, making Steinbeck ahead of his time as a twentieth-century thinker and a predecessor to post-humanism. According to Gloria Gaither, the project of Modernity “had as its goal some identifiable

intentions which placed knowledge and the human cognitive potential to access it at the center of the Modern world view” (54). As do object-oriented ontologists of today, Steinbeck believed that some knowledge of the world is inaccessible to human cognition, but his insistence upon talismanic patterns in his fiction helps ameliorate some of the dissatisfaction with the unknown by allowing his characters to encounter truth via intuition, rather than reason and cogitation. According to Todd M. Lieber, “The talisman, in the basic sense of the word, is a symbol that one does not know the meaning of and cannot rationally explain, but to which the deeper portion of the mind nevertheless attaches significance and value” (263).

For Lennie, the most obvious talismans are the rabbits of his fancy, which depict his psyche and also become literal characters within the novel. By consistently linking George to economic capitalism and Lennie to natural creatures, Steinbeck reveals a theme that is paramount in naturalism: that nature prevails over man’s intentions. In addition, it is important to understand Steinbeck’s holistic view of ecology, because he viewed man as an integral part of nature, not as an isolated feature autonomous to the world as many modernist thinkers have tended to do. Thus, the tragedy that is *Of Mice and Men* does not result from the natural process of death and its contingent loss of the American Dream but from George’s realignment with the social system that denies his connection to Lennie and the natural world.

By discussing Lennie’s trans-corporeal existence as comprising both the natural environment and George qua person, Lennie’s death is even more tragic than fratricide because George loses an integral part of himself, which represents Lennie’s death as at least a partially suicidal act for George. In reality, however, a trans-corporeal character must commit suicide in order to reveal Lennie’s death as a sign of George’s loss of self. By considering Steinbeck’s seemingly contradictory views on teleology and human progress and coupling these with his

phalanx theory of the group-man, it is apparent that Steinbeck had a postmodern view of human subjectivity that is supported by object-oriented ontologists who recognize that objects in relation to other objects become new objects.

The Steinbeckian Subject

In his 1962 acceptance speech for the Nobel Prize in literature, Steinbeck famously claimed, “I hold that a writer who does not passionately believe in the perfectibility of man, has no dedication nor any membership in literature” (no pag.). At first such an assertion seems to be at odds with his non-teleological perspective, an idea that denies the sovereignty of final causes, design, and purpose. Matthew Langione, thus, considers Steinbeck’s belief in man’s perfection as a contradictory view, due to its teleological nature—its focus on the endgame. However, I contend that this does not take into account Steinbeck’s monism, which ultimately eliminates differentiation between objects, as all things compose a single whole. Because of this, Steinbeckian subjectivity is amorphous, and distinguishing features of bodies, the skin as a barrier for instance, become little more than signifiers of an object’s actualized existence within the material world, and not effective containment features of a totalized interior body. In this vein, Steinbeck shares an affinity with Stacy Alaimo regarding the concept of the trans-corporeality of matter. For now, suffice it to say that trans-corporeality is the permeability of the body that allows for environmental objects to enter and exit without making it appear to be a different body; this usually goes unnoticed by the affected subject. Thus, trans-corporeality is “the emergent, ultimately unmappable landscapes of interacting biological, climatic, economic, and political forces” that continuously alter, define, and redefine a given body (Alaimo 2).

As a proponent of holism, Steinbeck's belief in the perfection of man is not teleological because he recognized that the final expression of perfection (or any teleological attribute) cannot be embodied by a single form, hence his use of the phrase "perfectibility of man," rather than "perfectibility of *a* man" or "perfect man." As Langione points out, Steinbeck's belief in the perfectibility of man comes from Emerson's "unattained but attainable self," which, although possible to discern theoretically, does not manifest in ephemeral human bodies (88). Instead, progression toward perfection seems to be able to be made by objects unifying with others and affecting one another. In Steinbeck's final novel *The Winter of Our Discontent*, after the talisman in his pocket deters him from committing suicide, Ethan Hawley expresses this person-to-person transmission of affective virtue in the last lines of the novel, as he refers to his daughter: "I had to get back—had to return the talisman to its new owner. Else another light might go out" (279).

If the perfection of man is thus an intrapersonal phenomenon, possible only through the engagement of countless unpredictable localized actualizations, such an aim is less teleological than it appears because Steinbeck recognized that objects are in constant interaction with other objects and that this interaction should be viewed as an organism of its own. According to Gaither, "The firm belief in the connectedness of all things—both human and natural—and the view that community is necessary to survival, recurs throughout Steinbeck's work" (58). This is especially pertinent to *Of Mice and Men*, wherein Crooks confesses, "A guy goes nuts if he ain't got nobody. Don't make no difference who the guy is, long's he's with you . . . I tell ya a guy gets too lonely an' he gets sick" (69).

As a major theme of the novel, companionship is not represented as a mere nicety; instead, Steinbeck implies that community involvement is necessary for the physical and mental wellbeing of the individual. Gaither discusses this type of communion as indicative of

Steinbeck's unique understanding of subjectivity. In a 1933 letter to Carlton A. Sheffield, Steinbeck expresses this directly: "Groups . . . have always been considered as individuals multiplied. They are not so. They are beings in themselves, entities" (64). This is what Gilles Deleuze refers to as an assemblage, a single body composed of seemingly autonomous constituent parts. Here, Bruno Latour's insight that a man with a gun is no longer considered simply a man but a new object entirely with entirely new capabilities—a man-with-a-gun—underscores Steinbeck's postmodern sensibilities. In this well known example, Latour argues, "You are different with a gun in your hand; the gun is different with you holding it. You are another subject because you hold the gun; the gun is another object because it has entered into a relationship with you" (179). Steinbeck's group man is, thus, a Latourian collective, an autonomous, agential entity composed of individual subjects so enmeshed that they become indistinguishable.

To understand Steinbeck's monistic views, one must first understand his religious views, which arise from scientific observation rather than spiritual faith. Although he had been raised an Episcopalian and was interred during an Episcopalian funeral, John Timmerman refers to him as "an Anglican agnostic: 'an unbeliever who took belief seriously,' with 'perhaps the best credentials available to write about his own stated subject—people'" (qtd. in Ray 132). In many regards, Steinbeck was a humanist. As William Ray illuminates, at one point a pastor delineated a list of sins during a sermon, which Steinbeck announced to be

"a lot of crap." As the preacher reached his rhetorical peak—"Ho, every one that thirsteth, come ye to the waters; and he that hath no money, come ye, buy and eat!" [Friend Robert] Bennett says Steinbeck stood up and exclaimed, "Yes, you

all look satisfied here, while outside the world begs for a crust of bread or a chance to earn it! Feed the body and the soul will take care of itself!” (130-131)

To me, Steinbeck’s emphasis on the body is not only humanistic but also one grounded on scientific observation. Although Steinbeck may have taken “belief seriously” and found spirituality important, he also understood that the health and wellbeing of the body is of immediate importance, for there can be no continued spiritual development in life without the perpetuation of the human body. Thus, Steinbeck’s holistic perspective, which he developed with Ricketts, is necessarily egalitarian because the health and wellbeing of one is necessary for the wellbeing of the whole. Although he continued to be sporadically involved with the Episcopal church until his death, his religious and philosophical ideologies, which were founded on scientific monism and social advocacy, were not well represented by traditional Christianity. For this reason, Steinbeck considered that “St. Paul’s [Episcopal] was a place to escape *from*, not *to*” (Ray 135).

Trans-corporeality and Steinbeck

If groups of people are “bodies themselves, entities” as Steinbeck claims, it follows that one must not then judge groups as they would individuals. Furthermore, the amalgamation of personal qualities of the individual members does not necessarily transfer to the qualities of the group. For this reason, Steinbeck is able to claim that “a mob nearly always seems to act reasonably, for a mob,” because groups of people and individual persons function as conceptual and environmental entities, totalities regardless of their myriad parts. For Steinbeck, a group of people becomes an object in actuality, and he discusses this as his phalanx theory in *In Dubious Battle*. Steinbeck views the phalanx as an agential object that cannot be reduced to its constituent

parts: people. Here, Steinbeck expresses an anti-reductionist ideology, which is a core component of object-oriented ontology today. By anticipating changing perspectives on materialism, Steinbeck presented a type of science-based realism that contemporaneous critics were not prepared to analyze at the time.

Moreover, object-oriented ontology insists that reductionism cannot be used to determine what makes a body a body because minute changes to constituent parts do not necessarily change an object's capabilities or one's perception of those abilities. For instance, we cannot claim that a tree is not still a tree if it were to undergo significant physical transformation, such as pruning. The same holds true for biological organisms such as human beings. There are inorganic compounds within the body, as well as agential living cultures upon the skin and within the mouth and intestines, the removal of which would not make the person less of a person. In stark comparison, Bennett points out that these elements in concert make a subject *more* of a person. "Here we stumble on a banal instance of what Michel Foucault might have called the 'productive power' of food: once ingested, once, that is, food coacts with the hand that places it in one's mouth, with the metabolic agencies of intestines, pancreas, kidneys, with cultural practices of physical exercise, and so on, food can generate new human tissue" (qtd. in Bennett 40). In addition to this, some cultures may be necessary to sustain life, and this reveals the unavoidable interpersonal connections between life forms necessary to prolong living. In Bennett's words, these elements are the actants composing the overall assemblage (i.e., body). That these life forms exist within the human body is evidence of the body's permeability and interdependency: objects, often toxins and bacteria, pass into the body via intermediaries such as food and air and exit through excretion, and usually they do so without change to the body being observed. For this reason, the human body cannot be said to be isolated from the components of the

environment. In *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self*, Alaimo refers to this as trans-corporeality, and it is revealed in Steinbeck's fiction via holistic ideology: he questions human subjectivity and presumes that a subject could be composed of bodies in much the same way that singular bodies are composed of constituent parts.

According to Rosemarie Garland-Thomson, the body cannot be divorced from its environment: “[A]ll bodies are shaped by their environment from the moment of conception. We transform constantly in response to our surroundings and register history on our bodies” (qtd. in Alaimo 12). Steinbeck obviously understood this idea, for Crooks' mangled back, Curley's crushed hand, and Candy's stump are all bodily records of the environment's alteration of the human body. Also such inclusions in the novel belie the notion of genetic determinism, which indicates Steinbeck's non-teleological ideology: genetics may lay the plans for how the body takes form, but environmental factors are equally agential in determining outcomes. As the title suggests, plans—even genetic plans—often go awry depending on environmental circumstances.

Furthermore, this view of life is consistent with naturalistic themes, for circumstances beyond a character's control (and the control of genes) are subject to natural forces. These three characters suffer damage to their bodies due to forces associated with exploitative capitalism: Candy's hand is caught in a machine during ranch work; Crooks is kicked in the back while tending horses; and Curley's hand is mangled when he attacks Lennie, one of his father's hired laborers. As such, Steinbeck implies that the nature of capitalism is responsible for the dispossession of the laborers, which held especially true during the Great Depression when laborers were obligated to take whatever work happened to have been available. This can be seen in the loss of life, limb, and property the laborers experience on account of capitalistic behavior.

Steinbeck confronts the disposition of capitalist workers by exposing the physical trauma their bodies undergo while completing capitalist work. For instance, Crooks cynically claims that he has “seen too many guys with land in their head. They never get none under their *hand*” (emphasis mine; 72). Furthermore, Crooks “being a stable buck and a cripple . . . was more permanent than the other men, and he had accumulated more possessions than he could carry on his back” (63). Here, Steinbeck is subtle: Crooks’ ailing back is incapable of carrying (i.e., possessing) much. Thus, bodily harm caused by capitalistic environmental factors indicates dispossession, and the men themselves indeed register history upon their bodies through disfigurement, which suggests that capitalistic practices limit the agency of the individual.

George: Laborer, Unionist

Although most of the dispossessed workers of the Steinbeck’s Great Depression shows the scars of industry on their bodies, George’s characterization as protagonist is more closely aligned to economic capitalism than that of the other characters. In the introductory chapter, Steinbeck closely aligns George’s abstract feelings of dispossession and despondency to the economic conditions necessitated by the Great Depression:

George stared morosely at the water. The rims of his eyes were red with sun glare. He said angrily, “We could just as well of rode clear to the ranch if that bastard bus driver knew what he was talkin’ about. ‘Jes’ a little stretch down the highway,’ he says. ‘Jes’ a little stretch.’ God damn near four miles, that’s what it was! Didn’t wanta stop at the ranch gate, that’s what. Too God damn lazy to pull up. Wonder he isn’t too damn good to stop in Soledad at all. Kicks us out and

says, ‘Jes’ a little stretch down the road.’ I bet it was *more* than four miles. Damn hot day. (3-4)

In this passage, George reveals a deep dissatisfaction with his life traveling from one temporary job to another, which is due foremost to economic conditions across the country and not from Lennie’s yet unforeseen misbehavior.

An initial glance may suggest that George is a hypocrite: he criticizes a bus driver for being too lazy because it makes additional work for him. He also appears to be jealous and have an inferiority complex, insinuating that the driver likely feels superior to George for being duly employed. However, this cannot be written off as feelings of selfishness or entitlement. Instead, this indicates an element of George’s identity that is inexplicably tied to the economic culture of the time. As shall be seen, George is intent on working for what he believes to be an achievable American Dream, and this is evident in his word choice throughout the novel:

“You remember where we’re goin’ now?”

Lennie looked startled and then in embarrassment hid his face against his knees. “I forgot again.”

“Jesus Christ,” George said resignedly. “Well—look, we’re gonna *work* on a *ranch* like the one we come from up *north*....”

That *ranch* we’re goin’ to is right down there about a quarter mile. We’re gonna go in an’ see the *boss*. Now, look—I’ll give him the *work tickets*, but you ain’t gonna say a word. You jus’ stand there and don’t say nothing. If he finds out what a crazy bastard you are, we won’t get no *job*, but if he sees ya *work* before he hears ya talk, we’re set. Ya got that?

“Sure, George. Sure I got it.”

“O.K. Now when we go in to see the *boss*, what you gonna do?”

(emphasis mine; 5-6)

As evident through the use of his words associated with employment, George is fixated on procuring work and therefore cannot be charged with hypocritical laziness. In fact, this conversation represents George as a competent worker who must delegate responsibilities to Lennie in order to secure employment. And even though he decides for Lennie and himself to camp by the river that night rather than walk to the nearby ranch, this is not an example of shirking responsibility. This is actually an example of his further entanglement with the economic culture, as can be seen when Lennie questions him:

“George—why ain’t we goin’ to the ranch and get some supper? They got supper at the ranch.”

George rolled on his side. “No reason at all for you. I like it here. Tomorra we’re gonna go to work. I seen thrashin’ machines on the way down. That means we’ll be bucking grain bags, bustin’ a gut. Tonight I’m gonna lay right here and look up. I like it.” (7)

As an assertion of freedom, which it certainly is, George’s comments stop short of Steinbeck criticizing capitalism and the limitations it imposes upon human laborers. When paired with Whit’s comments later, these passages indicate how dedicated George is to working to build a viable life.

Whit said, “I guess you guys really come here to work.”

“How do you mean?” George asked.

Whit laughed. “Well, ya come on a Friday. You got two days to work till Sunday.”

“I don’t see how you figure,” said George.

Whit laughed again. “You do if you been around these big ranches much. Guy that wants to look over a ranch comes in Sat’day afternoon. He gets Sat’day supper an’ three meals on Sunday, and he can quit Monday mornin’ after breakfast without turning his hand. But you come to work Friday noon. You got to put in a day an’ a half no matter how you figure.”

George looked at him levelly. “We’re gonna stick around’ a while,” he said. “Me and Lennie’s gonna roll up a stake.” (47)

As these lines indicate, George does not seem encumbered by his responsibilities as a laborer. Instead, he sees work as a means to a viable end wherein he will be free to live as he chooses. However, this life is dependent upon the wellbeing of both George and Lennie and will ultimately remain out of George’s reach at the end of the novel.

When George meets the boss at the ranch, his role as the business and employment manager is emphasized, and he successfully quells the boss’s concerns about Lennie’s mental fitness as if he were in an interview:

The boss licked his pencil. “What’s your name?”

“George Milton.”

“And what’s yours?”

George said, “His name’s Lennie Small.” ...

“He ain’t much of a talker, is he?”

“No, he ain’t but he’s sure a hell of a good worker. Strong as a bull.” ...

The boss said suddenly, “Listen Small!” Lennie raised his head. “What can you do?”

In a panic, Lennie looked at George for help. “He can do anything you tell him,” said George. “He’s a good skinner. He can rassel grain bags, drive a cultivator. He can do anything. Just give him a try.”

The boss turned on George. “Then why don’t you let him answer? What you trying to put over?”

“George broke in loudly, “Oh! I ain’t saying he’s bright. He ain’t. But I say he’s a God damn good worker. He can put up a four hundred pound bale.”

(20-21)

As a good friend and caregiver, George takes responsibility for ensuring employment for himself and Lennie. However, other characters are suspicious of George’s intentions. When the boss accuses George of taking advantage of Lennie for personal gain, George dispels his concerns:

“I said what stake you got in this guy? You takin’ his pay away from him?”

“No, ’course I ain’t. What ya think I’m sellin’ him out?”

“Well, I never seen one guy take so much trouble for another guy. I just like to know what your interest is.”

George said, “He’s my ... cousin. I told his old lady I’d take care of him.”

... The boss turned half away. “Well, God knows he don’t need any brains to buck barley bags. But don’t you try to put nothing over, Milton. I got my eye on you.” (21)

To Steinbeck, it was the nature of industry itself to exploit the work of laborers. For this reason, George plays the role of a workers’ union to protect Lennie from systemic abuse, which Lennie would be unable to recognize due to his decreased mental faculties. It is up to George,

and only George, to ensure that Lennie is not taken advantage of by a system over which he has no control. This is a system that involves abstract thinking that Lennie is not capable of utilizing.

Immediately after meeting with the boss, George and Lennie are introduced to his son Curley, and George again must speak on behalf of his friend in order to discourage further attempts at exploiting him. Here, George is portrayed as considerate of Lennie's autonomy but who still must speak out in order to maintain some equilibrium in the balance of power between economic and natural systems.

“Seen my old man?” he asked.

The swamper said, “He was here jus’ a minute ago, Curley. We over to the cook house, I think.”

“I’ll try to catch him,” said Curley. ... “You the new guys the old man was waitin’ for?”

“We just come in,” said George.

“Let the big guy talk.”

Lennie twisted with embarrassment.

George said, “S’pose he don’t want to talk?”

Curley lashed his body around. “By Christ, he’s gotta talk when he’s spoke to. What the hell are you getting’ into it for?”

“We travel together,” said George coldly.

“Oh, so it’s that way.”

George was tense, and motionless. “Yeah, it’s that way.” ...

“An’ you won’t let the big guy talk, is that it?”

“He can talk if he wants to tell you anything.” He nodded slightly to Lennie.

“We jus’ come in,” said Lennie softly.

Curley stared levelly at him. “We’ll, nex’ time you answer when you’re spoke to.” (23-24)

In this scene, Steinbeck links Curley to his father, the boss of the ranch business, to reveal his critique of capitalistic exploitation. As the voice of industry, Curley makes demands of Lennie that he cannot understand, and George must intervene in order to protect Lennie’s rights.

After Curley leaves the bunkhouse, George questions Candy about Curley’s pugnacious behavior, which Candy claims to be the result of an inferiority complex: “He’s alla time picking scraps with big guys. Kind of like he’s mad at ’em because he ain’t a big guy. You seen little guys like that, ain’t you? Always scappy?” (24). George’s response implies the danger of a cultural system (capitalism) imposing restrictions and limitations to a natural creature. “He said ominously, ‘Well, he better watch out for Lennie. Lennie ain’t no fighter, but Lennie’s strong and quick and Lennie don’t know no rules’” (25). Here, Steinbeck emphasizes the unpredictability of natural creatures in response to cultural circumstances. As would a threatened animal, Lennie may lash out in any way possible in order to ensure his survival. Although the boss and his son may believe that they are capable of controlling their workers, this notion can only be expected if the animal in question is aware of and follows the rules. As we shall see, this social contract between Lennie and his employer is not fulfilled due to Lennie’s characterization as human animal, rather than as a human laborer.

Lennie: Human Animal

To complement George's representation of the economic-cultural aspect of personhood, Steinbeck introduces Lennie, whose body and mental state at first seem to be affected more noticeably by genetics than by freewheeling environmental agents, and this is because he is portrayed as a product of nature, rather than a product of capitalistic culture. In a world obsessed with cultural concerns, such as surviving in a capitalistic society, natural conditions are subject to suspicion, for the naturally minded may express opposition to so-called cultural imperatives. For this reason, George lies to the boss when asked why he speaks on Lennie's behalf: "He's my . . . cousin. I told his old lady I'd take care of him. He got kicked in the head by a horse when he was a kid. He's awright. Just ain't bright" (21). Later in confidence, Lennie asks George if he had indeed been kicked in the head, to which George replies, "Be a damn good thing if you was . . . Save everybody a hell of a lot of trouble" (22). This scene indicates that natural genetic disability arouses suspicion as opposition to capitalist aims. In the fictive world Steinbeck depicts, direct causation is thus considered favorable to genetic determinism because it would indicate Lennie's acceptance of the authorized practices of the American economy, his acquiescence to ranch life. By lying, George provides an explanation of direct causation, which indicates that such reasoning makes life easier in a world in which teleological understanding is the predominate mode of thinking. To express the truth that Lennie was born with this mental disorder would arouse suspicion because mental illness was not well understood at this time. Since non-teleological explanations (e.g., myriad factors contributing to decreased mental faculties occurring in utero) could not be positively determined, studied, and understood, George's lying is ideal for stifling suspicion and fears of Lennie's possible behavior and stability.

To make clear that Lennie is a natural creature who does not fit into society's mold of the perfect capitalist, Steinbeck consistently compares him to animals starting with his first description: "Behind [George] walked his opposite, a huge man, shapeless of face, with large pale eyes, and wide sloping shoulders; and he walked heavily, dragging his feet a little, the way a bear drags his paws" (2). In the next paragraph, Lennie "drank with long gulps, snorting into the water like a horse" (2). From early on, Lennie's hands are often referred to as paws, which stands in distinction to the *hands* of other characters, men who are often referred to via synecdoche as ranch hands. By describing body parts as either animal-like or human-like, Steinbeck is able to connect bodies thematically. In this case, hands are appropriate for distinguishing between industry and nature but also for distinguishing between agency and dispossession. For Candy, the hand is a symbol for his bodily limitations, which reflects the loss of control over his financial well being. For Curley, whose hand is crushed in Lennie's vice-like grip, the hand symbolizes his inability to control nature, as well as the loss of his wife, for whom he had previously kept one hand soft by wearing a glove full of petroleum jelly.

In addition to bears and horses, Steinbeck refers to Lennie within the first chapter as being "like a terrier" (8) and a "crazy son-of-a-bitch" (10). He also writes of George claiming that "somebody would shoot [Lennie] for a coyote" if he were on his own (12). However, Lennie's characterization as animal-like does not stop here. After the child-minded Lennie irritates George by mentioning that he prefers beans with ketchup, George scolds him, claiming, "I wisht I could put you in a cage" (11). According to Bert Cardullo, "It is no accident that . . . Lennie is likened to an animal" (24). Cardullo implies that due to his violent nature, "the best place for [Lennie] would have been in a home or hospital or even in the wild" (24). Here, a home or hospital is a controlled safe place, a laboratory-like setting in which Lennie can be safely

detained, because his wayfaring with George as necessitated by capitalist culture proves not to be an appropriate environment for a creature governed by a natural pursuit of pleasure.

Although George may be curt with Lennie, it is clear that he cares about him a great deal, as he looks after him for years, not only out of duty but also because he values his companionship while traveling as a migrant worker. But Lennie's categorization as an animal is not the only connection Steinbeck makes between Lennie and nature. In this chapter, he also introduces three animals for which Lennie has an affinity and which serve as foreshadowing for the trouble he will cause later in the novel: mice (which he has a history of unintentionally killing), rabbits (which serve as a symbol for a life of independence and satisfaction), and companion dogs (one of which Lennie ultimately kills on account of his aggressive petting once George provides it to him). In this way, Lennie serves as nature embodied, and as such, Steinbeck's naturalistic worldview is exposed: as much as society (i.e., George) may attempt to control nature (i.e., Lennie), the human cannot overpower nature by mere will alone.

Although George tends to issue a great deal of control over Lennie, who is mostly unable to live without a guardian, their relationship is much more symbiotic than that of overlord and subject. In fact, each plays a vital role in constructing the identity of the other. This characterization is necessary to recognize the non-actualized suicide of a virtual character. For Lennie, George is a mentor who, despite his often caustic reactions, models appropriate behavior and a mostly harmless way of life. As early as the first chapter, Steinbeck clothes the men similarly to build this connection: "Both were dressed in denim trousers and in denim coats with brass buttons. Both wore black, shapeless hats and both carried tight blanket rolls slung over their shoulders" (2). Additionally, their physical statures are opposite, which emphasizes their complementary characterization: George being "small and quick, dark of face, with restless eyes

and sharp strong features,” compared to the huge, sluggish Lennie (2). Steinbeck scholars have been quick to point out the similarities between the characters’ attire and appearance, but their similarity in dress and opposing physical statures have not been discussed as features that unite the men as a single entity. George’s intelligence and stoutness coupled with Lennie’s dullness and hulking body indicate a balance that has symbiotic results. Furthermore, George’s brusque prudence and Lennie’s childish naiveté serve as characterizations that create a balance within their relationship: “‘Lennie!’ He said sharply. ‘Lennie, for God’ [sic] sakes don’t drink so much ... You gonna be sick like you was last night ... I ain’t sure it’s good water’” (3).

Although the men are distinctly characterized, their similarities seem familial, as Lennie appears to behave as George’s young son. “Lennie dabbled his big paw in the water and wiggled his fingers so the water arose in little splashes; rings widened across the pool to the other side and came back again. Lennie watched them go. ‘Look, George. Look what I done’” (3). After they drink from the pool, Lennie attempts to conform to George’s mannerisms as an impressionable youngster may emulate his father: “Lennie, who had been watching, imitated George exactly. He pushed himself back, drew up his knees, embraced them, looked over to George to see whether he had it just right. He pulled his hat down a little more over his eyes, the way George’s hat was” (3). Presumably, it is George’s decision how the two dress, given his understanding of finances, necessities, and decorum; in this way, he surely is acting as Lennie’s guardian and father figure. By characterizing Lennie as a child seeking approval from the more mature George, Steinbeck’s portrayal of the two is familial, which suggests that even if they are not genetically related, the two are indeed similar enough to warrant classification as kin.

Further support for my reading of Steinbeck’s intimate characterization as a means of trans-corporeal blending comes from Leo Gurko, who claims,

George feels deeply compelled to control Lennie ... [and] finds the task personally gratifying. It is of course gratifying to his ego; no one can resist the temptation of being the master of some one [sic] else's destiny. It also heightens the quality of his own life. As Warren French theorized, George is rescued from dullness and mediocrity by maneuvering to keep Lennie out of trouble. (15)

Here, ego is to be understood as one's *concept* of self, rather than simply as the self. With this understanding, Lennie's being, as George perceives it, helps substantiate his understanding of his own existence. Thus, this reveals interdependency shaping their identity: without Lennie, George is only partially a man, which is further emphasized by the third-person limited narrator that never reveals the inner workings of George's mind. On a more immediate level, however, George's guardianship of Lennie is a major aspect of the life he lives and, thus, a major part of who he is. To me, this equates to Steinbeck having been affected by a virtual character consisting of the two, which he then captured with characterized unity. Put simply, George, as the reader comes to understand him, would not exist without his pairing with Lennie. Together, they are something different, something united, not two men with two different lives. Coupling this understanding with Steinbeck's monist philosophy reveals an overt depiction of Alaimo's transcorporeality, in which the factors (i.e., George and Lennie) are fully recognizable separate entities in actuality that reveal a single subject embodied by both.

Boundary-Crossing Rabbits

In order to represent the suicide of a virtual character, Steinbeck must develop the competing natural and economic forces as internal conflicts rather than external. To do this, Lennie must come to symbolize nature and George to symbolize economic capitalism. Steinbeck

develops the connection between Lennie and the natural environment most evidently by repeating the use of the word *rabbit*, which occurs seventy-four times throughout *Of Mice and Men*. Within the opening paragraph, Steinbeck's imagery for the setting reveals it to be a place where "[r]abbits come out of the brush to sit on the sand in the evening," which introduces the rabbit motif as connected to freedom from society (1). This carries on until the end of the novella, and Lennie's last thoughts suggest that their plan for such a life will go awry: "And I get to tend the rabbits ... An' live on the fatta the lan'" (101). After he speaks these lines, Lennie only speaks twenty-eight more words before George shoots him, and his final words are merely catalysts for Steinbeck to dispel objections to George as being callous:

Lennie said, "I thought you was mad at me, George."

"No," said George. "No, Lennie. I ain't mad. I never been mad, an' I ain't now. That's a thing I want ya to know ..."

Lennie begged, "Le's do it now. Le's get that place now." (101)

Whereas George's dream is to live independently with "a little house and a couple of acres," Lennie's concept of happiness is necessarily less abstract, and for this reason the rabbit motif is especially pertinent as it casts his dreams as more concrete (13). For a man with limited mental capacity, Lennie must align his thoughts with concrete things rather than abstractions. When Curley's wife opens up to Lennie about her past dreams of being an actress before he accidentally but inevitably kills her, Lennie comprehends her but is only able to add to the conversation by relating to her with concrete objects. She confides to him:

"If I'd went, I wouldn't be livin' like this you bet."

Lennie stroked the pup [that he had killed] back and forth. "We gonna have a little place—an' rabbits," he explained.

She went on with her story quickly, before she should be interrupted . . .

“Well, I ain’t told this to nobody before. Maybe I ought’n to. I don’t *like* Curley. He ain’t a nice fella.” (84).

Unlike the characters with whom he connects during the course of the novel (i.e., George, Crooks, Candy, and Curley’s wife), Lennie is mostly unable to express abstract thought. As a character whose understanding of the world is limited to that of a concrete nature, Lennie’s connection to the natural environment is of vital importance because he is first and foremost a sensual creature whose understanding of the world is constructed through sensual interaction with his environment, notably by touch. Coming to understand this, Curley’s wife allows Lennie to stroke her hair, which is a moment of great intimacy between the two but one that ends tragically with her death.

Before the fear-filled altercation between the two, Curley’s wife realizes the single-mindedness of Lennie: he is transfixed by rabbits because rabbits help him understand who he is in the world and what he is capable of accomplishing.

“Don’t you ever think of nothing but rabbits?”

“We gonna have a little place,” Lennie explained patiently. “We gonna have a house an’ a garden and a place for alfalfa, an’ that alfalfa is for the rabbits, an’ I take a sack and get it all fulla alfalfa and then I take it to the rabbits.” (85)

Finally, she questions him why he is so enamored of rabbits, and he replies simply, “I like to pet nice things with my fingers, sof’ things” (85). Acknowledging that she too likes soft things, she allows him to touch her hair, but worried that he will “muss it up,” she yells, which causes him to panic and clench her hair between his giant hands (86). As she struggles, “Lennie began to cry with fright. ‘Oh! Please don’t do none of that,’ he begged. ‘George gonna say I done a bad thing.

He ain't gonna let me tend no rabbits'" (86). Even here while Lennie is on the verge of manslaughter, he is fixated on rabbits because he cannot comprehend his panic and the possible ramifications of his actions apart from his concrete understanding of the world. In contrast to this, George would be concerned with the woman's well-being and the consequences of harming her, the loss of independence, whereas Lennie fears losing his would-be pets first and foremost. "Don't you go yellin', ' he said, and he shook her; and her body flopped like a fish. And then she was still, for Lennie had broken her neck" (87).

After the tragedy, two animals, a pigeon and a dog, encounter the smell of death within the barn and have adverse reactions, which Davison points out as grounds for Fitzgerald's criticism that Steinbeck plagiarized Norris (223). The pigeon enters and then immediately flies out of the barn, and the dog's "hair rose along her spine" (88). For George, not only does this mark the end of the life of Curley's wife but also the end of his dream, which is only viable with Lennie as his companion. When Candy asks if he and George will still be able to collect their money and purchase their would-be plot of land, George is dismissive and melancholy: "I'll work my month an' I'll take my fifty bucks an' I'll stay all night in some lousy cat house. Or I'll set in some poolroom till ever'body goes home. An' then I'll come back an' work another month an' I'll have fifty bucks more" (90). These lines indicate how important Lennie is for George's dream. Without Lennie, a change is immediately recognizable in George, which further emphasizes how integrally important their unity is. When Lennie is factored out of the equation, George's most extreme desires change in an instant, and he becomes a new subject all together, a man in isolation, broken and dejected. Here, Steinbeck's notion that a group is not at all similar to the individuals that compose it is inverted: the individual George is not at all like the single entity that he and Lennie had hitherto been. The difference between George in isolation and

George paired with Lennie is so different that even his lifelong obsession with personal freedom vanishes at once. In this way, Steinbeck represents the natural elements of the human animal being at odds with its delegated role in society as an internal conflict afflicting a virtual assemblage of George and Lennie as one.

In the final chapter, Steinbeck returns to the setting of the opening scene, indicating that George and Lennie are no closer to their goal than they had been at the outset of their journey. However, the striking difference between the imagery in the first chapter and the last is the absence of rabbits in the final scene. This indicates that the dream is no longer an option, as well as suggesting that Lennie, who is consistently linked to rabbits, will soon be no more. Although both the opening and final chapters occur in the evening, the former is a night full a promise, a night before the coming of a new day, whereas in the latter, the evening is a subtle indication that Lennie's end is approaching. The free snakes with periscope heads in the first chapter are distinguished from those damned in the final: as a heron "lanced down and picked it out by the head, and the beak swallowed the little snake while its tail waved frantically," and this serves as further foreshadowing for Lennie's death, as well as the end of his deplorable actions (95).

But before his death, the true trans-corporeal nature of Lennie's cognitive state is revealed through his imagination, which manifests visions of his Aunt Clara and a gigantic talking rabbit. Surprisingly, it is Lennie's simple mind that Steinbeck allows readers to enter, rather than George's more complex mind, and the result is a testament to both the importance of concrete objects to Lennie's understanding of the world, as well as an indication of how much Lennie as subject is comingled with environmental elements.

Sequestered in the clearing where George had instructed him to go if ever he found himself in trouble, Lennie sits by the riverbank, and ponders his lot, but due to his decreased

mental faculties, he envisions first his Aunt Clara, who serves as a window into his conscience and, above all, his ego, rather than contemplating abstractly the ramifications of his actions and the effects they have on others. While doing so, Lennie repeats lines he had heard from George and re-appropriates them to his imagined aunt. Here also, we have Lennie's ego shaped by his intimate interaction with George:

And *when she spoke, it was in Lennie's voice*. "I tol' you an' tol' you," she said. "I tol' you, 'Min' George because he's such a nice fella an' good to you.' But you don't never take no care. You do bad things."

And Lennie answered her, "I tried, Aunt Clara, ma'am. I tried and tried. I couldn' help it."

"You never give a thought to George," *she went on in Lennie's voice*. "He's been doin' nice things for you alla time. When he got a piece a pie, you always got half or more'n half. An' if they was any ketchup, why he'd give it all to you."

"I know," said Lennie miserably. "I tired, Aunt Clara, ma'am. I tried and tried."

She interrupted him. "All the time he coulda had such a good time if it wasn't for you. He woulda took his pay an' raised hell in a whore house, and he coulda set in a pool room an' played snooker. But he got to take care of you."

(emphasis mine; 96-97)

These lines not only reveal Lennie's inner turmoil but also reveal Lennie's simple understanding of the world in which objects are vested with significance for understanding himself. Here, Steinbeck repeats important elements such as rabbits, whore houses, ketchup, and billiards, to

represent distinct ways of life. For George, whose houses and pool rooms signify the alternate lifestyles that he could have if he were not to serve as a caregiver to Lennie—lifestyles that, although he determines preferable while speaking in anger, are anathema to his ideal life of living off the fat of the land. For Lennie, however, rabbits and ketchup are symbols for his conception of the good life that George has impressed upon him. Unable to contemplate abstract notions of right or wrong on his own, Lennie parrots George's words to judge himself as "bad." Once he has done so, Lennie sulks: "I might jus' as well go away. George ain't gonna let me tend no rabbits now" (97).

In this short scene, Steinbeck presents a trans-corporeal entity comprising at least three individual persons: Aunt Clara, George, and Lennie himself. As inexplicably tied to his personal emotions, the imagined Aunt Clara is a manifestation of Lennie's feelings of dejection, fear, self-loathing, and panic. However, it is unlikely that the words Lennie imagines are words he recalls her speaking from the past, for at one point he seems to forget his aunt's name: "George scoffed. 'Lady, huh? Don't even remember who that lady was. That was your own Aunt Clara'" (9). Instead, Steinbeck ascribes George's words to the imagined Aunt Clara, and so Lennie's understanding of his emotions are based on George's explanation of the world: "'An' whatta I got,' George went on furiously. 'I got you! You can't keep a job and you lose me ever' job I get. ... An' that ain't the worst. You get in trouble. You do bad things and I got to get you out'" (10).

Immediately following this fantasized event, Lennie becomes even more critical of himself upon imagining the emergence of a gigantic rabbit because he identifies so much with them. Here, rabbits and his natural environment combine to manifest as a being perhaps equal in stature to his own body. This imaginary rabbit is a testament to the trans-corporeal nature of

Lennie as subject because the environment is shown to be a literal part of Lennie's mentally-divided self.

Aunt Clara was gone, and from out of Lennie's head there came a gigantic rabbit. ... And it spoke in Lennie's voice too.

"Tend rabbits," it said scornfully. "You crazy bastard. You ain't fit to lick the boots of no rabbit. You'd forget 'em and let 'em go hungry." ...

"I would *not* forget," Lennie said loudly.

"The hell you wouldn'," said the rabbit. "You ain't worth a greased jack-pin to ram you into hell. Christ knows George done ever'thing he could to jack you outta the sewer, but it don't do no good. If you think George gonna let you tend rabbits, you're even crazier'n usual. He ain't. He's gonna beat hell outta you with a stick, that's what he's gonna do."

"Now Lennie retorted belligerently, "He ain't neither. George won't do nothing like that. I've knew George since—I forget when—and he ain't never raised his han' to me with a stick. He's nice to me. He ain't gonna be mean."

"Well he's sick of you," said the rabbit. "He's gonna beat hell outta you an' then go away an' leave you."

"He won't," Lennie cried frantically. "He won't do nothing like that. I know George. Me an' him travels together."

But the rabbit repeated softly over and over, "He gonna leave you, ya crazy bastard. He gonna leave ya all alone. He gonna leave ya, crazy bastard."

(97-98)

In this scene, Lennie is especially self-critical and emotional, revealing his most in-depth, independent thinking within the entire book. Whereas his conversation with the Aunt Clara of his imagination is mostly a recapitulation of the sentiments George at one point expresses to him, the conversation he has with the rabbit as is based upon his own personal thoughts pertaining to the situation at hand. By coupling these independent thoughts with the enchanted object that most heavily influences Lennie (i.e., the rabbit), Steinbeck emphasizes the trans-corporeal nature of Lennie's existence: a major part of who Lennie believes himself to be is represented as a totally separate entity, which overtly shows the inextricable multifaceted connection between bodies within a single subject. Although Steinbeck makes this connection quite clear in the case of Lennie and the giant rabbit, the combinatory nature of matter is only suggested for George and Lennie as physical persons.

Although some of the language the rabbit uses is similar to the words George spouts in anger, particularly the phrase "crazy bastard," the majority of the sentiment expressed is the product of Lennie's own pained thinking, and this differs significantly from the words of the imagined Aunt Clara. For instance, comparing his self-worth to that of a "greased up jack-pin" is unique, as the phrase occurs nowhere else in the text. Furthermore, although George threatens to "sock" Lennie in the first chapter, Lennie claims that George has never threatened him with a weapon, and his adamancy that George will not do so (i.e., "I *know* George . . .") indicates an intimate knowledge of him as a person, which he derives from experience and not mere repetition of George's instruction. Finally, Lennie is convinced that George will not leave him, as the rabbit threatens, which is consistent with George's character. Although he may claim that "if [he] was alone [he] could live so easy," not once does he threaten to leave Lennie to fend for himself (10). In short, this scene is the only evidence of Lennie's independent thinking within the

novella that is not directly influenced by George's didactic intent. Thus, the individualism that this scene reveals is inextricably aligned to the natural world via a rabbit, which Steinbeck shows to be a major component of Lennie's internal identity, further blurring the line between man and environment and showing ostensible trans-corporeality of the mind-nature continuum.

Conclusion

Although Fitzgerald's insight that Steinbeck was influenced significantly by the work of Frank Norris is valuable, he is able to escape claims of plagiarism, as *Of Mice and Men* and *McTeague* differ greatly in terms of plot. As a literary naturalist, Steinbeck indeed follows in the same line as Norris in his treatment of nature, but his concept of subjectivity goes far beyond that of his model. For years, critics have lambasted Steinbeck for deficiencies in his craft, particularly accusing him of sentimentality. Sentimentality, in a sense, is used to mean "contrived," which belie the intended honesty of realism as a genre, but only now are scholars beginning to understand the scientific and philosophic worldviews that engender his work. According to biographer Jackson Benson, "His use of science put him in a position of isolation—often the critics did not understand what he was doing" (249). He goes on to claim that like many of Steinbeck's protagonists, George is a "man of action who one way or another, one time or another, messes things up and is a parody of the traditional protagonist who overcomes obstacles to achieve a satisfactory resolution. Steinbeck's point is, of course, that you don't act to gain results—a teleological formulation—you *look* in order to *understand*" (263).

Steinbeck's interest in science may appear through characters such as Doc, a marine biologist in *Cannery Row* and *Sweet Thursday*, but these are mere cameos in the grand scheme of his life's work. As an amateur scientist and a journalist, Steinbeck found observation and

reportage greatly important, and this is evident within his literary style. Although some charge that he approaches his subject sentimentally, Steinbeck took pains to “maintain a deliberate demystifying, non-judgmental eye, merely ‘setting down the thing’” (Kocela 72). This way of writing undoubtedly comes from his obsession with non-teleological thought, a mode of understanding that focuses on the present moment—not how things happened and not how things *should* happen but how things actually *are*. This is particularly relevant to *Of Mice and Men*, which had originally been titled “Something That Happened,” and we see an important change from past tense to present tense with the title (the best laid plans) *Of Mice and Men* (often go awry). In my opinion, Steinbeck is able to escape accusations of sentimentality because his non-teleological worldview is necessarily focused on the present moment of action and is non-didactic. Instead, he presents a tragedy as a tragedy without glossing his text with explanations that seek to contrive a sense of unnecessary pathos.

Finally, to those who might claim that the ending of *Of Mice and Men* is sentimental, I emphasize George’s dejected and complacent demeanor after he shoots Lennie. His death is in no way glorified, nor is it captured with meretricious ornamentation: “The crash of the shot rolled up the hills and rolled down again. Lennie, jarred, and then settled slowly forward to the sand, and he lay without quivering” (102). George, however, has a physical response similar to the convulsions of a dying man: “George shivered and looked at the gun, and then he threw it from him, back up on the bank, near the pile of old ashes” (102). There is no question why George convulses: the combined assemblage that he and Lennie were had suffered a fatal shot, and its death is actualized in George’s physical response. This scene, although oozing pathos, is in no way sentimental, and the tragedy is not so much that Lennie dies but that George *kills* Lennie and, in so doing, a major part of himself. In such a scene, sentimentality would be

fostered through compassion for Lennie, but the reader is left feeling sorry and sickened for George, who will now live forever alone without a driving sense of purpose. The present moment is emphasized, set down as it happens, and what could have happened or *should* have happened does not actualize on account of humans not being masters of the nature but contingent components within nature.

Works Cited

- Alaimo, Stacy. *Bodily Natures: Science, Environment, and the Material Self*. Bloomington: Indiana UP, 2010. Print.
- Benson, Jackson J. "John Steinbeck: Novelist as Scientist." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction* 10.3 (1977): 248-264. Print. JSTOR.
- Cardullo, Bert. "On the Road to Tragedy: Mice, Candy, and Land in *Of Mice and Men*." *American Drama* 16.1 (2007): 19-29. Print. MLA.
- Davison, Richard Allan. "*Of Mice and Men* and *McTeague*: Steinbeck, Fitzgerald, and Frank Norris." *Studies in American Fiction* 17:2 (1989): 219-226. Print. MLA.
- Gaither, Gloria. "John Steinbeck: the Postmodern Mind In the Modern Age." *The Steinbeck Review* 3.1 (2006) 53-68. Print. JSTOR.
- Gurko, Leo. "Of Mice and Men: Steinbeck as Manichean." *University of Windsor Review* 8.3 (1973): 11-23. Print.
- Kocela, Christopher. "From Object Realism to Magic Materiality: The End(s) of Social Critique in Steinbeck's *The Winter of Our Discontent*." *South Atlantic Review* 73.1 (2008): 68-86. Print. JSTOR.
- Langione, Matthew. "John Steinbeck and the Perfectibility of Man." *The Steinbeck Review* 3.2 (2006) 87-99. Print. JSTOR.
- Latour, Bruno. *Pandora's Hope: Essays on the Reality of Science Studies*. Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1999. Print.
- Lieber, Todd M. "Talismanic Patterns in the Novels of John Steinbeck." *American Literature* 44.2 (1972): 262-275. Print. JSTOR.

Ray, William. "John Steinbeck, Episcopalian: St. Paul's, Salinas." *Steinbeck Review* 10.2 (2013): 118-140. Print.

Steinbeck, John. *In Dubious Battle*. 1936. New York: Penguin, 2006. Print.

---. "John Steinbeck – Banquet Speech." Nobelprize.org. 13 Nov 2012.

http://www.nobelprize.org/nobel_prizes/literature/laureates/1962/steinbeck-speech_en.html. Web.

---. *Of Mice and Men*. 1937. New York: Penguin, 2002. Print.

---. *The Winter of Our Discontent*. 1961. New York: Penguin, 2008. Print.

CHAPTER V

LESSONS IN REALISM, LESSONS IN REALITY

On the qualities of effective realism, Frank Norris emphasizes the prominence of storyline over an author's didactic or theoretical intent. He argues, "No matter what its purpose or how great a lesson it purposes to teach, the novel should *be* a novel; first and foremost, it should tell a real story, of real people and of real places" (1104). Norris satisfies this requirement with *McTeague*, wherein the focus really is on Mac being a terrible person motivated by his insatiable consumptive nature. Although an attuned reader may recognize this as an allegory for life in a capitalistic society and, thus, as a warning, Norris does not overwhelm his readers with theoretical backing to emphasize these points. He simply tells a story about real characters interacting with real things. He leaves readers with a portrait of a miserable life and without a moral instruction as to how to live their own.

Having admired Norris' work, F. Scott Fitzgerald also seeks only to tell a story and not to clog the plot with theoretical explanations behind the characters' intentions. However, he complicates the role that story plays in society by transferring the focus onto perspective, which he accomplishes by implementing Nick Carraway as an unreliable narrator. Readers are not intended to see Fitzgerald's *Gatsby*; they are to see Nick's assessment of him. The reason that Nick writes his own *Gatsby* memoir is that it is up to him to make him great and to reveal the truth, flawed as he may be in reporting it. At the end of the novel, the fictive society represented therein will have one interpretation of *Gatsby's* life: eccentric millionaire Jay *Gatsby* killed Myrtle Wilson in a hit-and-run accident. *Gatsby* was then avenged by Myrtle's husband, who then killed himself. This is *Gatsby's* final reputation for society to learn. Nick's perspective, though, allows for the truth to appear, which also reveals Fitzgerald's major critique of American

culture that aristocrats are above the recourse of the law: Tom Buchanan committed adultery and abused his mistress. His wife killed his mistress; Buchanans' silence prompts Wilson's suspicions of Gatsby. Wilson kills Gatsby and then kills himself, leaving no witnesses to defend Gatsby's innocence.

John Steinbeck also seeks only to tell a story and not to provide a didactic theory within his work. This is evident by the structure of the text, which was written to be readily transferable to stage, wherein audience members only hear the lines of actors and not effusive narration. He is able to do this by placing an emphasis on dialogue and having each chapter depict a single scene and location. However, Steinbeck's realism seems to be the most phantasmagorically charged of the three, and this is revealed by trans-corporeal bodies interacting in combinatorial ways throughout the novella. As a close observer of the American people with a journalistic approach to research, Steinbeck tried to express the potency of the ordinary. The result is that the George's action does not seem contrived or sentimental, because Steinbeck reserves judgment on George. A superficial reading of *Of Mice and Men* ends with the question: Was George justified in killing Lennie on account of protective compassion, or is George simply wrong? This question has no place in Steinbeck studies—because it disregards the non-teleological nature of discourse running through the author's life's work. This question is teleological, and thus anathema to Steinbeck's philosophy, because it compels the reader to answer what *should* happen. Steinbeck was not interested in this question, but only in what *did* happen: A life of promise, independence, goodwill, and responsibility ended—and one character is left with the burden of living half alive and half dead.

Frank Norris's nineteenth century was a remarkably different time than our current era, but his work reveals his importance as our intellectual ancestor. Norris's Realism hails from Darwin and reveals a shift from epistemological to ontological understandings of existence as is associated with the emergence of Quantum Mechanical theory later. By analyzing the progression of Naturalistic themes through twentieth-century authors, we can see a broader picture of what emerging ideas influenced such drastically different views of the physical universe during this time.

According to Norris, the novel as artistic technology was the best source for understanding the times in which he lived. Norris argues, "[T]he novel is the great expression of modern life. Each form of art has had its turn at reflecting and expressing its contemporaneous thought ... " (1206), and "To-day is the day of the novel. In no other way and by no other vehicle is contemporaneous life so adequately expressed; and the critics of the twenty-second century, reviewing, our times, striving to reconstruct our civilization, will look not to the painters, not to the architects nor dramatists, but to the novelists to find our idiosyncrasy" (1207). I have no qualms about Norris' view here, and I point the authors he influenced as bearing the responsibilities of the Realist per his influence: emphasizing story over theory by developing "real" people and "real" places.

However, as the notion of what is real changed through new understandings of the physical universe (e.g., Relativity, Quantum Mechanics), novelists successfully illustrated the complex realities their characters faced regarding personhood. Norris' Mac greedily acquires objects in order to influence a more pleasant reality, but on account of his unethical self-concern, the objects reveal him to be out of control of nature as he transforms from human to beast. In a similar fashion, Fitzgerald creates Gatsby as someone who believes himself to be capable of any

transformation based upon will alone. The reality that Fitzgerald captures is that for all the subterfuge and disguise he may actualize within a subject's TPO, the real qualities of ontologically free objects still present themselves to the world irrespective of his attempts to control them. In both these works, the Naturalist theme of the human's impotency in the face of nature is preserved. Finally, Steinbeck writes of two friends who are so close and so dependent upon one another for making their lives livable that they seem to be dualistic components of a single entity. And although his words explicitly name George as Lennie's killer, the unwritten reality is that George loses a part of himself. The character comprising both men feels so desperate and so out of control that it gives up and ultimately commits suicide.

Wanted: An Augmented Realism for An Augmented Reality

In far less abstract terms, an ontological understanding of existence and personhood is necessary for progress within the twenty-first century. Communicative technology has developed in terms of social media, and the way we communicate with one another has changed so drastically that the novel must be augmented and supplemented to capture a reliable depiction of contemporary reality.

In current times, personhood is more complicated than it has been in the past because as new technologies come to be, new activities are taking place in non-spatial, digital arenas. It is now possible to share live images and videos across the world in real time. Being unable to capture this is a major limitation to the novel as a form: in order for a novel to exist in actuality, it must already be written. As such, the novel is always a representation of a past idea. Although this can also be said of social media posts, the difference is the immediacy now available by a different communicative medium. Also contrasting the novel as a form, social media posts can

be edited in real time with immediate effects. As a traditional form of technology, the novel must be empowered to depict more of the non-lingual world. However, there is far more to non-lingual representation than photographs and videos, which will be addressed momentarily.

The role that social media places in actualizing new manifestations of personhood cannot be understated. The human being is no longer a mere body interacting with its immediate environment. Consider a single person using several different social media platforms: Facebook, Instagram, and Twitter. If each account is assigned a different user name, it is clear that three individual personas may arise. But unlike in the novel, whose author is usually limited to only word and organization, social media posters have more options: they can post pictures, re-share ideas posted by others with or without comment, and they can change the format of their posts to change the story being told. For instance, a single event could be narrated first in short tweets, but as dramatic elements of the plot unfold, more effectual photos or videos could incorporate visually stimulated interpretations. In a final change of events, a post could be re-shared from another source, which could ultimately indicate that the content of the story was expressed using a sarcastic tone that had not actualized up until that moment in time. For example, a blogger could use these methods to discuss his or her achievement in *x* field as a result of unerring good character. After showing this progress, the blogger could re-share a photo of a well-known corrupt official regarded for his hypocrisy or an athlete known to use performance enhancing drugs, revealing a previously unrecognized tone of the holistic text that suggests all previous information was spoken ironically. At present, these are some of the limitations of the novel as a vessel for Realism in the twenty-first century.

The reality of personhood in the current time has been revealed: human identity now involves much more than the human body. Stacy Alaimo represents a trans-corporeal human

subject as permeable, always incorporating elements of the environment into its existence. In *The Posthuman*, Rosi Braidotti states this collusion clearly: “The boundaries between the categories of the natural and the cultural have been displaced and to a large extent blurred by the effects of scientific and technological advances” (3). Personhood is now able to transcend spatial and temporal limitations of the previous century by interacting within new virtual environments. When a creature’s environment expands, in this case digitally, the body takes on more characteristics of the environment as its own. According to Braidotti, “As nature-cultural compounds, these animals qualify as cyborgs, that is to say as creatures of mixity or vectors of posthuman relationality” (73). Although the novel may have been the ideal medium for representing humanity in Norris’ time, without serious formal experimentation, the novel will not be able to represent the realism of twenty-first century post-humanism.

As technology has changed to meld digital and actual environments, the domain of the text can no longer be considered as distinct as the world on the page and the world of the reader, or the world on the couch and the world in the videogame. The videogames of today incorporate additional technologies that cause the digital environment and the actual environment to collude into a previously unactualized realm of existence. This is one such realm of the posthuman, the cyborg: the cross-platform setting of action that occurs both digitally and physically.

Take for instance *Pokemon Go*, which uses global positioning satellites to connect player’s physical bodies within actuality to virtual objects within an abstract digital field. By showing the location of both the human body and the virtual objects on the same digital map, a new realm of existence that composes both physical and non-physical objects is available for experiential navigation. In a sense, *Pokemon Go* and gaming systems such as the Nintendo Wii influence reality by involving human movement and problem-solving in ways that has not yet

been captured by written word alone. Whereas a critic versed in reader response theory may argue that the reader enacts the meaning of the words, this new mode of communication reveals that the text also can give meaning to the player's movement in actuality. Although reader response theory is beneficial for reading novels, it will not hold as a way to analyze technological communication of the current day. Object-oriented ontologist and video game enthusiast Ian Bogost will likely play an important role developing an understanding of this field.

In response to many concerned students and parents, I argue that literature will retain its potency throughout human experience as an effective vessel for understanding the world. I make this claim in response to Braidotti, who states, "Considered more of a personal hobby than a professional research field, I believe that the Humanities are in serious danger of disappearing from the twenty-first-century European university curriculum" (10). Although I understand her concern deals with administrative and legislative funding initiatives, I am more optimistic for the Humanities. As a college, the Humanities will have to welcome broader understandings of reality according to the posthuman era, and I believe that theorists and authors will significantly change their rhetorical practices in order to develop a realistic depiction of contemporary experience through written words. Out of necessity, I see e-readers becoming primary literary vessels to express posthuman narratives. Instead of on paper pages, words will be presented on a digital screens with the great boon of being able to be supplemented with multimedia inclusions. Plotted action can be incorporated into the story by how a digital page turns: if it fades, slides, disappears, falls back, or jumps ahead—then these non-lingual elements will influence a reader's interpretation by non-verbally incorporating motion into the plot as a rhetorical feature. Physical action of the reader, as well as his or her actual words, can be incorporated into the cross-

platform domain in which the real qualities of the reader indeed become actual elements of a text's plot.

The change in perspective on what makes a human subject in the twenty-first century is in part due to technological advancements that grant physical humans access to a digital environment. This now makes it possible to create much more realistic depictions of second-person narration than have previously occurred in literature. I believe that in the past, the second-person point-of-view has been inaccurately conceived due to a fallacious attention to pronoun use. Use of the pronoun *you*, for instance, is a sign of the previous understanding of the second-person. Cook books and how-to manuals utilize this approach, but such texts are not written in true second-person, which indicates the *speaker's* identity as the source of words, not the *audience's* point-of-view as having heard them. In a cookbook, for instance, the pronoun *you* considers only the audience, yet the speaker remains implied as first-person: First you crack the eggs; then you scramble, and finally we'll eat.

Twenty-first century technology can fix this error in understanding and allow for a true second-person point-of-view wherein the *reader's* actual words and actions become part of the plotted narrative. For instance, a digital platform can require that a reader repeat a phrase into a device's microphone before the next element of the plot (e.g., detail, explanation, dialogue) will be presented to the reader. For the most part, this perspective has been limited by the tangible, unalterable nature of the traditional novel in printed form.

As authors incorporate different modes of writing into holistic texts, the pastiche nature of communication may become more apparent to the lay reader. Theorists may see this according to deconstruction or Mikhail Bakhtin's *polyphony*. If a reader were to analyze a character of one of these holistic texts according to his or her posts on several different social media platforms, it

may become clear how malleable characters can be when facing varying fictive audiences. It may also reveal a prevalent threat within posthuman reality: identities are malleable and can be misused or abused without detection.

In addition to literary changes needed to account for twenty-first century perspective, our daily lives must change to anticipate problems associated with trans-corporeal identities. With each digital persona we create, we welcome the possibility of others assuming our identity if they access our accounts. Identity theft is increasingly common today, given the number of digital avenues criminals can take to access personal information. As social media applications share more data across different platforms and interfaces (e.g., Facebook and Pandora's synchronizing capabilities), there are more opportunities for a criminal to enter the assembled cache of the digital *you*. When we assemble digital presences, they become much larger than our actual bodies. These digital assemblages, by nature of their ontology, will affect and be affected by other objects regardless of the idiosyncratic intent of our finite bodies. As a result, we have uncovered posthuman vulnerabilities that had not previously existed.

The twenty-first century will continue to pose its challenges to humanity, but today's posthumans are well equipped to confront them in creative ways. We have accompanied our concrete problems of the actual world with other less tangible but equally real problems. But students of the Humanities, whether active in academia or simply living lives fueled by their curiosity, will always be working to make sense of a truly unfathomable reality.

Works Cited

Braidotti, Rosi. *The Posthuman*. Cambridge: Polity, 2013. Print.

Norris, Frank. "The Responsibilities of the Novelist." *Norris: Novels and Essays*. Ed. Donald Pizer. New York: The Library of America, 1986. 1206-10. Print.

Norris, Frank. "Theory and Reality." *Norris: Novels and Essays*. Ed. Donald Pizer. New York: The Library of America, 1986. 1103-05. Print.