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Life Without Measure: Literary Reflections on Freedom and Commerce in Émile Zola, Henry James, Thomas Mann, and Charles Dickens

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Abstract

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By Sean Tommasi

This study discusses literary responses to economic and commercial phenomena in mid to late nineteenth-century Europe. I argue that the problem of how to freely interpret and transform a world governed by the determinative calculations of market mechanisms is central to the four novels I examine. Each novel performs in economically informed social settings the relation between aesthetic reflection and rational calculation through dynamic characters and ambiguous situations. At stake, in one way or another, is the possibility of thinking and acting beyond objective institutional limits by way of an irreducible excess of subjectivity that only comes to life through meaningful social relationships.

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This dissertation is dedicated to Sofia Pinedo-Padoch.

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Introduction

This dissertation concerns the attempts of certain nineteenth-century novels to describe the limits of institutional systems. Novels by authors like Dickens and Zola depict with fair prominence contemporary social, legal, and economic systems; they also present characters and events that exceed these institutions. Such novels are about persons and events in their liminal tensions with normative conformity.

The lives of a novel's central characters tend to be, or tend to become in the course of the plot, somehow extraordinary, even if in a way that is only perceptible to the reader's privileged view of their interiorities. Characters only come to life when their actions, bodies, words, thoughts, or even just the overall meaning of their existence, develop in conflict with the very institutional fabric out of which they are woven.[1] The subject is an effect of institutional processes, but it is a critical effect—a crisis. This holds true of many novels, perhaps even all novels: consider Don Quixote, the eponymous character of which appears as a crisis of the literary institution itself, a derangement of the norms guarding the separation between modern reality and chivalric fiction. Quixote is the model for all subsequent heroes of the novel, from Tom Jones to Jude Fawley, who are each to some degree deranged from the perspective of institutional norms. Nineteenth-century novels, however, tend to describe social, economic, and political institutions in unprecedented detail

1. Richard Lehan offers a similar criterion of realist literature, namely that in moral deliberations characters tend to consult their own experience rather than normative ideals (Lehan, *Realism and Naturalism*, 4).

and afford them more prominent positions in the narrative.[2] Characters, too, beginning in this period, tend to consist in more subtle derangements and live through more deeply layered conflicts. The nineteenth-century hero is no longer extraordinary for his comical insanity or mischievousness, but for the ineffable existential crisis swirling in his interior. The extraordinariness of such a character is, then, also very ordinary.

The novel, as a literary work, is able to illuminate the dimension of crisis where technical expositions fail. The crises of subjectivity often yield to normative functionality in both psychological and philosophical explanations of the relationship between mind and world. Literary or poetic modes of engagement, however, deal with singular persons and things, which are resistant to any law that would sublate them into an order of generality. A character, a setting, or an object may resonate strongly with many other entities, both fictional and real, but its literary significance derives from its specificity rather than from a universal concept. Literature achieves this by bringing to light its contents in their ambiguity. Something sharply and exactly defined, made apparent through clear concepts, is always replaceable and subject to mass production and exchange. But something or someone presented through a hesitant description of perhaps superfluous qualities, through irony,

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2. Tanya Agathocleous argues that a subgenre, at least, of "cosmopolitan realism" delved into metropolitan institutions in defiance of the ideal and invisible worlds dreamed up by religion. "By secularizing religious paradigms writers sought not merely to universalize the moral meanings of their texts but to globalize them, locating them within a historicized vision of the contemporary world. The scientific specificity of urban realism, with its attention to particular locales, class, or ethnicity, anchored and differentiated the abstractions of universalism in order to situate them in the 'real world' of capitalist modernity" (Agathocleous, *Urban Realism and the Cosmopolitan Imagination in the Nineteenth Century*, xvi).

through multiple and contradictory perspectives, through a lens muddled with affect—these circuitous, indirect, irrational, and unnecessary modes of presentation give us a faint apparition, with which we nevertheless feel intimately acquainted, of an entity quivering just slightly in excess of the rigid lines of determinate lawful existence. Broadly speaking, then, aesthetic presentation exposes beings in their freedom.

I will look at four novels set in middle to late periods of the nineteenth century which are either roughly contemporary to the writing of the novel itself or which are not too distantly retrospective. Each of these novels especially concerns one particular institution: money and the commercial practices that mobilize it. My first chapter will read Émile Zola's *La Curée*, which was published in 1872 but set during the 1850s and 1860s, and which is about property speculation during Haussmann's renovations of Paris. In the next chapter, I will look at Henry James's *The Wings of the Dove*, a novel about greed, inheritance, and death, published in 1902 and set in its contemporary turn-of-the-century Europe. In my third chapter, Thomas Mann's 1901 novel, *Buddenbrooks*, offers an overview of nineteenth-century commercial life through a story about the lives of three generations of a merchant family between 1835 and 1877. The final chapter concerns Charles Dickens's last complete novel, *Our Mutual Friend*, published serially between 1864 and 1865, set "in these times of ours, though concerning the exact year there is no need to be precise,"[3] and dealing with money's ability to bring strangers together and weave a plot around them. In one way or another, these novels, beyond their fascinating demonstrations of nineteenth-century commerce in action, also attempt to locate the reality or possibility of subjective freedom amid the constraints and coercions imposed by the modern economy. Each novel tries to let the

3. Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, 1.

critical ambiguities of its characters disturb or question the normative procedures of everyday economic life.[4] My concern with historical chronology is limited to the fact that each of these novels emerge from and reflect on some period or periods largely within the second half of the nineteenth century, during which era the laissez-faire capitalism of classical liberalism reached its height as an autonomous, widespread, and pervasive system before hitting the series of massive crises that began in 1914. The distinctions between the various periods within this era are not so important to my overall claims as to allow the chronology of the novels to determine the order in which I read them. Rather, I have imposed a logical order on the particular themes I observe in these novels, in accordance with the philosophical lens through which I observe them.

The lens in question is Kant's *Critique of Judgment*, a text which anticipates, in some cases explicitly and in other cases only implicitly, so many of the aesthetic, economic, and political questions which are taken up by the novelists treated in this dissertation. Any literary analysis must, to some extent, conceptualize its text, but the literary work resists hard and fast determinations; perhaps, then, it is better to take a conceptual apparatus from some other source, and see how it resonates with the literary material in question, rather than

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4. Catherine Gallagher has undertaken a study proceeding from a similar premise. "The novels in the [realist] tradition … established dynamic tensions between freedom and determinism, between public and private worlds, and between the representation of facts (what is) and that of values (what ought to be)" (Gallagher, *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction*, xii). Gallagher is concerned exclusively with English fiction. She focuses on the formal and rhetorical issues arising from the antinomies of freedom and determinism, public and private spheres, facts and values, that are woven into the texts. I focus instead on what the philosophical consequences are of the encounter between the novelist and these antinomies within a fundamentally Kantian context of European thought.

trying to directly pipe the fluid literary material into a system that one then claims derives entirely from the work itself. For this reason, I have chosen to appropriate philosophical authority from Kant, insofar as I borrow from his critical system a constellation of conceptual themes which, it seems to me, resonate in interesting and productive ways with my selection of novels. At the same time, it was neither possible nor desirable to bring into dialogue with these novels a conservative interpretation of Kant's third Critique. While the interpretations of Henry Allison and Paul Guyer, for instance, are invaluable to a serious understanding of the Kantian system on its own terms and merits, and toward specifically philosophical aims of education, such interpretations ultimately say very little to the literary imagination of a novelist writing a century later. I take liberties with my reading of Kant, but with the intention of adapting his basic philosophical problems to the needs and concerns of both the late nineteenth-century intellectual climate as well as a present-day standpoint that must take into account the many developments in thought which unfolded through the twentieth century. The order, then, in which I deal with each novel in this dissertation, follows the logical order in which Kant's four analytic moments of aesthetic judgment appear in the first part of his *Critique of Judgment*. Each novel, through my initiation of a literary-philosophical dialogue, resonates with, or responds to, one conceptual moment of Kant's analytic. To get an idea of how this will play out, I will first say a few things about Kant's philosophy itself.

Probably no one better laid out the problem of freedom than Immanuel Kant. While his *Critique of Pure Reason* showed how the cognition of nature was only possible through the very *a priori* necessary forms that determine its arrangement and operation, his *Critique of Practical Reason* demonstrated the possibility of human freedom as the determination of the

will through the self-given moral law of reason. Thus, although the appearance of nature, and the human being with it, is governed by the rules of spatial, temporal, and logical forms imposed by cognition, nevertheless freedom from these rules is possible beyond the appearance of nature by virtue of the faculty of reason and its ability to think beyond the given.[5] Kant's third and final critique, the *Critique of Judgment*, is an attempt to think about the separation and connection of our faculties of understanding and reason, or the concepts of nature and freedom. What makes Kant's project so unique is that he does not discuss a naive reality of nature and freedom, but restricts himself to a critique of the limits of thinking. Indeed, for Kant, the question of nature and freedom is nothing more and nothing less than a question of the boundaries of thought and the possibility of transcending those boundaries.

At issue for my literary investigation, then, is Kant's philosophy of the compatibility of natural law and human freedom. But whereas for Kant, the most obvious threat to freedom was the Newtonian concept of nature as a deterministic mechanism, the century

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5. Reason derives this ability from "transcendent" principles which are strictly distinguished from "transcendental" principles. In Kant, the transcendental is the formal a priori conditioning the possibility of experience, while the transcendent is what lies beyond possible experience. A transcendent principle requires us to think beyond experience for the sake of some necessary goal of reason, such as obedience to the moral law or the organic systematization of experience. "Let us call the principles whose application keeps altogether within the limits of possible experience immanent principles, and those that are to fly beyond these limits transcendent principles. But by transcendent principles I do not mean the transcendental use or misuse of the categories …. Rather, I mean by them actual principles requiring us to tear down all those boundary posts and to claim an entirely new territory that recognizes no demarcation at all" (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 349).

following Kant, the nineteenth century, was more concerned with the threat of socio-economic coercion. To Marx, for instance, the division of industrial labor, the abstractions of money, and the general rule of capital formed a system as rigid and taken for granted as were the laws of physics. If literature had always, in one way or another, tried to express the disharmony between the subject and the objective world, then – under the influence of thinkers of social reform like Karl Marx, Charles Fourier, or Robert Owen, but also in direct view of the startling conditions of factories, the degradations of the poor, and the abuses of financial speculation – the task of the novel for many nineteenth-century writers was to express the alienation, conflict, and possibly even the redemption of the modern individual in its relationship to capitalist society. In this new register of concern, many novels continue the project to think the possibility of a reconciliation between objective order and subjective freedom undertaken by Kant in his third *Critique*.

In the *Critique of Judgment*, Kant asks how it is possible to further conceptually classify the huge and tangled variety of physical material which is contained by the broad concepts of the understanding (space, time, causality, etc.) but is not fully explained by them. The power of judgment, Kant argues, strives to locate a concept even for that which has no concept given in advance, so that it may develop a hierarchy of conceptual connections in the service of reason's compulsion to bring everything, of nature and freedom alike, under a system of fully coherent experience. Judgment does so by presupposing a purposiveness of nature, i.e. that nature in its diversity of particulars is organized by the logic of a conceptual order that is not immediately given to our understanding.[6] Just as the sciences must assume this purposiveness in order to proceed in their natural investigations, so too must we

6. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 18-20.

assume, in the interest of freedom's efficacy, the possibility that our moral ends can be realized somewhere within the purposive logic of nature.[7] The conclusion I draw from Kant's third *Critique* is that freedom persists amid nature because human beings in essence dwell both within and beyond limits. That we are impelled by reason to know the empirical even beyond the limits set by our understanding, that we are urged to act without regard for empirical incentives despite the apparent impossibility of acting in the name of the moral law alone—all this means that because we ourselves have drawn the limits of existence, we may also live beyond them.

Kant devotes the first half of the *Critique of Judgment* to aesthetic judgment or taste. Is there an *a priori* basis for taste? Is there a rule by which judgment may proceed with some certainty in its evaluation of aesthetic objects? Judgment faces the same difficulty when evaluating a work of art as it does when conceptualizing the functionality of a natural organism: in neither case are we simply given the rule for proceeding, but we must rather search for one. Where do we search for the concept that would give meaning to the particular object in question? The search must be in part an inward one, and at least for aesthetic judgments this involves what Kant calls a free and harmonious play between the faculties of imagination and understanding, that is, an inner rumination on the matter at hand.[8] Kant's basic insight is that we are capable of bringing to natural, external objects some of the depth of our inner life. A painting or a flower can become, to a spectator or a botanist, an expression of inner freedom, whether it be the urge to know the infinite or the desire to find beauty and meaning in an otherwise cold and mechanical world. What Kant

7. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 336ff.

8. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 62.

calls the supersensible, that realm in which things exists independently of our mechanical understanding, in which the moral law realizes universal happiness, and in which knowledge achieves completion—this realm, it seems to me, is the invisible image of the continuous vital possibility of reaching beyond and even transforming external reality via the depths of subjectivity. The feeling of pleasure that accompanies the aesthetic judgment of the beautiful, or that accompanies the scientist's discovery of a lawful coherence between diverse phenomena in nature, is the feeling of having glimpsed the supersensible realm in which the outward expanse of the world and the inward deepening of the subject somehow converge.[9]

Aesthetic judgment refers the presentation of the object in question back to the cognitive powers themselves, comparing the object's form to the harmonious play of the imagination and understanding. The imagination traces the shapes of the object in question, then passes this image to the understanding, which in turn lends it the mere form of conceptuality. Unable to explain exactly *what* the object is, judgment finds pleasure in discovering that it nevertheless has a certain unknown *whatness* to it. The object seems purposive, or meaningful, and yet one cannot quite pin down that meaning, although one is free to reflect on it.[10] Kant has found a way to describe, in the language of his critical project,

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9. I infer this idea from Kant's connecting of the feeling of pleasure to the discovery of unities in nature that are not determined by the laws of the understanding and which therefore trespass beyond the bounds of experience (Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 26-8).

10. In Dieter Henrich's interpretation, reflective judgment "compares the state of imagination with the conditions of a possible conceptualization in general." Purposiveness without purpose would refer to the imaginative exhibition of conceptual unity as such. The imagination freely varies this exhibition, thus providing the formal unity with a unique complexity. "Imagination provides the complexity, and the accordance with the general structure of exhibition provides the concise unity of

the ambiguity of meaning that we find in all things which we are not concerned with in a technical manner. That aesthetic judgment attributes a purposiveness without purpose to its object means, in more phenomenological terms, that it finds its object to be pregnant with infinite meaning, the limitation of which is only possible through hermeneutic methods. Only by interpreting that whose meaning is ambiguous can we arrive at a "determination," although never complete and never simply "correct," of the meaning of such an object. The meaning one arrives at, the determination to which one commits, however temporarily, has only been secured via a long path through the depths of subjectivity. For Kant, purposiveness without purpose is a reflection of the play of subjective powers, and I take this to mean more broadly that interpretation is always an activity that involves the subject in its whole being. Whatever we interpret, we do so by way of our memories, our existential orientation, our personalities, and even our bodies. We do this not merely with works of art, but also with the utterances of others, the events that surround us, and the decisions of our life. Zola, James, Mann, and Dickens each look for freedom in the subject's ability to find meaningful purpose against, beyond, or through the world's technical relations of modern commerce. This may involve an imaginative colorization of monochromatic business calculation, or a turn toward an ethical axis of human interaction against more instrumental

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the form" (Henrich, *Aesthetic Judgment and the Moral Image of the World*, 49-50). I take all of this to mean that the meaning of the object of reflective judgment requires unity, since otherwise it would be meaningless, but that this unity remains indeterminate and free. A work of art cannot be interpreted in just any way, since it is held together by a particular formal unity that resists wild speculation, but it can be interpreted in many ways, since its unity ultimately consists not in a pre-given idea but in concrete relations that the imagination may associate with elements beyond the work itself.

interactions.[11] In each case, a need for something more than what commercial life directly offers drives the individual to explore and possibly transcend the limits of economic rationality.

Kant's analytic is divided into four "moments," and I have chosen this schema as a suitable map for pursuing my literary investigation. Each Kantian moment addresses an aspect of the problem of freedom and determination in hermeneutic practice or reflective judgment. The problem of the free interpretation of an economically calculated world, rather than merely the mechanically determined world at issue for Kant, constitutes the guiding thread in this study of four nineteenth-century novels. Not only is such interpretation an aesthetic problem for these novelists themselves, but, as I will try to demonstrate, in the view that their narratives take, the freedom of meaning is a basic problem of nineteenth-century social reality. The aspects of the problem, as laid out by Kant, are: disinterestedness, subjective universality, purposiveness without purpose, and *sensus communis*. I have chosen each novel because of its especial philosophical relevance to one of these aspects, but also for the way in which its own literary reflection goes beyond Kant's thinking about the problem in question. Again, the Kant that appears in this study will be somewhat adapted to later ways of thinking. I am by no means trying to present a faithful reading of Kant, but

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11. Agathocleous pursues a similar idea about realist novelists but from the perspective of the concept of utopia applied to the urban metropolis. "Disenchanted with the forces that were bringing the world together, cosmopolitan writers attempted to re-enchant it by subjecting it to the alchemical power of the imagination" (Agathocleous, *Urban Realism and the Cosmopolitan Imagination in the Nineteenth Century*, 7).

rather the way his basic ideas and questions, unhinged from their Enlightenment agenda, echo through the aesthetic and social concerns of these later novelists.

There is a great deal of precedence for appropriating Kant to later styles of discourse and changing the implications of his thought. Even the mid to late nineteenth-century neo-Kantians of Marburg and Baden discarded many of Kant's particular systemic articulations, such as the categories of the first *Critique*, and instead re-animated his fundamental insights for the new scientific era.[12] The most important neo-Kantian to this dissertation is Georg Simmel (1858-1918). His book on the role of money in modern life, *The Philosophy of Money*, an invaluable source for my own understanding of the social and cultural entanglement of money, is indebted to Kant for its sensitivity to the relationship between form and experience. The conditions, for Simmel as for Kant, of experience are the forms (for Kant, these forms are highly abstract epistemological categories, like causality, while for Simmel, they include normative social relationships and institutional forms like money) that shape our thoughts, desires, and actions. For Simmel, however, especially in his later work, there is a reciprocal effect on the forms themselves, issuing from life itself, the unhampered and creative life of the subject.[13] Thus, not only do Simmel's insights on money play a strong role in this study, but his general philosophy of life and form does as well.

My understanding of Kant's "reflective judgment" owes a great deal to Rudolf Makkreel. He appropriates that concept to a tradition of hermeneutics centered around

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12. See Köhnke, *The Rise of Neo-Kantianism*, 1991.

13. For an analysis of the mutual influence of Kant's formalism and Goethe's thoughts about life on Simmel's work, see Donald N. Levine, "Soziologie and Lebensanschauung: Two Approaches to Synthesizing 'Kant' and 'Goethe' in Simmel's Work" in *Theory, Culture and Society* 29: 26-52.

another neo-Kantian thinker, Wilhelm Dilthey. Makkreel's work on reflective judgment aims "to draw out the implications of reflective judgment for the more general epistemological and hermeneutical problems of human inquiry."[14] In a piece on the relation between Kant and Heidegger, Makkreel sums up the sense of reflective judgment that I would like to employ throughout this dissertation.

> The ability to accept a measure of indeterminacy in one's life is part of what it means to live and interpret it authentically. Authentic actions are thought of as being decisively one's own. However, once doing becomes intertwined with the self-interpretation of one's life it may become more appropriate to redefine authenticity in terms of responsiveness. To be responsive is not just a matter of acting, but of being receptive to one's situation. In this sense living authentically requires both taking moral responsibility for one's actions and reflecting about their significance in the larger scheme of things. … To live one's live authentically means being able to judge when to assert oneself and when to acquiesce to larger forces. This mode of cognition, which can also be called wisdom, is never a fully determinate thing and always subject to revision. As in many instances of judgment it involves something more like a sense capable of critical revaluation than a procedure controlled by determinate rules. (Rudolf Makkreel, "From Authentic Interpretation to Authentic Disclosure: Bridging the Gap Between Kant and Heidegger" in *Heidegger, German Idealism, and Neo-Kantianism*, 80).

Finally, there is a unity to be found in thinking the four moments of Kant's analytic of aesthetic judgment together. Disinterestedness, subjective universality, purposiveness

14. Makkreel, *Imagination and Interpretation in Kant*, 3-4.

without purpose, and *sensus communis* express together the relationship between distance and intimacy. In order to judge the indeterminate and incalculable, we must take our affective distance while yet involving the most singular play of our faculties; in doing so, we stand somewhere between the unique and the universal; we evoke from our object meanings that touch on the deepest concerns of life, but we are hesitant to submit these to determinate practical applications; and finally, aesthetic judgment translates the ineffable privacy of the soul into public discourse. Everything about employing reflection rather than determination in our interpretation of the world involves negotiating proximities to ourselves, to the world, and to other individuals. Money is a fascinating phenomenon to take as the object of aesthetic judgment, or to examine in its opposition to such judgment, because, as an institution that saturates the totality of society, it too concerns negotiations of distance and intimacy. This dissertation, then, will look at the various configurations of distance and intimacy, explored by four realist novels, that emerge in the negotiations or struggles between limit-setting, coercive social institutions and the limit-crossing, transcendent impulse of subjective freedom.[15]

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15. J. M. Bernstein also sees the conflict between life and institutional form at the heart of the novel in his Marxian and Lukácsian study. "The central aesthetic problem of novel writing is synthesising the heterogeneity of life in accordance with form, where life and form, parts and whole, are considered as originally dirempt from one another, and as categorically discontinuous, as inhabiting different domains or levels of experience" (Bernstein, *The Philosophy of the Novel*, 147).

1 Émile Zola's Taste for Business

Impartiality within the Division of Labor

A specialized technician who repeatedly produces only one part of a much larger machine may have an interest in the quality of the part, but he defines this quality as adhering to the standard specifications set by the industry. He must do so, since any variation according to personal preference would preclude the piece from fitting together with the larger machine, the functioning of which he need not grasp with precision. He has no choice but to act with strict disinterestedness insofar as his particular character must not have its way in adding any personal touches to the machine-piece on which he works. In order for the larger machine to function, each piece must be produced according to an objective standard which only the logic of the superordinate and impersonal plan may dictate. It is true that there are innovators who design new and apparently self-complete products that bear the mark of a peculiar and biased character, but these inventions must, in order for mass production to begin, be objectified as a schematic set of intractable rules and instruction. Moreover, the innovator, too, has industry-set standards to obey and a limited set of tools available for use, so that even the most novel idea must constrain itself—must even regard itself as a contribution to a greater labor that perhaps exceeds the innovator's awareness. Thus, each worker who contributes to the ordered circulation of goods and services must act with a certain amount of, or even complete, disinterestedness as far as the character of his final

product is concerned. One achieves such impartiality by conforming the character of one's labor to objective rules and standards.[1]

The advantage of disinterestedness is that many individuals can contribute to one goal without coming into conflict with one another. But the tendency to increase efficiency and quantity of production through the division of labor, rather than heading toward the accomplishment of grand humanistic goals, only links processes together at ever higher levels. Not only individuals are elements in the division of labor, but each process of production resulting from that division becomes in turn another element in a more

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1. Marx refers the objective organization of production to the general force of capital, while he paints the abstract fact of disinterestedness in his own realist portraits of dehumanized industrial workers. "In manufacture, as well as in simple co-operation, the collective working organism is a form of existence of capital. The social mechanism of production, which is made up of numerous individual specialized workers, belongs to the capitalist. Hence the productive power which results from the combination of various kinds of labour appears as the productive power of capital. Manufacture proper not only subjects the previously independent worker to the discipline and command of capital, but creates in addition a hierarchical structure amongst the workers themselves. While simple co-operation leaves the mode of the individual's labour for the most part unchanged, manufacture thoroughly revolutionizes it, and seizes labour-power by its roots. It converts the worker into a crippled monstrosity by furthering his particular skill as in a forcing-house, through the suppression of a whole world of productive drives and inclinations, just as in the states of La Plata they butcher a whole beast for the sake of his hide or his tallow. Not only is the specialized work distributed among the different individuals, but the individual himself is divided up, and transformed into the automatic motor of a detail operation, thus realizing the absurd fable of Menenius Agrippa, which presents man as a mere fragment of his own body." (Marx, *Capital, Volume I*, 481-82)]

comprehensive process. The linking of processes becomes the goal itself of industry, while any notion of a final goal, somehow valuable in itself and toward which everyone collectively strives, becomes illusory. The goal of each element in the production process is to cause the next in the series.[2] It is because none of the elements in the machine process is self-sufficing that the series is endless. The notion of successful progress, whether economically or scientifically, presupposes the value of a system that defers meaning in order to allow an endless growth of technical inclusivity. Only the interested reflection of an individual can conceive of a meaning that has value in itself. But intrinsic value resists the quantitative growth of knowledge and production: aristocratic titles, for instance, which provided a sense of having a fixed place in the world, were in many ways opposed to the restless attitude of free-enterprising capitalists. By deferring the sort of meaning that captures the whole human being in a state of wonder or security—as religion, mysticism, philosophy, literature and

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2. Thorstein Veblen describes the extent of the mechanical relativism involved in the turn-of-the-nineteenth-century industrial machine process. "No one of the mechanical processes carried on by the use of a given outfit of appliances is independent of other processes going on elsewhere. Each draws upon and presupposes the proper working of many other processes of a similar mechanical character. None of the processes in the mechanical industries is self-sufficing. Each follows some and precedes other processes in an endless sequence, into which each fits and to the requirements of which each must adapt its own working. The whole concert of industrial operations is to be taken as a machine process, made up of interlocking detail processes, rather than as a multiplicity of mechanical appliances each doing its particular work in severalty. This comprehensive industrial process draws into its scope and turns to account all branches of knowledge that have to do with the material sciences, and the whole makes a more or less delicately balanced complex of sub-processes" (Veblen, *The Theory of Business Enterprise*, 7-8).

visual art still do for many—a connecting process is able to grow *ad infinitum*, so long as the connections it makes remain technical, i.e. are primarily means of achieving further ends.

One of Simmel's key insights in *The Philosophy of Money* is that money is the purest symbol and most pervasive agent of the merely technical reticulation of life.[3] Social exchanges, institutional activity, cultural values, and every other element of human existence, takes place to an overwhelming degree through the quantitative medium of money until a logical structure of life emerges, the relevant parts of which can be taught with precision to those wishing to become technical specialists in its various operations. Kant made an important distinction between two kinds of practical activity that is relevant here. Within the practical sphere, there are principles of action that are *technically* practical, and there are those that are *morally* practical.[4] The first sort, technical principles, tell us by what means we may achieve a particular goal within empirical nature. If we want to build a computer, then there are certain discoverable principles by which this goal may be reached. It is only a matter of acting in accordance with a series of rules derived from the natural order of things. Thus, for Kant, the technically practical will of an agent is determined by the concept of nature, since natural causality is the only sort of causality at issue. On the other hand, action that is morally practical proceeds from the concept of freedom, or, more precisely, the categorical imperative that prescribes for us to act upon a maxim that could be willed without contradiction as a universal law. Morally practical actions, then, issue from the moral law within us, or from the non-empirical impulse of reason. Money, for Simmel, is a sort of

3. Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, 146-52.

4. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 10-12.

Kantian concept of nature determining the empirical logic of causality through which extends the endless series of technical means and ends.[5]

Aesthetic Disinterestedness

Perhaps the admiration for disinterestedness, or impartiality, in aesthetic judgment has its roots in the productive power of the division of labor. Kant also brings up technically practical reason when discussing what kind of liking is involved in aesthetic judgment and which kinds are not.[6] The liking for something which is the basis for a judgment of taste cannot be connected to an interest in some external end. In other words, if we like something because it is useful, or because it produces a good external effect by its very existence, then we do not like it in a wholly disinterested way. Disinterested aesthetic judgments have no regard for the existence of the aesthetic object, and therefore no regard for its external consequences. I want to argue that Kantian aesthetic disinterestedness finds an analogy in the abstractions of economic life.[7] Economic activity does concern itself with

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5. Kant's cognitively deterministic nature gives way in Simmel to an economically articulated network of instrumentality. "Money is the purest reification of means, a concrete instrument which is absolutely identical with its abstract concept; it is a pure instrument. The tremendous importance of money for understanding the basic motives of life lies in the fact that money embodies and sublimates the practical relation of man to the objects of his will …" (Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, 211).

6. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 43-53.

7. John Guillory identifies a related connection between aesthetic disinterestedness and industrial modes of production. "The division of labor, the employment of wage-labor, vastly increased the accumulation of commodities, but it did not necessarily increase their fineness; it rather exposed the apparent aesthetic inferiority of commodities to works of art. Hence the qualitative distinction

the existence of means for the realization of concrete ends, but the interest of the typical economic agent is directed—by virtue of the intangible meaning contained in any given end, a meaning which only ever points to another object—to the most abstract medium of economic activity itself, namely money, which often appears even to common sense as the immediate and even final goal of our labor. Money, for Simmel, has a tendency to stand out as the ultimate end of life, since it can in principle acquire anything.[8] And yet money—since it is nothing in itself but abstract quantitative value, and indeed is a universal means by virtue of this complete colorlessness—cannot be of interest without the imagination to render it tangible and attractive. The modern economic mode of existence, then, is technical insofar as it concerns a series of means-ends relationships, but it resembles the formal aesthetic attitude insofar as its interest clings to the abstract form of money. Just as aesthetic judgment for Kant is interested only in the pure relations of the beautiful form, so too economic existence for Simmel finds its focal point of interest in money as the pure symbol and instrument of the relatedness of all commodities. Both sorts of interest qualify as the disinterestedness that Kant has in mind, insofar as neither concerns the actual existence of an object. Even if people want to possess commodities, these ephemeral desires are swept up in the greater current that brings money, and therefore production and consumption as

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between the work of art and the commodity could be coordinated with class distinction as the distinction between taste and the lack of it" (Guillory, *Cultural Capital*, 313). The claim is that disinterested taste emerges as a way for an elite class to cordon off art from merely useful commodities. My claim, however, is that taste is only one facet of the versatile logic of objectivity and impartiality that pervades science, economics, and even art throughout the modern period.

8. Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, 232.

pure activities unconnected with any specific commodities, to the fore. Similarly, in the aesthetic sphere, often an individual will desire the existence and possession of some object he finds beautiful, and yet a principled detachment, an insistence on asceticism, or a belief about the impossibility of ever possessing the beautiful object will make constant circulation and withheld possibility the real goals.

Interest in the sense of payment made for the loan of money illustrates the peculiar kind of disinterested interest involved in economic affairs. The Catholic Church in the Middle Ages condemned usury on the basis of a comment made by Aristotle. "Hence usury is very justifiably detested, since it gets wealth from money itself, rather than from the very thing money was devised to facilitate. For money was introduced to facilitate exchange, but interest makes money itself grow bigger. (That is how it gets it name [viz. *tokos*]; for offspring resemble their parents, and interest is money that comes from money.)"[9] An interest in money is not an interest in the products of which money is the representative; it is an interest in money itself, or, put another way, money is its own object. The logic of interest, in the sense of usury, is this: if I lend my money to someone else, then I cannot use it for whatever investment opportunities may come up in the meantime, and therefore I should exact money from whoever borrows my money in order to compensate for all the profit I could be making from investing my money elsewhere. Of course, this means that even the logic of interest is based on a logic of investment, which also involves the making of money from money. Aristotle regarded interest as a perversion of the natural order. Money only pretends to give birth to offspring, or profit, but since nothing real is being produced, there can be no real profit. Fernand Braudel suggests that this attitude issued from farmers:

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9. Aristotle, *Politics*, 19.

"These hostile reactions must all surely be the result of the intrusion of money—an impersonal means of exchange—into the closed world of the old agrarian economies. There was an instinctive reaction against this strange power."[10] The mechanics of credit, which apparently reward lenders for doing nothing, stands in contrast with the concrete sensibility of agricultural workers, who can only produce something through hard labor and an intimate relationship with the natural world. Interest appears to operate above the natural world, running through its calculative operations and producing its wealth without interacting with concrete objects, without employing the techniques of farmers or craftsmen. This ethereal realm of interest is neither the natural world of ready-to-hand technique, nor the supersensible moral realm, but another world altogether, one in which the eternal investment of the soul gives way to the timely investments of capital, and the intimate order of nature gives way to a meaningless circulation of abstract processes.

Representations of the Businessperson

Every member of a society develops in a direction that somehow responds to the particular economic situation of their time and place. In a basic sense, this means that people will fill various economic roles demanded by the structure of society, so that if the economy in question is largely agrarian, then a great number of people will become farmers. On a deeper level, however, the more subtle logic of the economy will influence even a person's style of thinking, speech, and manners.[11] In the capitalist economies of the last two centuries, many

10. Braudel, *The Wheels of Commerce*, 561.

11. Thus, Max Weber argues that once the Protestant ethic has aided in the birth of the spirit of capitalism, the now independent economic institutions in turn determine, by imposing the necessity

new economic roles have emerged along with many new forms of social personality. The most pervasive role, or rather the category that comprehends a great number of roles while still appearing distinctive in the popular imagination, is that of the businessperson. Not only is the businessperson a certain kind of agent necessary to the particular system of capitalism, but the role also names a sort of personality, a social type whose personal features derive from the impersonal nature of business itself.[12]

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of subjective adaptation to objective structures, the styles of life that previously depended on religious and other impulses. "At present under our individualistic political, legal, and economic institutions, with the forms of organization and general structure which are peculiar to our economic order, this spirit of capitalism might be understandable, as has been said, purely as a result of adaptation. The capitalistic system so needs this devotion to the calling of making money, it is an attitude toward material goods which is so well suited to that system, so intimately bound up with the conditions of survival in the economic struggle for existence, that there can today no longer be any question of a necessary connection of that acquisitive manner of life with any single Weltanschauung. In fact, it no longer needs the support of any religious forces, and feels the attempts of religion to influence economic life, in so far as they can still be felt at all, to be as much an unjustified interference as its regulation by the State. In such circumstances men's commercial and social interests do tend to determine their opinions and attitudes. Whoever does not adapt his manner of life to the conditions of capitalistic success must go under, or at least cannot rise" (Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 33-34).

12. For an early sociological analysis of the figure of the businessman, see Werner Sombart, *Der Bourgeois* [1913], translated by Mortimer Epstein as *The Quintessence of Capitalism: A Study of the History and Psychology of the Modern Business Man* (New York: E.P. Dutton & Co., 1915).

One of the functions of the nineteenth-century European novel, as proclaimed by authors such as Balzac[13] and Flaubert[14], is to present a detailed and faithful snapshot of a particular society at a given moment in history. This is in part accomplished through the embodiment of objective social types in fictional characters. For the literary documentation of the businessperson as a social type, we can look to few better sources than the novels of Émile Zola. Zola's second Rougon-Macquart novel, *La Curée* (1872), is about property speculation in the early days of Haussmannization. It chronicles the rags-to-riches period in the life of Aristide Saccard (né Rougon), a member of the morally-diseased family of Zola's cycle of novels. Two characters in particular represent the businessperson type, although under rather different gradations. Both, however, direct their intellectual energies toward the

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13. "French society would be the real author; I should only be the secretary. By drawing up an inventory of vices and virtues, by collecting the chief facts of the passions, by depicting characters, by choosing the principal incidents of social life, by composing types out of a combination of homogeneous characteristics, I might perhaps succeed in writing the history which so many historians have neglected: that of manners" (Preface [1842] to *The Human Comedy*, quoted from Ellen Marriage's translation in *The Novels of Balzac, Volume 10* [Philadelphia: The Gebbie Publishing Co. (1899)])]

14. "Do you really believe that this mean reality, whose reproduction disgusts you, does not make my gorge rise as much as yours? If you knew me better, you would know that I hold the everyday life in detestation. Personally I have always kept myself as far away from it as I could. But aesthetically I wanted this time, and only this time, to exhaust it thoroughly. So I took the thing in an heroic fashion, I mean a minute one, accepting everything, saying everything, depicting everything—an ambitious statement!" (Letter to Laurence Pichat [1856] in John Charles Tarver, *Gustave Flaubert As Seen in His Works and Correspondence* (London, 1895), 199)]

fluctuations of quantitative market information, and minimize their emotional investments in the qualitative aspect of life swirling beneath the numbers. Hence their apparent indifference to both the suffering of others, as well as to even the possibility of their own happiness.

The first character in question is Sidonie, the sister of Aristide Saccard. In Zola's Paris, the dissolution of thick relations by commercial life and the financial institutions that support it gives rise to a new sort of mind. The calculating mind can operate as quickly as things can circulate, can account for precise differences in quantity. It is nimble, because none of its matter is ponderous.[15] Even the heavy buildings torn down and erected in the renovation of Paris are only a series of speculative and calculative operations performed on numbers. And these personalities are not only found in the upper echelons of the business world. Sidonie is a kind of rag-and-bone woman for whom every encounter is an impersonal business opportunity. She deals in "waterproofs, galoshes, braces … oil for restoring hair, orthopaedic appliances, and a patented automatic coffee-pot" (Zola, *The Kill*, 50). At one

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15. The preponderance of the calculating intellect over the sentimental mind, especially in large metropolises, is one of Simmel's persistent themes. "The rhythm of [rural] life and sensory mental imagery flows more slowly, more habitually, and more evenly. Precisely in this connection the sophisticated character of metropolitan psychic life becomes understandable—as over against small town life which rests more upon deeply felt and emotional relationships. The intellect, however, has its locus in the transparent, conscious, higher layers of the psyche; it is the most adaptable of our inner forces. … Money economy and the dominance of the intellect are intrinsically connected. They share a matter-of-fact attitude in dealing with men and with things … The intellectually sophisticated person is indifferent to all genuine individuality, because relationships and reactions result from it which cannot be exhausted with logical operations (Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life" in *Simmel on Culture*, 175-6).

point her entresol is filled with dozens of pianos. The particular commodity is irrelevant to her business, because Sidonie deals in the abstract relations of commerce. When she has finished selling someone something, "she would insinuate herself into her customer's good graces and become her business agent, attending solicitors, lawyers, and judges on her behalf" (51). Sidonie burrows into every administrative artery she can, representing these aspects of people's lives sometimes for no apparent reason of profit. "It would have been difficult to say what she gained from this sort of business; she did it to begin with out of an innate taste for shady dealings and sharp practice." In this, one of its more extreme forms, the calculative personality is only interested in profit as a regulative principle of activity; the real focus is on the complexity and thoroughness of calculative reach. The real goal seems to be the complete identification of individual existence with the commercial dimension of society. "[S]he was a walking catalogue of people's wants and needs. … With a faint smile she hawked these wants and needs about; she would walk ten miles to interview people; she sent the baron to the good mother, induced the old gentleman to lend the three thousand francs to the distressed family, found consolation for the fair-haired lady, and a not too enquiring husband for the girl who had to get married" (51-2). Her efforts to quickly move about town, occupy the homes of everyone, and facilitate any relations through which money passes indicates a nature that wants to be as disinterested as money, that wants to ride along with its circulation.[16] The calculative mind is in fact the spirit of money, its real motive force. Without people like Sidonie, its circulation would be slow and inexact.

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16. Sidonie, as well as her brother, is the opposite of the figure of the flâneur "who walks long and aimlessly through the streets" (Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 417). As Priscilla Ferguson has noted of *La Curée*, "no work is further from the universe of flânerie. Zola's characters are frenetically and

Rather than aging quickly from the dissolution of Parisian society, Sidonie "appeared ageless." She is not a cross between man and woman, but rather sexless. "The woman in her faded away; she became a mere business-person," "her complexion had the piteous pallor of stamped paper" and "her eyes seemed to swim in the whirlpool of jobs and preoccupations of every kind with which she stuffed her brain" (51-3). Sidonie is almost a biological adaptation to modern urban life. Those who continue to chase pleasure still act and think with their full person, only they do so in a much faster and chaotic environment. But the adapted mind protects itself by paring itself down to the calculative faculty. Sidonie is unaffected by what would be emotionally difficult situations. When her brother's first wife is on her deathbed, she coldly suggests to him in the adjacent room that he quickly marry another girl, Renée, for her money. All of Sidonie's investments are of the commercial rather than the emotional sort. "She was as dry as an invoice, as cold as a protest, and at bottom as brutal and indifferent as a bailiff's assistant" (53). That she is ageless and sexless is an abbreviation for the idea that she is not a factical being, that she has none of the qualities

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absolutely engaged in the city. His paris is no place for the idle or detached observer, and something more murderous also has entered the urban dynamic. Whichever translation of *La Curée* one decides to use—The Hunt, The Kill, The Quarry—the world of Paris is now divided between the hunter and the hunted. Movement is much more than movement. Midcentury transmutes movement into direct conflict" (Ferguson, *Paris as Revolution: Writing the Nineteenth-Century City*, 113-14). Ferguson argues, apparently opposite to my claim for disinterestedness, that the novel's characters are absolutely engaged. In my view, both claims are correct, since, while Sidonie and Saccard are morally disinterested, they are, of course, nevertheless highly engaged in their pursuits, even cathecting them with emotional energy. Indeed, money itself is personally disinterested while yet being thoroughly involved in the world's affairs and certainly anything but idle.

that would make her a unique person who relates to others in ways that are all her own.[17] Sidonie is as rootless, omnipresent, indeterminate, and disinterested as the money she animates. This is why she cannot prostitute herself: not for a sense of morality or dignity, but because she is not a determinate entity that can be commodified. "There was only one thing she never sold, and that was herself; not that she had any scruples, but because the idea of such a bargain could not possibly occur to her" (53). Functioning as a kind of transcendental *a priori* of commodity exchange, Sidonie cannot herself be taken up in the activity of exchange. In the same way, money cannot be exchanged against money, unless it is to alter the accidental form of its denomination (making change), or unless it becomes a commodity against foreign currencies or precious metals, which are themselves media of exchange.[18] Money and the people who devote themselves to inhabiting its operations, exist prior to and as a condition of exchange. They escape exchange not because they are singular beings, but rather because they are transcendental non-beings.

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17. Of course, Sidonie, like any other finite individual, has a facticity, a grounding in circumstance that opens some possibilities while closing off others. But her calculative mode of existence at least pretends to realize an ideal of total freedom from inherited or imposed attachments. "Without facticity consciousness could choose its attachments to the world in the same way as the souls in Plato's Republic choose their condition" (Sartre, *Being and Nothingness*, 83).

18. In the case of borrowing money with interest, which appears to involve paying for money, what one is in fact buying is the right to use the money for a given period of time. No matter how much interest one pays, one is never in full possession of the money borrowed. In fact, no one can ever own money, because all money is only a form of credit. The constant possibility of inflation, as the diminishing of the value of one's money, verifies this.

Aristide Saccard, the second character with which I am here concerned, is not to be found at the consummate point of the ideal businessperson type, insofar as his energies are neither mainly intellectual nor mostly devoted to entirely rational relationships. Aristide is disinterested to the extent that he deals in the impersonal fluctuations of the money economy, but he borders on an artist type insofar as he follows threads well beyond their rational significance.[19] However, just because he has an aesthetic tendency does not mean, as Kant has shown, that he abandons the disinterested attitude. Indeed, Saccard manages to occupy the limit point at which the impartiality of commercial activity and the disinterestedness of aesthetic judgment meet. His style confirms that the analogical relationship between commerce and aesthetics indicates a possible convergence in reality. Each lends itself to the other by virtue of their shared interest in disinterestedness. Thus, Saccard is able to admire the moral corruption of Paris precisely because he finds it both profitable and beautiful. The very organ by which he negotiates his commercial affairs seems to be one and the same with the aesthetic organ that comprehends and produces beauty.

Aristide is much like Sidonie in his will to occupy the channels of all commercial activity. He does so on a larger scale than Sidonie, but the real difference between these two characters lies in the fact that Saccard goes about his business with a richer and more

19. Consider, as an example of the artist type who transcends rationality and model for this side of Saccard's personality, Rimbaud's poet as seer: "The Poet makes himself a seer by a long, gigantic and rational derangement of all the senses. All forms of love, suffering, and madness. He searches himself. He exhausts all poisons in himself and keeps only their quintessences. Unspeakable torture where he needs all his faith, all his superhuman strength, where he becomes among all men the great patient, the great criminal, the one accursed—and the supreme Scholar!—Because he reaches the unknown!" (Rimbaud, *Rimbaud: Complete Works, Selected Letters*, 377).

dynamic personality. Thus, Saccard's personality is somewhere between Sidonie's and and his libidinous wife Renée's. Like the former, he has little trouble doing business without emotional concerns about others; indeed, Saccard is a willing participant in the arrangement with his sister made only a few feet away from his dying wife. Also like Sidonie, he extends his senses into every corner that he can in order to become an index of useful information. "For two years he was seen wandering round the corridors, lingering in all the rooms, leaving his desk twenty times a day to go and talk to a friend, or deliver a message, or take a stroll through the offices" (47). But, like Renée, Saccard is consumed by a fiery passion that is foreign to Sidonie. Saccard directs his passionate energy into his business, and perhaps for this reason is able to reach a grander scale of commerce than that on which his sister operates. He has a "weakness for complicated transactions" (163), like his sister, but for him the complexity serves an aesthetic end. "The simplest operations became complicated as soon as he touched them, and turned into dramas: he became quite impassioned …" (188). His passion for business is like a passion for theater; transactions must be like dramas to hold his interest. He takes delight in the lies he tells to others in order to further his business, the more so as they increase in complexity. "He was quite unaware of the incredible number of threads with which he interwove the most ordinary piece of business. He derived real joy from the cock-and-bull story he had just told Renée; and what delighted him most was the impudence of the lie, the sheer number of possibilities, the astonishing complication of the plot. He could have had the land long since had he not constructed all this drama; but he would have found less enjoyment in obtaining it easily" (196). Saccard takes risks, like any businessperson, but more important for him than the speculative risks in predicting the market are the senseless risks he takes to build up the drama of his ventures. The greater the

ordinary speculative risk, the greater the possible return or loss; but the kind of risk that Saccard takes in extending the dramatic narrative of his plans is the kind that increases the possible return or loss of a wider range of interests. At risk in Saccard's speculations are his pride, dignity, heroism, and, perhaps above all, his own aesthetic value as a character in the drama that is his life. The concept of value is multidimensional for Saccard: his interest in quantities of money always extends into qualitative distinctions. Thus, Saccard does not calculate his way through schemes, but rather forms, manipulates, and applies qualitative images.

Saccard thinks about his endeavors in vibrant sensations. His intellect is synesthetic. He smells the "odours of alcoves and financial deals" (44). He hears money in his *nom de guerre*, Saccard: "it sounds as if you're counting five-franc pieces" (46). He repeatedly conceives of the city's speculative opportunities in an image of gold raining down: "he knew that the shower of gold beating down upon the walls would fall more heavily every day" (67). This is not just the narrator's figurative interjection. When Saccard sees a ray of sunlight fall on the city from between two clouds, he exclaims, "Oh! Look! It's raining twenty-franc pieces in Paris!" (68). If Simmel's ideal businessman does his work with an abstracted faculty of calculation, leaving the other domains of his life untouched, Saccard does business like an artist paints. He employs a wide range of sensibility in planning his schemes. Indeed, not only does his mind represent commercial situations in images, but his whole body seeks to actively transform the world in accordance with his images. Hence the scene in which, before he has made his fortune, Saccard overlooks the pre-transformed Paris with his first wife, using his hand to carve up the city along the lines of the as yet secretly planned boulevards. With his eyes, he sees the future Paris, but with his hand he begins the process

of effecting it. Just as thoughts can be early stages in the continuous process by which an action is performed, Saccard's miming of cuts seems to be the early quivering of his nervous system in preparation for the great activity that will follow.[20] Thus, in this scene, Saccard is

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20. Simmel argues that the will, which seems to be what is at stake in this scene, presupposes as its conditions for practical fulfillment a real world and an intellect that is able to calculate a way through that world. What the will brings is a vital purposefulness that determines the particular direction that the action is to take. Saccard's miming represents the will itself, gathering irrational impulses and desires in the twilight before action finally dawns. "[The will] is unable to effect anything at all unless it gains some kind of content that is completely external to it. For by itself, the will is nothing but one of the psychological forms (such as being, duty or hope, etc.) which make up the content of our life. It is one of those categories—probably realized psychologically by concomitant muscular or nervous reactions—by which we comprehend the ideal content of the world in order to give it a practical significance for us. Just as the will—the mere name of the form raised to a certain degree of independence—does not by itself choose any definite content whatsoever, so too the mere awareness of the world's content, that is from an intellectual standpoint, does not bring about any purposefulness. Rather, the contents of the world are completely neutral, but at one point or another they unpredictably become coloured by the will. Once this occurs, one finds that the will is transferred in a purely logical objective manner to other conceptions that are causally related to the earlier ones and that now possess the status of 'means' to that 'final purpose'. Wherever the intellect leads us, we are completely dependent, since it leads us solely through the actual connections between things. The intellect is the mediator through which volition adjusts itself to independent being. If we conceive of a rigid conception of the calculation of means and abide by it, then we are purely theoretical, absolutely non-practical beings when we act in this manner. Volition only accompanies the series of our considerations like an organ pedal note or like the general

not representing what is to come with the gestures of his hand; he is rather moving toward it. I emphasize this point to demonstrate the extent to which Saccard's mind, body, and senses are thoroughly connected with one another in an organic way. His activity is not the result of discrete mental and physical operations performed one after another in a single, unidirectional series. Beyond its ideally rational form, then, business may be carried out through a tangle of interconnected threads that do not always take the shortest path. Saccard's playful "representation" of Haussmann's renovations is in fact a vital component of his work, just as dreams are probably vital parts of the decisions we make when awake. Indeed, there is something dream-like, feverish, and nocturnal about Saccard's gestures. "Night was falling. His dry, feverish hand kept cutting through the air. Angèle shivered slightly as she watched this living knife, those iron fingers mercilessly slicing up the boundless mass of dark roofs. For a moment the haze of the horizon had been descending slowly from the heights, and she fancied she could hear, beneath the gloom gathering in the hollows, distant cracking sounds, as if her husband's hand had really made the cuts he spoke of, splitting up Paris from one end to the other, severing beams, crushing masonry, leaving behind it the long, hideous wounds of crumbling walls. The smallness of this hand, pitilessly attacking a gigantic prey, became quite disturbing, and as it effortlessly tore apart the entrails of the great city, it seemed to take on a steely glint in the blue twilight" (69). Angèle perceives something real in all this. Saccard's "knife" is not a pretend knife, but a "living knife," which somehow seems even sharper than an ordinary knife. His hand lends reality, by giving sharp distinctions, to what is otherwise only a "boundless mass" of roofs. When

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presupposition of a domain in whose peculiarities and conditions it does not interfere, yet which alone can give life and reality to it" (Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, 429-30).

night falls entirely, Saccard appears to enter a trance-like state, prognosticating a "third network" of boulevards, which heralds "sheer madness, an orgy of spending, Paris will be drunk and overwhelmed" (69). Here, Saccard envisions the very dissolution that is the cause of Renée's encroaching madness, as well as the cause of the Sidonie-type who retracts all human faculties except for the calculative function. But Saccard is neither a passive debauchee nor an indifferent medium of business transactions. He is not exactly affected by the dissolution, but rather rides it like a wave. More than any other character, Saccard embodies the full spirit of the Second Empire. The thick values of pre-capitalist society have not completely given way to the thin relations of pure commerce; this intermediary state between intoxication and rationality throws older social relations into an orgiastic tangle.[21]

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21. Benjamin touches on similar ideas in his reflections on prostitution under the Second Empire. Benjamin's own time, he argues, delights in representing love in its most lascivious forms, but can only do so by freeing it from its connections to social reality. During the Second Empire, on the other hand, extreme sexual delight was taken precisely in confusing the prostitute with values of moral dignity. The suggestion is perhaps that the "free love" of modern life follows the logic of money in its insistence on being kept separate from and indifferent to other social institutions or religious values, and that it is less honest about its entanglement in seemingly unrelated regions of psychic and social life than was the sexuality of the Second Empire, which paid for sex but at least subordinated its quantification to qualitative concerns. "Comparison of today's erotic fields of action with those of the middle of the previous century. The social play of eroticism turns today on the question: How far can a respectable woman go without losing herself? To represent the joys of adultery without its actual circumstances is a favorite device of dramatists. The terrain on which love's duel with society unfolds is thus, in a very broad sense, the realm of 'free' love. For the Forties, Fifties, and Sixties of the previous century, however, things were entirely different. … [In Ferdinand

Thus, the old morals still exist, but they are deformed and mixed up. Family relations still exist, but they have become perverted in acts of incest. Saccard does not become the victim of this dissolution, but he does take delight in the vibrant colors of this strange alchemical stew, and, moreover, wants to use it for his aesthetico-commercial purposes. Saccard is an artist who makes use of an environment that is beautiful in its meltdown. "When he sat at the window and watched the teeming life of Paris beneath him, he was seized by an insane desire to hurl himself into the furnace in order to mould the gold like soft wax in his fevered hands. He inhaled the breath, vague as yet, that rose from the great city, the breath of the budding Empire, laden already with the odours of alcoves and financial deals, with the warm smell of sensuality" (43-4). The dissolution of Paris gives it the appearance of having more life than ever, in the same way that a dying sun is beautiful and vibrant. Expending its energies feverishly, releasing even more energy in the breakdown of traditions, just as food releases energy when broken down, Paris is most alive in this period of dissolution.[22] Far

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von Gall's Paris und seine Salons] we learn that in many of these boardinghouses at the evening meal … it was the rule to bring in cocottes, whose job it was to play the part of girls from good families. In fact, they were not disposed to let down their masks too quickly, preferring instead to wrap themselves in endless layers of respectability and family connection; to strip these away entailed an elaborate game of intrigues that ultimately served to raise the women's price. What is expressed in these relations, it goes without saying, is less the period's pruderie than its fanatical love of masquerade" (Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 493).

22. The spatial reorganization of Paris, planned by Georges-Eugène Haussmann, had both financial and psychological effects on Second Empire Paris. It is not only the process of dissolution that affected sensibility, but, as David Harvey points out, the emergence of a completely rationalized network of spatial communication presented the mind and the body with a possibility for speed

from consisting only of cold monetary connections, the people and the things of Paris revel in thick and meaningful relations that are now at their most ambiguous and therefore exciting in their dissolution. Saccard does not merely attend the circulation of money, as a more sober businessman might, but rather he becomes a master of these ambiguous relations that the circulation of money is inadvertently leaving behind in its trail.[23]

Saccard illustrates a fundamental tension in modern economic life between disinterestedness and another mode of our being which cannot accurately be called interest. If disinterestedness means preserving a distance from the matter at hand and only involving a select part of one's being, then the opposing attitude is an intimacy with and exposure to the matter. It is probably impossible to ever exist entirely in one mode alone. Total distance

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hitherto unexperienced. "The new space relations had powerful effects on Parisian economy, politics, and culture, and the effects of the sensibilities of Parisians were legion. It was as if they were instantly plunged into a bewildering world of speedup and rapid compression of space relations" (Harvey, *Paris, Capital of Modernity*, 109).

23. David Baguley argues that the most common characteristic of naturalist novels is a presentation of an "entropic vision": "At the heart of the naturalist vision, then, there is a poetics of disintegration, dissipation, death, with its endless repertory of wasted lives, of destructive forces, of spent energies, of crumbling moral and social structures, with its promiscuity, humiliations, degradation, its decomposing bodies, its invasive materialism, its scenes of mania, excess, destruction …. Indeed, it is a literature in which time is fundamentally problematic, for time is presented as a process of constant erosion." He too points out that money in Zola is frequently the agent of this erosion: "Money, as well as sex, 'la note de la chair et de l'or', as Zola liked to state the problem, runs rampage over social barriers, circulating like a raging ferment in the social body" (Baguley, *Naturalist Fiction: The Entropic Vision*, 222, 210).

would preclude even perceiving the object at all, while complete intimacy would mean the annihilation of the subject. And yet both are always, by definition, in tension: there is no point of moderation at which each complements the other, but rather the co-existence of both always means the imperfection of subjective experience. Thus, in matters of love, we constantly face the problem of distance and intimacy, of preserving the independence of the self and the other while simultaneously wanting to move ever closer. The tension itself, not the fairy-tale resolution, is the condition of love, a human occupation that is essentially a constant lesson in finitude.[24] In commercial life, the demand we face in simple exchanges to evaluate everything quantitatively, to withdraw our sense of dignity when the market takes a turn for the worse, to pay our debts with a notion that it is our objective duty to do so—all of this is a kind of distance from our affective life, from deeper instincts, and from the possibility of a sense of value found between people and things rather than above them in the abstract realm of market operations. Our desire for intimacy is in tension with this distance, but it is a different sort of tension than that involved in love. While in love, the tension between distance and intimacy is nothing less than the expression of our finitude, in commercial life it is the expression of our alienation from the world. Finitude means existing within and beyond limits, which is another way of saying that finite beings take their distance

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24. The condition of value itself, for Simmel, is this tension of desire. "We desire objects only if they are not immediately given to us for our use and enjoyment; that is, to the extent that they resist our desire. … The object thus formed, which is characterized by its separation from the subject, who at the same time establishes it and seeks to overcome it by his desire, is for us a value. The moment of enjoyment itself, when the opposition between subject and object is effaced, consumes the value" (Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, 66).

at the same time that they plunge into depths. Alienation, however, is the state in which the objective form of the world rejects the greater part of our subjective forms.[25] The commercial world, which has been reduced by much effort to an almost mathematical system of technical processes, and which substitutes endless production for substantive meaning, rejects intimacy and cheapens exposure. *La Curée*'s Renée, for instance, spends much of the story searching for some object of intimacy that could serve as an interruption of the flat boredom of her moneyed existence. Every desire has been commodified, it seems, so that her one escape can only be the most perverse erotic adventure that she is capable of imagining, namely an affair with her husband's son. Renee exposes herself to intense amorous feelings, falling completely in love with her step-son, but meanwhile, in her

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25. The young Marx calls money "the pimp between need and object," stressing that this mediation does not bring the world to the subject, but rather expropriates the personal capacities of the subject, leaving the latter dried up and virtually non-existent in relation to the objective structures of capitalist society. "That which exists for me through the medium of money, that which I can pay for, i.e. which money can buy, that am I, the possessor of the money. The stronger the power of my money, the stronger am I. The properties of money are my, the possessor's, properties and essential powers. Therefore what I am and what I can do is by no means determined by my individuality. I am ugly, but I can buy the most beautiful woman. Which means to say that I am not ugly, for the effect of ugliness, its repelling power, is destroyed by money. … Through money I can have anything the human heart desires. Do I not therefore possess all human abilities? Does not money therefore transform all incapacities into their opposite? … The inversion and confusion of all human and natural qualities, the bringing together of impossibilities, the divine power of money lies in its nature as the estranged and alienating species-essence of man which alienates itself by selling itself. It is the alienated capacity of mankind" (Marx, *Early Writings*, 375-77).

distraction, is fleeced for all her inherited property by both her step-son and husband. A series of parties, at which her dresses become more and more revealing, until she is almost naked, symbolize the exposure which she believes is admitting a deeper intimacy with her self and her world, but which in the end leaves her a victim of theft and rape. Renee's exposure results in her death, a void easily filled for Saccard by other women, just as Renee herself quickly filled the void of Saccard's first wife as part of a financial arrangement.

Irrational Dispositions of Human Energy

Many nineteenth-century novels, especially those of a realist or naturalist persuasion, attempt to present social life in its contemporary forms. Either directly or indirectly, then, these novels deal with industrial capitalism, since social forms, from the family structure to labor relationships to religious organizations, were, in the nineteenth century, undergoing continuous modification in response to the changing economic forms of capitalism. But many such novels even deal quite explicitly with the economic forms themselves. Balzac quite often analyzed the form of money itself through stories about obsessive greed. Zola explored the forms of specific institutions, such as the market of property speculation in *La Curée*, or, later, the stock exchange in *L'Argent*. At least a few realist novelists noticed that, within capitalist society, a conflict had arisen between, on one hand, dispassionate mechanical labor and cool calculation, and, on the other hand, a persistent layer of irrational forces, the constant effort of life trying to express itself. Thus, in his *La Fille aux yeux d'or*, Balzac describes life in Paris as both ardent and acute, that is, passionate and yet ephemeral. Society burns through the passion of individuality as fuel for the ultimately disinterested cause of running through an endless cycle of production. "In no other country has life ever

been more ardent or acute. The social nature, even in fusion, seems to say after each completed work: 'Pass on to another!'"[26] He continues:

> By dint of taking interest in everything, the Parisian ends by being interested in nothing. No emotion dominating his face, which friction has rubbed away, it turns gray like the faces of those houses upon which all kinds of dust and smoke have blown. In effect, the Parisian, with his indifference on the day for what the morrow will bring forth, lives like a child, whatever may be his age. He grumbles at everything, consoles himself for everything, jests at everything, forgets, desires, and tastes everything, seizes all with passion, quits all with indifference—his kings, his conquests, his glory, his idols of bronze or glass—as he throws away his stockings, his hats, and his fortune. In Paris no sentiment can withstand the drift of things, and their current compels a struggle in which the passions are relaxed: there love is a desire, and hatred a whim; there's no true kinsman but the thousand-franc note, no better friend than the pawnbroker.

Subjective passion does not disappear under industrialism, but it does change its rhythm and intensity. Passions are more fickle and less fiery. They whir by with such speed and faintness of color that the faces of Parisians appear indifferently gray. The fluctuations and transformations of intimacy convert, when they occur at a rapid enough speed, into total indifference, just as the scenery from a moving train loses its rich singularity and quickly becomes boring. The rate at which money circulates is not conducive to the patience of

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26. Honoré de Balzac, "The Girl with the Golden Eyes" in *The Works of Honoré de Balzac, Volume 13* (Philadelphia: Avil Publishing Company, 1901), 282.

dwelling that intimacy—of love, perception, or thought itself—requires. Thousand-franc notes and pawnbrokers, as Balzac puts it, substitute for kinsmen and friends.

All the passion of the individual is converted into the energy that the economic society itself needs to speed ahead into the future. In *La Bête Humaine*, Zola symbolizes this powerful drive of society with the locomotive train. "What did it matter what victims it crushed in its path! Was it not, after all, heading into the future, heedless of the blood that was spilled? And on it sped through the darkness, driverless, like some blind, deaf beast turned loose upon the field of death, onward and onward, laden with its freight of cannon-fodder, with these soldiers, already senseless with exhaustion and drink, still singing away."[27] The driver and stoker have murdered each other, the last surge of passion, the last sacrifice of subjectivity, needed to unleash the machine's absolute power. The locomotive is heedless, blind, deaf; it only knows to push onward, without any goal beyond this. The soldiers ride the train, unaware that it is driverless, unaware that they will die in it. And had they not found themselves on this train, they would have gone to war, also unaware that it was driverless, unaware that they were being sacrificed to an empty cause. If we take Georges Bataille's view that wars, seen from a wide enough angle, are excuses for burning off excess energy, then we can understand Zola's implication of the soldiers in this final image to indicate an analogy between war, technology, and industrialism, in which all three are simply means by which vital energy is channeled into senseless momentum.[28]

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27. Zola, *La Bête Humaine*, 368.

28. Industrialism itself created a whole new bursting store of energy in the form of population growth but also in the new human potentials created by emerging technologies (potential for rapid communication through trains and the telegraph, for novel expression through photography, and for

unheard of destruction through military technology). The machine processes subdue the passions of those who work for them, but only to create new ones of greater intensity. This is why modern life is sometimes characterized as boring, dispassionate, and monotonous, but other times as exciting, fervent, and ever novel. In any case, for Bataille, modern industrial society seems unable to direct its new energies toward meaningful purposes, and instead either throws them back into new but still pointless industries or spends them on great destructive acts of war. He holds out for the possibility that we might waste our energies in more artistic or festive ways. "Recent history is the result of the soaring growth of industrial activity. At first this prolific movement restrained martial activity by absorbing the main part of the excess: The development of modern industry yielded the period of relative peace from 1815 to 1914. Developing in this way, increasing the resources, the productive forces made possible in the same period the rapid demographic expansion of the advanced countries (this is the fleshly aspect of the bony proliferation of the factories). But in the long run the growth that the technical changes made possible became difficult to sustain. It became productive of an increased surplus itself. The First World War broke out before its limits were really reached, even locally. The Second did not itself signify that the system could not develop further (either extensively or in any case intensively). But it weighed the possibilities of a halt in development and ceased to enjoy the opportunities of a growth that nothing opposed. It is sometimes denied that the industrial plethora was at the origin of these recent wars, particularly the first. Yet it was this plethora that both wars exuded; its size was what gave them their extraordinary intensity. Consequently, the general principle of an excess of energy to be expended, considered (beyond the too narrow scope of the economy) as the effect of a movement that surpasses it, tragically illuminates a set of facts; moreover, it takes on a significance that no one can deny. We can express the hope of a avoiding a war that already threatens. But in order to do so we must divert the surplus production, either into the rational extension of a difficult industrial growth, or into unproductive works that will dissipate an energy that cannot be accumulated in any case" (Bataille, *The Accursed Share, Volume 1*, 24-5).

In *La Curée*, Zola sets out his intention in the preface to "show the premature exhaustion of a race which has lived too quickly and ends in the man-woman of rotten societies, the furious speculation of an epoch embodied in an unscrupulous temperament..." (Zola, *The Kill*, 3). Again, the disinterested functions of capitalism exhaust the passions of human beings, transforming living society into something rotten and ambiguous (Zola uses the ambiguity of gender to achieve a visceral effect on his readers, but the real ambiguity seems to lie in the cross between human desire and abstract financial operations). Financial figures, ceaseless production, faster technology, the continual destruction of war: these objective institutions are powerless in themselves without the vital energy of human beings who first create and then serve them. But the energy of life is not in itself neutral; it qualifies itself in various directions. It is no accident that the harnessing of electrical and combustion power emerges at the same time that money takes on an unprecedented importance for economies. Like money, these sorts of energy are neutral, submissive to whatever possibility a machine can actualize. The production process requires neutral energy to realize its neutral aim of endless circulation combined with forward momentum (which is appropriately the type of motion enacted by the wheels on a locomotive train). Human energy, however, is still necessary to the economy, even if at minimum it was only to dig up oil or shovel coal into a furnace. Unlike electricity or combustion, human energy is directed by a will that is a composite of innumerable forces of emotion and thought.[29] Zola did not think that the human will was incalculable, but he did think that understanding it required perspectives other than physics and chemistry.

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29. Freud, for instance, characterizes an operative instinct as "a certain quota of energy which presses in a particular direction" (Freud, *New Introductory Lectures on Psycho-Analysis*, 96).

The Experimental Method

In 1880, Zola wrote an essay entitled "The Experimental Novel." It is a treatise on the direction in which he believes literature has been going during his century, and in which he believes it ought to continue, namely toward a scientific grasp of the human being in social life. Zola subscribes to the scientism of his day, and argues that literature will one day be able to perceive the series of causal connections involved in the operations of the psychological and social life of people, no less than physics has been able to do with the motion of bodies, or than physiology was well on its way to doing with the functioning of organisms. He names authors typically associated with realism, Balzac and Stendhal, as having already made much progress toward this goal. Zola's own "naturalism" attempted to understand human life by way of the scientific framework of Darwinian evolution with its combination of the principles of trait inheritance and environmental influence.[30] He espoused a method of aesthetic judgment that would serve his rational impulse toward precise, unambiguous, and disinterested knowledge.

And yet in his novels Zola is aware of what results from disinterested production when it simply forces human energy into its service. The normal outcome may be endless production, but the bound psychical energies will violently interrupt the uniform series from time to time. Zola, to be sure, blames the murderous impulses and sexual depravities of his Rougon-Macquart family on heredity, but he implies that economic society conditions the

30. Zola, *The Experimental Novel*, 19.

possibility of their eruption in the first place.[31] The machine process, whether of a train engine or a stock market, summons energy from a deep primeval corner of the human being, as though, for the same reason we drill for oil, the energy which is buried deepest is at the same time the most condensed and potent.[32] But it is also the most incalculable kind of energy, since its uses belong to the furthest reaches of the past. The effort to put this energy to calculative use is what, in Zola's novels, results in murder, incest, as well as stock market and train crashes. How then, can Zola advocate the employment of the aesthetic faculty—which surely as the capacity for a kind of hermeneutic intimacy with sensation involves some of our deepest and most unpredictable psychical energies—in the service of a determinate, mechanical, and disinterested understanding of the human being? Zola, I will argue, does not pull off a successful intertwining of aesthetic and scientific judgment, but he does point in a

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31. Far from subscribing to exclusive genetic determinism, Zola allows for complex interactions between biological inheritance and environmental factors. His view is expressed through the eponymous character in *Doctor Pascal*. "Ah, this heredity! what a subject of endless meditation it was for him! The strangest, the most wonderful part of it all, was it not that the resemblance between parents and children should not be perfect, mathematically exact? … Heredity, instead of being resemblance, was an effort toward resemblance thwarted by circumstances and environment" (Zola, *Doctor Pascal*, 35).

32. The relationship between the steam engine and primeval memory in La Bête Humaine is exemplary here. Jacques Lantier, an engine driver, feels compelled to murder women. The mysterious but intense desire to do so is echoed by the blind force of the train's engine. "Had that thirst of his returned, that thirst to avenge ancient wrongs which he could no longer quite remember, that sense of grievance accumulated from male to male ever since that first betrayal in the depths of some cave?" (Zola, *La Bête Humaine*, 329).

fruitful direction. By claiming that the *experiment* is the key to scientific success, and therefore also the key to literature gaining scientific acuity, Zola goes a long way toward negotiating the freedom that subjectivity looks for in aesthetic experience. The experiment is a sort of miniature display model of some aspect of experience, or a methodical attempt to express to the perception and understanding of others what at first appears only subjectively. It combines the interest of subjective experience with the disinterestedness of common objectivity in such a way that endless production is not the goal. Rather, the goal of the experiment, for Zola, is a steady and patient illumination of the meaningful relations that tie human beings to their world.

Naturalism, for Zola, is not an aristocracy of singular geniuses, but a democratic labor force. It scorns the individualistic vision as a fantasy that has no bearing on reality. In the same way that the elaborate designs of *haute couture* fashion enjoy only an aristocratic position in small pockets of reality, while it is mass-produced clothing that counts for sartorial objectivity, so too only those works of art that result from commitment to a normative standard of inquiry have real currency in the age of science. "[N]aturalism is not a school, as it is not embodied in the genius of one man, nor in the ravings of a group of men, as was romanticism … it consists simply in the application of the experimental method to the study of nature and man. Hence it is nothing but a vast movement, a march forward in which everyone is a workman, according to his genius. … Everyone, the great and the small, moves freely, working and investigating together, each one in his own specialty, and recognizing no other authority than that of facts proved by experiment. Therefore in naturalism there could be neither innovators nor leaders; there are simply workmen, some more skillful than others" (Zola, *The Experimental Novel*, 44-5). However, since each is a

workman "according to his genius," the picture we get is a little different from workers in a factory. The naturalist artist does not give up his whole being to the experimental method, but rather meets it with his subjective genius. Works of art, then, would avoid the uniformity of a mass-produced inventory, and would instead exhibit singular vision while nevertheless following the objective method that allows for universal communicability. How is this compromise between subjectivity and objectivity made concretely?

Here we again come up against the problem of freedom and necessity. The artist is bound to a method that privileges external reality, while at the same time his inner "genius" seeks free expression. Zola's solution is found in the following statement: "All experimentalist reasoning is based on doubt, for the experimentalist should have no preconceived idea, in the face of nature, and should always retain his liberty of thought" (3). Thought is unfree only when it submits to its own prejudices and fanciful notions. So long as the subject rests within itself, interpreting the world from the sealed enclosure of self-consciousness, then it is a prisoner. Freedom of thought consists in restricting one's thinking to the dictation of natural phenomena, but this really means opening one's thought up to what lies beyond the limits of subjectivity.[33] As it was for Descartes, doubt is the first step that Zola believes ought to be taken in order to expose the self to its world.

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33. Zola is surely more Kantian than positivist in this regard. Consider the proximity to Kant's conception of the rational experiment. "When approaching nature, reason must hold in one hand its principles, in terms of which alone concordant appearances can count as laws, and in the other hand the experiment that it has devised in terms of those principles. Thus reason must indeed approach nature in order to be instructed by it; yet it must do so not in the capacity of a pupil who lets the

The next step, however, seems more odd, since it involves adopting a position that Zola calls determinism. The experimental method, according to his reading of Claude Bernard,[34] applies to the discovery of the immediate causal relationships between phenomena. It has no business with grand metaphysical questions about why there is something rather than nothing, but can only be used to ask *how* such and such a phenomenon is directly caused. If causal relationships form a series, then the experimental method works to uncover only neighboring relationships in the series. This notion acknowledges a determinism, a position that nothing is without its conditions. Neither a thing nor an action nor a thought can be without the series of causes that surround it and condition its existence. But, through Bernard, Zola argues that only a *fatalism*, which concerns the inner essences of things and their necessity, proposes that the world is a process that runs a certain and inevitable course. Quoting Bernard: "We have given the name of determinism to the nearest or determining cause of phenomena. We never act upon the essence of phenomena in nature, but only on their determinism, and by this very fact, that we act upon it, determinism differs from fatalism, upon which we could not act at all. Fatalism assumes that the appearance of any phenomenon is necessary apart from its conditions, while determinism is just the condition essential for the appearance of any phenomenon, and such appearance is never forced" (29). Determinism acknowledges the obvious fact that the emergence of things and states are connected to previous or co-present

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teacher tell him whatever the teacher wants, but in the capacity of an appointed judge who compels the witnesses to answer the questions that he puts to them" (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 19).

34. Zola's treatise is largely an appropriation of *An Introduction to the Study of Experimental Medicine* (1865), by the nineteenth-century physiologist, Claude Bernard.

conditions. It does not, however, deduce from this fact the metaphysical proposal that everything that happens must have happened in exactly the way it did and will continue to happen in a predetermined way. On the contrary, the experimental method that assumes determinism also assumes that it is able to freely act upon the determinative connections that concern it. The experimentalist, then, would consider a waste of time the question about whether there is any way to think ourselves out of the conundrum that, logically speaking, determinism seems to lead to fatalism. Instead, the experimentalist simply goes to work, just as Samuel Johnson kicked a stone in order to prove that things exist outside the mind.[35] He acts on the determinative connections between phenomena by modifying particular interactions in order to produce an ideal situation that might possibly yield the results he has anticipated by hypothesis.

In a moment I will further discuss the method of manipulating the interactions between phenomena, but first I want to draw attention to the impersonal nature of experimentalism. I have already mentioned that the scientific attitude begins in a doubt that strives toward a kind of self-elimination in order that nature may be heard clearly. Again, Zola quotes Bernard: "The revolution which the experimental method has caused in science

35. James Boswell reports this anecdote, beloved among philosophers, in which Johnson dismisses Berkeleyan idealism by demonstrating in concrete practice the resistance put up by solid matter. Zola similarly avoids determinism by privileging practical intuition over abstract reasoning. "After we came out of the church, we stood talking for some time together of Bishop Berkeley's ingenious sophistry to prove the non-existence of matter, and that every thing in the universe is merely ideal. I observed, that though we are satisfied his doctrine is not true, it is impossible to refute it. I never shall forget the alacrity with which Johnson answered, striking his foot with mighty force against a large stone, till he rebounded from it, 'I refute it thus'" (Boswell, *Life of Johnson*, 333).

consists mainly in the substitution of a scientific criterion for a personal authority. It is the characteristic of the experimental method to depend only on itself, as it carries within itself its criterion, which is experiment. It recognizes no authority but that of facts, and it frees itself from personal authority" (43-4). In this passage, Bernard locates freedom not in the subject but in objectivity. The cause of unfreedom has been, he says, the authoritative rule of the personality. The path to freedom consists in impersonalism and subjective indifference. But whose freedom is Bernard talking about here? It seems as though freedom is not the business of individuated subjects, not of a "who" at all, but rather concerns only the objective institutionalized method of scientific experimentalism itself. It is the method which becomes free from the fancies of individual subjects, and liberty of thought means thinking via the method. It is no different with money: those who have a lot of money are said to possess a certain kind of freedom, but the freedom in fact belongs to the infinite potential of the money itself, while the subject only borrows its freedom. This is why societies under free-market economies are considered free on the whole, while obviously there are many impoverished individuals living in these societies who seem to enjoy hardly any freedom at all. If freedom is defined via an objective institution, then the freedom of the individual depends on contingent access to that institution. Zola advocates the freedom of art by encouraging it to channel itself through such an objective institution, in this case the experimental method. In doing so, however, he denies freedom to works of art that either predate the modern period, or emerge from non-scientific cultures, or that simply refuse to follow Zola's extreme scientism. That said, a good deal of value can be found in the experimentalist concept of manipulating phenomena, which I will now explore.

Someone who experiments does not merely observe. The experimental novel, which Zola identifies with at least part of what literary history has come to think of as the realist tradition, is not indifferent and passive photography. Zola explicitly resists the popular notion that he and his contemporary novelists are mere photographers. "A contemptible reproach which they heap upon us naturalistic writers is the desire to be solely photographers. We have in vain declared that we admit the necessity of an artist's possessing an individual temperament and a personal expression; they continue to reply to us with these imbecile arguments, about the impossibility of being strictly true, about the necessity of arranging facts to produce a work of art of any kind. Well, with the application of the experimental method to the novel that quarrel dies out. The idea of experiment carries with it the idea of modification. We start, indeed, from the true facts, which are our indestructible basis; but to show the mechanism of these facts it is necessary for us to produce and direct the phenomena; this is our share of invention, here is the genius in the book" (11). Photography is neither the ideal of art nor of science; both must intervene in the external world in order that it show its true self. The photograph, in Zola's conception of it, claims to reveal truth and yet only displays a heap of dead shapes.

The relationship between subjectivity and objectivity that Zola is proposing through Bernard's experimentalism is subtle. He wants neither to produce a mere record of society with no perspective, nor to project only the contents of his own soul. But is either extreme even possible? A photograph, even if taken without the direct supervision of a photographer, for instance by a Mars rover, still emanates a force of perspectival attraction. Even its stark objectivity and strangeness provoke interpretive responses from all sorts of unexpected angles of thought. On the other hand, no soulful work of art, no matter how

expressionistic or Romantic, can ever entirely transcend materiality. There is always an unanalyzable and impervious residue of matter that escapes the internal coherence of meaning presented in, say, a poem or a painting. That matter is not physical reality, which is itself a system of meaning devised by science, nor is it the relations of production, as Marx would have it. It is simply what is always just beyond our horizons of interpretation, the incomprehensible quality of being by which it is always otherwise than we make it out to be.[36]

Science, having to face the inevitable gap between subject and object, came up with a method that, in its essence, displays a profound sensitivity to the very metaphysical problems that also confront philosophy and art. The experiment, through increasingly objective phases from its dawn in the seventeenth century toward the twentieth century, became the means of a more or less successful communication between subject and object in spite of their alienation from one another.[37] For Zola, the object is society, the contents of which are

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36. To think this remainder without subordinating it to the concept, to measure our thinking against what is systematically unknowable, is the task of what Adorno calls negative dialectics. The non-identical moment speaks from works of art as well as from more urgent spheres. "If negative dialectics calls for the self-reflection of thinking, the tangible implication is that if thinking is to be true—if it is to be true today, in any case—it must also be a thinking against itself. If thought is not measured by the extremity that eludes the concept, it is from the outset in the nature of the musical accompaniment with which the SS liked to drown out the screams of its victims" (Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, 365).

37. Cf. Lorraine Daston and Peter Galison, *Objectivity* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2007), for a history of objectivity in representational images in science, a history that weaves closely in with that of the objectivity of experiments.

subjects. Because social institutions are so comprehensive, perhaps especially so beginning in the nineteenth century, taking care of people's interactive needs in so many ways—and because the institutions themselves appear to work independently of any one individual, persisting for many generations—it was possible to assume, in Zola's time, that subjects themselves now counted as mere parts of the great objective mechanism of interrelated institutions. Part of the realist impulse is a curiosity about what other people are thinking or what their motivations are, in the same way that we might inquire about the working of an automobile, a geyser, or a planetary orbit. The individual subject, now swept along by the mechanisms of an ordered society, becomes an object of psychological investigation. Again, Zola quotes Bernard:

> When we reason on our own acts we have a certain guide, for we are conscious of what we think and how we feel. But if we wish to judge of the acts of another man, and know the motives which make him act, that is altogether a different thing. Without doubt we have before our eyes the movements of this man and his different acts, which are, we are sure, the modes of expression of his sensibility and his will. Further, we even admit that there is a necessary connection between the acts and their cause; but what is this cause? We do not feel it, we are not conscious of it, as we are when it acts in ourselves; we are therefore obliged to interpret it, and to guess at it, from the movements which we see and the words which we hear. We are obliged to check off this man's actions one by the other; we consider how he acted in such a circumstance, and, in a word, we have recourse to the experimental method. (10)

The modern individual is a detective investigating the hidden motives of his fellow citizens, a loner confronted by masses of people who could just as well be machines, as Descartes

pondered when he looked out his window onto the street, and as it also seemed to the narrator of Poe's "Man of the Crowd" gazing through the window of another interior. Indeed, these scenes express the sense that while subjective interiority is becoming increasingly rich with scientific, philosophical, and artistic ponderings, the outside world, the object of our ponderings, is becoming increasingly strange and forbidding. The experimenter is a lonely figure, someone employing all kinds of indirect methods to try to understand a world that inexplicably concealed itself from him. While others are able to avoid the feeling of alienation by burying themselves in social customs and entertainments, the experimentalist cannot help feel that he is not like those others, and that in fact those sociable people are the strangest of all, so deeply have they embraced meaningless objective codes.[38]

The goal, then, of experimentalism is for the subject to somehow enter the object, and thereby to know it from within. "The problem," as Zola puts it, "is to know what such a

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38. "I might conclude immediately that the wax is therefore known by how the eye sees and not by an inspection of the mind alone, had I not looked out of the window at people passing on the street below and said, in the same customary way as in the case of the wax, that I saw the people themselves. But what do I see apart from hats and coats, under which it may be the case that there are automata hidden? Nonetheless, I judge that they are people. In this case, however, what I thought I saw with my eyes I understand only by the faculty of judging, which is in my mind" (Descartes, *Meditations and Other Metaphysical Writings*, 29). "At first my observations took an abstract and generalizing turn. I looked at the passengers in masses, and thought of them in their aggregate relations. Soon, however, I descended to details, and regarded with minute interest the innumerable varieties of figure, dress, air, gait, visage, and expression of countenance" (Poe, "The Man of the Crowd" in *Poetry and Tales*, 389.)]

passion, acting in such a surrounding and under such circumstances, would produce *from the point of view* of an individual and of society" (my italics; 9). Unlike the attempts of Romanticism to re-enchant the world by letting the inner logic of the soul interpret nature, the scientific experiment intervenes only to configure the initial organization of matter in order to see where things go from there. The subject "directs" nature, but in the sense that a film director orients everyone prior to the cue for action—once things get going, the motion belongs to the actors themselves. To give another metaphor from film, in some ways a very scientific medium of art, we might say that the experimenter becomes the transcendental subject of his objective material in the same way that the filmmaker "creates" a work by recording events that are unfolding in reality. His role as subject is to select, position, and arrange through direction, editing, and other technical cinematic operations, but unlike the painter or poet who really do seem to give birth to worlds with nearly complete freedom, the filmmaker must always defer his power to the sheer force of actuality that is both his material and object of artistic interest. Nevertheless, film achieves more than stark records of spatial and temporal relations; the medium itself seems to inhabit its objects so deeply that we hear them speak. Even a deserted stony landscape can become, in a film, an impressive revelation of humanity. Zola wants to achieve for the novel, by using the scientific experimental method, what artists would later achieve with cinema, or perhaps were already achieving with photography, even if Zola believes this latter to be incapable of getting beyond mere recording. It is, he says, "only a question of putting yourself in the desired conditions" (15). One must inhabit the object in order to know it, even while retaining the vantage of exteriority. Being a subject means knowing oneself in a way that no one else can, but it also means never being able to know oneself in the way that others can. Zola's

experimenter occupies a dual vantage point of interiority and exteriority. By setting up the conditions of the experimental object, the experimenter's idea of arrangement becomes the initial principle of motion, and therefore almost the *will* of the object in question. Insofar then, as he is the will of the object, he knows it from the inside. Nevertheless, the experimenter also retains the position of being a mere director of initial conditions, and therefore, positively, a spectator of the object's motive development.

Another way of putting all this is that the experimenter involves his own actions in the actions of his material, so that what gets observed is a joint enterprise of the two. Just as Kant's transcendental cognition thinks its material into the shapes that stand before it, and therefore involves itself in the constitution of objectivity, so too, but at a higher level, the experimenter actively participates through intellectual and physical involvement in the motions that he then observes and calls objective. Quoting Bernard: "The name of 'experimentalist' is given to him who employs the simple and complex process of investigation to vary or modify, for an end of some kind, the natural phenomena, and to make them appear under circumstances and conditions in which they are not presented in nature" (6). Zola adds that "experiment is but provoked observation." The experiment—which consists in a hypothetical idea, an apparatus, material, and the directional activity of the experimenter based on his idea—is really an *a posteriori* model of Kant's *a priori* constitutive cognition. It is in fact a much more localized, narrow, and *ad hoc* version of transcendental cognition. The point is not to constitute experience in general, as is the point of Kant's theoretical faculty, but rather to constitute a very particular educational experience.

The experiment is experience for those who do not merely want to *know*, but want to know something in particular.[39]

The novel, then, is an experiment in social reality. It wants to know about the laws that govern the behaviors of the urban masses, the domestic family, or the dwellers of a rural town. Hypotheses take the form of premises in the plot, which set the characters in motion until they naturally settle into some conclusive or inconclusive state. Of course, the novelist "invents" everything, but not in the sense that he produces it entirely out of his own head. The novelist's invention concentrates most of its originality into the initial premises of the plot, while for the rest he employs a sensibility for the workings of reality. A character cannot do just anything after an initial situation is set up, but rather has to follow a path that is psychologically realistic. The novelist must first know something about social reality even in his effort to learn about it, just as the experimental physicist needs to already know a great deal about physics. In this way, the novelist can collaborate with what he already knows about the world in order to discover something yet further. His manipulations and

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39. Hermann Cohen and other Marburg neo-Kantians, including Paul Natorp and Ernst Cassirer, adapted Kant's transcendental a priori of experience in a similar way. For these thinkers, arriving on the scene of a great epistemological shift toward positivism, the a priori needed some kind of material anchor. Eschewing Helmholtz's physiological reduction of the transcendental categories, the Marburg school tended to interpret Kant's whole theoretical project as a reflection on scientific method. In other words, they use Kant's logic from the first Critique, in which experience is shown to consist in subjectively held but objectively valid forms of knowledge, to describe the practical workings of scientific method. For the most comprehensive English-language treatment of the Marburg neo-Kantians, see Köhnke, K.C., *The Rise of Neo-Kantianism: German Academic Philosophy Between Positivism and Idealism*, trans. R.J. Hollingdale, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

inventions of reality must issue from previous knowledge about how, for instance, a certain sort of person would probably respond to a certain situation. "[T]he whole operation consists in taking facts in nature, then in studying the mechanism of these facts, acting upon them, by the modification of circumstances and surroundings, without deviating from the laws of nature" (9). The invention of realist novelists consists in transforming observations into a set of models in miniature and then arranging these models in new but plausible situations.

Zola does not himself compare the operations of novels to playing with miniature models, although Peter Brooks has recently explored this analogy.[40] It is a useful figure for grasping the peculiar convergence of actuality and possibility that occurs in realist art. How does the realist artist negotiate his gravitations toward the two poles of reality and invention? How does he maintain a cool impartiality in order to represent things as they are, even while needing to interest his whole being in the material so that its relations of human significance light up? And finally, all this is also to ask: how does he present the hidden possibilities that we feel lie dormant in stern actuality? The model is the actual reduced to a manageable size for an individual human being. Here is how Zola puts it: "This, then, is the end, this is the purpose in physiology and in experimental medicine: to make one's self master of life in order to be able to direct it. … Well, this dream of the physiologist and the experimental doctor is also that of the novelist" (25). The objective disinterestedness of the production of the model consists in submitting its form to the dictation of nature, regardless of how the producer himself would have liked for it to look. The subjective invention, however, consists in arranging these models into scenarios designed from his own tastes and interests. The play

40. Peter Brooks, *Realist Vision* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2005).

that follows skirts the border between object and subject: obedient at all times to what is and what is not permitted by the rules of reality from which these models derive their forms, the novelist nevertheless develops the action out of his own personal sense for the possible meanings that could arise in things. The novelist is aware that although the progress of actuality follows important rules, there is also a dimension of subjective depth that pervades this actuality, a dimension of meaning that, he feels, must be more than a merely overlaid interpretation of cold facts, but must also somehow be a part of the course of things. Playing with model toys seems to express this view, that we contain in our meaning-driven will the course of physical reality just as much as its own logic contains us. Real possibility is not merely a statistical fact, but rather is the palpitation of an object ready to change its state in one direction or another on account of the multivalent meanings imbued in it by interpretation. Novelists may discover such real possibilities by experimenting with the realistic models they build. Zola does not go this far in his conception of the value of experimentation. Ultimately, for him, the scientific attitude leads to a domination of reality, which Zola, to be sure, wants very much: "Here is our role as intelligent beings: to penetrate to the wherefore of things, to become superior to these things, and to reduce them to a condition of subservient machinery" (25). Zola misses the opportunity to theorize a use of science for the understanding of reality in its delicate entanglement with human meaning. Instead, he heads in the direction in which science was already going, putting on a pedestal the goals of progress, mechanization, and domination. However, the sort of experimentalism I have just outlined calls out from beneath the surface of Zola's theory; it is itself a dormant possibility contained in the actuality of scientific imperialism.

Aesthetic liking in Kant is differentiated from a liking for what is agreeable. Liking for the agreeable has an interest in the existence and beneficial consequences of its object, while aesthetic liking coolly admires the mere form of its object. Aesthetic judgment is disinterested in the sense that it cares nothing for the actual existence of its object, but in caring for its form, it is in a sense interested in the existence of its *possibility*. Unfortunately, for Kant the sense of an aesthetic object as existing in a mode of possibility does not go far beyond the sense in which money exists as pure possibility.[41] The quantitative neutrality by which money stands for the possible realization of any economic goal is similar to the contentless relations of beauty that admirably present to the faculties the suggestion of a purpose with no actual purpose. The aesthetic sphere, under the Kantian view, is hardly different from the commercial sphere: each only consists in the repetitive instantiations of a form, whether of the commodity or of the beautiful, to serve a purposeless consumption, whether by the consumer or by the imagination. And yet the role of the supersensible in Kant is to express a dimension of experience in which the human being transcends the homogeneity of formal relations and affirms possibility in a deeper sense than as what is formally given. Supersensible possibility, rather than as a Marxian sphere of commodity fetishism, appears in Kant as utter heterogeneity—not as relative difference, for instance between prices, but the difference as such that always slightly withdraws the world from our

41. Compare "the uncommitted nature of money" in Simmel with the assertion in Kant that "taste only plays with the objects of liking without committing itself to any of them" (Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, 216; Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 53).

various interpretations.[42] The Kantian system, then, suggests that we take aesthetic disinterestedness beyond its initial exposition as a mere interest in empty formality.

Zola attempts to synthesize objective disinterestedness and subjective intimacy in his conception of the experimental novel. Aesthetic judgment learns, through Zola, not to keep impartiality separate from intimacy, but rather to combine them in a sort of intimate disinterestedness of experimentalism. As in Kant, Zola's disinterested attitude disregards the actual existence of its object, but in a very different way. Kant generally wants aesthetic judgment to disregard existence so that it may concentrate on pure form and thereby achieve universal validity. Zola, however, wants aesthetic judgment to disregard the notion that

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42. We do take an interest in what Kant calls "intellectual beauty" even at the same time that we maintain a disinterestedness toward it. This intellectual beauty is none other than the moral law within us, which we judge with disinterested taste in the phenomenon of our own personal sacrifice, but which simultaneously produces an interest in us for our own freedom of infinite possibility. Thus, while an attitude of impartiality is appropriate to an object of formal beauty, Kant acknowledges that some kind of pure interest is required by the formal possibility of the moral law, surely because this latter is not an empty form in which anything is possible, but one which directs us toward the highest good. "The object of a pure and unconditioned intellectual liking is the moral law in its might, the might that it exerts in us over any and all of those incentives of the mind that precede it. This might actually reveals itself aesthetically only through sacrifice (which is a deprivation—though one that serves our inner freedom—in return for which it reveals in us an unfathomable depth of this supersensible power, whose consequences extend beyond what we can foresee). Hence, considered from the aesthetic side (i.e., in reference to sensibility), the liking is negative, i.e., opposed to this interest, but considered from the intellectual side it is positive and connected with an interest" (Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 131).

existence is an impenetrable block of actuality. Rather than abstracting pure forms, Zola's experimentalism would turn reality malleable and play with its structures in the interest of an idea (see the previous footnote on intellectual beauty in Kant). Instead of meditating on pure relations, his novels would actively explore and alter the real channels that form the complex network of life. Zola brings the scientific enterprise back down to the level of social life, the origin, as Marx believed, of the abstractions of money and other such formal entities. His novels are thereby able to participate in concrete life, not only as an observer, but as a potential agent of change. There is too great a sense of mastery and determinism in Zola's notion of this potential change, but he lays some groundwork for a more subversive theory of the radical potential of art in relation to capitalism.

2 Henry James and the Unknown Quantity

Between the One and the Many

After taking up the disinterested *quality* of a judgment of taste in the first moment, Kant's explication moves on to consider the *quantity* of an aesthetic judgment.[1] Quantity here means: for how many is a judgment valid? Is a judgment of taste valid only once for the subject in its present state? Does the judgment lose its validity if the subject should renounce commitment later on due to a change in mood? The answer is already given by the explication of quality: a judgment of taste does not hinge on contingent states of personal interest or commitment. A judgment of taste is valid in itself beyond its contingent emergence from an accidentally disposed subject, and therefore remains valid for and continues to demand agreement from not only the same subject in later states but also entirely other subjects. However, since a judgment of taste is reflective, and not determinate, its validity, though apparently universal, nevertheless issues from some disinterested corner of the individual personality.

> Since a judgment of taste involves the consciousness that all interest is kept out of it, it must also involve a claim to being valid for everyone, but without having a universality based on concepts. In other words, a judgment of taste must involve a claim to subjective universality.[2]

1. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 53-64.

2. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 54.

Aesthetic expressions rooted in reflective judgment are, like mathematical objects, ideal: they survive the death of their originators' personalities, continue to exert changes upon the world, and are thought to perhaps remain in some way important even beyond the extinction of humanity.[3] A judgment of taste is valid for more than the singly counted personal subject, and yet, unlike the mathematical determination, valid for less than the infinity of the logical universal quantifier ∀ (for all). Kant uses the awkward term 'subjective universality' to express his notion of a judgment which is somewhere between these two extremes of quantity. While the subjective contingency of a mathematical formula can be explained away as inessential to the formula, which is said to be more discovered than created by the subject, the soul appears bound to even the most enduring of aesthetic

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3. This Kantian idea gets more fully thought out in the tradition of phenomenology. Husserl, for example, points to the parallel ideality of mathematical and cultural objects. "Geometrical existence is not psychic existence; it does not exist as something personal within the personal sphere of consciousness; it is the existence of what is objectively there for 'everyone' (for actual and possible geometers, or those who understand geometry). Indeed, it has, from its primal establishment, an existence which is peculiarly supertemporal and which—of this we are certain—is accessible to all men, first of all to the actual and possible mathematicians of all peoples, all ages; and this is true of all its particular forms. And all forms newly produced by someone on the basis of pregiven forms immediately take on the same objectivity. This is, we note, an 'ideal' objectivity. It is proper to a whole class of spiritual products of the cultural world, to which not only all scientific constructions and the sciences themselves belong but also, for example, the constructions of fine literature" (Husserl, "The Origin of Geometry" in *The Crisis of European Sciences and Transcendental Phenomenology*, 356-7).

expressions.[4] The personality *gives* rather than *delivers*, we might say, its judgment or expression and thereby marks it with the indelible trace of a subjective point of view. And yet such expressions are able to transcend the horizon of the individual life and reverberate their value in infinite ways across history and geography. The Platonic dialogues capture perfectly this quantity: they open an order of thought that appears not to have met with a conclusive denial of value for any historical epoch or cultural group, while they yet perform the importance of their being situated in a singular time and place. No philosophical or poetic idea can ever be detached from the lived context of meaning in which it takes place without altering the reciprocally effective relationship the idea has developed with the world. Thus, the quantity of an aesthetic judgment lies somewhere between the oneness of a soul and the infinity of the world.

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4. "History, political economy, the sciences of law and of the state, the studies of religion, of literature and poetry, of art and music, of philosophical world-view, as well as the theory and conceptual cognition of the historical process, are such sciences [viz. human sciences or Geisteswissenschaften. Wherein, then, lies the affinity between them? In attempting to go back to something ultimate that they have in common with one another, I find that all these sciences refer to human beings, their relation to one another and to outer nature. … What, then, is common to all these sciences in their reference to human beings, their relations to one another and to outer nature? They are all founded in lived experience, in the expressions for lived experiences, and in the understanding of these expressions. Lived experience and the understanding of every kind of expression of lived experiences provide the basis of all judgments, concepts, and cognitions that are distinctive of the human sciences" (Dilthey, *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*, 91-2).

This is still, however, a poor way of expressing the matter, since "between" one and infinity is a rather vague thing to say. Obviously, the concept of such a quantity is not satisfied by a particular number, but rather demands some kind of dialectical sublation of the ideas of the one and the many. Our quantity is, it seems to me, not found anywhere along the numerical series between one and infinity at all, but rather is the lived experience of being-between as such.[5] The quantity of a reflective judgment does not find its place within the system of quantity belonging to the mathematical world, but rather consists in the experience of existing and expressing oneself between the lonely interiority of the self and the busy peopledness of the world. We perhaps make no utterance without in some manner pushing outward to force the world into adapting to what we have said, and, in that same push, feel the established order push back against us. Expression is not a matter of sending packets out to a functional receiver; rather, it is always a struggle with no distinct beginning or conclusion. Not only does the quantity of a reflective expression never finally reach the clear infinity of a logical proposition, but it never even begins at the distinct singularity of the subject. Such expressions are part of a reflective life that is always already wandering.[6] We do, in some sense, originate our expressions, but we equally have picked them up along our way.

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5. I derive the general sense of this idea from Heidegger's "separation of the between, the gathering middle, in whose intimacy the bearing of things and the granting of world pervade one another" (Heidegger, "Language" in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 202).

6. "The soul … is fundamentally, by its very nature, 'something strange upon the earth.' Thus it is always underway, and in its wandering follows where its nature draws it" (Heidegger, "Language in the Poem" in *On the Way to Language*, 163).

Difference, Quantity, and Proportion

Henry James, although probably without realizing it, picked up along his own way a concern for the Kantian problem of aesthetic quantity. It finds expression in at least one of his late novels, *The Wings of the Dove*, in the guise of a drama about money and death. I can begin demonstrating this literary translation of a philosophical problem by examining two words, each of which appears with some frequency throughout James's late work. These words are significant to the history of philosophy prior to and after James: difference and quantity. Though common enough in any text, James gives them as much responsibility as would any thinker in the tradition of German Idealism. The word 'difference,' regardless of meaning and not counting variations, appears ninety-three times throughout *The Wings of the Dove*, a great deal for a text of a non-technical genre. Its frequency speaks to the thematic importance of the effective agency of situational shifts. Like many other normally abstract or formal features of reality—similarity, opposition, connection—difference takes on a life of its own in James's novel. In James's late work, abstract rather than concrete nouns are often the subjects of actions.[7] Thus, rather than two things being different, it is the difference itself, between two things, that has some further effect. "There *was* a difference in the air—even if none other than the supposedly usual difference in truth between man and woman; and it was almost as if the sense of this provoked her" (James, *The Wings of the Dove*, 119-20). Rather than making an observation about there being a difference between men and women, the narrator observes that this difference, at least through the sense of it, has an effect of

7. See Žižek, *The Parallax View*, 125; Seymour Benjamin Chatman, *The Late Style of Henry James* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1972).

provocation. In fact, it is not even clear that the difference in question is one of gender; what is important is that a palpable difference as such contaminates the tranquility of the scene. The seismic agency of this mere structural relation is even more evident in the following passage. Milly has recently discovered that her new friend Kate knows intimately, although strangely has never mentioned him, a young gentleman, Merton Densher, whom Milly independently met and fell in love with elsewhere.

> Somehow, for Milly, brush it over nervously as she might and with whatever simplifying hand, this abrupt extrusion of Mr Densher altered all proportions, had an effect on all values. It was fantastic of her to let it make a difference that she couldn't in the least have defined—and she was at least, even during these instants, rather proud of being able to hide, on the spot, the difference it did make. Yet all the same the effect for her was, almost violently, of that gentleman's having been there—having been where she had stood till now in her simplicity—before her. (175)

The difference appears for Milly in the form of the suspicious absence of Densher from Kate's life and conversation. If Kate knows Densher so well, where is he and why hasn't she mentioned him? Entirely composed of invisible things (knowledge, absence, suspicion), the difference has an effect, as though it were a heavy thing in its own right, upon every proportion and value. Imperceptible though it may be, even eluding definition, the

difference violently reconfigures the situation between Milly and Kate and pushes the plot in a new direction.[8]

The other word, also usually technical or philosophical, to appear with unusual frequency in James's late fiction is the word 'quantity' itself. This word appears thirty-one times throughout *The Wings of the Dove*; its meaning, from case to case, is difficult to grasp. A character is often described, in their total effect, as a quantity: "She was in fine quite the largest possible quantity to deal with" (105). The composition of a general situation of life, in its relationship to consciousness, can also be a quantity: "[her mind] was dealing with new quantities, a different proportion altogether" (126). Such quantities, of course, are often "equivocal" (141), "mixed" (155), or "precarious" (358), since they represent not exact measurements of a scientific kind but rather obscurely felt vibrations or pressures caused by particular configurations of social phenomena. Nevertheless, obscure though they may be, these quantities do *differ* from one another and thereby contribute to those effective differences just discussed. There are impressions of more and less, even if exact degrees cannot be discerned. Thus, just prior to the passage concerning the recent difference in the epistemological situation between Milly and Kate, the secrecy of the latter's knowledge is described as a changed impression of quantity. "Yet it now came over her as in a clear cold wave that there was a possible account of their relations in which the quantity her new friend had told her might have figured as small, as smallest, beside the quantity she hadn't" (175). The narrative voice of James's novel speaks from shifting perspectives between multiple

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8. Heidegger also calls the 'between' the 'dif-ference'. "The intimacy of world and thing is present in the separation of the between; it is present in the dif-ference" (Heidegger, "Language" in *Poetry, Language, Thought*, 199-200).

characters as well as within the changing mental states of the individual characters. It describes the world seen from these limited yet bustling points of view. Quantity, in cases like the one just noted, often describes a relationship of difference between perspectives. Kate's candor appears vast from one perspective but narrow from the newly revised point of view. The shift appears to consciousness as a change in the quantity of some qualitative social force.[9]

James's subtle use of 'quantity' suggests that experience includes impressions of "more" and "less" that are vital to our interpretive activities and which yet do not submit to strict calculation.[10] Qualities, in relation to one another and to our faculties, exhibit

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9. Peter Brooks claims that Henry James, despite his modernism, is a realist because of his pervasive concern with the representation of life. What distinguishes James is his attention to the subtleties of changes in representational perspective, his concern for exactly how life is perceived, "at what angle, through what peephole" (Brooks, *Realist Vision*, 180).

10. Simmel, too, understood the importance of quantitative difference for the individual life. I will discuss momentarily his thoughts in *The Philosophy of Money*, but right now it is worth mentioning his more general existential insight in *The View of Life*. According to this later text, we feel determinately situated only by virtue of existing between two indeterminate and obscure poles of magnitude along each thread of our experience. "Man's position in the world is defined by the fact that in every dimension of his being and behavior he finds himself at every moment between two boundaries. This condition appears as the formal structure of our existence, filled always with different contents in life's diverse provinces, activities, and destinies. We feel that the content and value of every hour stands between a higher and a lower; every thought between a wiser and a more foolish; every possession between a more extended and a more limited; every deed between a greater and a lesser measure of meaning, adequacy, and morality. … This participation in realities, tendencies, and ideas

quantitative differences. It is even difficult to say what end there might be to the variety of *qualities* of quantity there may be: size, force, intensity, beauty. Or are these reducible to the mere self-likeness or self-unlikeness of whatever qualitative impression is in question? In any case, James identifies a quantitative dimension of experience which resonates with the Kantian quantity of aesthetic judgment. As the Kantian quantity indicates a breadth of validity that lies somewhere between, on one hand, the merest private application, and, on the other hand, absolute universality, similarly the Jamesian quantity indicates a shadowy range of proportions that govern the extent to which the self and the world each have their say with one another. A Jamesian character like Mrs. Lowder, who is the "largest possible quantity" described above, has a personality the weight of which extends her qualities into far-reaching consequences for others and for the events of the story. The epistemological situation between Milly and Kate bears upon Milly with such force that it drives her to act in certain ways. James is not, like Kant, concerned with judgments or validity *per se*, but rather with impressionistic configurations and the range of their influence. Kant is interested in how an aesthetic judgment, which derives no authority from any normative concept, is able to demand agreement from everyone else; James is concerned with how, in general, the events of consciousness and the events of the social-historical world combine to produce one stream of life. James takes up the Kantian inclination to place the brunt of his inquiry on

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that are a plus and a minus, a this-side and a that-side of our here and now, may well be obscure and fragmentary; but it gives life two complementary, if also often colliding, values: richness and determinacy. For these continua by which we are bounded and whose segments we ourselves bound form a sort of coordinate system through which, as it were, the locus of every part and content of our life is identified" (Simmel, *The View of Life*, 1-2).

the category of quantity, since what is at stake is the relationship between the subject (individual) and the world (totality). The stream of life presented by James's novel involves a ceaseless and indefinite struggle of proportional clout between singularity and universality in which all relevant "numbers" appear only as felt variations of either the "more" of a possible transcendence or the "less" of a possible recession. Characters have a sense of proportion, so that when that proportion alters, they become acutely aware that something is amiss. Hence Densher's reaction to the news that the publication he works for would like him to go to the United States to write a travelogue. Being at odds with the perspective of himself that his newspaper has taken, that he has "been chosen for such an errand confounded his sense of proportion. He was definite as to his scarce knowing how to measure the honour, which struck him as equivocal; he hadn't quite supposed himself the man for the class of job" (110). James's way of describing this common sort of reaction brings out the structural functions of consciousness in its relation to others and the world. Our judgments, as well as other kinds of expressions, emerge from and respond to a context of shifting proportional relationships. Differential proportion is also an important aspect of the relationship of exchange. Characters do not merely remark on difference, but decide on matters concerning gifts, desert, and debt in accordance with felt rules of proportion. "But don't you ask a good deal, darling, in proportion to what you give?" Kate asks Milly after the latter has asked the former to be discreet about her illness. Milly has been vague and secretive about her illness to Kate, so that it seems out of proportion to the latter that she should offer to keep quiet when Milly has not offered her enough information. Again, the structure of proportions concerns quantities of knowledge in respect to relative privacy or publicness.

Simmel offers a relevant discussion of the relationship between quantity and quality in *The Philosophy of Money*. When a variable quantity is causal, its effect does not necessarily vary in direct proportion. Around a certain threshold of increase or decrease of the causal variable, some qualitatively different effect may emerge all of a sudden rather than having shown itself by proportional degrees.

> The most common example refers to the so-called threshold of consciousness: external stimuli that affect our nerves are unnoticeable below a certain strength; but when this threshold is reached the stimuli suddenly evoke sensations, and the stimuli's merely quantitative increase brings about an effect of qualitative determinateness. In some cases, however, the increase has an upper limit with regard to this effect, so that the simple continuation of an increase in the stimulus beyond this threshold results in the disappearance of the sensation. This points to the most extreme form of discrepancy between cause and effect which is brought about by the mere quantitative increase of the cause, namely, the direct transformation of the effect into its opposite.[11]

Quantitative differences of phenomena, then, do not merely produce directly proportional differences of quantity in related phenomena, but often will throw forth unforeseen transformations of quality. These transformative events are not lawless, since some pre-given threshold is in play, but the nature of these thresholds may not be determinable by any hard and fast rule. The timing, for instance, involved in swinging a bat at a hurled baseball, at least vis-a-vis the actual experience of the player, is not a matter of numerical calculation, but depends on the player's learned feeling for the reaction-threshold toward which the

11. Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, 262

proximity of the ball quickly increases. Or take an approaching person yet far off: we cannot distinguish their face, although a feeling of familiarity perhaps attaches to an ineffable configuration of observable features, but it is only all of a sudden, in an instant, that their identity emerges and we recognize our friend.[12] The moment of recognition, like the perception that it is time to swing the bat, emerges as a qualitative leap out of all proportion to the mere single addition of yet another identical degree that has just taken place on the scale of increase. And yet the scale has been necessary to prepare for that leap. No sudden instinct to swing the bat is possible without the graded increase in nearness that began as soon as the pitcher threw the ball. Similarly, no sudden moment of recognition could have occurred without the previous intimations of familiarity working off the gradual approach of the friend. Finally, it is critical to note that not only should one not expect direct proportions to hold between the quantitative changes of causally-related phenomena, but sudden reversals of effect are also possible. Thus, for example, refinement of dress may command more and more respect and admiration with its increase, until passing a certain threshold when it suddenly appears foppish or pretentious.

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12. Merleau-Ponty identifies the same experience: "If I walk along a shore towards a ship which has run aground, and the funnel or masts merge into the forest bordering on the sand dune, there will be a moment when these details suddenly become part of the ship, and indissolubly fused with it. As I approached, I did not perceive resemblances or proximities which finally came together to form a continuous picture of the upper part of the ship. I merely felt that the look of the object was on the point of altering, that something was imminent in this tension, as a storm is imminent in storm clouds. Suddenly the sight before me was recast in a manner satisfying to my vague expectation" (Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, 20).

Quantitative changes of proportion govern much of the phenomenological action of James's novel. Simmel's threshold, which figures a relationship between quantity and quality, allows us to understand how dramatic qualitative changes come about in the narrative. Throughout the middle portion of the plot, we gradually develop a sense of Kate's intentions for Milly and Densher. This occurs for us through Densher's own growing consciousness of the matter. Many "quantities" conspire to create the totality which constitutes the great revelatory moment for Densher. That Densher and Kate are in love with one another; that Densher is too poor for Kate's aunt to approve of his marrying Kate; that Milly is wealthy; that Milly is fatally ill, a fact which itself only gradually comes to light for different parties at different times; that Milly is in love with Densher—these quantities grow or shrink in relation to one another and to the perceptions of characters until knowledge of Kate's plan emerges. "She did at last make him think, and it was fairly as if light broke, though not quite all at once. … He had quite, within the minute, been turning names over; and there was only one, which at last stared at him there dreadful, that properly fitted. 'Since she's to die I'm to marry her?'" (394). Kate has already been urging Densher to spend time with Milly, on the pretext that if Kate's aunt, Mrs. Lowder, believes that Densher is in love with Milly, then she will be less inclined to obstruct him from spending time with Kate. Densher is never fully satisfied with this reasoning, since it does not appear to include a permanent solution to their problem, but he goes along with it anyway. The moment of recognition, for Densher, comes very late in the unfolding of the plan. The horror of his awareness comes not so much from the ethical questionability of fleecing a dying woman for her money as it does from realizing that he has already been engaged in the plan, gradually moving toward its completion, without having quite seen what he has been put up to. And yet, could Densher really have

been completely unaware of Kate's intentions? His intelligence precludes such ignorance and we are given the impression that, like the person who gazes into the distance at the half-familiar friend, Densher has had a preconscious notion of what lies at the end of his path.

In *The Wings of the Dove*, characters frequently experience the moment of a recognition which is uncanny for its having already been lurking just beneath conscious perception.[13] Densher's recognition of Kate's plan is an echo on a larger scale of more subtle scenes. Milly, for example, sees Kate and Densher together for the first time, and in fact sees Densher for the first time since she has been in London, while taking a tour alone of the National Gallery. Rather than looking at paintings, Milly takes to looking at people. She drifts through the museum, allowing a kind of raw perception to take hold of her consciousness. She watches, in particular, the copyists, who mirror her own visual attention. While the copyists reproduce the proportions of line and color, Milly reproduces the proportions of people in society.

> They found, her eyes, it should be added, other occupation as well, which she let them freely follow: they rested largely, in her vagueness, on the vagueness of her visitors; they attached themselves in especial, with mixed results, to the surprising stream of her compatriots. She was struck with the circumstance that the great museum, early in August, was haunted with these pilgrims, as also with that of her knowing them from afar, marking them easily, each and all, and recognising not less promptly that they had ever new lights for her—new lights on their own darkness. She gave herself up at last, and it was a consummation like another:

13. Although preconscious content is not the same as repressed content, perhaps the former can still serve as the basis for an uncanny experience similar to that which the latter conditions in Freud's theory (Freud, *The 'Uncanny'*, 241).

> what she should have come to the National Gallery for today would be to watch the copyists and reckon the Baedekers. That perhaps was the moral of a menaced state of health—that one would sit in public places and count the Americans. It passed the time in a manner; but it seemed already the second line of defence, and this notwithstanding the pattern, so unmistakeable, of her country-folk. They were cut out as by scissors, coloured, labelled, mounted; but their relation to her failed to act—they somehow did nothing for her. Partly, no doubt, they didn't so much as notice or know her, didn't even recognise their community of collapse with her, the sign on her, as she sat there, that for her too Europe was 'tough.' (240)

Milly's impressions are vague insofar as she remains morally detached from the crowd. It is only "her eyes" that constitute the subject of the activity. And yet these eyes are busy in summing up the forms of the individuals walking about. She counts them, she measures their outlines, she classifies them by nationality and by other types—in general, she figures the "patterns" of the crowd. In other words, Milly is engaged in an active perception of formal proportions or quantities. The results are "mixed," but there are no great leaps in the process, no surprises beyond faint changes of degree: the differences between individuals are not so great that one cannot easily group them by type. Her perception shifts by degrees so slight that the emergent pattern is "unmistakeable," that is, no genuine surprises can throw off the accounting. Out of this homogeneous procedure, however, begins a new heightening of awareness. As proportions begin to change, as new quantities introduce themselves, Milly's consciousness begins to expand beyond the locality of the museum in order to account for these new facts. Three individuals, a mother and two daughters, appear before Milly's calculating eyes. One of them has just remarked that some gentleman across the

room is "handsome." Again, she "recognizes" them as types: "she *knew* the three, generically, as easily as a school-boy with a crib in his lap would know the answer in class" (241). However, what she now has to account for is that one of the daughters is looking at someone else across the room with recognition. "Milly had her back to the object, but her face very much to her young compatriot … in whose look she perceived a certain gloom of recognition." The mother reluctantly agrees that the gentleman is handsome, qualifying the judgment: "Well, if you choose to say so. … In the English style." Milly, still without turning around to look at the handsome Englishman, perceives in these three individuals the possibility of an intimate connection to herself. She appears to be slowly recognizing, still unconsciously, in the hints of their observations, the identity of the man who stands behind her. "Milly's heart went out to them while they turned their backs; she said to herself that they ought to have known her, that there was something between them they might have beautifully put together." She finally turns around, expecting to see a handsome painting in the English style, but instead sees that they are among Dutch paintings. And yet even this fact has been anticipated by an awareness of the truth that is accelerating toward full-blown knowledge: "the dim surmise that it wouldn't then be by a picture that the spring in the three ladies had been pressed" (242). She sees a man, still only "a gentleman in the middle of the place," that is, an indifferent quantity. Next, she recognizes first that this is "the object just observed by her friends," and then that there is a certain "arresting power" about him. The final instant leading up to full recognition is, far from another smooth transition from one degree to the next, a painful and forceful intensity: "This arresting power, at the same time—and that was the marvel—had already sharpened almost to pain, for in the very act of judging the bared head with detachment she felt herself shaken by a knowledge of it. It was

Merton Densher's own." Recognition emerges into consciousness all at once, even at nearly the same time that Milly sees Densher as merely another man in the crowd; and yet the feeling of pain appears to symbolize the sudden convergence of quantities that were precursors to the recognition, operating below the surface of Milly's awareness. Though the relations of these quantities were already forming through anticipation, even during Milly's casual stroll through the Gallery, and even perhaps through the decisions that brought her to the museum, consciousness is only able to recognize their most explicit intersection. This is possible, of course, because Milly is more than a passive observer: just as, for Kant, physics only discovers the laws that have been constituted in advance by cognition as such, similarly Milly's recognition of Densher is only significant insofar as she has anticipated him.[14] Thus, Milly might not have come upon Densher at the museum, but the moment she did come upon him was bound to be the final result of a long process of unconscious searching, a process consisting in the organization of various quantities both emotional and perceptual.[15]

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14. "[A]ll we cognize a priori about things is what we ourselves put into them" (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 73).

15. Unexpected chance meetings, for Freud, can be unconsciously anticipated by earlier perceptions that were suppressed for emotional reasons. Freud recalls running into a couple about which he had just been entertaining a revenge fantasy. He soon after realizes that he had probably seen them coming down the street "but had set the perception aside—on the pattern of a negative hallucination—for the emotional reasons which then took effect in the phantasy that arose with apparent spontaneity" (Freud, *The Psychopathology of Everyday Life*, 264). Surely, however, a more elaborate version is also possible, and would constitute a species of what Freud calls "symptomatic acts," whereby rather than merely ignoring a perception seconds before the encounter, a series of

Money, in *The Wings of the Dove*, does not stand in opposition to qualitative, spiritual, or unconscious forms of life. Instead, James looks at how money operates within these forms. However, if he refuses to view the world as a technical articulation of clear means and ends, and instead sees it as an organic swelling and shrinking of proportions, the borders of which are marked by vaguely intuited thresholds, then by the same token he also refuses to completely assimilate rational and quantitative forms like money to a totally unconscious and irrational life. The suggestion in describing the movements of perception and interpretation in terms like 'quantity' and 'proportion' is that life has become unshakably rooted in forms of technology and capital. James, then, achieves a fusion of rational and vital forms in his phenomenological mode of narrative. Kant, who already introduced the quantitative "moment" into the complex of aesthetic reflection, can help us to understand the logic by which quantity operates within life as the mediation between the singularity of the subject and the universality of the world. James finds a similar logic operating in capitalist society. Quantity, he shows us, denotes more than the mediation of subjective judgment with objective assent. It connotes a wide range of mediations between self and world, including, as we have seen, our interpretive capacities, but also the role of money. Money represents the attempt to bridge the abyss between the self and the world without remainder. Like the categorical concepts of the Kantian understanding, which by necessity supply us with the means of correct perception, money is supposed to offer a universal form of guaranteed access to practical objectives. In actual fact, however, the quantity of money works more like the phenomenological or interpretive quantities: it exists in proportions

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actions, perhaps quite lengthy, would be performed, unwittingly designed to increase the probability of the encounter.

bound to the fluctuations of life. Some have more money than others do; money is more powerful or effective in the hands of some than it is in the hands of others; and money takes on different qualitative meanings depending on how it is gathered, how much of it is gathered, and around what sort of personality it is gathered. Contrary to what the initial purely rational understanding of money would suggest, it is not a mere homogeneous scale of value, but rather an often unpredictable, though still quantitative, force in organic social life.[16]

The money that is the focal point of James's novel is a large but unknown quantity unified around the aristocratic personality of Milly. More than an aggregate sum, Milly's

16. "Not only does one million marks in the possession of a single individual accord him a status and a social qualification that is totally different from the thousandfold multiple of its corresponding significance to the owner of one thousand marks. Rather, at the basis of this subjective consequence, it is also true that the objective economic value of one million marks cannot be calculated in terms of the marginal utility of its thousand parts at a thousand marks each. On the contrary, it forms a comprehensive unit in the same way as the value of a living creature, acting, as a unit, differs from the sum total of its individual organs. In the previous chapter I argued that the money price of an object, no matter how many coins it consists of, is none the less a unit. I stated there that one million marks are, as such, a mere aggregate composed of unconnected units. Yet as the value of a landed estate they are the unified symbol, expression or equivalent of the amount of its value and not at all a mere agglomeration of single-value units. This practical determination has its personal correlate. The quantity of money is realized in relation to the unity of a person as a quality and its extensiveness is realized as intensity—a process that could not be achieved by the mere summation of its constituent parts" (Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, 273).

money is a qualitative fortune that, rather than typifying her as a mere example of her social class, lends itself to her singular distinction.

> Mrs Stringham was never to forget—for the moment had not faded, nor the infinitely fine vibration it set up in any degree ceased—her own first sight of the striking apparition, then unheralded and unexplained: the slim, constantly pale, delicately haggard, anomalously, agreeably angular young person, of not more than two-and-twenty summers, in spite of her marks, whose hair was somehow exceptionally red even for the real thing, which it innocently confessed to being, and whose clothes were remarkably black even for robes of mourning, which was the meaning they expressed. It was New York mourning, it was New York hair, it was a New York history, confused as yet, but multitudinous, of the loss of parents, brothers, sisters, almost every human appendage, all on a scale and with a sweep that had required the greater stage; it was a New York legend of affecting, of romantic isolation, and, beyond everything, it was by most accounts, in respect to the mass of money so piled on the girl's back, a set of New York possibilities. (123)

Milly's singularity, her, as Stringham sees it, "strangeness," her vibrating radiance, owes itself to a freedom bought with money and authenticated by death. Money represents her infinite possibilities, the capacity to manipulate all sorts of proportions at will. Her singularity depends on her fortune excusing her from having to be just another laborer. Moreover, money affords her an endless range of choices by which she may construct her life according to an unrestricted personality. Without, however, Milly's familiarity with death, she would be unaware in the first place that her life is something to be fashioned. Death makes up the other half of her singularity, because through its negation she is able to separate her life as such from the mere contents that fill it. And yet, again, without her money, death would only

be an all-too-material hardship, a crude destruction of life, rather than a spiritual negation that brings life into view. Milly has lost her family, but her mourning is her grace; she is fatally ill, but her illness will be her path to immortality.

Immortality of the Soul

We first encounter Milly vacationing in Switzerland with her older friend, Mrs. Stringham. As a prefiguring of her illness and eventual death, an early scene unfolds in which Milly has gone for a walk through the mountainous region and Mrs. Stringham goes out to look for her. She finally, unbeknownst, comes upon Milly taking in a view from a sharp precipice.

> The whole place, with the descent of the path and as a sequel to a sharp turn that was masked by rocks and shrubs, appeared to fall precipitously and to become a 'view' pure and simple, a view of great extent and beauty, but thrown forward and vertiginous. Milly, with the promise of it from just above, had gone straight down to it, not stopping till it was all before her; and here, on what struck her friend as the dizzy edge of it, she was seated at her ease. (134)

The promontory represents the edge of life, but what lies beyond it is not nothing. Beyond this sudden fall, or rather what is made possible by this dropping off of the land, is a "pure and simple" *view*, beautiful though vertiginous. Death, which is in a manner a dropping off of life, does not drop off into darkness, but opens out onto a view. Although the edge frightens Mrs. Stringham, for Milly this view is a promise toward which she moves quickly and upon which she settles restfully. Milly looks to the promise not out of nihilism or suicidal tendency but out of eagerness for life as such.

> [I]f the girl was deeply and recklessly meditating there she wasn't meditating a jump; she was on the contrary, as she sat, much more in a state of uplifted and unlimited possession that had nothing to gain from violence. She was looking down on the kingdoms of the earth, and though indeed that of itself might well go to the brain, it wouldn't be with a view of renouncing them. Was she choosing among them or did she want them all? (135)

Mrs. Stringham, whose thoughts these observations represent, correctly sees that Milly is neither looking forward to self-destruction nor saying goodbye to the world. However, she assigns to Milly an impulse far too imperial than consistency with her character allows. The meaning of the vista for Milly seems rather to be that life, understood not as a series of experiences but as the unique nexus of all the tendrils sent out to touch the world, that is, the soul itself, is drawn from beyond the furthest limit of ordinary existence. Having no actual existence of its own, being rather the form of the individual's possible experiences, the soul must draw its non-being from beyond being, namely from death.[17] Only through a

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17. Milly recalls the figure of the German poet Novalis, the Romantic poet whose early death was part of the destiny of his, as Hegel puts it, beautiful soul. Hegel, however, is critical of a Romantic inwardness that finds expression in self-annihilation. Such a death can only be the result of a soul undergoing disorganization rather than increasing integration. "Its activity is a yearning which merely loses itself as consciousness becomes an object devoid of substance, and, rising above this loss, and falling back on itself, finds itself only as a lost soul. In this transparent purity of its moments, an unhappy, so-called 'beautiful soul', its light dies away within it, and it vanishes like a shapeless vapour that dissolves into thin air" (Hegel, Phenomenology of Spirit, 400). Lukács offers an opposing interpretation of Novalis's biography, which also seems appropriate to Milly's situation: "No one

relation to death can we develop something externally non-existent, our life considered apart from its contents, the form we usually call our personality. Simmel's 1918 publication, *The View of Life*, speaks aptly to Milly's existential situation. It brings together the ideas of life, death, and immortality, which feature so prominently in James's own discourse.

The object of Simmel's book of four "metaphysical essays" is to present the complex meaning of the viewing in which life engages. Simmel is not presenting his own opinionated view on what life is, but rather he is looking into what the concept of a view has to do with the concept of life.[18] In the third chapter, "Death and Immortality," Simmel observes that life only comes into view of itself from the perspective of an internal dying. Death, he first

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emphasized the exclusive importance of the ultimate goals more stubbornly than this delicate youth doomed to an early death; no one was more at the mercy of all the hazards of the Romantic way of life—and yet he was the only one among all these great theoreticians of the art of living who succeeded in leading a harmonious life. Each of the others became dizzy at the sight of the abyss which spread before their feet even on the brightest days, and each fell from the heights into that abyss; only Novalis succeeded in wresting a life-enhancing strength from the ever-present danger. The danger which threatened him was more brutal, more physical than that of the others, and yet (or perhaps just because of this) he was able to draw the greatest life-energy from it" (Lukács, *Soul and Form*, 51).

18. "The categories of theory and of viewability [Anschaulichkeit] describe in many ways also those of life, but they have a different meaning. With respect to life, for example, form means something completely different than it does elsewhere. … A very deep theme: that the forms of our perception (i.e., our world) are defined by the fact that our perception indeed is a life, and therefore life itself has those forms from the outset and carries them over into the formation of the contents of perception" (Simmel, "Notes from Simmel's 'Metaphysics' File" in *The View of Life*, 191-2).

of all argues, is—from either a psychological, biological, or philosophical perspective—internal to life. "The mystery of organic form lies in the fact that it is limit: it is at once the thing itself and the cessation of the thing, the domain in which the being and the no-more-being of the thing are one" (Simmel, *The View of Life*, 63). Even if an organism should be killed by an external accident, it still had, internal to its life, a drive toward death manifested at the very least in the biological process of senescence. Life is functionally one with death since even in its attempts at survival life is engaged in a consumption of itself that leads ever closer to death. The very internal necessity of death, however, divides life from itself. Realizing that, while it appears to be something now, life must one day become nothing, the living subject concludes that its life is contingent and effectively non-existent. But what does seem to survive this fragile life are certain ideal contents. We must die, but our ideas do not have to die.

> But in fact we die and thereby experience life as something accidental, something ephemeral, something that, so to speak, can also be otherwise. Only thus could the thought have arisen that the contents of life do not indeed have to share the fate of its process; only thus could we have become aware of the meaning—independent of all transience and ending, and valid beyond life and death—of certain contents. Only the experience of death could have dissolved that fusion, that solidarity of life-contents with life. (71)

The process of recognition does not end here. The subject, having been able to separate the contents of its experience from its accidental life, now turns back upon this accidental life to view it as a separate process in itself. If the individual life can drop off into death, leaving behind its contents, which may be passed on to posterity, then that individual life must be

something in itself, at least while it is living. Consciousness takes a step yet further now to decide that should the ideal contents which constitute its experience demand an existence beyond mere life by virtue of their timeless values, then life, as equally a thing in itself, and an ideal process at that, ought to be capable of enduring endlessly as well.

> The thought of immortality enters here. Just as … death allows life to founder so as to permit the timelessness of its contents, as it were, to become free, so now, on the other side of the dividing line, death terminates the series of experiences of particular contents without thereby cutting off the ego's demand to perfect itself forever or to exist further—the counterpart of that timelessness. (74)

The individual life is not only a material process, but, more fundamentally, a formal ideational procedure with a unique identity. Thought of as the ego, life proceeds through psychical forms which appropriate particular external contents as private experiences. The personality, it may be called, is an individual lawfulness, or a regulative idea, determining in what peculiar way the world will unfold for this subject. As a formal lawfulness, perhaps the individual life persists beyond its material substance, just as the essential idea of a story may resurrect itself in any number of particular narratives; or, for that matter, just as personal identity survives the radical vicissitudes that take place even within the individual life.

> What leads more deeply to the point of uniqueness of the individual … is only the manner of functional relation of the particular elements, which is the *general* aspect *of this individual*, *his* law of being, which—precisely in contrast to the particular elements—he can as little share with others as he can have his life in common with others. And now—speculatively—the timelessness of this law, the ideal form of individual reality, would perhaps admit a turn to

> the idea of migration of souls. … Thus, the soul migrating through many bodies and lives is nothing but the soul of the particular life "writ large"; and soul migration is nothing but a grotesque enlargement, a radicalization and a rendering absolute of certain experiences of daily, relativistic life. (94-5)

Insofar as we take a view of our life as a process distinct from its contents, we can work on ourselves, or "perfect" the idea of ourselves, toward an ever-increasing uniqueness which would hold out the promise of eternal value and, possibly, eternal existence. By differentiating our personality, deepening it, complicating it, we create an ideal form that has no equivalent. Not bearing substitution, the personality would submit itself to posterity for re-instantiation but not replacement. Simmel further notes that a depth of personality suggests immortality in yet another way: since every thought seems to imply something unthought yet pulsing just below the surface, "no single content that has risen to the level of being formulated in consciousness absorbs the psychic process entirely into itself; each one leaves a residue of life behind it that knocks on the door it has shut, as it were" (76). We leave behind thoughts without thinking them, we choose against actions that can never be taken up again, we opt for or fall into an actuality that necessarily expels infinite possibilities from realization. "Our narrow reality is perhaps shot through with the feeling of these unbounded tensions and potential directions, and equipped with the intimation of an intensive endlessness that is projected in the time-dimension as immortality" (76). The lived experience of our finitude is not the event of the death of the body, but rather the experience of living through limits that keep out other possibilities in order to create the interior space of actual life. And yet these possibilities are never fully shut out from our existence; life seems to drag them along. We do not think certain thoughts and we do not go

down certain paths, but those thoughts and those paths haunt us forever.[19] The infinite sprawl of the self, taken in both its actuality and missed possibilities, is so relationally laid open to the world, that it seems impossible that this dissemination should just vanish with the destruction of the body. Certainly, life closes itself off from the world, and its biological survival depends on maintaining this closure—but the limits by which it achieves this security are also openings onto the life that this particular soul might live in an ideal realm where limitation does not take the form of exclusion.

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19. Walter Benjamin reads a related idea out of Proust. Involuntary memory, the engine of Proust's narrative, is the way in which we open up the structural limits with which voluntary memory mechanically fashions the everyday picture of our life we carry with us. Our true life is much vaster, richer, more complicated, more organically interrelated, more ambiguous, and more open than the tidy stories our voluntary memory puts together would lead us to believe. More than events merely forgotten, the true life is an infinity found in the most concrete and singular objects (the taste of a madeleine dipped in tea, for instance). This seems to correspond to the "intensive endlessness" that leads Simmel to the notion of immortality. And indeed Proust's narrator discovers a kind of immortality through involuntary memory. Should we, however, never discover this hidden life, its unnoticed accumulation is the only thing that in the end truly ages us. "À la Recherche du temps perdu is the constant attempt to charge an entire lifetime with the utmost awareness. Proust's method is actualization, not reflection. He is filled with the insight that none of us has time to live the true dramas of the life that we are destined for. This is what ages us—this and nothing else. The wrinkles and creases on our faces are the registration of the great passions, vices, insights that called on us; but we, the masters, were not home" (Benjamin, "The Image of Proust" in *Illuminations*, 211-12).

Henry James organized his own reflections on immortality in an essay called "Is There a Life After Death?" published in a collection of pieces on the subject of the afterlife by various authors. He reaches a conclusion similar to that which Simmel expresses, namely that if we are to think the soul's immortality, our speculations should focus on the relational complexity of consciousness. There are many reasons, for James, why immortality is in all likelihood a mere fancy: the scientific evidence that consciousness has its seat in the physical brain; the lack of any real proof that the dead are in any sort of communication with our world; and the obvious indifference of the universe to our moral lives. Nevertheless, James claims to subscribe to a belief in personal immortality that is phenomenologically evident and psychologically imperative. He recounts that his original inquiry into the possibility of his own immortality began with an almost Cartesian probing of his own consciousness. As it turned out, the investigation itself led to a heightened awareness, and even a furthering, of the complexity of his mind. We may speculate that these phenomenological inquiries James recalls include the very planning and writing of his three late novels. For what else are these latter efforts but inscriptions of the elaborations of the mind's relationships to its own contents? The effect, then, of this investigation into immortality became a condition of his belief in immortality, not because the investigation figured out an answer to the mystery, but because the investigation is a process of quantitatively increasing elaboration that eventually succeeds to a new qualitative change in the nature of the relationship of consciousness to its own finitude. In taking the measure of his consciousness, James notices that this very effort extends immeasurably.

> What had happened, in short, was that all the while I had been practically, though however dimly, trying to take the measure of my consciousness—on this appropriate and prescribed

> basis of its being so finite—I had learned, as I may say, to live in it more, and with the consequence of thereby not a little undermining the conclusion most unfavorable to it. I had doubtless taken thus to increased living in it by reactions against so grossly finite a world—for it at least *contained* the world, and could handle and criticise it, could play with it and deride it; it had *that* superiority; which meant, all the while, such successful living that the abode itself grew more and more interesting to me, and with this beautiful sign of its character that the more and the more one asked of it the more and the more it appeared to give. (James, "Is There a Life After Death?" 219-20)

James learned to "live" in his consciousness more, which corresponds to the notion, in *The Wings of the Dove*, that Milly turns away from life as a series of experiences but turns toward it as a view of life as such. He exchanges the gross finitude of the world, conceived as a mere succession of external events, for the intensive endlessness, to use Simmel's phrase, of the mind in its capacity to handle, criticize, play, and deride without end. James's consciousness becomes something that gives prodigally of itself so long as it is questioned. How could something the resources of which are thus infinite, which gives new ideas and relations out of its own bottomless depth, using up no limited supply—how could such an entity ever vanish so long as one does not cease to challenge it?[20]

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20. Nietzsche may be more in accord with James and Simmel than his explicit rejection of immortality would seem to indicate. Immortality, for Nietzsche, is the Christian notion of a soul saved once and for eternity upon death. Such a conception, he argues, deforms the individual's pursuit of knowledge during life, since the approach of death urges him toward a definite decision on certain spiritual questions. Forgetting about immortality eases the burden of arriving at a complete metaphysical conception that will please God, and instead allows one to pursue questions without the

For James, the capacity for the soul to persist in the world hinges on "the enormous multiplication of our possible relations with it" (James, "Is There a Life After Death?" 221). Like Milly, gazing out beyond the promontory, the immortal soul takes an "unlimited vision of being" (222). It is the figure of the artist, of course, who best embodies this procedure toward immortality. The artist lives among the wastefulness of thought, the great portion of consciousness that contributes nothing practical to the world of industry.

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need to ever resolve them. This openness of the pursuit of self-knowledge is what James and Simmel seem to indicate by their conceptions of immortality. Rather than an eternal state of perfection after death, immortality would be the endless but non-anxious wandering of thought, or the practice of opening up subjectivity. Nietzsche calls this mode of thought 'experimentation'. "So far as the promotion of knowledge is concerned, mankind's most useful achievement is perhaps the abandonment of its belief in an immortal soul. Now mankind can wait, now it no longer needs to rush precipitately forward or gulp down ideas only half-tasted, as it formerly had to do. For in the past the salvation of the 'eternal soul' depended on knowledge acquired during a brief lifetime, men had to come to a decision overnight—'knowledge' possessed a frightful importance. We have reconquered our courage for error, for experimentation, for accepting provisionally—none of it is so very important! and it is for precisely this reason that individuals and generations can now fix their eyes on tasks of a vastness that would to earlier ages have seemed madness and a trifling with Heaven and Hell. We may experiment with ourselves! Yes, mankind now has a right to do that! The greatest sacrifices have not yet been offered to knowledge—indeed, merely to have an inkling of such ideas as nowadays determine our actions would in earlier times have been blasphemy and the loss of one's eternal salvation." (Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, 204).

> For the artist the sense of our luxurious "waste" of postulation and supposition is of the strongest … If he were not constantly, in his commonest processes, carrying the field of consciousness further and further, making it lose itself in the ineffable, he shouldn't in the least feel himself an artist. As more or less of one myself, for instance, I deal with being, I invoke and evoke, I figure and represent, I seize and fix, as many phases and aspects and conceptions of it as my infirm hand allows me strength for; and in so doing I find myself—I can't express it otherwise—in communication with *sources*; sources to which I owe the apprehension of far more and far other combinations than observation and experience, in their ordinary sense, have given me the pattern of. (223-24)

The issue here is aesthetic, but, as I want to demonstrate throughout this dissertation, aesthetic reflection, taken initially in the Kantian sense, is not limited to art. It indicates a mode of thinking about being that takes up the largest part of the mind, although this great territory may be mostly unconscious.[21] Such reflection is called wasteful only because James

21. Aesthetic judgment itself, in Kant, is certainly conscious and to a certain extent rational. This is because "the aesthetic power of judgment in judging the beautiful refers the imagination in its free play to the understanding so that it will harmonize with the understanding's concepts in general (which concepts they are is left indeterminate) … (Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 113). The rational and conscious understanding grasps the free play of the imagination under its conceptuality. And yet, the indeterminacy of this conceptuality is owing to the consciously inaccessible activity of the finer mechanics of this free play. Indeed, the play is free precisely in not being held accountable to any distinct idea of the conscious mind. Thus, we make judgements of taste, and can account for them to a certain extent, but we must always fall short in any attempt to completely account for them, since they have drawn on mental sources too deep, complex, and ambiguous to every fully dig up and sort out. In Freud's view, the unconscious, which is not so much a region as it is a mode, is the greater

defines it in opposition to the much narrower slice of consciousness concerned with usefulness operating along the instrumental or technical axis of the world. Reflective judgment, even if we understand it strictly on Kant's terms, is the process by which the mind, without a determinative compass, orients itself within the uncharted continent of being.[22] The means by which this miracle is accomplished resists full articulation for both

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part of mental life. We might tentatively surmise an overlap between the reflective free play of the Kantian imagination and the sphere of unconscious mental activity in Freud. "The unconscious is the larger sphere, which includes within it the smaller sphere of the conscious. Everything conscious has an unconscious preliminary stage; whereas what is unconscious may remain at that stage and nevertheless claim to be regarded as having the full value of a psychical process. The unconscious is the true psychical reality; in its innermost nature it is as much unknown to us as the reality of the external world, and it is as incompletely presented by the data of consciousness as is the external world by the communications of our sense organs" (Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams*, 613). Gaston Bachelard attempts to make the connection between the unconscious or semi-conscious life and poetic creation or reflection. He identifies reverie as the hinge between the lost moments of psychic life and objectively recorded poetic statements. "Reverie is commonly classified among the phenomena of psychic détente. It is lived out in a relaxed time which has no linking force. Since it functions with inattention, it is often without memory. It is a flight from out of the real that does not always find a consistent unreal world. By following "the path of reverie"—a constantly downhill path—consciousness relaxes and wanders and consequently becomes clouded. … The reverie we intend to study is poetic reverie. This is a reverie which poetry puts on the right track, the track an expanding consciousness follows. The reverie is written, or, at least, promises to be written" (Bachelard, *The Poetics of Reverie*, 5-6).

22. Kant discusses problems of judgment in "What Is Orientation in Thinking?" that are similar to those discussed in the third Critique. The problem in the essay is that when reason leaves behind

Kant and James. The latter, however, brings a poetic sensibility to its explanation and thereby takes a different approach, even if it is philosophically untenable, toward illuminating it. Kant, to be sure, does address the increasingly philosophically taboo subject of the immortality of the soul, but assigns to it a very restrictive role: immortality is a belief which bolsters our enthusiasm for being good individuals in this life.[23] James rather sees in immortality the expression, symbol, or perhaps even the metaphysical reality of the thinking soul's relationship with the world beyond its technical articulation. To be able to make sense of the mass of existence for which there are no rational signposts, the poet must draw on invisible sources of thought to produce truths that are in no way provable. These sources dwell beyond the world, in a dimension that has nothing to do with measured time or space, and our ability to communicate with them suggests that, like Plato's souls that remember eternal truths, we originally come from that invisible realm and will one day return to it. However, James implies that this realm, as much as it represents an objective source of knowledge about the world, from which any artist may draw insight, is yet nothing more and nothing less than the individual soul itself. Moreover, this source only exists, only has truth corresponding to the world, for the artist who works to deepen his soul through persistent

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objects of experience, it "will then no longer be in a position, in determining its own faculty of judgement, to subsume its judgements under a specific maxim with the help of objective criteria of knowledge, but only with the help of a subjective distinction." Kant analogizes that distinction to the one between left and right that we employ in navigating ourselves spatially. The distinction as such is what he calls the "need" in thinking. "[Reason] perceives its own deficiency and produces a feeling of need through the cognitive impulse." (Kant, "What Is Orientation in Thinking?" in *Political Writings*, 240-243 n).

23. Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 155-7).

contemplation. Artistic truth, that is, sound orientation within the wilderness of being, emerges only through an elaboration of the soul's depth which can also be understood as an outward articulation of the soul's relation to the world. In this way, the infinite deepening of the soul converges with the infinite expansion of the world. Immortality, for James, is just that convergence.

Milly is immortal in the Jamesian sense, but because the narrative rarely takes the explicit perspective of her consciousness, it is difficult to substantiate this claim. We cannot easily point to the unique complexity of her personality, the vast extent of its relationships to the world, the irreplaceability of its value. James characterizes Milly in the preface as someone "conscious of a great capacity for life," "enamoured of the world," and "passionately desiring to 'put in' before extinction as many of the finer vibrations as possible" (James, *The Wings of the Dove*, 35). This would seem to match the qualities of the artist-type in James's essay on immortality: in love with being, and desiring to complicate the mind's entanglement with it. Of course, James acknowledges that Milly cannot simply either be or not be this way; rather, her universal entanglement is to be a process in the manner analyzed above, a negotiation of quantitative proportions. Immortality is only an image, the reality being an uncertain process. "The image so figured would be, at best, but half the matter; the rest would be all the picture of the struggle involved, the adventure brought about, the gain recorded or the loss incurred, the precious experience somehow compassed." We may see here that, as I suggested above, Milly's work of consciousness is also James's work; as Milly learns how to live beyond death, so too James learns this by writing his novel. In reference to its writing, he says "it might have a great deal to give, but would probably ask for equal services in return, and would collect this debt to the last shilling." The very

construction of the novel is a matter of quantities, a working-out of proportions analogous to monetary exchange. And yet, as was evident in James's lacunar attempt in the immortality essay to describe the artistic process of drawing on invisible "sources," however Milly carries out the aesthetic adventure of developing the mind intensively and extensively, this process eludes, to a certain extent, representation. Not Milly *per se*, but death itself, escapes James's poetic operations: "the poet essentially *can't* be concerned with the act of dying" (36). Life is constructed out of many limits, separating one quantity from another, but death is the furthest limit that divides being from what makes being possible. Death hides the "sources" the artist must draw on to make something new and compelling out of being; it both conceals and lets in the power of limitation as such, without which neither order nor the dismantling and re-imagining of order would be possible.[24] 'Death' is only a name for that

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24. Heidegger was the first to analytically lay out the existential meaning of death in terms of its disclosive function. "The closest closeness which one may have in Being towards death as a possibility, is as far as possible from anything actual. The more unveiledly this possibility gets understood, the more purely does the understanding penetrate into it as the possibility of the impossibility of any existence at all. Death, as possibility, gives Dasein nothing to be 'actualized', nothing which Dasein, as actual, could itself be. It is the possibility of the impossibility of every way of comporting oneself towards anything, of every way of existing. In the anticipation of this possibility it becomes 'greater and greater'; that is to say, the possibility reveals itself to be such that it knows no measure at all, no more or less, but signifies the possibility of the measureless impossibility of existence. In accordance with its essence, this possibility offers no support for becoming intent on something, 'picturing' to oneself the actuality which is possible, and so forgetting its possibility. Being-towards-death, as anticipation of possibility, is what first makes this possibility possible, and sets it free as possibility. Being-towards-death is the anticipation of a potentiality-for-Being of that

exteriority that we feel from within the order of being. The "actuality," whatever that would mean, of the exterior itself is an unsolvable mystery. The artist cannot represent the beyond itself—cannot represent the condition of representation itself. "Milly's situation ceases at a given moment to be 'renderable' in terms closer than those supplied by Kate's intelligence, or, in a richer degree, by Densher's …" (46). The closer we get to conceiving of death as something that will really happen to us, the more baffled and speechless we become. Thus, the narrative speaks through Milly's consciousness in the early portion of the novel, when she is only just discovering the illness inside of her, but soon filters her through the experiences of Kate, Densher, and others, and, finally, hides completely from view her final weeks and, of course, hides the death itself. Death, in a sense, occurs all at once, a sudden silencing of life, but it is preceded by a threshold of varying length which intimates it for the dying individual in ways that seem to become less and less utterable.[25]

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entity whose kind of Being is anticipation itself. In the anticipatory revealing of this potentiality-for-Being, Dasein discloses itself to itself as regards its uttermost possibility. But to project itself on its ownmost potentiality-for-Being means to be able to understand itself in the Being of the entity so revealed-namely, to exist. Anticipation turns out to be the possibility of understanding one's ownmost and uttermost potentiality for-Being-that is to say, the possibility of authentic existence" (Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 306-07).

25. Andrew Cutting points out that Milly's death is internal, gradual, and quiet, and for this reason it is difficult for herself, other characters, or the narrator to describe or even name it. Nevertheless, if an external death could be better described factually, an internal death lends itself to intellectual involvement. Hence the characters' and the narrative's ability to weave Milly's death into the whole fabric of the plot as a guiding idea. "In Roderick Hudson, death comes suddenly, as if with a blow delivered from outside human experience; in *The Wings of the Dove*, violence has been internalised.

The Difference Nothing Makes

As I shall demonstrate, however, what is unrepresentable is by no means *nothing*, or, at least, what is nothing is not without its own palpable force of difference. Similarly, what is unrepresentable is also not completely inaccessible to thought, however indirect the mode of access must be. The very silence of death, and the growing incoherence of the murmurings leading up to it, are not concealments of what lies beyond, but the beyond itself hushing the ceaseless noise of the world and taking apart its meaningful proportions of quantity. The style alone of James's novel suggests this function of death, for what most characterizes the late style are the gaps in representation of events and the jumbling of meaning at the level of the sentence. This prompted his brother, the philosopher William James, to write:

> I have read *The Wings of the Dove* (for which all thanks!) but what shall I say of a book constructed on a method which so belies everything that *I* acknowledge as law? You've reversed every traditional canon of story-telling (especially the fundamental one of *telling* the story, which you carefully avoid) and have created a new *genre littéraire* which I can't help thinking perverse, but in which you nevertheless *succeed,* for I read with interest to the end (many pages, and innumerable sentences twice over to see what the dickens they could

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Whereas Roderick falls from a cliff and dies instantly, Milly does not leap from the Alp where Susan Stringham discovers her early on, but instead makes a gradual descent towards her death as if following steps into Hades. Whereas Roderick seems to participate in his death only partially—his suicidal motives are cloudy—Milly and her friends actively explore the approach of her death, even though this eventuality is for the most part never named" (Andrew Cutting, *Death in Henry James*, 82-83).

> possibly mean) and all with unflagging curiosity to know what the upshot might become. It's very *distingué* in its way, there are touches unique and inimitable, but it's a "rum" way; and the worst of it is that I don't know whether it's fatal and inevitable with you, or deliberate and possible to put off and on.[26]

As would strike any reader used to James's earlier work, the sentences of *The Wings of the Dove* take effort to decipher. The novel's first sentence already shows the deliberate clumsiness characteristic of the book's style throughout: "She waited, Kate Croy, for her father to come in, but he kept her unconscionably, and there were moments at which she showed herself, in the glass over the mantel, a face positively pale with the irritation that had brought her to the point of going away without sight of him" (55). The number of commas, and the corresponding number of ideas and images, fragment the thematic coherence of the sentence. The agency of abstract nouns confuses a mind not used to thinking of something like 'irritation' as being an entity in itself that brings a person to the point of going away. James's deliberate complication of sentences seems part of an effort to complicate consciousness and bring it into a more labyrinthine and mysterious relation to the world. For, his sentences are not merely difficult to read, but they engender ambiguity by their complexity. Ambiguity is the multiplying of relation, the splitting of the straightforward path into a network of possibilities. Furthermore, ambiguity brings about the impossibility of final decision, whether this is the decision of the reader trying to interpret a passage, or the decision of a character concerning morality or truth within the novel. Unresolvable

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26. Letter from William James [1902], cited in Henry James, *The Wings of the Dove*, edited by J. Donald Crowley and Richard A. Hocks [New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 2003], 473.

ambiguity is a sign of the influence of what lies beyond death, namely, the openness of a nothing that, when let in, throws the quantitatively proportioned world into confusion.

The Wings of the Dove can seem to jabber indistinctly at the level of the sentence, but it also lets silence reign over certain events. As the process of dying can show, silence, while qualitatively distinct, is nevertheless often reached by a path of unintelligible speech. While the latter is ambiguous but practically decidable, silence is the absolutely undecidable foundation of ambiguity. James is silent about two things: love and death. Both phenomena, however, announce themselves through the undecidable ethical and metaphysical situations they create. There are two love scenes, neither of which are represented, and both of which are therefore left in some obscurity as to their nature. The first scene, which is really not a scene at all, has taken place between Densher and Kate. Densher has asked Kate to promise, if he is to go through with their plan to deceive Milly into marrying him, that Kate will at least have sex with him before she returns to England and leaves him alone with Milly in Venice. Kate reluctantly agrees, the chapter breaks off, and at the beginning of the next Kate has already left Venice and Merton is sitting in his apartment contemplating the act that has now taken place there. James prefigures Milly's death in the erasure of the sex scene. What does one have to do with the other? Both love and death are experiences of absolute limitation and absolute exposure. Death brings to view the negation of our existence (the drop-off) but also exposes us to living as such. Love involves a negation of self-interest, even while in many ways being motivated from self-interest, but also exposes us to the other. Both exposures are like the exposure of a person in the wilderness without shelter, completely vulnerable to the elements. Protective structures are not to be found, no compass points the way back to order, and everything is, by the only law that does exist, completely

unexpected. We get a sense of this experience in the anxiety of facing death and in the blissful and frightening disorientation of love.[27] Wandering through the wilderness, exposed to the mystery rather than the order of being, means being in the middle. The middling wanderer is neither fully self-enclosed in singular oneness nor sublated into a unified multiplicity. Rather, he or she is somewhere between, off the radar, lost to any positioning system. The experience of having wandered is what escapes representation. Densher's sexual encounter with Kate is for him such an experience, and the only evidence of it are the traces it has left behind. Thus, when the new chapter opens after the lacuna following the last, Densher is contemplating, we should not say the "act," but the traces of his amorous adventure.

> It was after they had gone that he truly felt the difference, which was most to be felt moreover in his faded old rooms. … [T]he interest the place now wore for him had risen at a bound, becoming a force that, on the spot, completely engaged and absorbed him, and relief from which—if relief was the name—he could find only by getting away and out of reach. What had come to pass within his walls lingered there as an obsession importunate to all his senses; it lived again, as a cluster of pleasant memories, at every hour and in every object; it made everything but itself irrelevant and tasteless. It remained, in a word, a conscious

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27. "The violence of love leads to tenderness, the lasting form of love, but it brings into the striving of one heart towards another the same quality of disorder, the same thirst for losing consciousness and the same after-taste of death that is found in the mutual desire for each other's body. In essence, love raises the feeling of one being for another to such a pitch that the threatened loss of the beloved or the loss of his love is felt no less keenly than the threat of death" (Bataille, *Erotism: Death and Sensuality*, 241).

> watchful presence, active on its own side, for ever to be reckoned with, in face of which the effort at detachment was scarcely less futile than frivolous. Kate had come to him; it was only once—and this not from any failure of their need, but from such impossibilities, for bravery alike and for subtlety, as there was at the last no blinking; yet she had come, that once, to stay, as people called it; and what survived of her, what reminded and insisted, was something he couldn't have banished if he had wished. (399)

Again, the event consists in a quantity that makes a "difference." This quantity, however, is not a countable one, nor is it a quantity that has become qualitatively new after passing through a threshold, like the qualitatively altered perceptions we examined above. The invisible event of love alluded to in this scene is rather a quantity that has forever disappeared into a threshold, a quantity that is irretrievably lost in an indiscoverable between, a point that no calculation could determine. And yet this unknown quantity makes *all* the difference: an indescribable change settles over everything in the vicinity of the event, analogous to the feeling that when one thing is out of place in a room, but one cannot identify it, *everything* looks somehow out of place.

It is significant that not only did this event between Densher and Kate happen only once, but, according to the narrator, it could only have happened once. There were impossibilities of its repetition which could not be avoided. In this case, however, the impossibility of repetition allows the event a possibility of singularity. The event, that is, does not occur in the usual flow of time, whereby one instant, filled with whatever content, succeeds another. Rather, the singular event occurs in the self-given and irreplaceable moment, which does not contain a content but simply is a unique content. Comparable to nothing else, these encounters derive their value from themselves; causally reducible to no

other event, they derive their existence from themselves. Can such an event be repeated? Simmel, sensitive to the logic of life, provides some insight into the matter.

> We often feel that the highest culmination of *joie de vivre*, which signifies for the individual his perfect self-realization in the material of existence, need not be repeated. To have experienced this once gives a value to life that would not, as a rule, be enhanced by its repetition. Such moments in which life has been brought to a point of unique self-fulfilment, and has completely subjected the resistance of matter—in the broadest sense—to our feelings and our will, spread an atmosphere that one might call a counterpart to timelessness, to *species aeternitatis*—a transcendence of number and of time. Just as a law of nature does not derive its significance for the state and coherence of the world from the number of its instances but from the fact that it exists and is valid, so the moments of the highest transcendence of the self have meaning for our life because they once occurred. No repetition that did not add anything to their content could enlarge this meaning. (Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, 275-6)

What would differ about the logic that James presents, in my reading, is that rather than pertaining to a culmination of the self or an appropriation of the world, such an experience of singular value would emerge from a wandering in the absolute between. It is disorder and ambiguity which manage to shuck off the technical conditions of value and existence, thereby allowing a unique event to arise from nowhere.[28]

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28. Relevant here is Benjamin's concept of history. "History is the subject of a structure whose site is not homogeneous, empty time, but time filled by the presence of the now." Historical materialism, the revolutionary method of history, explodes the linear series of progressive history by giving past

However, though they arise from nowhere, these events are not isolated from the world, private experiences for the subject to selfishly enjoy. Instead, it is precisely the singular event which is able to make a difference to the image of the world as a whole. As Simmel notes, concerning death as a singular loss of the unique individual, in *The View of Life*: "Only these 'unique' people die fully and completely, only their death changes the fixity of the world's image" (83). The world, as a fixed image, consists of a systematic interlocking of exchange relations. Elements substitute for one another, money measures the balance of values, people fill vacated roles, all without disrupting the overall system. Real change, as opposed to mere *ex*change, comes about through the vibrations of irreplaceable beings. What is unique cannot fit into the system as it is; there are no positions available for it. Such an event can only exist by announcing itself out of turn and by giving of itself without a contract that guarantees fair return. Indeed, the singular being has the privilege to give itself without return because its existence is not rationally accountable, it eludes measurement, and it originates from mysterious depths of creativity. Hence the historically persistent feeling that artistic or intellectual works should be produced for their own sake without financial

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moments a singular meaning that brings them to life in the present. "Thus, to Robespierre ancient Rome was a past charged with the time of the now which he blasted out of the continuum of history." The revolutionary event is itself bound up with this historical explosion. "The awareness that they are about to make the continuum of history explode is characteristic of the revolutionary classes at the moment of their action" This disorder of linear time tied to the emergence of the singular event is in keeping with what I mean by the experience of singular value in the absolute between. (Benjamin, "Theses on the Philosophy of History" in *Illuminations*, 261).

consideration.[29] Neither the physical labor of the artist nor the material used in the process can really be counted as reciprocally exchanged elements, since these things seem inessential when considered in relation to the meaning of the work they produce. Money would have to account not for the labor and material but rather for the artistic quality of the work, which seems to escape precise quantification. Even when these works are exchanged for money, there are usually further concerns about how the work is to be priced and whether or not its ideal content, when reproducible, can ever be owned by the purchaser. The value of the

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29. For instance, Schelling thought of art as a product of a union of conscious and unconscious forces, emanating from the undiscoverable ground of being itself. "This unknown, however, whereby the objective and the conscious activities are here brought into unexpected harmony, is none other than that absolute [Schelling inserts a footnote: the primordial self] which contains the common ground of the preestablished harmony between the conscious and the unconscious. Hence, if this absolute is reflected from out of the product, it will appear to the intelligence as something lying above the latter, and which, in contrast to freedom, brings an element of the unintended to that which was begun with consciousness and intention." What is especially interesting about this force is that not only does it bring the artist to make something that he himself does not entirely comprehend, but it also separates him from others in a kind of solitude, as though the social relationality, and thus socio-economic relations too, of the individual needed to be suspended for the radicality of the ground of being to speak. "Just as the man of destiny does not execute what he wishes or intends, but rather what he is obliged to execute by an inscrutable fate which governs him, so the artist, however deliberate he may be, seems nonetheless to be governed, in regard to what is truly objective in his creation, by a power which separates him from all other men, and compels him to say or depict things which he does not fully understand himself, and whose meaning is infinite" (Schelling, *System of Transcendental Idealism*, 221-3).

actual and potential effectivity of a penetrating work of art infinitely exceeds any value assigned to it for purposes of exchange. These works disrupt the system of exchange and transform the image of the world. What is most characteristic of this endless transformative power is the ambiguity of the event or the work. Easily commodified products are always fixed and reproducible. They consist of exact proportions that can be readily understood and consumed, exchanged, or reproduced without remainder. Singular works or events are ambiguous and thereby elude the manipulations of commerce. But it is also from this ambiguity that they derive their endless generosity. Singularities seem to give of themselves endlessly because we are never finished interpreting them, finding new uses for them, or exploring new ways to love them. Milly, through her unrepresentable limit of death, finally exceeds herself, leaving behind an ambiguous network of traces that forever transform the world for Kate and Densher. Treated like a commodity by these latter, in their attempt to exchange her life for a large sum of money, Milly proves too much for the scam.

The second love scene takes place, or rather, again, does not take place, between Densher and Milly. We are not so sure that it is sexual in nature, but we know that something significant and unrecordable has happened. "The essence was that something had happened to him too beautiful and too sacred to describe" (469). Whatever it was, Densher seems shamefully certain that it has constituted a union between them sufficient enough that he should expect a full inheritance of Milly's fortune. Densher has left Venice weeks prior to Milly's actual death. We get the sense, however, that he has not done so out of cowardice, but because he has already experienced her death in the amorous moment between them. Recalling the moment, Densher sees himself thrown ecstatically, though not necessarily with pleasure, beyond himself.

> He himself for that matter took in the scene again at moments as from the page of a book. He saw a young man far off and in a relation inconceivable, saw him hushed, passive, staying his breath, but half understanding, yet dimly conscious of something immense and holding himself painfully together not to lose it. The young man at these moments so seen was too distant and too strange for the right identity; and yet, outside, afterwards, it was his own face Densher had known. He had known then at the same time what the young man had been conscious of, and he was to measure after that, day by day, how little he had lost. (468-69)

James draws a parallel between the remembered event and the literary work. Each approaches the Kantian quantity of "subjective universality" through the generous elaboration of thoughtful relations. The comparison furthermore signifies that an immortality is working through the scene, carrying it beyond its everyday transience, toward an eternally transformative ideal meaning. Just as the scene does not belong to an exchangeable position within history, but has become a singular event that transcends and transforms history, so too Densher has transcended any identifiable position by giving himself in an inconceivable relation to Milly. Densher is no longer oriented by a positioning system, as he was when he traveled to America to record a series of foreign experiences. Whereas in that case he was able to remain identical to himself as an English journalist, despite a change of location, and thereby was able to document popularly consumable observations of the different regions of the United States, in this case, his adventure consists in a radical departure from positionality as such, an ecstatic leap toward the other that resists objective documentation. What Densher has held onto and not lost is what remains of Milly

beyond her death. This is the immense thing toward which he must remain silent, content to only half understand, if he is to keep it safe.[30]

Ethics of Inheritance

However, Densher's love for Milly, though surely authentic in its singular moment, verges on a threshold leading back to calculated interest. The ambiguity of the meaning of their union threatens to sink back into the clear-cut and single-minded purpose of exploitation. Thus, as Densher dwells in the strange memory of his ecstasy, he simultaneously awaits an official notification of his inheritance, although he does not bear the contradiction with ease at all. Finally, after having already heard of her official death, Densher receives a letter from Milly. Unable to bear the probability that the letter will combine Milly's sentimental feelings for him with the promise of the guilt-laden legacy, Densher attempts to efface from its reception all but the blunt fact of his successful inheritance. He begins this attempt by bringing the letter to Kate still sealed, thus putting off the receipt of the haunted money. Densher tells Kate that the letter, which has arrived just in time for Christmas, is obviously the gift they have been expecting. He goes on to explain that because Kate has done

30. Again, I am using Heidegger's language to convey the idea that it is only through a mode of thinking, remembering, or experiencing which is reflective, that is, which, in Kantian terms, conceptualizes without determinate concepts, that we can "safekeep" or "safeguard" that which is incalculable. "Man will know, i.e., carefully safeguard into its truth, that which is incalculable, only in creative questioning and shaping out of the power of genuine reflection. Reflection transports the man of the future into that 'between' in which he belongs to Being and yet remains a stranger amid that which is" (Heidegger, "The Age of the World Picture" in *The Question Concerning Technology and Other Essays*, 136).

something sacred for him, namely given herself to him sexually, he would like in turn to give this gift to her.

> '... I won't,' she said, 'break your seal.'
>
> 'You positively decline?'
>
> 'Positively. Never.' To which she added oddly: 'I know without.'
>
> He had another pause. 'And what is it you know?'
>
> 'That she announces to you she has made you rich.'
>
> His pause this time was longer. 'Left me her fortune?'
>
> 'Not all of it, no doubt, for it's immense. But money to a large amount. I don't care,' Kate went on, 'to know how much.' And her strange smile recurred. 'I trust her.'
>
> …
>
> 'You played fair with me, Kate; and that's why—since we talk of proofs—I want to give *you* one. I've wanted to let you see—and in preference even to myself—something I feel as sacred.'
>
> She frowned a little. 'I don't understand.'
>
> 'I've asked myself for a tribute, for a sacrifice by which I can peculiarly recognise —'
>
> 'Peculiarly recognise what?' she demanded as he dropped.
>
> 'The admirable nature of your own sacrifice. You were capable in Venice of an act of splendid generosity.'
>
> 'And the privilege you offer me with that document is my reward?'
>
> He made a movement. 'It's all I can do as a symbol of my attitude.'
>
> (496)

Densher is faced with a convergence of generosities that threatens to turn into an infinite debt of guilt. Kate has given herself to him, but he has emotionally cheated on her in giving himself to Milly. Milly has given herself to him, but her second gift, the financial inheritance, reminds him that his emotional gift was predicated on Milly's exploitation. In order to somehow equalize all this, Densher gives Milly's gift to Kate. But what exactly is he giving? Not the money, since both Densher and Kate would share this anyway. Densher is trying to give Kate two things, the first being that which he feels "as sacred," namely, the amorous moment between himself and Milly, as payment for the sacred act of love that Kate gave to him. In other words, to rectify his betrayal of Kate, Densher wants to symbolically give her the love that he expressed toward Milly. The symbolic gesture, however, conceals the second and more real thing Densher wants to give over to Kate: the moral responsibility of dealing with the consequences of their scheme. For what Densher is coming to realize, if not fully in this scene, then certainly by the novel's end, is that Milly's spiritual singularity, kept safe by him in the ideal space of his encounter with Milly on the thresholds of love and death, consists in a bequeathed ethical dilemma. Milly, that is, immortally haunts Densher through the gift of an ambiguous ethical situation which he wishes to avoid in passing it on to Kate.

The soul, according to Henry James and Simmel, is the unique personality of an individual.[31] What it means, however, to be unique, as I have already argued, involves

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31. Or rather, the soul, for Simmel, is the unique personality thought as an unanalyzed unity. Capitalism does not merely lead to the disunity of the soul, but destroys even the uniqueness of the personality by making the majority of its traits irrelevant to the social function of the individual. "The enigmatic unity of the soul cannot be grasped by the cognitive process directly, but only when it is broken down into a multitude of strands, the resynthesis of which signifies the unique personality.

ambiguity of form. The unique soul, or the essence of the individual, is not one thing which could be fully accounted for and reproduced. Whether we have in mind the individual personality, a historical event, or a work of literature, what lends singularity to these is an inexhaustibility of meaning. Thus, I am claiming that Milly's immortal soul is expressed at the end of *The Wings of the Dove* as the bequest of an ambiguous ethical situation, although I do not wish to claim that Milly's soul is ultimately reducible to a meaning oriented around the lives of Densher and Kate. On the contrary, Milly's soul is, *for Densher and Kate alone*, this ethical situation. The association of ghostly hauntings with the soul of the individual speaks to this idea that a soul's posthumous immortality is always given in the form of the personal concerns and anxieties of those who knew the deceased. In Densher's and Kate's case, then, and for the reader who takes their perspective, Milly's soul expresses itself as this singular and undecidable ethical dilemma concerning her money. For not only would the soul's ambiguity express itself as a potential multitude of posthumous concerns in the various remembrances of those who knew the living person (Mrs. Stringham, for example, would be haunted by a very different spiritual essence of Milly), but each private haunting would also in turn represent some inexhaustibly ambiguous point of the relation of the deceased to the haunted individual. What is crucial to James's conception of the ghostly soul is that the essential aspect which survives for the haunting take the form of an unsolvable problem or a point never fully comprehensible but open to endless interpretation. One can never be sure that one has understood a ghost's intention, and this is what constitutes its ability to persist beyond the borders of the factual life.

Such a personality is almost completely destroyed under the conditions of a money economy" (Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, 296).

Since Kate refuses to accept the haunted gift, Densher throws the letter into the fire. Both of them agree that the letter is irrelevant because they both feel they know without a doubt that Milly has left Densher a considerable sum of money. What neither Kate nor Densher has fully taken into account is the qualitative meaning of the money in question. Kate's plan appears to have proceeded on the assumption that money is money, regardless of who it belongs to, and that this is *a fortiori* true once its possessor is dead. Money is a measure of quantity, the precision of which tends to exclude relations to the more nuanced portions of life. Insofar as money can be exchanged for anything in principle, the more dignified elements of the world balk at an association with it.[32] Money is only a linear series of units that pass through a person without really touching them. Its lack of qualitative order makes it suitable for quantitatively ordering the technical configurations of economic life. As I discussed above, however, while all of this is true in principle, money, as a phenomenon entrenched in life, does not always escape sentimental, spiritual, and generally qualitative molds. Milly's money, I have shown, already holds a peculiar relation to her personal style of living. As her qualitatively significant fortune, the money assumes the form of Milly's personality. This in itself makes the potential extraction of her money from her person a risky endeavor. Like a surgeon, Kate wishes to remove Milly's money without having to take

32. While the money economy, for Simmel, has a tendency to free up individuals from inherited obligations and permanent social functions, thereby allowing for a differentiation of personalities to flourish, these very unique individuals increasingly feel that the money form in turn crudely represents their loftier qualities: "modern culture distances money from these personal values, makes its significance less and less compatible with all that is really personal, and suppresses the assertion of personal values rather than accept such an inadequate equivalent" (Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, 372).

out any of the vital organs that contain it. In other words, Kate, in order that her hands should remain clean, must pull off her scheme without Milly's awareness, and therefore without hurting her, so that the money comes loose as an aggregate sum of cash indifferent to its origin. For the plan to work without ethical complications, money ought to be a neutral bridge between the desires of the self and the material of the world, no matter which self or what materials. Instead, Milly's money wanders around the threshold, stuck between an attachment to her soul and a neutral dispersion. Its ordinary quantitative value loses ground to the infinite possibilities of its ethically ambiguous position.

Densher has attempted to free the money from this position by burning Milly's note without reading it. Surely by casting into oblivion the "turn" she would give her gift, the money will come out indifferent. But the very discarding of Milly's letter turns out to impel her soul upon him even more.

> Then he took to himself at such hours, in other words, that he should never, never know what had been in Milly's letter. The intention announced in it he should but too probably know; only that would have been, but for the depths of his spirit, the least part of it. The part of it missed for ever was the turn she would have given her act. This turn had possibilities that, somehow, by wondering about them, his imagination had extraordinarily filled out and refined. It had made of them a revelation the loss of which was like the sight of a priceless pearl cast before his eyes—his pledge given not to save it—into the fathomless sea, or rather even it was like the sacrifice of something sentient and throbbing, something that, for the spiritual ear, might have been audible as a faint far wail. This was the sound he cherished when alone in the stillness of his rooms. He sought and guarded the stillness, so that it might prevail there till the inevitable sounds of life, once more, comparatively coarse and harsh, should smother and deaden it—doubtless by the same process with which they

> would officiously heal the ache in his soul that was somehow one with it. It moreover deepened the sacred hush that he couldn't complain. He had given poor Kate her freedom. (503)

Milly's communication has become nothing, while yet being so much more significant for Densher than it could have been had he read it. It constitutes another unknown quantity with incalculable effects. The "intention announced in it" is the promise of inheritance, the particulars of which Densher can easily guess at; but the "turn she would have given her act" is the unknowable movement of her soul beginning to vibrate through the relations of Densher's life. Milly's words are a lost "revelation"; but a revelation, whether lost or not, transforms the individual's world, or rather calls on the individual to transform the world through decisive action.[33] The revelation is like a "priceless pearl," that is, something which

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33. Martin Buber's account of a revelation between the 'I' and the 'You' involves the reception of an inarticulable meaning upon which one must act. It is in this sense that Densher receives the ethical call to responsibility from Milly in this singular and eternal moment, the meaning of which persists despite Densher's attempt to throw it away. "What is it that is eternal: the primal phenomenon, present in the here and now, of what we call revelation? It is man's emerging from the moment of the supreme encounter, being no longer the same as he was when entering into it. The moment of encounter is not a 'living experience' that stirs in the receptive soul and blissfully rounds itself out: something happens to man. … The man who steps out of the essential act of pure relation has something More in his being, something new has grown there of which he did not know before and for whose origin he lacks any suitable words. Wherever the scientific world orientation in its legitimate desire for a causal chain without gaps may place the origin of what is new here: for us, being concerned with the actual contemplation of the actual, no subconscious and no other psychic

has neither a use nor a value that can be measured, but which nevertheless causes wonder. Densher continues to preserve Milly's soul, or the singular form that her soul takes for him, in the stillness of silence. For the moment, silence is opposed to the noise of the world, just as Densher, for now, preserves Milly's soul privately in order to absolve Kate. However, silence is not something altogether separate from worldly noise; rather, it challenges the order of noise, and can, under the right circumstances, potentially upset that order. Similarly, the singularity of Milly's soul will not bear to be hidden by Densher's private contemplations; in its singular eventfulness, it must burst forth and influence an order of being that transcends Densher's interiority.[34]

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apparatus will do. … Man receives, and what he receives is not a 'content' but a presence, a presence as strength. … The question about the meaning of life has vanished. But if it were still there, it would not require an answer. You do not know how to point to or define the meaning, you lack any formula or image for it, and yet it is more certain for you than the sensations of your senses. … This meaning can be received but not experienced; it cannot be experienced, but it can be done; and this is what it intends with us. The guarantee does not wish to remain shut up with me, it wants to be born into the world by me" (Buber, *I and Thou*, 157-9).

34. According to Kristin Boudreau, Densher experiences Milly's disembodied presence because of the immensity of her consciousness, but his own mind is an equally important recipient, transforming the Emersonian "dead fact" of her letter into a "quick thought," a dead thought that has regained life in being thought through again. *The Wings of the Dove* "dramatizes the possibility of consciousness so immense and implacable that it extends beyond the body. Merton Densher … comes to sense the presence of immaterial beings. If the beings that appear to him are not always the ghosts of dead persons—in some cases we might call them the ghosts of past experiences—they nonetheless assume the identity of disembodied consciousnesses. James's novel poses as Emersonian question about the

Densher receives another piece of mail, this time not directly from Milly but from her lawyer in New York. It obviously contains the official notification of his inheritance. Again, he tries to pass the responsibility on to Kate by sending her the envelope still sealed. When the two next meet, Kate has broken the seal, although she has not looked at its contents.

> 'You see I've not hesitated this time to break your seal.'
>
> …
>
> 'It's not "my" seal, my dear; and my intention—which my note tried to express—was all to treat it to you as not mine.'
>
> 'Do you mean that it's to that extent mine then?'
>
> 'Well, let us call it if we like, theirs—that of the good people in New York, the authors of our communication.'
>
> (504)

Densher insists on thinking of the inheritance as coming from an anonymous "they" in New York, hoping that he will somehow be able to accept the money and make things work with Kate. Densher expresses some disappointment that Kate did break the seal; he reasons that she perhaps ought to have left it unbroken so that they could have sent the inheritance back to New York without seeming to the lawyer as if they were refusing it on account of the

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relationship between 'quick thoughts' and 'dead facts': What is the connection between life and death? Is life after death possible? Can death in life be avoided?" (Boudreau, "Immensities of Perception and Yearning: The Haunting of Henry James's Heroes" in *Henry James and the Supernatural*, 43-4).

possible paltriness of its sum. In any case, Densher tells Kate, he is disappointed that she has broken the seal. "It makes the difference that I'm disappointed in the hope … that you'd bring the thing back to me as you had received it" (505). Kate correctly suspects that Densher is trying to place the burden of the ethical situation on her in the form of a condescending test. "You wanted to measure the possibilities of my departure from delicacy?" she asks. He replies: "Well, I wanted—in so good a case—to test you." Kate is rightly offended; she argues that any knowledge of her morals that he could expect to get from such a test would be illusory.

> 'How do you know,' she asked in reply to this, 'what I'm capable of?'
>
> 'I don't, my dear! Only with the seal unbroken I should have known sooner.'
>
> 'I see'—she took it in. 'But I myself shouldn't have known at all. And you wouldn't have known, either, what I do know.'
>
> (505)

It comes out that Densher wants to refuse the bequest and, moreover, wants Kate to do the same. The money has become abject to Densher, haunted as it is by Milly's wronged soul. "I won't touch the money," he bluntly states. "Who then in such an event *will?*" Kate asks in return. "Any one who wants or who can" (506). Since the inheritance has failed to give up the absolute difference which Milly's unknown quantity has given it, the only possible restoration of its indifference lies in giving the money away to an anonymous recipient. Kate points out that she would not be able to accept the money without Densher in any case, since it was bequeathed to him. "How can I touch it but *through* you?" She thereby throws back the ethical responsibility on Densher in reminding him that only he has a direct relation

of "touch" to Milly, and that it is only through this sensual and spiritual touch that the money is bequeathed at all. Densher retorts that she cannot do so "any more … than I can renounce it except through you," thereby returning the volley of responsibility by reminding Kate he has given her the inheritance. "There's nothing … in my power," she replies. "I'm in your power," Densher retorts. Through this debate, which goes on even further, it becomes clear that the situation is undecidable by reason. "It had come to the point really that they showed each other pale faces, and that all the unspoken between them looked out of their eyes in a dim terror of their further conflict." They realize that the arguments to be made are endless. At one point, they even fall back on appealing to the goodness of Milly, as though they could somehow see what she has done for Densher as an untainted act of good will. "A faint smile for it—ever so small—had flickered in her face, but had vanished before the omen of tears, a little less uncertain, had shown themselves in his own" (507).

Finally, Kate seems ready to give into Densher, that is, to marry him on the condition that they give up the money entirely. One thing stands in the way, as far as she can see in this moment, and that is Densher's love for Milly. Kate shrewdly accuses Densher of having fallen in love with Milly only through her death. "[Y]our change came … the day you last saw her; she died for you then that you might understand her. From that hour you *did* [love her]" (508). As I have argued, Densher's love is conflated with Milly's death, both being experiences of an absolute limit of existence that disrupts the relative limits of being. Kate's own condition, if she is to accept Densher's, is that he give up this love. "Your word of honour that you're not in love with her memory." We have been given no reason hitherto for believing that Kate could be jealous. Her condition is one last attempt to escape the ethical responsibility of facing the money in all its ambiguous meaning. Kate is in fact as in

love with her own memory of Milly as Densher is. Memory is precisely their problem, since it is through memory that the dead survive. Densher tacitly agrees to the condition: "I'll marry you, mind you, in an hour" (509). The final lines of the novel follow this.

> 'As we were?'
>
> 'As we were.'
>
> But she turned to the door, and her headshake was now the end. 'We shall never be again as we were!'

Milly's death has made a difference, not among the relative proportions of quantities, but in the very logic of Kate's and Densher's world. Her death constitutes, as it were, a new *a priori* category through which all future experiences must be given for interpretation. Kate is not being merely dramatic when she protests that nothing can ever be the same again. Her acute perception recognizes the absolute difference that has been made at the very foundation of their existence. Obviously, Kate is in one sense claiming that their relationship is forever tainted insofar as they have committed this horrible crime of robbing an innocent girl in the last weeks of her life. In a deeper sense, however, what is different for each of them, and especially for confident Kate, is that no relation, difference, or proportion can ever be certain again. Kate's plan started out as a calculated manipulation of quantitative proportions in order to get around her aunt's obstruction and achieve a union with Densher. When the logic of life involves only such calculations, how can anything of ethical significance enter the picture? Milly, on the other hand, sees life in another way, sees her life from the perspective of death, enabling her to perceive the insignificance of calculable relative proportions in the face of the revelatory force of the nothing. What Milly leaves behind,

then, for Densher and Kate, that is, what is essential about her life in relation to the calculating Densher and Kate, is ethical ambiguity. No longer can Kate and Densher deal with one another by simply moving proportions around; they must each confront, and somehow act upon, if they are to be together, that which is unknowable, incalculable, and unexpected about each other. Nor can either handle any situation concerning value without acknowledging the logic of the gift that underlies all quantities. For, the most basic lesson that Milly has bequeathed is that every quantitative relation, no matter how apparently neutral, is simultaneously qualified, complicated, and undermined by an indelible givenness demanding endless response.

3 Thomas Mann and the Purpose of Money

Purposiveness without Purpose

Kant's third moment in his analytic of aesthetic judgment concerns purpose and provides this chapter with the philosophical thought to which I will read Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks* as a response. A purpose, for Kant, is something considered as brought about by an intelligent design, not necessarily by God or the will of a particular human being, but usually just by a socially normative concept.[1] An aesthetic judgment, however, cannot have for its basis a definite purpose, because in that case it would carry with it an interest.[2] In order to maintain the neutral stance of taste, judgment cannot have recourse to a distinct purpose. We do not make a pure judgment of taste if we like a house's design for the comfort of living it would provide. On the other hand, the object of our taste must have some basic intelligibility in order to be judged at all. It must have a *form* that is more than just spatial or temporal, since on their own these forms could offer no real distinction for taste to judge. Aesthetic judgment requires some trace of an intellectual form that is nevertheless not a definite purpose. But an intellectual form is precisely a *concept*, and a purposeful object is the effect of such a concept, the realization of its design. What sort of concept, then, could

1. "A purpose is the object of a concept insofar as we regard this concept as the object's cause … and the causality that a concept has with regard to its object is purposiveness" (Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 64-5).

2. Whenever a purpose is regarded as the basis of a liking, it always carries with it an interest, as the basis that determines the judgment about the object of the pleasure. Hence a judgment of taste cannot be based on a subjective purpose. But a judgment of taste also cannot be determined by a presentation of an objective purpose" (Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 66).

aesthetic judgment possibly grasp without descending into mere interest? Kant argues that when we make a judgment of taste, we do so on the basis of a purposiveness without purpose.[3] What this means is that the object in question appears to have some kind of meaning, some intention on our souls or on the world, some reason for existing, but that this purpose is nonetheless inaccessible.

Kant is unclear about the range of objects he has in mind, although he gives some examples. Color and tone, he says, can be beautiful, not by virtue of the qualitative sensation produced by them, which is non-intellectual content and therefore risks causing mechanically a feeling of pleasure in the subject, but rather because they are "vibrations of the aether," the formal oscillations of which can be reflected on by the play of the imagination and the understanding. He goes on to remark that as far as artistic works go, taste may only take into account the formal design in these works, and not their content, which of course carry an interest.[4] At any rate, we may extract a fundamental insight from Kant's analytic of purposiveness in aesthetic judgment which does not require the abandonment of artistic content: the meaning of an object that we call aesthetic is never immediately obvious or even ever determinable, and yet we can and do find meaning in it. What constitutes the

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3. "The liking that, without a concept, we judge to be universally communicable and hence to be the basis that determines a judgment of taste, can be nothing but the subjective purposiveness in the presentation of an object, without any purpose … and hence the mere form of purposiveness" (Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 66).

4. "In painting, in sculpture, indeed in all the visual arts, including architecture and horticulture insofar as they are fine arts, design is what is essential; in design the basis for any involvement of taste is not what gratifies us in sensation, but merely what we like because of its form" (Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 70-1).

impression of depth in a work of art, its *profundity*, is this void of purpose which yet also serves as a limitless space of reflection. The aesthetic object breaks with the usual connectivity of determinate purposes in the everyday world, ruptures the chain of means and ends, and presents a *question* of purpose, the questioning of which can never be silenced with an answer. When we encounter such a mysterious hole in the otherwise seemingly unbroken continuity of life, we also gain an opportunity to question ourselves, our own purpose, insofar as we see ourselves reflected in the void. And it is not only art that disturbs existence, but any object, any event, any phenomenon that we happen to glance at through the lens of what Kant calls reflective judgment.[5]

Buddenbrooks brings under its narrative as much of the nineteenth century as it can handle without losing the singularity of its characters' lives. Thus, the reader travels from 1835 to 1877 without any great leaps and via a continuity of episodes rooted in the palpable everyday existence of several members of a single family spanning four generations. Mann's novel, by grounding its historical breadth in the personal experiences of related individuals, develops a logic of purposiveness, which I will distinguish from teleology as a logic grasped as an emergence of subjective processes rather than derived from a movement of objective spirit.[6] Purpose, in my reading of *Buddenbrooks*, will stand for the subjective sense of

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5. Refer to my Introduction for a justification of this usage of reflective judgment.

6. Kant distinguishes the terms in a similar way. He tends to reserve, although not always, the term 'purposive' for aesthetic subjective purposiveness and uses the term 'teleological' for the objective purposiveness of nature. "This is the basis for dividing the critique of judgment into that of aesthetic and teleological judgment. By the first I mean the power to judge formal purposiveness (sometimes also called subjective purposiveness) by the feeling of pleasure or displeasure; by the second I mean

orientation in society and history, personal response to cultural expectations, and the imaginative construction of a meaningful life.[7] *Buddenbrooks*'s macroscopic history offers a

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the power to judge the real (objective) purposiveness of nature by understanding and reason" (Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 33).

7. For Kant, the construction of purposes through the imagination and understanding orient the subject not only in aesthetic perception but morally as well. The purposiveness in a structure is also the "standard idea" of that structure, which we generate by comparing the many images we have encountered of one kind of thing and finding the average. "For instance: Someone has seen a thousand adult men. If now he wishes to make a judgement about their standard size, to be estimated by way of a comparison, then (in my opinion) the imagination projects a large number of the images (perhaps the entire thousand) onto one another. If I may be permitted to illustrate this by an analogy from optics: in the space where most of the images are united, and within the outline where the area is illuminated by the color applied most heavily, there the average size emerges, equally distant in both height and breadth from the outermost bounds of the tallest and shortest stature; and this is the stature for a beautiful man. (The same result could be obtained mechanically, by measuring the entire thousand, adding up separately all their heights and their breadths (and thicknesses) by themselves and then dividing each sum by a thousand. And yet the imagination does just that by means of a dynamic effect arising from its multiple apprehension of such shapes on the organ of the inner sense.)" The particular claim about human beauty is dubious at best, but the insight that ideal images or ideas, fashioned not mechanically but through the dynamic inner sense of each individual subject, are necessary for constructing the normative landscape of the world seems generally true. Kant goes on to note that the imagination is even capable of fashioning moral ideals by this dynamic method of comparison. "Yet these moral ideas must be connected, in the idea of the highest purposiveness, with everything that our reason links with the morally good: goodness of soul, or purity, or fortitude, or serenity, etc.; and in order for this connection to be made visible, as it were, in bodily expression

context for the small-scale purposes of individual subjects. Mann's novel is about the meaning of individual lives that move within the greater, imposing, ambiguous, and often alienating meanings of history and society.[8]

Buddenbrooks concerns the moneyed world of a wholesale merchant family. Money, throughout the novel, occupies a curious place between subjectivity and objectivity. On the subjective side, money is a central goal, anxiety, motivator, and even material of imaginative activity; objectively, money is a rational system of exchange that limits the scope of subjective possibilities, dwindles to quantitative abstraction the qualitative expressions of the imagination, and generally takes on the role of a kind of supersensible fate that reduces the subject itself to a mere element in an endless series of economic agents. Money and the imagination, as object and subject, are at cross-purposes with one another, and yet they also blend together to produce purposes that are neither purely subjective nor purely objective. The introduction of the economic factor allows Mann to develop a concept of purpose that

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(as an effect of what is inward), pure ideas of reason must be united with a very strong imagination in someone who seeks so much as to judge, let alone exhibit, it" (Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 82-4).

8. Catherine Gallagher examines the attempts by nineteenth-century English novelists to shift the narrative action from the public to the private home and the family in order to try to locate therein the survival of individual freedom against social institutions. "Many industrial novelists tried to overcome the discontinuity between freedom and determinism in their work by shifting the location of the novel's action from the public, social world to the private world of the family. Even though it was finally inconsistent for the critics of industrial capitalism to imagine a voluntary will operating against the material and psychological constraints of modern society, the family circle seemed a place potentially exempt from these restrictions, a sphere in which an individual will could prevail" (Gallagher, *The Industrial Reformation of English Fiction*, 113-14).

is neither a teleology of political history, nor an entirely free prerogative of individual will. Purpose, in the money-strewn world that Mann paints, is always a question: a question of meaning and action in a world where imposingly objective social structures penetrate the walls of interior domesticity. We might figure the world of *Buddenbrooks* as one in which economy has returned to the household, from which it developed originally as the *nomos* (law) of the *oikos* (home), after adventuring through its evolution toward a massive system of global exchange.[9] This return of economics to the private domicile is violent: it means that no longer does money serve the individual's needs, but it determines all aspects of the

9. "Among the numerous word combinations with nomos, none is more frequent and more familiar than oiko-nomia and oiko-nomos. ... Oikonomos appeared in the 6th century, when the verb for nomos was nemein, which customarily meant to administer or to govern. Until the end of the 4th century, Xenophon, Plato, and Aristotle reserved the word for the domestic economy and household, including such moral qualities as prudence, circumspect planning, thrift, and honesty. The modern antithesis of production and consumption still was far from the oikos. Obviously, a special relation exists between nomos and what today we call Daseinsvorsorge [cradle-to-grave social welfare], i.e., Ernst Fortshoff's generally accepted key word for modern administrative law. The nomy [nomos] apparently belonged more to the oikos than to the polis. Strangely enough, even after further developments, when spaces and measures were expanded, the word oikos was retained. At the end of the 18th century, a new scholarly discipline arose in Europe, a kind of science of economics, which was called either 'national economy' or 'political economy.' How extraordinary that, in the expansion of nomos from the house to the polis, it retained its linguistic relation to the old 'house'—it was not called national- or polito-nomy, but eco-nomy. The same is true for the national budget, which still is tied to the oikos" (Carl Schmitt, *The Nomos of the Earth*, 339).

individual's personal life.[10] *Buddenbrooks* is about the struggle for meaningful purpose in a family home where the meaningless value of money is taking over the run of things. It is the story of a decline—of a family, a business, and meaning itself—as the logic of money appropriate the relations that previously served the interests of familial intimacy.

Familial Disintegration

The system of money does not occupy a void; rather, like a virus, it requires an established system from which it can convert certain relational threads to its own purposes. The lines of a family, for instance, are useful to money for its need to gather itself into a fortune over a period of time that may be longer than the lifespan of an individual. However, as this capitalist logic grows into the familial structure, it also destroys many of the latter's qualitative functions. For if the family comes to see the purpose of its unity as a means for the processing of capital, then it will simultaneously collapse into disunity as each member realizes that he or she could fare better in another more profitable social group.[11] Thus,

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10. Rebecca Stern argues through the common trope of "domestic fraud" in the Victorian novel that in the nineteenth century the drama of political economy had pervaded the supposed sanctuary of the private home. "Far from being an isolated haven of fiscal safety and ignorance, even the most modest home was a site of purchase, exchange, and employment" (Rebecca Stern, *Home Economics: Domestic Fraud in Victorian England*, 5).

11. Simmel makes a similar point in *The Philosophy of Money*: "Under specific historic conditions, money simultaneously exerts both a disintegrating and a unifying effect. For instance, the organic unity and narrowness of family life has on the one hand been destroyed as a consequence of the money economy, while, acknowledging this as a fact, it has been emphasized that the family has become almost nothing more than an organization for inheritance. If, among several interests that

Buddenbrooks traces the decline of a thick concept of family, which would involve, among many other things, love, gratitude, and piety, slowly replaced by a thin and functional concept of family which mainly defers to laws concerning the ownership, control, and inheritance of assets. But inseparable from this decline of family is the decline of the family business, the grain merchant firm established by old Johann Buddenbrook's father in 1768. The failure of the business, rather than being wholly responsible for the decline of the family, instead provides certain opportunities for familial clashes regarding money and thereby sets in motion the decline, the seeds of which had been planted by the importance that the business had already come to have for the family's unity. While the mutual alienation of the Buddenbrooks becomes visible during the upheavals of their financial decline, this alienation was already present long before such upheavals gave cause to notice it. The novel indeed suggests that even during the family's and its business's happier times, at the housewarming party of the first few chapters for example, a deterioration of warm relations already lurks.

Buddenbrooks begins at the new home of Johann Buddenbrook, with his wife Antoinette, their son Jean, his wife Elisabeth, and the children of the latter, Antonie, Tom, and Christian. They are celebrating the recent purchase of the house by having several guests

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determine the cohesion of the group, one of them has a destructive effect upon all the others, then this interest will survive the others and become the only bond between the different elements whose other relationships it has destroyed. It is not only because of its immanent character, but precisely because it destroys so many other kinds of relationships between people, that money establishes relationships between elements that otherwise would have no connection whatsoever. Today there probably exists no association between people that does not include some monetary interest, even if it is only the rent for a hall for a religious association" (Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, 347).

over for dinner. The mood is cheerful as the eight-year-old Antonie "Tony" Buddenbrook plays verbal games with her grandfather. The first sentence of the novel is spoken by Tony: "Was ist das. – Was – ist das..." She is attempting to remember an article of the catechism, at the request of her grandfather, who proceeds to poke fun at what to him, as a descendant of the enlightened eighteenth century, is religious nonsense. The novel's opening, then, presents a question in its most general form: "What is it?" The question resonates throughout the novel as various characters come to face the general questionableness of their own existences. It appears to be the same type of question that old Johann has on his mind during his final days when all he can utter, over and over again, as he appears to be reflecting on his life, is "Curious. Curious" (68-9). Many years later, when young Tom, now middle-aged and head of the firm, reads Schopenhauer in an effort to understand the meaning of life, he asks "What was that?" (634) in reference to the strangeness of his encounter with Schopenhauer's metaphysical interpretation of death. And the final chapter will have Tony, now fifty years old and one of the last surviving members of the family, crying out, "Where have they all gone?" (730), a question which reaches beyond its immediate reference to her departed family members, and calls for an answer to the question: What is that which we call life, if it can so easily vanish? The old Tony has no satisfactory response; but the young Tony is able to answer her question, "What is that?" with a rehearsed passage taken over from the religion into which she has been born. "'I believe that God made me,' and quickly added, her face brightening, '– and all creatures,' and, suddenly finding the track smooth – she was unstoppable now and her face beamed with happiness – she rattled off the whole article, as prescribed by her catechism, newly revised and published under the auspices of an august and wise senate in this year of our

Lord, 1835" (3). The answer to the question concerning the meaning of life is, at the beginning of the novel, that life has its ultimate source of existence and meaning in God. Indeed, all things have their source in God, "'including clothes and shoes,' she said, 'meat and drink, hearth and home, wife and child, fields and cattle...'" (3). Everything for Tony has its source in God, but this conviction is not one of genuine faith, but only rote memorization. The words ring hollow, and no one is more aware of this, and more delighted by it, than Tony's grandfather, who laughs and asks Tony about her "fields and cattle, asked how much she wanted for a sack of wheat, and offered her a contract" (4). Johann knows that there is no God, and that things and people are governed by money alone.

Johann, however, is evidently disturbed by this fact, not only at the end of his life, but also in his skeptical attitude toward modernization. "Practical ideals," he says to his son Jean, "Nope, set no store by 'em at all! … Trade schools and technical schools and commercial schools are popping up like mushrooms, and grammar schools and classical education are suddenly all foolishness, and the whole world has nothing in its head but coal mines and factories and making money. Fine, fine, it's all very fine. But on the other hand a bit *stupide*, over the long term – is it not?" (24-5). As a man of the eighteenth century, marked here by his use of French, Johann certainly abides by a solid work ethic and puts his trust in the system of trade, but he also appears to be a humanist, believing in values beyond the market. His son Jean, a man of the nineteenth century, is both more religious and more practical than his father. He is simultaneously more fearful of God and more obsessed with money. But Johann detects a lack of genuine ethical probity in the younger generation: they use Christianity as a way of putting on a show of moral uprightness, all the while caring about nothing but money. His other son Gotthold sends an angry letter to his father after

being disinherited of some money, writing, "I do *protest* said treatment with all the sense of justice I can muster as a *Christian* and a *man of business*, and I assure you for the last time that, should you not choose to respect my just claims, I will no longer be able to respect you either as a *Christian* or as my *father* or as a *man of business*." Johann's response: "Un-Christian! Ha! Very tasteful, I must say – pious and money-hungry. You young people are a pretty lot, aren't you? Your heads full of fancies and Christian humbuggery. What idealism! And we old folks are heartless scoffers. And then there's the July Monarchy and practical ideals. And rather than pass up a few thousand thalers, write your old father a letter chock-full of the rudest insults" (42-3). Religion, rather than preserving bonds between family members or meaningfulness of existence, turns out to be only a facade covering the currents of mere financial concerns. Jean, although not understanding the threat that the falseness of his own religious piety indicates, does at least dimly perceive the danger involved in the financial dispute with his step-brother Gotthold. "Father – we sat here so cheerful this evening, it was such a lovely celebration, we were so happy and proud of our accomplishments, of having achieved something, of having brought our firm and our family to new heights, to a full measure of recognition and respect. But this acrimony with my brother, your eldest son, Father – let us not have a hidden crack that runs through the edifice we have built with God's gracious help. A family has to be united, to hold together, Father; otherwise evil will come knocking at the door" (44). This foreshadowing of the family's decline locates the seed of destruction in the act of putting money above family.

The Buddenbrooks are never solely bound together by money, neither at the beginning of the novel nor by the final chapter of their decline. Rather, their financial ties, which only bind the members accidentally (why not leave the family and direct one's full

energies to a limited liability corporation?), struggle with the relations of intimacy that bind them together as a family by a psychological feeling of necessity. The two principles of familial unity – which we might simply call love and money, the one necessary, the other accidental – are represented by two kinds of accounting that appear throughout the book. The relation of love, that force which connects beings that are irreplaceable to one another even if they feel hatred for each other, is represented by the Buddenbrook book of genealogical and historical records. This book lays out the family tree, but also contains prose reflections on major family events. I will discuss this book in detail later in the chapter, but here I want to discuss the other kind of accounting, which reflects the monetary force that both unifies and disintegrates the Buddenbrook family. Several times throughout the novel, a character will rattle off a series of numbers, the "marks *courant*" that account for the state of the family fortune and its possibilities.[12] For instance, after Jean reproves his father's callousness with regard to Gotthold, he immediately performs some quick calculations in order to let the figures decide.

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12. Werner Sombart on the importance of numerical figuring to capitalism: "A great part of capitalist economy is taken up with the making of contracts and agreements concerning commodities and services that have a money value …. Moreover, the beginning and the end of capitalist economic activities is a sum of money. Consequently, calculation forms an important element in the capitalist spirit …. By calculation I mean the tendency, the habit, perhaps more—the capacity, to think of the universe in terms of figures, and to transform these figures into a well-knit system of income and expenditure. These figures, I need hardly add, always express a value, and the whole system is intended to demonstrate whether a plus or a minus is the resultant, thus showing whether the undertaking is likely to bring profit or loss" (Sombart, *The Quintessence of Capitalism*, 125).

> "What are you doing, Jean?" Johann Buddenbrook asked. "I can't see you."
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> "I'm figuring," the consul said dryly. The candle flared and revealed him standing up straight; he stared into the dancing flame, his eyes colder and more alert than they had been all afternoon. "On the one hand: you give Gotthold 33,335 and Frankfurt 15,000; that comes to a total of 48,335. On the other hand: you simply give Frankfurt 25,000, which means the firm comes out 23,335 to the good. But that is not all. Assuming that you compensate Gotthold for his share in the house, the dam will be broken, meaning that he will *never* be satisfied and that after your death he can claim a portion of the inheritance equal to what my sister and I receive, bringing with it the loss of hundreds of thousands for the firm – lost capital that will no longer be available to me as its sole owner. No, Papa," he concluded with an energetic wave of a hand and stood up taller still, "I must advise against your giving in." (44)

Johann is unable to see Jean, because this portion of their conversation takes place as the last candle flame in the room is going out. Jean's figuring is thereby allowed to take place without visible facial expressions admixing with its mathematical purity. He is suddenly decisive, in spite of all his previous moral doubts, because neither man's soul is visible and the light of mathematical reason is able to shine in all its clarity. His face withdrawn, Jean's words consist in the mere activity of business.[13] An intimate encounter between what we call

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13. Even deceit is impossible when the face is withdrawn, since, according to Levinas, any intimate relation, deceitful or truthful, requires the sort of original and non-reducible expressiveness of which only the face is capable. "Language as an exchange of ideas about the world, with the mental reservations it involves, across the vicissitudes of sincerity and deceit it delineates, presupposes the originality of the face without which, reduced to an action among actions whose meaning would

souls is no longer possible in the figurative darkness for which the room's literal darkness stands. Intimacy is of course possible in the dark, but here we are dealing with a deeper darkness that involves the turning away of singularity. By reducing the complex ethical situation that has arisen between Gotthold and the family to a series of numbers that are supposed to add up to a just decision, Jean and Johann withdraw the singularity of their relations. They turn the ethical situation over to the sphere of objectivity in which there are no irreplaceable relations, but only functions that process indifferent variables. The singular relations of familial intimacy cannot be counted, because they occur in a space that is subjective and yet universally valid, that is, the space in which Kant's aesthetic judgments occur. These relations are subjective, because they involve an encounter between personalities that is visible in its essence to no one but those involved; they are closed relations that cannot be included in the totality of elements that constitute the objective world.[14] Yet they are universally valid, in a complex sense, because all such relations intersect

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require an infinite psychoanalysis or sociology, it could not commence. If at the bottom of speech there did not subsist this originality of expression, this break with every influence, this dominant position of the speaker foreign to all compromise and all contamination, this straightforwardness of the face to face, speech would not surpass the plane of activity, of which it is evidently not a species—even though language can be integrated into a system of acts and serve as an instrument. But language is possible only when speaking precisely renounces this function of being action and returns to its essence of being expression" (Levinas, *Totality and Infinity*, 202).

14. In a discussion of theoretical versus practical interests, Simmel argues that the subtle qualitative differences between members of a family are usually only visible among those members, while outsiders only perceive the more general, grosser qualities of the family as a whole. The subtle qualities correspond to practical interest, and the grosser qualities to theoretical interest. The practical

at an ideal point of common understanding and global ethical accomplishment – the kingdom of ends or supersensible realm in Kant.[15] Jean, in this scene, is on the verge of an

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sphere concerns itself with subtle, concrete, irreducible qualities, the relations and purposes of which can only be imperfectly worked out through reflective judgment; the theoretical sphere concerns itself with generalities that are determined by a more precise classificatory mode of judgment. Practical judgment corresponds to a perspective from the inside, while theoretical judgment corresponds to a perspective from the outside. "For the thinker who is interested in metaphysics, the individual differences between things are often regarded as inessential, and he is concerned with such general conceptions as 'being' and 'becoming' which are common to all things. Practical life, on the other hand, requires us to be attentive to the differences, peculiarities and nuances of people and circumstances with which we are concerned; while the general human qualities and the basis that is common to all the problematic conditions seem obvious and not in need of special attention. Indeed, even such attention can only clarify them with great difficulty. For instance, the relations between members of a family develop on the basis of experience of those personal qualities by which each member is distinguished from any other; the general character of these family relations is usually not a subject for particular observation by the members of that family. Only outsiders seem to be able to describe it" (Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, 133). See also Buber: "Every actual relationship to another being in the world is exclusive. Its You is freed and steps forth to confront us in its uniqueness" (Buber, *I and Thou*, 126).

15. Kant's kingdom of ends, in order to achieve this intersection at an absolutely common point, presupposes an abstraction from all particular differences between human beings, leaving nothing but their identical rational cores. And yet, the concepts also presupposes the treatment of people as ends in themselves, which to our modern sensibilities indicates a respect for individual uniqueness. (On the shift of the object of love from universality to individuality, see Simmel, "Eros, Platonic and Modern" in *On Individuality and Social Forms*.) "All rational beings stand under the law that each of

ethical encounter with his father and Gotthold, and this narrative tension that comes so early in the novel should give us a sense of the encounter's decisiveness for all the events to come. Perhaps if he had the fortitude to confront his father with his whole being – his body and soul, his doubts and convictions, the full honesty of his contradictory self – then he would have begun a path toward preventing the family's decline. But Jean instead stages the confrontation on the plane of objectivity – by necessity with only part of his being, the calculative faculty – where the lines of relation only intersect on an endlessly repeated and homogeneous grid. For certainly in the economic world everyone is related, but only with, and as, temporary means and ends that form an interlocking pattern. There are no purposes that push beyond this system, no purposes that attempt to think beyond its limits.[16]

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them is to treat himself and all others never merely as means but always at the same time as ends in themselves. But from this there arises a systematic union of rational beings through common objective laws, that is, a kingdom, which can be called a kingdom of ends (admittedly only an ideal) because what these laws have as their purpose is just the relation of these beings to one another as ends and means" (Kant, Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals, 41). A more modern, and also more spiritual, revision of Kant's moral philosophy can be found in Buber: "Extended, the lines of relationships intersect in the eternal You. Every single You is a glimpse of that. Through every single You the basic word addresses the eternal You" (Buber, *I and Thou*, 123).

16. Of course, we can never exist without treating each other as means; everyone must to a certain extent be locked into an objective grid of instrumentality. The non-instrumental purpose, which can be found in the face-to-face relationship to another person, is rather a transcendence of flat objectivity, the potentiality for which is hidden in the coldest relations. Buber discusses the complex dynamic that holds between the 'You' and the 'It'. "This, however, is the sublime melancholy of our lot that every You must become an It in our world. However exclusively present it may have been in

There are many other scenes where a cold verbal account of financial figures by one of the characters ends up stifling the dialogue that the other wanted to have. When Elisabeth asks Jean if they could hire a butler to relieve some of the burden felt by herself and the other servants in keeping the enormous house in which they dwell, Jean, instead of discussing it with her as one human being to another, fires another series of figures at her, detailing the recent dwindling, from "900,000 marks *courant*" to "approximately 420,000, plus another 100,000 from your dowry" (76). In between these numbers he details the long list of financial incidents that have led from one point to the other. How could anyone possibly respond to such an aggressive presentation of numerical facts? Jean closes off the possibility of a relation between himself and his wife –- really, does not respond at all –- by referring the matter to specific calculations that might as well be read by Elisabeth in a ledger. The narrative result of Jean's calculative personality is that his death leaves very few traces of a void in the family.

The first scene following Jean's death does not consist of details of mourning or reflections on his life, but rather another assessment of the financial state of affairs in the family. This time it is his son Thomas, now head of the firm, who performs the calculations.

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the direct relationship—as soon as the relationship has run its course or is permeated by means, the You becomes an object among objects, possibly the noblest one and yet one of them, assigned its measure and boundary. … Even love cannot persist in direct relation; it endures, but only in the alternation of actuality and latency. The human being who but now was unique and devoid of qualities, not at hand but only present, not experienceable, only touchable, has again become a He or She, an aggregate of qualities, a quantum with a shape. … The It is the chrysalis, the You the butterfly. Only it is not always as if these states took turns so neatly; often it is an intricately entangled series of events that is tortuously dual" (Buber, *I and Thou*, 68-9).

"Do forgive me," Thomas says, "if at this moment I speak only from the viewpoint of the firm and not of the family – but these dowries, these disbursements to Uncle Gotthold and to Frankfurt, these hundreds of thousands that had to be withdrawn from our capital. And in those days, the head of the firm had only a step-brother and a sister, only those *two*. But enough of all that. We have our work cut out for us..." (251). Thomas apologizes for speaking from the firm's viewpoint and not the family's, but in fact he does speak for the family. "The longing for action, victory, and power, the urge to force good fortune to its knees, blazed in his eyes briefly and fiercely. He felt the whole world looking expectantly at him to see if he would know how to further the interests of both the old firm and the family, and not just preserve their prestige" (251). For Thomas, the viewpoint of the firm has become that of the family, since the interests of one are the same as those of the other. If a family name is the concept that binds each member together, then a particular meaning of that name must be available in order to understand the way in which the binding together of these members is organized and effected. Here, the meaning of the name is a capitalistic principle that requires the multiplication of monetary quantities through investments.

To the family that makes a name for itself in business, or rather that makes its name out of its business, money is the illusory guarantor of their own permanence. The notion is expressed early on by a friend of the Buddenbrook family, the poet Hoffstede:

> May your future be untarnished,
> Nothing mar the joys ahead,
> Rather let each day be garnished
> By an endless bliss instead.
> (30)

The family fortune is held safe by entities the very names of which suggest permanence—the firm, securities, property, investments, inheritance—rather than being at the mercy of God's will. Every concession to spirituality—for instance, Elisabeth's "Jerusalem evenings"—is associated with weakness and decline. Every ethical hesitation—take the Gotthold situation—is taken for a sentimental delay. Every amorous adventure—old Johann's fondly remembered love for his first wife, Tony's youthful flirtation with Morten, or Thomas's secret affair with the shopgirl—is a distraction from the business of real life. Each character who becomes briefly entangled in such dangerously meaningful purposes is quickly reminded, usually through the stern warnings of other members of the family, that these are nothing more than singular moments with no great extension in space or time, and are therefore unimportant.[17] Only money, the units of which are distinct, abstract, and therefore

17. As I will further discuss in this chapter, the singular moment is the location of absolute value in experience. Concrete, unrepeatable, but giving itself to endless reflection, the moment is a crystallization of countless relations between the self and the world. I draw partially on Henri Lefebvre's theory of the moment. "Among moments, we may include love, play, rest, knowledge, etc. We cannot draw up a complete list of them, because there is nothing to prevent the invention of new moments. … Relatively durable, [the moment] stands out from the continuum of transitories within the amorphous realm of the psyche. It wants to endure. It cannot endure (at least, not for very long). Yet this inner contradiction gives it its intensity …. The manner of its duration means that it cannot be brought into harmony with continuous evolution, or with pure discontinuity (a sudden mutation or 'revolution'). … All the content of moments comes from everyday life and yet every moment emerges from the everyday life in which it gathers its materials or the material it needs. The originality of the moment comes partly—and only partly—from its circumstantial content. Rather

identifiable and repeatable, can be extended infinitely in time, albeit in the homogeneous time of clocks, the counterpart to money in Benjamin Franklin's equation, "time is money."[18] The family's untarnished future, their endless bliss, cannot depend on secret romances, ethical crises, or religious folly, because the singular meanings and values of these encounters

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than tearing it, it weaves itself into the fabric of the everyday, and transforms it (partially and 'momentarily', like art, like the figure in a carpet). In this way it uses something it is not: something happening close by, something contingent and accidental. With its circumstantial contingencies, and while it lasts, the moment also has the urgency of a command and a necessity. … [Every moment] can establish itself as an absolute. It is even a duty for it to do so. Now we cannot conceive of the absolute, let alone live it. Therefore the moment proposes itself as the impossible. … The moment is an impossible possibility, aimed at, desired and chosen as such. Then what is impossible in the everyday becomes what is possible, even the rule of impossibility" (Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume II*, 344-47).

18. Benjamin Franklin, "Advice to a Young Tradesman, Written by an Old One" in *The Autobiography and Other Writings on Politics, Economics, and Virtue*, ed. Alan Houston (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 200. On this relationship of equality, Simmel offers a more philosophical explanation: "The mathematical character of money imbues the relationship of the elements of life with a precision, a reliability in the determination of parity and disparity, an unambiguousness in agreements and arrangements in the same way as the general use of pocket watches has brought about a similar effect in daily life. Like the determination of abstract value by money, the determination of abstract time by clocks provides a system for the most detailed and definite arrangements and measurements that imparts an otherwise unattainable transparency and calculability to the contents of life, at least as regards their practical management. The calculating intellectuality embodied in these forms may in its turn derive from them some of the energy through which intellectuality controls modern life" (Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, 450).

seem to rest in silent, invisible and immeasurable sources. With money, however, one can plan for the future, project familial longevity with wills and long-term investments; money is the stuff out of which one creates a future.

Indeed, such a model of organization is ideal for a firm, in which the only relevant purpose of each member is to work toward collective profit through private interest. Working for the company's financial future implies working for the return of one's own investment. The purpose, however, of a family is quite different from the goal of financial profit. According to the Hegelian concept of the family, the individuals draws from its family a nexus of ethical relations from which they can orientate themselves in the world. The family is the manifestation of the idea that no one enters the world without *a priori* qualitative differentiations. People inherit, without a choice in the matter, a great deal of their worldly bearings from their families, however these may be composed, and to whatever extent they are present. Unlike the initial capital investment that gives birth to a corporation, and which then disappears into its undifferentiated flow of returns and re-investments, the family, as an originary ground of the individual, persists as an active force throughout life and on the individual as a whole. Whether in the form of a present group of people to whom one can turn, or as a memory of people who have disappeared, or as the felt absence of those who were never there, the family is a ground of individual existence, the function of which is not simply to create and send forth, but to continue to exert an ever-evolving influence on the lives of its members. The fate of each individual is to encounter, whether with love or

hatred, as comfort or anguish, this complex familial inheritance at every turn in their existence.[19]

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19. Mann's exploration of the family appears to borrow a great deal from Hegel's analysis in the Phenomenology of Spirit. Hegel discusses the individual between family and civil community, which in my reading corresponds to the tension between family and business in *Buddenbrooks*. The more general topic is the 'ethical order', i.e., the culture of norms that is immediately accessible to the individual, but that also gets mediately codified in state laws. "If, then, the community is that substance conscious of what it actually does, the other side has the form of immediate substance or substance that simply is. … This moment which expresses the ethical sphere in this element of immediacy or [simple] being, or which is an immediate consciousness of itself … this is the Family. The Family, as the unconscious, still inner Notion [of the ethical order], stands opposed to its actual, self-conscious existence; as the element of the nation's actual existence, it stands opposed to the nation itself …." Thus, the immediate sense of proper conduct is derived unconsciously by the individual from family life, while in civil society this ethical sensibility becomes self-consciously actualized through variously codified social, legal, and economic demands. "However, although the Family is immediately determined as an ethical being, it is within itself an ethical entity only so far as it is not the natural relationship of its members, or so far as their connection is an immediate connection of separate, actual individuals; for the ethical principle is intrinsically universal …." The relations between family members that constitute the bond of immediate ethical inheritance are not external piecemeal relations constituted through education or sentimental love, because the ethical order must be delivered as a whole to the individual as a whole by an inner necessity. "It seems, then, that the ethical principle must be placed in the relation of the individual member of the Family to the whole Family as the Substance, so that the End and content of what he does and actually is, is solely the Family. But the conscious End motivating the action of this whole, so far as it is directed towards that whole, is itself the individual. The acquisition and maintenance of power and wealth is in part

To hand this existential structure over to the free-floating and indifferent logic of money is to generate a severe conflict in the depths of life. The family is purposive for the individual, although not purposive in the sense that the family intends one to adopt a certain profession, or to fulfill a certain destiny. Rather, it is purposive without purpose, and, like

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concerned only with needs and belongs to the sphere of appetite; in part, they become in their higher determination something that is only mediated. This determination does not fall within the Family itself, but bears on what is truly universal, the community; it has, rather, a negative relation to the Family, and consists in expelling the individual from the Family ….” The individual, in relating itself to the family, is motivated by external business concerning the acquisition of money and power. If these motivations supercede the purpose of the family as such, then the individual exits the family and enters civil society primarily. “The positive End peculiar to the Family is the individual as such … to the whole individual or to the individual qua universal. … The deed, then, which embraces the entire existence of the blood-relation, does not concern the citizen, for he does not belong to the Family, nor the individual who is to become a citizen and will cease to count as this particular individual; it has as its object and content this particular individual who belongs to the Family, but is taken as a universal being freed from his sensuous, i.e. individual, reality. The deed no longer concerns the living but the dead, the individual who, after a long succession of separate disconnected experiences, concentrates himself into a single completed shape, and has raised himself out of the unrest of the accidents of life into the calm of simple universality. But because it is only as a citizen that he is actual and substantial, the individual, so far as he is not a citizen but belongs to the Family is only an unreal impotent shadow” The individual that, as a whole, relates itself to the family, is nothing more than a pure universality, i.e. is death. Hegel’s conclusion is that the primary purpose of the family is to bury its dead. It is unclear how this facet of Hegel’s analysis relates to *Buddenbrooks*, although, as we shall see, the deaths of family members constitute an important component of the novel (Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 268-70).

Kant's aesthetic concept, is the basis of the individual member's imaginative engagements with life. The family orientates the individual in preparation for encounters that rely, not on pure rationality, but on qualitatively unique perspectives. Every individual trained in the principles of accounting can manage his money with relatively equal prudence, but the family, as an existential ground, prepares the individual for other sorts of problems. How one looks at a painting, for instance, or how one loves another person, are in part inherited from this basic familial orientation. These are always singular encounters, for which there are no established rules by which one may guide oneself in one's conduct. Such singular situations include the religious, ethical, or amorous sort mentioned above. When the existential blueprint of subjective life is organized around money, the purpose of which is only empty and homogeneous multiplication, the individual inherits a general sense of alienation. At least, we might interpret this to be the reasoning behind the estrangement, both from the family and from themselves, of each member of the Buddenbrook family.

Tony Buddenbrook, for example, consciously receives her bearings from the family genealogy. While deliberating over whether or not she should marry her persistent suitor, the commercial agent Herr Grünlich, Tony decides to leaf through the large notebook containing her family's history. "The reverent importance given to even the most modest events pertaining to the family's history was inspiring. Propping her elbows on the secretary, she read with growing enthusiasm, with pride and high seriousness" (155). The unconscious bearing that individuals take from the peculiar composition and influence of their family is here represented as a conscious act of reading. Tony becomes aware that the singular events of her family's history carry a weight that is felt even now, years after these events have happened, on account of the reverent way in which they have been recorded. This recording

symbolizes the way in which, even without such a notebook, the gravity of certain familial events continue to haunt even much later generations. "No event had been omitted from even her own brief past: her birth, her childhood illnesses, her first day of school, her enrollment in Mademoiselle Weichbrodt's boarding school, her confirmation. All of it had been entered in the consul's small, hurried commercial hand, with an almost religious respect for facts—for was not even the most insignificant event the will and work of God, who wonderfully guided the destinies of this family? And what else might be recorded here after her own name, given to her in honor of her grandmother Antoinette? Future members of the family would bring to the task the same piety with which she now followed past events" (155). The book traces the linkages of the family's unity through the inheritances of singular events. Just as Tony's life follows from her ancestors, so too will future generations take their senses of direction from hers. The facts which the book contains are not inert facts; rather, they contain a power to act beyond themselves, a power that Tony perceives in the "religious respect" that seems to have been given to them. These facts are thereby able to become vital for the individuals who orientate themselves by means of them. Indeed, it seems to Tony, each event, no matter how trivial, becomes "the will and work of God," brought together into a coherent destiny. This destiny is not the work of financial planning, but rather of the spiritual intertwining of events brought about by each family member who records their own events in a spirit of religious reverence for everything that has been recorded before and will be recorded after. "'Links in a chain,' Papa had written. Yes, yes! And as a link in that chain, she had a higher, more responsible importance—she was called to help shape, by deeds and personal resolve, the history of her family" (155). Finally, after scanning the list of marriages, beginning with her earliest ancestor and ending with the

wedding of her parents in 1825, Tony stares at the recording of her own name, as daughter to Johann and Elisabeth, and then with resolve "she grabbed the pen, plunged rather than dipped it into the inkwell, and, crooking her index finger and laying her flushed head on her shoulder, wrote in her own clumsy hand, slanting upward from left to right: 'Engaged on 22 September 1845 to Herr Bendix Grünlich, merchant from Hamburg'" (156).

We should note, however, that Tony's father's "religious respect" for facts is also written in a "commercial hand," and this observation portends an altogether different kind of familial binding at work. In *Buddenbrooks*, the dowry is one of the principal means by which the family tries to plan for its future. Both of Tony's marriages are attempts to use a dowry to extend the family's connections with potentially lucrative businessmen. Her initial impulse to promise herself to Morten, a revolutionary medical student she meets during a seaside vacation, is dismissed by her father in favor of the more prudent opportunity to marry Herr Grünlich. Grünlich turns out to be a terrible businessman, despite Jean's initial analysis of his standing. He loses all his money, and, when Tony leaves him, reveals that he only married her for the substantial dowry. Tony's second marriage, to Herr Permaneder, a hops merchant, ends in a similar manner. The Buddenbrooks lose money and reputation, while Tony, for whom another marriage is out of the question socially and personally, loses her power to extend the family's financial and temporal legacy. With no other values to rest on, the draining of money stands in for the dissolution of the family itself. Even the untimely death of Clara, Jean's other daughter, is barely an occasion for mourning; it rather represents for the family yet another financial loss, as her widower, the pastor Tiburtius, ends up receiving, due to a mishandling on her mother's part, Clara's entire inheritance. The network of dowries and inheritances, which are supposed to extend the family name coextensively

with its fortune, give the family's religious cohesion over to the greed and misfortunes of business. Thus, the family subsists—or in the Buddenbrooks' case does not subsist—not by the inner necessity of ethical relations, but rather by the whim of speculation.

Isolated Lives

In *Buddenbrooks*, God appears to stand for the possibility of a meaningful encounter with others, as we have seen in the role God plays in Tony's interpretation of the family genealogy as a religious destiny, and as we will especially see later in the novel's final scene. After Clara's death, when business has started to go bad, Tom momentarily acknowledges God, but with the guilt and shamefulness of someone who has invested his family in money alone. "And now not only is Clara's dowry gone forever, but someday her whole share of the estate will leave the family for an indefinite period as well. And business is not good; it's been dreadful, in fact, ever since I spent a hundred thousand on my new house. No, things are not going well for this family, not when there are grounds for scenes such as we've had here today. Believe me—believe this if nothing else—if Father were alive, if he were here with us today, he would fold his hands and commend us all to the mercy of God" (426). Tom's sudden turn toward God is not out of hopefulness for salvation. He does not turn to the God who seems to weave the family's happy destiny in the notebook. Rather, he turns fearfully as someone who knows he has condemned himself and his family to an abandonment by God. For Tom, God is not even there to be turned toward, except in the indirect and hypothetical speech of his father. Only now that cracks have appeared in the family's monetary structure is Tom able to see the groundlessness of the family name.

Without a cohesive family from which to take their bearings, each character struggles to determine the meaning of their lives out of their own poor supply of resources. Knowing nothing else but marrying for money, Tony is hardly able to make sense of her own life after she fails in her two endeavors. She convinces herself that she understands life after her first marriage falls apart, repetitively uttering banalities. "From this point on, moreover, Tony began to use a certain phrase frequently: 'After all, life is like that....' And at the word 'life' she would open her eyes wide in a pretty but serious sort of way to indicate what deep insight she now had into human life and human fate" (230). She forever illustrates her former youthful naivety with the same story about trying to preserve the colored stars in a jellyfish ("'Do you want to know how stupid I was back then?'" [619]). She inevitably compares her former self to a goose: "'Well, one can't spend one's whole life being the silly goose I once was. Life sweeps one along with it" (229-30). In short, Tony feels a need to understand the purpose of life, but is content to wallow in platitudes. After her second marriage, she spends the rest of the novel in boredom, to the point that she later has to find some fulfillment in vicariously living through her daughter's marriage. Without a role to play in the business, and with no husband, Tony has no place in the family, and therefore has no sense of direction from which to begin an engagement with life that digs deeper than her platitudes.

Christian, the perpetually ill brother of Tony and Tom, represents a slightly more engaged attempt to find meaning amid the fragmentation of his business-driven family. Without being quite able to plumb the depths of his inner life, he remains content to obsessively interpret the bodily phenomena of himself and others. He applies the play of his imagination and understanding to reality, in order to come up with a value more meaningful

than that of money, in which he has almost no interest at all, although he is unable to see more deeply than the afflictions and peculiarities of bodies or hear anything beyond the humorous oddities of people's speech patterns. Already as a child, he delights in imitating the quirks of various people he encounters. "Well, Christian," his mother asks the seven-year-old upon his returning from school, "what did you learn this afternoon?"

> "We laughed ourselves silly"—he was starting to chatter away now, while his eyes wandered from person to person in the room. "I have to tell you what Herr Stengel said to Siegmund Köstermann." He bent forward, shaking his head and addressing the empty air with great emphasis. "'Externally, my good lad, externally you are sleek and dapper, true, but internally, my good lad, you are black.'" He dropped all his "r"s as he said it, and "black" came out as "bleck"—and his face was so convincingly comic at depicting this "extuhnal" sleekness and dapperness that they all broke into laughter. (11)

Christian's eyes, always roaming over people, but rarely seeming to ever meet their own eyes, are perpetually scanning the surface of reality, looking for some absurdity which he can incorporate into his own body and then mock. He is unable to encounter the other, except by mimicking their outwardness. As for himself, he never finds anything comical, but instead mulls over his afflictions, verbalizing them dramatically or philosophically. Later, on this same day, he becomes nauseous. "I'm sick at my stomach, Mama, I'm *damned* sick!" (31). This tendency to enunciate his physical illness becomes increasingly concerned with meaning as he grows older.

> "Tell me," he said out of the blue, "have you ever had that feeling? It's hard to describe—you're trying to swallow something that's hard and it goes down the wrong way and it hurts all the way down your back?" And as he spoke, his nose was all tense little wrinkles again.
>
> "Yes," Tony said, "that's perfectly normal. You take a drink of water."
>
> "Really?" he asked, dissatisfied. "No, I don't think we mean the same thing." And a serious look shifted uneasily back and forth across his face.
>
> (255)

Here, Christian's problem with swallowing affords him an opportunity to describe the sort of experience that is minute enough to be ignored by most individuals. He thus gives himself a challenge to articulate the phenomenon with enough precision to successfully bring about an empathetic recognition from the person to whom he is speaking. Bodily phenomena especially lend themselves to this exercise, because they are subjective, and yet we suspect that others have experienced them too. The empirical feeling itself is mute, but if we concentrate our powers of articulation, we may be able to communicate it. This is, for instance, what every patient must do when visiting a doctor about some illness, the cause and nature of which one is in the dark about. By articulating the malady, we conceptualize it, that is, make it purposive. Thus, rather than remaining a silent datum, the pain seems to become the effect of our own interpretation of it. The physical feeling becomes a particular instance of the general concept that we have just created in our description.[20] Christian,

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20. Gadamer has much to say on this topic. First of all, he emphasizes the importance of dialogue in the relationship between doctor and patient. "If patients succeed in taking up the same sort of dialogue as they would normally pursue when trying to reach agreement with someone, this can help

however, is never able to successfully communicate his problems to his family members, or at least he is never satisfied with the response. No one ever seems to mean the same thing he does, and he instead withdraws into himself, usually becoming silent and morose immediately after these episodes of hermeneutic self-analysis. But here he continues:

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to stimulate the ongoing process of easing the relationship between pain and well-being, as well as the experience of regaining equilibrium. In the somewhat tense relationship between doctor and patient, dialogue can help a great deal. But this dialogue is only really successful when it takes place almost as if it were a normal conversation. In our everyday lives we fall into discussions which are sustained by everyone involved rather than led by one person in particular. And this is how it should be even for the special form of dialogue that takes place between doctor and patient." The point is that a dialogical production of meaningful, even phenomenological, interpretation, rather than a one-sided informing of technical descriptions and instructions, is better at working its way into relevance for the body. But more than this, Gadamer suggests that illness itself, and our interpretations of its messages, is somehow important to a more general understanding of life. Modern medicine, influenced by capitalism and instrumentalization, tends to stifle patients' abilities to listen to their bodies. "We notice how pain and the suffering it inflicts change in character when they are no longer accompanied by the certainty or the expectation that it can be eliminated. This is something we know from contemporary medicine with its virtuosic capacity to 'eliminate' pain, the source of pain, the symptom and sometimes even more than this. By means of its capacity to remove pain in this way modern medicine changed the role and importance within human life of certain illnesses which can be so quickly dealt with today. One simply takes something for it and then it is gone. Viktor von Weizsäcker, with whom I often had the opportunity of speaking before his own ill-health prevailed, always used to ask: what does illness tell the one who is ill? Not so much, what does it tell the doctor, but rather, what does it tell the patient? Can learning to ask such a question of oneself perhaps even contribute to helping the one who is ill?" (Gadamer, *The Enigma of Health*, 137, 76.

> Suddenly he said, "You know, it's strange—sometimes I feel like I can't swallow. No, now don't laugh. I'm being quite serious. The thought occurs to me that I can't swallow, and then I really can't. What I've eaten is clear at the back of my mouth, but these muscles here, along the neck—they just won't work. They won't obey my will, you see. Or, better, the fact is: I can't bring myself to actually will it."

Christian is so fixated on the sensory feelings of his body, that he is unable to get behind them to will an action. While he displays finesse in his ability to imitate the physical quirks of others, he is, on the other hand, often completely unable to generate an independent motion. He is able to mirror the activity of others, and he is able to observe the sensory data produced by his bodily functions, but he easily becomes unable to control these functions, as though the one organ he cannot feel is his will, is therefore unable to identify it and unable to identify *with* it. The general result of this tendency is that Christian cannot actively interpret the world. He can passively interpret its surface, but is unable to involve himself in it. Christian cannot create real meaning for himself, because he can neither access nor control the deeper regions of his interiority. Thus, to the dismay of the family, he spends his life idling in South America, cavorting around Europe, spending his time in gentlemen's clubs, and failing to stick with any serious endeavor he attempts.

At the same time, Christian's struggles for self-expression indicate a personality more engaged with the questions of existence than anyone else in the family at the time of this particular scene. And yet this is perceived as a sign of decline, by other characters as well as by the narrative itself. In the first half of the novel, Christian functions as a kind of *leitmotif* of decline, symbolizing the misfortune that will soon come to the family as a whole. He

contributes nothing to the business, he embarrasses his family in society, and both his physical and mental health are always precarious. But what stands above these facts, and stands for them, is his introspective tendency. That Christian evinces an inner life, by vocalizing an unfiltered stream of consciousness, is taken to be a sign of instability. The very appearance of the inner life is uncouth and even dangerous.

> "[I]t's the way he loses self-control – suddenly starts chatting away, blurting out to all the world the most unpleasant and intimate things. It sometimes borders on the uncanny. It's almost like someone delirious with fever, isn't it? They fantasize in exactly the same way, regardless of the consequences. Oh, it is merely a matter of Christian's worrying too much about himself, about what is going on inside him. He has a regular mania sometimes for dragging up the most insignificant things from deep within him and talking about them – things that a reasonable man doesn't even think about, doesn't want to know about, for the very simple reason that he is too embarrassed to share them with anyone else. There's something so shameless about that sort of unrestrained talk, Tony." (258)

It is, however, the very environment into which Christian has been born that has made possible his obsession with his own inner life. Infinite leisure time, a disengagement from his family members, nearly unlimited choices concerning where he should live and what interests he should pursue –- these factors, made possible by a moneyed existence, allow Christian the freedom to concentrate on developing, however, neurotically, his inner life. His mental energies are free to reflect whenever and in whatever way they choose. And yet Christian contemplates the texture of his experience to such an extent that he has become totally unsuitable for participation in the very capitalist enterprise that has given him his

contemplative leisure. To a prudent capitalist like Christian's brother Thomas, members of wealthy merchant families ought to devote their freedom to business, their inner lives being too dull to warrant excessive introspection.

> I have occasionally given some thought to that sort of useless curiosity and preoccupation with one's self – because I tended to be that way myself at one time. But I realized that it left me unstable, erratic, out of control. And for me the important thing is control and balance. There will always be people for whom this sort of interest in oneself, this probing observation of one's own sensibilities, is appropriate – poets, for instance, who are capable of expressing the inner life, which they prize so much, with assurance and beauty, thereby enriching the emotional life of other people. But we are just simple merchants, my dear; our self-observations are dreadfully petty. At the very best, all we are capable of saying is that we take some special delight in hearing the orchestra tune up, or that we sometimes can't bring ourselves to swallow. But what we should do, damn it, is to sit ourselves down and accomplish something, just as our forebears did. (259)

But Tom mistakenly believes that merchants only produce merchants, and that Christian therefore must be a merchant who has simply gone astray. He does not recognize that artists can be born out of merchant families –- as Thomas Mann himself was –- not in spite of the commercial nature of the family, but indeed because of it. Christian is at odds with his brother Tom, as well as with his father and grandfather, but not because he has gone astray, or because it is as if he is not the offspring of his father, but rather because he is of a type that such a family was bound to produce eventually. While it is in the nature of the commercial type to be practical and act prudently toward abstract goals of financial gain, the modern artist directs this same disinterested impulse inwardly, investing thought in the

endless mining of inner experience for the sake of artistic expression alone. Neither the commercial person nor the modern artist work with any concrete gain in mind, but both do what they do as an end in itself, the one expanding financial control over the world outwardly, the other exploiting for the sake of expression the depths of the psyche.[21]

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21. Flaubert compares his work to asceticism: "I love my work with a love that is frenzied and perverted, as an ascetic loves the hair shirt that scratches his belly. Sometimes, when I am empty, when words don't come, when I find I haven't written a single sentence after scribbling whole pages, I collapse on my couch and lie there dazed" (Flaubert, "Letter to Louise Colet" (1852) in *Selected Letters*, trans. Francis Steegmuller (London, 1954), 131. Rilke thinks of it as a ceaseless and full-minded effort toward the highest goals: "With every day it becomes clearer to me that I was right in setting myself from the start against the phrase my relatives like: Art is something one just cultivates on the side in free hours, when one leaves the government office, etc.—That to me is a fearful sentence. I feel that this is my belief: Whoever does not consecrate himself wholly to art with all his wishes and values can never reach the highest goal. He is not an artist at all. … Not as martyrdom do I regard art—but as a battle the chosen one has to wage with himself and his environment in order to go forward with a pure heart to the greatest goal …" (Rilke, "Letter to Ludwig Ganghofer" [1897] in *Letters, Vol. I*, trans. Jane Bannard Greene and M. D. Herter Norton [New York, 1945], 27-8). Compare these sentiments with the connection Max Weber makes between asceticism and the spirit of capitalism. "The religious valuation of restless, continuous, systematic work in a worldly calling, as the highest means to asceticism, and at the same time the surest and most evident proof of rebirth and genuine faith, must have been the most powerful conceivable lever for the expansion of that attitude toward life which we have here called the spirit of capitalism" (Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, 116). The artist submits all energy and desires to the pure goals of artistic achievement, heedless of personal enjoyment, in the same way that Weber's businesspersons devote themselves to hard work and infinitely high financial goals beyond what the satisfaction of personal

Christian's introspection is an attempt to create meaning out of the data of experience, but, in line with the capitalist logic of his family, it can do little more than accumulate fragmented interpretations of the same trivial sensory facts (his difficulty swallowing, or the pain along one side of his body) over and over again, just as the Buddenbrook firm can only try to accumulate units of currency by investing in the same commodity (wheat) over and over again. Both the firm's investments and Christian's self-interpretations work along the same axis of homogeneous, measurable time and space. Neither is able to descend along that other axis toward which Tony turns when she asks, "Where have they all gone?" – the axis of the other, transcendence, God, or death.

Life proceeds along the axis of the other when it frees itself from the chain of means and ends. On one hand, as long as life has no purposes other than those which are determinable and are of pragmatic interest, it will be unable to explore this axis. On the other hand, as soon as life aims at a purposiveness without purpose, but that yet has immediate value for the person as a whole, then this axis is opened up.[22] There is nothing

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needs and even pleasure would normally require. Christian's artistic sensibility leads to no concrete productions, but he endures and furthers his own pain and misery for the sake of developing his romantic imagination, in much the same way that his brother endures pain and misery for the sake of a goal that he believes is worthy in itself, the expansion of the firm.

22. In Kant's third *Critique*, reflective judgment, which feels a purposiveness in nature without being able to identify determinate purposes, is the basis for supposing that nature as a whole might include the possibility of the final purpose of human freedom, namely, the kingdom of ends in which each individual treats each other as dignified ends in themselves rather than as technical means. In other words, the ability to sense a non-causal purposiveness in nature, whether in the meaning of a work of art or the mysterious functionality of the organism, gives us hope that nature might also take into

mystical about this axis: it is that dimension of depth that Socrates opened up with his radical position of relentless questioning,[23] or that an ethical thinker like Martin Buber

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account the non-causal purposes of freedom and human dignity. We catch a glimpse of the supersensible realm of the kingdom of ends in objects that we feel transcend their mechanical causality. "We [must] presuppose the condition under which it is possible [to achieve] this final purpose in nature (in the nature of the subject as a being of sense, namely, as a human being). It is judgment that presupposes this condition a priori, and without regard to the practical, [so that] this power provides us with the concept that mediates between the concepts of nature and the concept of freedom: the concept of a purposiveness of nature, which makes possible the transition from pure theoretical to pure practical lawfulness, from lawfulness in terms of nature to the final purpose set by the concept of freedom" (Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 36-7). Kant's philosophy here suggests the idea that there is a deep connection between the evaluation of a thing as a reflective purpose and the encounter with another person as a recognition of their transcendent dignity. There is a similarity between the capacity for reflective judgment that freely interprets nature and the moral law within us that determines us to free action from within. Both presuppose the supersensible harmony of freedom and nature, and both involve an evaluation of things or persons that frees them of deterministic causality.

23. "What [Socrates] meant by education was not some causal operation that the knower performs on the unknowing, but the element in which men, communicating with each other, come to themselves, in which the truth opens up to them. … [A]part from his success and usefulness in the state, the individual is important for his own sake. The independence that comes of self-mastery … the true freedom which grows with knowledge—these are the ultimate foundations on which a man can face the godhead" (Jaspers, *Socrates, Buddha, Confucius, Jesus*, 6-7).

describes through the relation between I and You.[24] And it is the axis down which Kant's critical project turns when he raises the possibility of a universally valid subjective judgment of taste. We live, however, in an instrumental world, and the axis of the other would not be what it is did it not cross the axis of instrumentality. Buber's I-You relationship is the I-It relationship overflowing into an always temporary excess of itself,[25] and Kant's reflective judgment works upon objects that must also be constituted determinately (an infinitely interpretable work of art must also be a geometrically or physically determinable object in measurable time and space). The axis of the other must be reached via an inward deepening of the self, but it must simultaneously be reached via external instrumental reality.

Thomas and his son Hanno are only able to peer down the axis of alterity in states of severe decline.[26] The system of exchange that eats away at the potential for an encounter

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24. Buber actually suggests that Kant's relegation of freedom and necessity to two separate realms is more mystical than his own existential solution. "Kant can relativize the philosophical conflict of freedom and necessity by relegating the latter to the world of appearance and the former to that of being, so that the two positions no longer really oppose one another but rather get along with one another as well as do the two worlds in which each is valid. But when I mean freedom and necessity not in worlds that are thought of but in the actuality in which I stand before God … then I may not try to escape from the paradox I have to live by relegating the irreconcilable propositions to two separate realms; neither may I seek the aid of some theological artifice to attain some conceptual reconciliation: I must take it upon myself to live both in one, and lived both are one" (Buber, *I and Thou*, 144).

25. Buber, *I and Thou*, 69.

26. The experience of both health and sickness, rationality and decadence, constitutes an important lesson for the life of Nietzsche's body. It gives him a flexibility for changing the perspective of his

with the other, suddenly in its most pernicious moment can effect a reversal in the subject. As if the subject now becomes aware that what it thought was its calling is in fact its self-annihilation, the lines of relation that tied that subject to its world, and that tied that world together, all of a sudden show themselves, not as lines of relation, but as the fault-lines that separate the fragments of life from one another. These lines are not exactly void spaces—their content consists of the calculative functions of the system of production—but rather they are barriers, admitting only some parts of each fragment to travel through the network, and denying the bulk of those incalculable energies that are variously termed spiritual, poetic, ethical, or aesthetic. If, however, these limits are seen for what they are, then they themselves can be thought from a critical point of view. *Buddenbrooks* itself is an aesthetic and ethical critique of these limits. Mann's novel presents the commercial world from a dream-like point of view, in which many voices echo about, many odd details are magnified, and many unexpected detours are taken. The effect is a deliberate disturbance of the usual panoptic view we take of social or economic issues, resulting in a perspective that is at once panoramic and intimate. From this perspective, possibilities begin to appear, beyond those of the system itself, emerging like phantoms from an unseen region. These are the

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being as a whole, rather than only intellectually. Similarly, whatever insights Thomas and Hanno gain, emerge from having experienced both the rational life of business and the decadence of illness, madness, irrational curiosity, or wild imagination. "Looking from the perspective of the sick toward healthier concepts and values and, conversely, looking again from the fullness and self-assurance of a rich life down into the secret work of the instinct of decadence—in this I have had the longest training, my truest experience; if in anything, I became master in this. Now I know how, have the know-how, to reverse perspectives; the first reason why a 'revaluation of values' is perhaps possible for me alone" (Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* in *Basic Writings*, 679).

possibilities that come from the encounter, on one hand, between selves that resist their economic fragmentation and, on the other hand, between those selves and the world in its excessive fecundity and reckless intertwining. Within the story of *Buddenbrooks*, certain characters experience such encounters and catch glimpses of such possibilities. At the lowest point of Thomas's personal and commercial decline, he encounters Schopenhauer, and briefly tries to think the world from a perspective that transcends the system of exchange, perhaps for the first time in his life. However, the illumination is brief, and he is unable to find happiness or face his death with composure. Hanno, his son, does not experience a path toward decline, but rather represents the lowest and final point of his family's genealogy. It is as though the family has run so dry of any existential meaning that it is nearly incapable of producing even one more life. Hanno's life, indeed, only lasts several years, until out of necessity his fragile body and spirit evaporate. And yet as this representative of the family's death throes, Hanno is able to experience substantial value and meaning by way of a sickly perspective that cannot help but disfigure and thus also re-imagine the world.

Death as the Meaning of Life

As we saw with Aristide Saccard in Zola's *La Curée*, the successful capitalist employs a great deal of imagination in the pursuit of otherwise abstract financial matters. Once one is dealing with quantities of profit that are above the amount one could readily conceive of using to purchase either vital necessities or pleasant luxuries, then one requires a further motivating force to maintain the high level of personal energy required for success.[27] The capitalist

27. See Lorin F. Deland, *Imagination in Business* [New York: Harper and Brothers, 1909], a light and practical treatise—by the husband of American realist novelist Margaret Deland—on the role of the

makes money for the purpose of re-investment, and so for the purpose of making more money.[28] It would seem that there is no tangible goal involved here that would satisfy human desire. But a creative imagination is able to transform large sums of abstract quantity, or projections of infinite multiplication through repeated re-investments of capital, into alluring qualitative goals. Saccard, for instance, is probably only able to arouse himself to activity through the image of destroying large parts of Paris and converting the resulting release of energy into cash, or by imagining his money as akin to a strong current of water.[29] In both cases, the imagination turns quantity into a qualitative image of a substance that either erupts or flows, activities with which life is better able to identify. Mann does not give us insight into the sort of imaginative transformations achieved by Thomas during his most successful years in business, but, at the moment that his decline is made explicit, we hear about the fact of such an imaginative play having once been present in him. "The imaginative élan and cheerful idealism of youth were gone. To play at work, to work at play, to strive, to direct one's half-serious, half-whimsical ambition towards goals to which one ascribes only symbolic value—that requires a great deal of vigor, humor, and a breezy kind of courage for debonair, skeptical compromises and ingenious half-measures; but Thomas Buddenbrook

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imagination in business matters. Although the work does not discuss the imagination as a basis for the inclination to work for endless profit, which idea I derive from Zola's illustration, it does take the reader through many examples of how the imagination is used in the activities of actually making that profit.

28. The concept of a 'capitalist' derives from the concept of 'capital' which Marx defines as "M-C-M, the transformation of money into commodities, and the re-conversion of commodities into money: buying in order to sell" (Marx, *Capital, Volume I*, 248).

29. Zola, *The Kill*, 67-79.

felt indescribably weary and listless" (593). This weariness, however, is not a fatigue, or at least not in the sense of a depletion of energy. Rather, Thomas's weariness is only an inability to find meaningful purposive value in the pursuit of financial profit anymore.[30] His energy itself is intact and flowing, but without orientation or purpose.

> He was empty inside, and he could see no exciting project or absorbing task into which he could throw himself with joy and satisfaction. But he had a need to keep busy, and his mind never stopped working. He was consumed by his own restless energy, which for him had always been something different from his father's natural and solid joy in work, something artificial, more like a nervous itch, practically a drug—like the pungent little Russian cigarettes he constantly smoked. That energy had never left him, he was less its master than ever; it had gained the upper hand, had become such a torment that he wasted his time with a host of trivialities. (595)

Thomas never lacked energy, but his imagination seems to have been somewhat feeble from the beginning. His personality, even in childhood, is bland and predictable. At the narrative level, his character takes a very distant backseat to the wilder antics of Christian and Tony,

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30. J. G. Brennan emphasizes the role of the unidentifiable element within the subject in upsetting the bourgeois duty to conform to a straightforward business ethic. "Outwardly the archetype of the successful businessman, Thomas becomes progressively aware of a growing conflict within him. It is lethal—a struggle between his loyalty to the patrician bourgeois standards of family and firm, and 'something else' deep in his nature which has nothing to do with the values of successful commerce and profit-making" (J. G. Brennan, "Thomas Mann and the Business Ethic" in *Journal of Business Ethics* 4, no. 5 [Oct. 1985]: 404).

until suddenly in the last third of the novel, when business has turned bad, Thomas surprisingly emerges as the main character until nearly the very end. In fact, one of the few insights into his youthful personality comes in a short and isolated chapter in which we see that Thomas has been briefly courting, although is now breaking things off with, a young shopgirl in town. The narrative's point, though, seems to be that Thomas is not worthy of narration until his decline, because his personality is thin and his activities are routine. At any rate, what imagination he managed to muster for the shallow purposes of business has now disappeared, leaving him with pointless mechanical energy. He lapses into the kind of behavior characteristic of his brother Christian, that is, a constant bothering about trivialities.

Just as money requires for its institution a pre-existing set of relations, so too commerce requires a qualitatively dynamic energy that the abstract institutions of capital are not capable of producing on their own. Without imagination and passion, commerce would be a theoretical and inert mathematical structure. It requires these human qualities, among others, such as need and desire, to be propelled into a practical and living economic system.[31] The tendency of the capitalist mode of production, however, is not to cultivate these

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31. On modern industry and the energies of human labor, see Anson Rabinbach, *The Human Motor: Energy, Fatigue, and the Origins of Modernity* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992). Also relevant is Marx's labor theory of value, in which the system of commodities extracts a quantified, abstract, homogeneous energy of labor power to form relative exchange values. Thus, it takes concrete energies but transforms it into abstract value. "With the disappearance of the useful character of the products of labour, the useful character of the kinds of labour embodied in them also disappears; this in turn entails the disappearance of the different concrete forms of labour. They can no longer be distinguished, but are all together reduced to the same kind of labour, human labour in the abstract" (Marx, *Capital, Volume I*, 128).

qualities in their application, but rather to use them up, just as a machine burns its fossil fuel, which is then eternally committed to a useless state of entropy, a state of total objectivity from which human laborers are estranged.[32] The circulatory system of capital demands potent psychical energies -– the nearly religious zeal of the large-scale capitalist, the utopian desires of the average consumer, the devotion of the laborer to his or her family -– but it gives nothing back to these energies, and therefore it depletes them.[33] Physical exercise,

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32. "Labour not only produces commodities; it also produces itself and the workers as a commodity and it does so in the same proportion in which it produces commodities in general. This fact simply means that the object that labour produces, its product, stands opposed to it as something alien, as a power independent of the producer. The product of labour is labour embodied and made material in an object, it is the objectification of labour. The realization of labour is its objectification. In the sphere of political economy this realization of labour appears as a loss of reality for the worker, objectification as loss of and bondage to the object, and appropriation as estrangement, as alienation. So much does the realization of labour appear as loss of reality that the worker loses his reality to the point of dying of starvation" (Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* in *Early Writings*, 324).

33. Alienated labor subsists on wages that provide physical sustenance, but the human quality of the energy itself is turned over to the commodity. "The relationship of labour to the act of production within labour. This relationship is the relationship of the worker to his own activity as something which is alien and does not belong to him, activity as passivity, power as impotence, procreation as emasculation, the worker's own physical and mental energy, his personal life—for what is life but activity?—as an activity directed against himself, which is independent of him and does not belong to him" (Marx, *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts* in *Early Writings*, 327). Compare this to non-capitalist forms of exchange: "It is above all the exchange of economic values that involves the notion of sacrifice. When we exchange love for love, we have no other use for its inner energy and,

artistic work, undivided craftsmanship, or the activity of thinking itself –- these activities use energy without depleting it; indeed, they rather develop those energies in the subject. While, at the level of physical phenomena, there is no such thing as the absolute creation of energy, at the level of human activity there is. Commerce reduces human activity to the mode of physics, converting psychical energy into a mathematized and depletable resource. Rather than furthering the organization of the subject who works for it, commerce uses up the subject by disorganizing it. The end result of progressive disorganization is entropy or death, and this is precisely the state in which Thomas ends up after his energies have been totally depleted by the firm. However, the stage prior to his death involves a sudden uprising of what little organization is left in him, a panicked awareness that he is on the path toward death, and a sudden desire for an alternative path.

The ground for Thomas's epiphany is the near complete loss of his personality. He centers his self around his clothes and grooming, because his now colorless energies are

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leaving aside any later consequences, we do not sacrifice any good. When we share our intellectual resources in a discussion, they are not thereby reduced; when we display the image of our personality, and take in those of other people, our possession of ourselves is not at all reduced by this exchange. In all these cases of exchange the increase of value does not involve a balancing of gain and loss; either the contribution of each party lies beyond this antithesis, or it is already a gain to be able to make it, and we accept the response as a gift which is made independently of our own offering. But economic exchange—whether it is of objects of labour or labour power invested in objects—always signifies the sacrifice of an otherwise useful good, however much eudaemonistic gain is involved" (Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, 80). Giving love, knowledge, or our personality does not involve a diminishing of the energies that essentially constitute these things, but in many cases even cultivates and increases them when we receive the gifts of these things in turn from others.

incapable of an investment in any but the most mechanical and superficial activities. "He was so fussy about dressing, and so inflexible and rigid about the sequence of its details – from the cold shower in the bathroom to the moment when he flicked the last speck of dust from his coat and ran the tips of his mustache through the curling iron one last time – that the daily repetition of all these countless little tasks and rituals almost drove him to despair" (596). His existence has been reduced to that of an actor, simulating the activities of a businessman in the most artificial way. "No doubt of it – Thomas Buddenbrook's existence was no different from that of an actor, but one whose whole life has become a single production, down to the smallest, most workaday detail – a production that, apart from a few brief hours each day, constantly engaged and devoured all his energies. He completely lacked any ardent interest that might have occupied his mind. His interior life was impoverished, had undergone a deterioration so severe that it was like the almost constant burden of some vague grief" (597). Thomas's inner life has deteriorated, and yet the narrative, from this point onward, gives us more insight into his inner life than it has given us for any other character hitherto. This is the peculiar contradiction concerning capitalism and the inner life. Capitalism diminishes the inner life insofar as it abuses subjective energies, and yet at the same time furnishes the possibility of a deeper inner life, by isolating the subject from others and by promoting the subject's power of choice (money frees one up to work here or there, buy this or that, etc.).[34] Thus, in a very strange reversal, Thomas's

34. "Thus money, as an intermediate link between man and thing, enables man to have, as it were, an abstract existence, a freedom from direct concern with things and from a direct relationship to them, without which our inner nature would not have the same chances of development. If modern man can, under favourable circumstances, secure an island of subjectivity, a secret, closed-off sphere of

depletion of interiority suddenly converts into a cavernous depth of interiority, the moment that he becomes conscious of and anxious about his alienation from life. (That the human spirit is capable of such an inexplicable reversal vouches for the possibility of redemption.)

Thomas contemplates suicide, a fact that we do not gather from his inner thoughts, but rather from his wife Gerda's perspective. After he nonchalantly brings up the topic, having just read about a business associate who killed himself the previous night, Gerda searches his face with a penetrating gaze, a moment that the reader must take to indicate that Thomas is indeed suicidal. "Gerda had fixed her eyes – those close-set brown eyes with bluish shadows at the corners – firmly on him, searching his face" (600). This reckoning with death is the catalyst that prompts Thomas's turning toward the axis of questionability, the path on which values are no longer quantitatively certain but rather call the subject to the task of existential inquiry. "All his energies were fading; the only thing that grew stronger was the conviction that all this could not last long and that his demise was near. The strangest premonitions would come to him. Several times at the dinner table, the sensation had come over him that he was not sitting there with his family, but had drifted off to some hazy distance and was looking back at them" (630). Thomas seems to be experiencing something like the beginning of a spiritual conversion, although it will not reach completion. The distance from which he looks at his family is the distance that the soul takes to begin a

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privacy—not in the social but in a deeper metaphysical sense—for his most personal existence, which to some extent compensates for the religious style of life of former times, then this is due to the fact that money relieves us to an ever-increasing extent of direct contact with things, while at the same time making it infinitely easier for us to dominate them and select from them what we require" (Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, 474).

process of deep reflection and inquiry. "Something else, a new worry, descended on him, took hold of him, and drove his weary thoughts before it. Because, as soon as he began to think of the end of life as something more than a distant, theoretical, and minor necessity and regarded it, instead, as imminent and tangible, as something for which one must make immediate preparations, he began to brood, to search himself, to examine how things stood between him and death and what he thought about matters beyond this earthly life. And at his very first attempt to do so, what he found was hopeless immaturity and a soul unprepared for death" (631). His first attempt to think about anything besides the relatively clear-cut world of business is prompted by a fear of death. While the limits that carve up the commercial world are there to secure the relations between people and things with precision, the limit of death is, on the contrary, that line which obscures every other limit, which calls into question the totality of relations.[35] The thought of death leads down an axis that dives below what previously appeared to be the only plane of existence, not into an absolute void,

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35. Death functions this way in Hegel, representing the negation that shakes up a totality and begins the process of sublation to a new order of being. Here, immediate consciousness becomes aware of itself, that is, becomes self-consciousness, through the fear of death. It is precisely through uncertainty and instability, via the possibility of total disintegration, that life becomes aware of itself as an integrity. "For this consciousness has been fearful, not of this or that particular thing or just at odd moments, but its whole being has been seized with dread; for it has experienced the fear of death, the absolute Lord. In that experience it has been quite unmanned, has trembled in every fibre of its being, and everything solid and stable has been shaken to its foundations. But this pure universal movement, the absolute melting-away of everything stable, is the simple, essential nature of self-consciousness, absolute negativity, pure being-for-self, which consequently is implicit in this consciousness" (Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 117).

but into absolute ambiguity, an uncertainty that cannot be resolved. "He had told himself that he had lived in his ancestors and would continue to live in his descendants. The idea had fitted well with his sense of family, his patrician self-confidence, and his reverence for history; and it had also supported his ambitions and strengthened him as he went about the tasks of life. But now, as he gazed into the piercing eye of approaching death, it was apparent that such a view fell away to nothing, was incapable of providing him even an hour of calm or anything like readiness for death" (631). Thomas's view of family genealogy is as linear and homogeneous as the endless series of capital investment, and it is in fact a view of the family as a firm. The son replaces the father as the agent of the firm, in turn to be replaced by his son, continuously down a line that has no room for differences of gender or occupation. This clearly delimited line of inheritances is unable to explain the subjective experience of facing death in its actuality, and for this reason, just as his grandfather could only utter the word "curious" before his death, Thomas now faces urgent questions concerning the real purpose of his own life.

Thomas, by chance, finds lying around his house "the second half of a famous metaphysical system," which he skims for a while until reaching a chapter entitled "Concerning Death and Its Relation to the Indestructibility of Our Essential Nature." The chapter is from the second volume of Schopenhauer's *The World as Will and Representation*,[36] and Thomas reads this chapter from beginning to end with an "almost deathlike look of earnest concentration" (633). He mulls over the strange reading experience during the day, puzzled but also startled by its profundity, until at night, while lying awake in bed, he has his

36. Arthur Schopenhauer, "On Death and Its Relation to the Indestructibility of Our Inner Nature" in *The World as Will and Representation, Volume II*, 463-509.

epiphany. "*I'm going to live!*" he says, "That's it – I'm going to live. *It* is going to live... and thinking that it and I are separate instead of one and the same – that is the illusion that death will set right. That's it, that's it! But why?" (634). Thomas has understood the Schopenhauerian notion that there is one eternal will, which, as representation, is individuated among many wills striving at cross-purposes, but the unity of which one rejoins in death.

> What was death? The answer to the question came to him now. The answer to the question came to him now, but not in poor, pretentious words – instead, he felt it, possessed it somewhere within him. Death was a blessing, so great, so deep that we can fathom it only at those moments, like this one now, when we are reprieved from it. It was the return home from long, unspeakably painful wanderings, the correction of a great error, the loosening of tormenting chains, the removal of barriers – it set a horrible accident to rights again.
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> An end, a dissolution? Empty words, and whoever was terrified by them was a pitiable wretch. What would end, what would dissolve? His body, his personality and individuality – this cumbersome, intractable, defective, and contemptible barrier to becoming something *different and better*.
>
> Was not every human being a mistake, a blunder? Did we not, at the very moment of birth, stumble into agonizing captivity? A prison, a prison with bars and chains everywhere! And, staring out hopelessly from between the bars of his individuality, a man sees only the surrounding walls of external circumstance, until death comes and calls him home to freedom.
>
> Individuality! Oh, what a man is, can, and has seems to him so poor, gray, inadequate, and boring. But what a man is not, cannot, and does not have – he gazes at all that with longing envy – envy that turns to love, because he fears it will turn to hate.

> I bear within me the seed, the rudiments, the possibility of life's capacities and endeavors. Where might I be, if I were not here? Who, what, how could I be, if I were not me, if this outward appearance that is me did not encase me, separating my consciousness from that of others who are not me? An organism – a blind, rash, pitiful eruption of the insistent assertion of the will. Far better, really, if that will were to drift free in a night without time or space, than to languish in a prison cell lit only by the flickering, uncertain flame of the intellect.
>
> And I hope to live on in my son? In another personality, even weaker, more fearful, more wavering than my own? What childish, misguided nonsense! What good does a son do me? I don't need a son. And where will I be once I am dead? It's so dazzlingly clear, so overwhelmingly simple. I will be a part of all those who say, who have ever said, or will say "I": and, most especially, *a part of those who say it more forcibly, joyfully, powerfully.* (635-36)

This chapter from Schopenhauer's system concerns the idea that death is only real from the perspective of representation, that is, the perspective of the momentarily existing individual. From the perspective of the thing-in-itself, or the will, which is atemporal, there is no death, or rather, death is only the eternal unity of the will. Whether or not Thomas properly understands the chapter is beside the point. It provides a suggestion from which Thomas develops the philosophy of life of which he is capable. Schopenhauer segregates the law of the will from the laws of representation, just as Kant segregates the phenomenal from the noumenal, and Thomas accordingly is unable to see any possible redemption in the life of the individual. Thus, Thomas, like Schopenhauer at times, affirms death as a solution to the error of life, seeing in death the return to the blissful unity of the will. As Schopenhauer puts it: "Dying is the moment of that liberation from the one-sidedness of an individuality which does not constitute the innermost kernel of our true being, but is rather to be thought of as a

kind of aberration thereof. The true original freedom again enters at this moment which in the sense stated can be regarded as a *restitutio in integrum* [restoration to the former state]" (Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Representation, Volume II*, 508). And yet, toward the end of Thomas's reflections, he comes up with a notion about self-affirmation. Only those who affirm their ego powerfully will have a share in the bliss of death, according to Thomas. This does not appear in the Schopenhauer chapter that Thomas is reading. It seems as though Mann has inserted some Nietzschean optimism into Thomas's thoughts. The idea, at any rate, seems to contradict his train of thought: why should only those who affirm their representing ego rejoin the unity of will after death? The point ultimately seems to be that Thomas is confused, and indeed the lack of coherence in his thinking corresponds to the rapidity with which the epiphany loses its effect on him. Within days, he has nearly forgotten about the event and instead decides to just believe in the Christian God and arrange his last will and testament. Thomas soon dies from a severe toothache, a contingent material excuse for a death that is narratively, and even metaphysically, necessary from the perspective of his decline in purpose.

Everyday Transcendence

The phenomenal world, for Schopenhauer, is connected by a chain of causes and effects, no element of which is capable of bearing a metaphysical value in itself.[37] Only the will in its

37. "The entire existence of all objects, in so far as they are objects, representations, and nothing else, is traced back completely to this necessary relation of theirs to one another, consists only in that relation, and hence is entirely relative …" (Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation, Volume I*, 6).

unity, to which the subject is once again gathered in death, offers repose from the conflict of individuated life.[38] Each aspect of the world, however, is really one and the same world, and our access to this unity is through our own bodies. The body appears as both determinate representation and inexplicable will.[39] I have tried to show that, in a related vein, Kant suggests a route by which the law of phenomenality, which corresponds to Schopenhauer's world as representation, may at least incline to harmonization with the law of freedom, which corresponds to Schopenhauer's world as will. Reflective judgment –- in proposing an indeterminate purposiveness to objects, beyond their mere causality, and furthermore doing so with a view toward communally agreed upon truth – affords reason with the possibility that the mechanical world may after all be amenable to and even wrapped up in a shared destiny with the moral freedom we presume belongs to our possibilities of action. If we are permitted to attribute to the flower a concept of its organic design, even though this is determinable neither by physics nor by geometry nor by any set of principles whatsoever, then perhaps we are also permitted to attribute a moral structure to the world in its organic

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38. "For it is true that everyone is transitory only as phenomenon; on the other hand, as thing-in-itself he is timeless, and so endless. But also only as phenomenon is the individual different from the other things of the world; as thing-in-itself, he is the will that appears in everything, and death does away with the illusion that separates his consciounsess from that of the rest; this is future existence or immortality" (Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation, Volume I*, 282).

39. "To the subject of knowing, who appears as an individual only through his identity with the body, this body is given in two entirely different ways. It is given in intelligent perception as representation, as an object among objects, liable to the laws of these objects. But it is also given in quite a different way, namely as what is known immediately to everyone, and is denoted by the word will" (Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation, Volume I*, 100).

totality, a moral structure that is developed out of our idea of freedom, which for Kant is the moral law, but which could be conceived in a more flexible way. Kant, then, shows how it is that images of transcendence are discoverable in phenomenal nature by way of the imagination, understanding, and reason. Schopenhauer, too, discusses, although with much less technical precision than Kant, how works of art are peculiar natural objects that are capable of leading the subject to the "ideas" which are articulations of the will in its unity that are less differentiated, that is, less phenomenal and closer to the in-itself of the world, than the derivative natural objects themselves.[40] Music, in particular, because of its lack of representational content, presents directly the idea of the will, although it cannot, as death can, actually gather us back into the fold of the will.[41] Thus, for both Schopenhauer and Kant, the ethical or metaphysical experiences of eternity, transcendence, freedom, the

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40. "But now, what kind of knowledge is it that considers what continues to exist outside and independently of all relations, but which alone is really essential to the world, the true content of its phenomena, that which is subject to no change, and is therefore known with equal truth for all time, in a word, the Ideas that are the immediate and adequate objectivity of the thing-in-itself, of the will? It is art, the work of genius. It repeats the eternal ideas apprehended through pure contemplation, the essential and abiding element in all the phenomena of the world" (Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation, Volume I*, 184).

41. "Thus music is as immediate an objectification and copy of the whole will as the world itself is, indeed as the Ideas are, the multiplied phenomenon of which constitutes the world of individual things. Therefore music is by no means like the other arts, namely a copy of the Ideas, but a copy of the will itself, the objectivity of which are the Ideas. For this reason the effect of music is so very much more powerful and penetrating than is that of the other arts, for these others speak only of the shadow, but music of the essence" (Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation, Volume I*, 257).

encounter with the other, or intrinsic meaning and value –- these occur in and between subjects and their phenomenal world. We also find this insight in Mann, presented through the development of Johann "Hanno" Buddenbrook, the fragile son of Thomas.

Already from the moment of his christening, the narrator describes Hanno as having "a peculiar look of premature age hardly suitable for a four-week-old baby" (388). In a sense, Hanno is born dead, or rather he is born as the death of his family, a death that briefly lives for the sake of marking the family's extinction. He is also, in the literal medical sense, almost a stillborn child: "You have reason to be very grateful," says the family physician, "it was a close call." Thomas tries to "put aside the horrible thought that this tiny creature, for which he yearned in vain for so long, came into the world in almost eerie silence." It is as if, since he survived but did not make a sound, Hanno is born between death and life, as if the decision, whether he would be born alive or dead, was never finally made. He represents the ambiguity of the limit between the commercial life of the Buddenbrook family and the exteriority of the capitalist mode of existence, but he also figures as the incalculable limit, which we may call death, that inheres between everything, calling the essence of everything into question, but also thereby offering everything to us for an interpretatively meaningful encounter. And Hanno does evidently live along such a poetic axis. As a toddler, he has intense dreams about poems that he has memorized during the day.

> "To my... garden... I will go," Hanno mumbled, "Onions and sweet peas to sow..."
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> "He's reciting a poem," Ida Jungmann explained, shaking her head. "Now, now, that's enough, lad, go to sleep."

"There a little hunchback stands... Sneezing, waving little hands," Hanno said, and then he sighed. Suddenly his expression changed and he closed his eyes halfway. Tossing his head back and forth on his pillow, he went on now in a soft, plaintive voice:

The moon rides high,
The babe doth cry,
Twelve strikes the clock,
That God may help the poorer folk.

And with these words came a sob so deep that tears formed on his eyelashes and slowly rolled down his cheeks […]

"They're in his reader," Fräulein Jungmann replied. … They're very odd poems. He had to memorize them this week, and he's been talking a lot about the one with the little hunchback. Do you know it? It's really very awful. This little hunchbacked man is everywhere, he smashes pots, eats the broth, steals the wood, keeps the spinning wheel from turning, makes fun of people – and then, at the end, he asks to be included in people's prayers. Yes, the lad's been fascinated by it. He's been thinking about it all day and all night. 'Don't you see, Ida? He doesn't do it because he's wicked, not because he's wicked! He does it because he's sad, but that only makes him sadder. And if people pray for him, then he won't have to do it anymore.' And this evening, when his mama came in to say good night on her way to the concert, he asked her if he should pray for the little hunchback, too." (455)

Hanno perceives things differently from how the other members of the family perceive them. To him, the mischievous hunchback of the poem is neither a silly fancy of the

imagination, nor an object of scorn, nor even quite an object of pity. Rather, the hunchback calls forth to him from the poem –- a call that pervades even his unconscious –- and begs for prayer, that is, a direct address along the transcendent axis of God. This precocious reception to the plea of the other and an awareness of the need for a religious response is in direct opposition to how Jean and his father chose to respond to the call of their own kin, Gotthold. The decline of his grandfather's and father's sense of ethical responsibility finds itself inverted in Hanno, who stands for the total decline of the commercial family, but is thus also a renewal of imaginative and moral sensibility. In a more obvious sense, Hanno's genuine concern for "the poorer folk" also stands in direct opposition to the condescending treatment of the poor practiced by his forbears in a number of scenes. Finally, Hanno demonstrates what is for his age an uncannily nuanced appreciation of the ambiguity of good and evil. His religiosity is not the rehearsed, by-the-book, unimportant dogmatism of his grandparents. Good and evil are not even idealized poles on a spectrum of more realistic in-between states. Rather, evil, or wickedness, is the reverse side of the good, but calling out for its redemption through prayer. Wickedness, in the poem of the hunchback, is represented by various struggles or conflicts within material reality: smashing, stealing, mocking, etc. The form of these activities is identical with the form of Schopenhauer's individuated phenomenal reality in which each divided will struggles against the others, fighting what is in truth one with it.[42] Prayer, the redemption of the wicked, is that seemingly impossible turn

42. Schopenhauer finds an apt metaphor for the self-divided struggle of the will among phenomenal individuals in the "bulldog-ant of Australia, for when it is cut in two, a battle begins between the head and the tail. The head attacks the tail with its teeth, and the tail defends itself bravely by stinging

which switches to an unseen axis, the axis of the relation to the other, and yet does not leave behind the phenomenon. This new axis is rather a perspective on the phenomenon that exceeds any determination of the latter. It is the axis along which one cannot say of the situation, for instance of the hunchback smashing pots, that it is good or evil. From the perspective that exceeds these determinations, there is no objective analysis, but only a direct address that takes place in the prayer.[43]

But if Hanno is poetically fluent in his sleep, the silence of his birth continues by day. Generally a quiet boy, Hanno is barely able to utter a word to his father, the man to whom he was hoped to be the successor of the family business. In what is presented as a typical scene, Thomas casually asks his son how things are going with him. "Not a muscle in [Thomas's] face betrayed his anxiety as he waited to see how Hanno would react to his greeting, how he would respond; he betrayed nothing of the painful wrenching inside him when the boy simply glanced his way with shy, golden-brown, blue-shadowed eyes that avoided looking directly at him, and then bent down mutely over his plate" (499). There is, however, another sort of language that attracts Hanno's sensibility. Music, to which he is introduced by his mother and a local church organist, Herr Edmund Pfühl, offers to Hanno "a logic that was deeper, purer, more unsullied and uncompromised than the logic that

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the head. The contest usually lasts for half an hour, until they die or are dragged away by other ants. This takes place every time" (Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation, Volume I*, 147).

43. Buber figures this axis, along which prayer is directed, as preceding time and space, but we may infer that it also precedes the sphere of relative moral values. "And even as prayer is not in time but time in prayer, the sacrifice not in space but space in the sacrifice—and whoever reverses the relation annuls the reality—I do not find the human being to whom I say You in any Sometime and Somewhere" (Buber, *I and Thou*, 59).

shapes the ideas and thoughts embodied in language" (486). Mann certainly has in mind Schopenhauer's notion that music presents the idea of the will in its unity, that is, prior to or beyond the divisive articulations of language and concepts. Music represents the surging of the will – the swells, pulsations, and ebbs of which the unified and indivisible motion of the will consists. It is the wordless language of the great sea, stormy or calm, that underlies and drives all things in life. For Schopenhauer, the various parts of music are analogous to certain aspects of life: the ground bass represents inorganic nature, the intervals of the scale are like the diversification of the species, the melody stands for the freedom of humanity, etc.[44] "Still, despite the evidence of all these analogies, we must never forget that music has only an indirect relation to them, not a direct one, because it never expresses appearance but only the inner essence, the in-itself of all appearance, the will itself" (Schopenhauer, *World as Will and Representation, Volume I*, 289). Music, by cutting straight through to the underlying will, churning in the bottommost depths of humanity and its world, has a disdain for representational appearances, as well as for even the higher ideas of those appearances. As a novelist, Mann does not share that disdain for worldly representations, but he does have a keen interest in Schopenhauer's view of music with regard to exploring the nature of Hanno's experience. What importance, then, does Hanno's involvement in music have for Mann's exploration of the problem of purposiveness? The Schopenhauerian will is a kind of purposiveness without purpose. The will wills, but it does not will anything in particular except in its individuations.[45] Mann, it seems to me, would be loath to take interest in a

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44. Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation, Volume I*, 258-59.

45. "In fact, absence of all aim, of all limits, belongs to the essential nature of the will in itself, which is an endless striving" (Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation, Volume I*, 164.

transcendent idea like Schopenhauer's will if it did not lend itself to being reined back in to the world of appearances in which, as a novelist, he is fully immersed. However, critical of instrumentality, Mann would also not want to chain music to the kinds of appearances that form a grid of fungible causes and effects, or those whose exchange values are calculable. If music is to remain transcendent –- insofar as it exceeds the meaning of things under Schopenhauer's *principium individuationis*, or Kant's phenomenal determinability -– and yet also consort with the phenomenal world –- which for any philosopher of life, as Mann in many ways is, comprises the territory of all thinking -– then Mann will have to direct it to a mode of appearance that resists identification and exchange.

This mode is the singular presentation of experience. The singular experience does not have value by virtue of being better or worse than another experience. Its value comes from its way of gathering everything beyond it into itself, and reciprocally donating itself to everything beyond it. Its borders are ambiguous, because they give and receive in relation to everything that is outside. Thus, the singular experience, like the adventure in Simmel's essay on the topic, seems to sum up the totality of life. Likewise, it gives new meaning afterward to everything else. The singular experience is a literary mode of life, because it is like a scene in a novel, structurally irreplaceable and of critical importance to the understanding of the rest. Such experiences are more than parts of a temporal series: they exceed the ordinary flow of life, and obtain an aspect of eternity insofar as they live above that flow. The adventure is, for Simmel, a figure of a mode of life that both separates itself from the totality and represents in summation that totality. It is singular insofar as it stands alone and bears its value within itself, but universal insofar as it expresses the whole. "An adventure is certainly a part of our existence, directly contiguous with other parts which precede and follow it; at

the same time, however, in its deeper meaning, it occurs outside the usual continuity of this life. Nevertheless, it is distinct from all that is accidental and alien, merely touching life's outer shell. While it falls outside the context of life, it falls with this same movement, as it were, back into that context again …; it is a foreign body in our existence which is yet somehow connected with the centre; the outside, if only by a long and unfamiliar detour, is formally an aspect of the inside" (Simmel, "The Adventure" in *Simmel on Culture*, 222). Finally, the kind of organization such an experience has in relation to the rest of life is purposive but with no particular purpose. For while, like a scene in a novel, its meaning is rich and potentially bears on anything, that meaning is never finally determinable, but is only revealed in an endless dialectic of reflection and interpretation. Mann seems to associate music with the singular mode of experience because they both share this quality of bearing an eternal meaning, that is, a meaning that overflows any possible determination. It is perhaps not that music is in the end really any different from painting or literature in this regard, but it does seem more eternal, as it were, than these other forms of art, on account of its eschewing any representational content that could be interpreted with a view to determining a final meaning.[46] For Mann, the living equivalent of the non-representational

46. "That in some sense music must be related to the world as the depiction to the thing depicted, as the copy to the original, we can infer from the analogy with the remaining arts, to all of which this character is peculiar …. Further, its imitative reference to the world must be very profound, infinitely true, and really striking, since it is instantly understood by everyone …. Yet the point of comparison between music and the world, the regard to which it stands to the world in the relation of a copy or a repetition, is very obscure. Men have practised music at all times without being able to give an account of this; content to understand it immediately, they renounce any abstract conception of this directed understanding itself" (Schopenhauer, *The World as Will and Representation, Volume I*, 256).

eternal expression of music is the singular experience of the everyday, that is, the everyday banal experience, which apparently represents almost nothing, but that yet somehow plumbs the depths of existence. Without significant content to speak of, some everyday experiences become like dense weights on the thin fabric of life.[47] One is never quite sure why these moments, and not others, became important to our lives, and often we only recognize their significance in our memories.[48] Mann essentially concludes, save for two epilogues, the novel

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47. Henri Lefebvre's theory of the moment aims to disclose significant structures hidden amid everyday life. "The moment cannot be defined by the everyday or within it, but nor can it be defined by what is exceptional and external to the everyday. It gives the everyday a certain shape, but taken per se and extrapolated from that context, this shape is empty. … It is a festival, it is a marvel, but it is not a miracle. … Festival only makes sense when its brilliance lights up the sad hinterland of everyday dullness …. … Everyday life is the native soil in which the moment germinates and takes root. … The theory of moments will allow us to follow the birth and formation of moments in the substance of the everyday in their various psychic and sociological denominations …. Perhaps it will even permit us to illuminate the slow stages by which need becomes desire, deep below everyday life, and on its surface" (Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life, Volume II*, 356-58).

48. Thus, Virginia Woolf, in a memoir, wonders why certain childhood memories are preserved and not others. "Unfortunately, one only remembers what is exceptional. And there seems to be no reason why one thing is exceptional and another not. Why have I forgotten so many things that must have been, one would have thought, more memorable than what I do remember? Why remember the hum of bees in the garden going down to the beach, and forgot completely being thrown naked by father into the sea?" (Woolf, "A Sketch of the Past" in *Moments of Being*, 70). It would seem that the logic of memory is not the same as the logic of practical life. Could involuntary memory constitute the logic that structures our experience according to singular moments, each of which represents the

with an unusually lengthy chapter about an ordinary day in the life of Hanno. Before we turn to this chapter, let us look briefly at its musical model.

Hanno has been trained by Pfühl in music theory, composition, and piano. On his eighth birthday, he performs for his family a fantasia he has written.

> Pale with excitement, Hanno had been able to eat almost nothing at dinner; but now, forgetting everything around him and removed from the world, he surrendered himself totally to his composition – which, alas, would be over in two minutes. The nature of his little melodic fantasia was more harmonic than rhythmic, and there was a very strange contrast between the basic, rudimentary musical resources at the child's disposal and the momentous, passionate, and almost elegant way he emphasized and enhanced them. Hanno stressed each modulation with a tilt and bob of his head, and, shifting forward to the edge of his seat, he used the pedal to give each new chord emotional value. Indeed, if little Hanno achieved any effect at all – even if it was limited only to himself – it was less a matter of sentiment than of sensitivity. By retarding or heavily accenting some very simple harmonic maneuver, he gave it a higher, mysterious, precious meaning. Raising his eyebrows, rocking or lifting his body, he would suddenly introduce a faintly echoing tone-color to some new chord, harmonic device, or attack, lending it a surprising nervous energy. And now came the ending, Hanno's beloved finale, which was to add the final simple, sublime touch to the whole composition. Wrapped in the sparkling, bubbling runs of the violin, which rang out with gentle, bell-like purity, he struck the E-minor chord *tremolo pianissimo*. It grew, broadened, swelled slowly, very sharply, and once it was at *forte*, Hanno sounded the dissonant C sharp that would lead back to the original key; and while the Stradivarius surged

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totality? It appears to be thus in Proust, where memory has decreed that the smell of a madeleine dipped in tea should contain within it the whole of the narrator's life (Proust, *Swann's Way*, 60-65).

> and dashed sonorously around the same C sharp, he used all his strength to crescendo the dissonance to *fortissimo*. He refused to resolve the chord, withheld it from himself and his audience. What would the resolution be like, this ravishing and liberating submersion into B major? Incomparable joy, the delight of sweet rapture. Peace, bliss, heaven itself. Not yet, not yet – one moment more of delay, of unbearable tension that would make the release all the more precious. He wanted one last taste of this insistent, urgent longing, of this craving that filled his whole being, of this cramped and strained exertion of will, which at the same time refused all fulfillment and release – he knew that happiness lasts only a moment. Hanno's upper body slowly straightened up, his eyes grew large, his tightly closed lips quivered, he jerked back, drawing air in through his nose – and then that blessedness could be held back no longer. It came, swept over him, and he no longer fought it. His muscles relaxed; overwhelmed, he let his weary head sink back on his shoulders. His eyes closed, and a melancholy, almost pained smile of unutterable ecstasy played about his mouth. (494-95)

The piece emerges both from Hanno's mind as a composition and from his body as a performance. Its purposiveness is developed perhaps only in a shadowy way by the mental activity of composing, which is why Mann does not present any scenes detailing its composition; it really achieves its vitality in the performance that seems to involve Hanno's entire being. Without setting down any graspable determinate meaning ("Frau Permaneder [Tony], for example, had not the slightest idea what the whole show was about" [495]), Hanno exudes indeterminate meaning from his inner depths, using intuitively controlled nuances of bodily movements to give shape to the expression. His whole character, from his anxieties about his father to his feelings of pity for the characters of poems, is given a succinct expression in these non-representational organic convulsions of body and sound. This is how he is best able to present himself to his family; unable to tell them about his

problems, or even express who he is, Hanno gives all of himself in this two-minute performance. The apex of the performance, the finale, is a description of an orgasm, but what does it represent for the logic of the singular experience? It is the music, and his experience of performing it, exceeding itself, that is, bursting forth beyond the usual order of experience while yet drawing all that experience with it. Hanno's orgasm is a crystallization of himself and his life, a sublime and happy self-gathering as unified as Schopenhauer's transcendent will. Thus, Mann is presenting in this scene a localization of the unified will, the harmony of non-differentiation brought down to the plane of difference. Its experience does not quite require death, but only a "little death" (the french '*petite mort'* means 'orgasm').

The episode detailing a day in the life of Hanno stands out, structurally and stylistically, from the rest of the novel. Since it concerns none of the other family members, it is difficult to place the chapter temporally. It seems to take place at an indeterminable point, within a gap of about a year, between the last chapter and the next. Moreover, the sense of gliding across days, weeks, months, and years that characterizes the majority of the novel, helping us get from 1835 to 1877, is here suspended as the reader is suddenly drawn in close to the meticulously described ordinary details of Hanno's day. Furthermore, the narrative point of view is nearly Hanno's own, a style used only with Thomas in his last years, and even then not to the same degree. And finally, this chapter is peculiar insofar as its contents do not in any obvious way contribute to the story of the novel as a whole. It could easily be separated from the rest of the novel and presented as a short story. The effect of these abrupt changes in the narrative is to mark Hanno as a radical break from the line of businessmen who precede him.

Hanno's life resembles the life of Christ: In the first place, Jesus arrives at the end of an important and traceable genealogy of fathers stretching back to Abraham, but bears no son of his own. Second, the life of Jesus institutes a turning of values, the former represented by the prohibiting law of the Torah, the latter by Christ's teachings of charity and forgiveness. And third, his death comes prematurely, but signifies a new beginning for humanity. Similarly, Hanno devolves from an important line of fathers stretching back to the early modern period; he embodies the rejection of business values for the sake of aesthetic sensitivity; and he dies at an early age, but inspires a hopeful sentiment in the final chapter. The life of Christ constitutes a turning of spiritual life, just as Hanno signifies a possible turning of history. As a turning, Christ's value could not come from his forbears, just as it could not come from the uncertain future. Rather, his value is borne by everyday banal episodes of his life turned miraculous (the humble birth in a manger, the multiplication of fish, the Last Supper, etc.). So too, Hanno's life, as a hinge between what has come before and what will come after, is both separate from the past and future and yet deeply important to them. His value, too, comes from everyday moments that radiate value out of their own intrinsic meaning.

The basic story of the chapter is as follows: Hanno, after having gone to see a performance of Wagner's *Lohengrin* with his mother the night previous, wakes up early with the intention of doing his homework, which he had been putting off all weekend, before he has to get ready for school. The morning is cold, and he has only slept a few hours, so he decides to sleep a few more minutes. By the time he manages to wake up, it is too late to do his homework. He gets to school a little late but is able to sneak into his classroom while the rest of the school is in the gymnasium reciting morning prayers. Hanno's fear is that if he

gets called on during any of his classes, and the teacher discovers he has not done his work, then he will receive the last demerit he needs to hold him back a semester. He makes it through Bible studies and Latin, but then in English class, where he least expects a problem on account of the teacher being weak and manipulable, the school's director takes over and eventually calls on Hanno to translate a passage from Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe*, which, of course, he is unable to do, and so receives a demerit. Afterward, Hanno's best friend, Kai, lectures Hanno about the meaninglessness and arbitrariness of the institutional system of education. Hanno replies that being sheltered by the strict school system is better than being left to figure things out for oneself. At the end of the day comes art class, during which Hanno is allowed to quietly work on his music. Hanno then goes home where he eats dinner, improvises music, eats supper, plays chess, and finally retires to his room to play the harmonium in his mind, putting off his homework once again until the next morning.

There is nothing extraordinary about this day: nearly everyone has felt the unbearable fear of being caught not having done a homework assignment. The educational institution is the first institution in the course of a typical life to control the life and emotions of the modern individual.[49] What is extraordinary is the preservation, whether in the form of a

49. Foucault discusses the development of the modern elementary school system in the eighteenth century: "The organization of a serial space was one of the great technical mutations of elementary education. It made it possible to supersede the traditional system (a pupil working for a few minutes with the master, while the rest of the heterogeneous group remained idle and unattended). By assigning individual places it made possible the supervision of each individual and the simultaneous work of all. It organized a new economy of the time of apprenticeship. It made the educational space function like a learning machine, but also as a machine for supervising, hierarchizing, rewarding." In addition to this, education was becoming increasingly geared toward preparing the individual for a

memory or a chapter in a novel, of the inner subjective expression that responds to the objective institution. The function of education, from Hanno's point of view, is to stifle subjective freedom: he is unable to just see an opera without having to sneak around all next day, pretending to have done his homework, and, moreover, he feels compelled to accept this tyrannical authority as the truth of his existence. That his freedom nevertheless persists, just by way of the articulation of his perspective, whether this be his stream of consciousness, his conversations with Kai, or his musical compositions, or his improvisations on the harmonium—this is an extraordinary thing in light of the heavy institutional pressures exerted on his subjectivity. A non-singular experience, that is, one which is forgettable, replaceable, identical or comparable to others, would be an experience of which the elements are almost entirely governed by an institutional logic, whether this be of education, society, or the economy. Such an experience would take place when habit falls in line with the forms of the institution, so that one's actions and thoughts are scarcely distinguishable from those of another in the same situation. Perhaps an experience becomes singular when the subject is able to draw from within a resistance to institutional norms, whether this be as action, expression, or thought. The elements of the experience would then no longer be confined to a rigid institutional structure, but would exude a significance that transcends the structure, a significance that indicates possibilities beyond norms. The

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useful position in society: "Now, at the beginning of the Revolution, the end laid down for primary education was to be, among other things, to 'fortify', to 'develop the body', to prepare the child 'for a future in some mechanical work', to give him 'an observant eye, a sure hand and prompt habits' …. The disciplines function increasingly as techniques for making useful individuals" (Foucault, *Discipline and Punish*, 147, 210-11).

idea of institutional resistance, at any rate, comes up explicitly during Hanno's conversation with Kai. "You see, here is a door," Kai explains to Hanno, "a courtyard door, it is open, beyond it lies the street. What would happen if we were to step out there and stroll up and down the sidewalk for a while? It's still recess; we have another six minutes, and we could be back in time. But the fact is: it's impossible. Do you understand? Here is the door, it is open, there are no bars, no barriers, nothing – just a threshold. And nevertheless it is impossible, the very idea of leaving for just one second is impossible. Well, let's disregard that and take another example. It would be quite absurd to say, if asked the time, that it is now about eleven-thirty. No, it is time for geography. That's reality. But now my question, for one and all, is: Is this life? With everything totally warped out of shape. Oh, good God, if only the institution would release us from its loving embrace" (714-15). Kai is making a remarkable point about the nature of limits: they have, on one hand, a sturdy reality within their institutional contexts, and have a power that is more than illusory to keep one on one side of them; but, on the other hand, from the point of view of "life" itself, which is not reducible to any institution, but is rather the infinity of possibility, these limits open onto new horizons if one is just daring enough, experimental enough, to cross them.[50] Indeed, these new

50. "The attempt is made here to conceive of life as something that constantly reaches beyond the bounds of its beyond and which finds its essence in this reaching beyond. It is an attempt to find the definition of life in general in this transcendence, to retain firmly the consistency of its individual form, to be sure, but only in order that it may be broken through by the continuous process" Simmel, *The View of Life*, 17). Simmel draws on Nietzsche's concept of life: "What is life?—Life—that is: continually shedding something that wants to die; Life—that is: being cruel and inexorable against anything that is growing weak and old in us, and not just in us. Life—therefore means: being devoid of respect for the dying, the wretched, the aged? Always being a murderer?" (Nietzsche, *Gay Science*,

horizons may delimit new institutions, just as "eleven-thirty" is only another institutional way of describing the time, and just as strolling along the sidewalk is just another institutionalized activity, but the point is not that one can escape from institutionality itself; rather, the point is that every subject is capable of transcending the limits of any particular institution. But for Hanno, if there were no school, then he would have to deal with a worse way of life, namely, the void of purpose he feels in relation to the expectations of his family and of society. "Right, and then what?" he responds to Kai. "No, forget it, Kai, it would be the same then, too. What would you do? We live a sheltered life here at least. Since my father died, Herr Stephan Kistenmaker and Pastor Pringsheim have taken on the job of asking me every day what I want to be. I don't know. I don't have an answer for them. I can't be anything. I'm afraid of the whole idea. … I'll never amount to anything, you can be sure of that. I've heard that, during a confirmation class recently, Pastor Pringsheim said that they might as well give

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50). Simmel's 'reaching beyond' echoes Nietzsche's image of shedding off dead skin. Indeed, Nietzsche's characterization of the process of limit-crossing seems to require more courage from the subject: "From this morbid isolation, from the desert of these years of temptation and experiment, it is still a long road to that tremendous overflowing certainty and health which may not dispense even with wickedness, as a means and fish-hook of knowledge, to that mature freedom of spirit which is equally self-mastery and discipline of the heart and permits access to many and contradictory modes of thought—to that inner spaciousness and indulgence of superabundance which excludes the danger that the spirit may even on its own road perhaps lose itself and become infatuated and remain seated intoxicated in some corner or other, to that superfluity of formative, curative, moulding and restorative forces which is precisely the sign of great health, that superfluity which grants to the free spirit the dangerous privilege of living experimentally and of being allowed to offer itself to adventure: the master's privilege of the free spirit!" (Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 8).

up on me, that I came from a degenerate family" (715). When held up to the network of purposes, the chain of means and ends, of which the social world is comprised, Hanno appears to be a nonentity, a wizened bud sprung from a now dead tree. He is like the opposite of Hegel's acorn, which contains within itself the whole folded-up structure of the dialectic.[51] Hanno is the failure of the teleological dialectic.

And yet, despite this, Mann gives more attention to the quality of Hanno's experience than he gives to any other character. Hanno's experience is not valuable in relation to the development of his family, nor in relation to the normative grid of society, but his experience is invaluable from the perspective of life and freedom. When Hanno returns home from school, and goes upstairs to improvise on his harmonium, he negates the imposition of the institutional world that has swallowed up his family and rejected him. He negates this world by positing a new world, the improvised piece in which he appears to live a whole life in a brief moment.

> He introduced a very simple theme, nothing really, a fragment of a nonexistent melody, a figure of a bar and a half; he first let it ring out in the bass, with a power one would not have expected of him, and it sounded like a chorus of trombones, imperiously announcing some fundamental principle, an opening onto what was yet to come – and with no clear indication of what it really meant. But when he repeated and harmonized it high in the treble, in tone colors like frosted silver, its essence was revealed to be a simple resolution, a yearning, painful descent from key to another – a short-winded, paltry invention, which gained its strange, mysterious, momentous quality from the pretentious, resolute solemnity of its definition and presentation. And now followed agitated runs, a restless, syncopated coming

51. Hegel, *Phenomenology of Spirit*, 7.

> and going, a searching and wandering, rent by shrieks, like a soul tormented by sounds that will not ebb into silence, but only repeat themselves in new harmonies, new questions and laments, new desires, demands, and promises. … What was happening? What was he feeling? Was this his way of overcoming dreadful obstacles? Was he slaying dragons, scaling mountains, swimming great rivers, walking through fire? … And it came, it could not be held back any longer, the convulsions of desire could not be prolonged; it came – like curtains ripping open, doors flinging wide, thorny hedges sundering, walls of flame collapsing. … (719-21)

The full passage is three pages long, detailing all the various motions of the improvisation. It is basically a more intense and elaborate version of the scene in which Hanno performs for his family. Mann concludes Hanno's day with this passage as if to say that the improvisation is an image of the day itself. The various motions of his soul, as he bows to and resists the structure of the educational institution, are repeated in miniature by the musical improvisation, which also contains both concessions and resistances to the structural laws of musical harmony. The experience of playing the improvisation is itself the climactic conclusion to Hanno's eventful day. And the day, taken as a whole, is no less organic, no less rich and potent, and no less intrinsically valuable, than the musical piece itself. Hanno's day is a crystallization of his life, of the life of his family, and of the nineteenth century itself. It is a humble dramatization of the tension between institutional determinism and the freedom of life. This freedom is expressed earlier by Morten while he looks out at the sea with Tony: "'Why, yes, freedom, you know, freedom,' he repeated gesturing somewhat awkwardly but enthusiastically toward the sea – not in the direction where the coast of Mecklenburg hemmed in the bay, but to the open water, where ruffling bands of green, blue, yellow, and

gray grew thinner and thinner, extending as far as the eye could see toward the grand blur of the horizon" (137). It is the same freedom expressed by Thomas, when later he too gazes at the sea: "Broad the waves … ah, see them surging, watch them breaking, ever surging, ever breaking, on they come in endless rows, bleak and pointless, filled with woes. And yet there's something calming and comforting about them, too – like all things simple and necessary" (648). Morten looks to the infinite limit of the horizon, the openness of possibility, while Thomas looks to the eternity of the repetition of the waves, the form and the content of freedom respectively.[52] These two aspects of freedom are brought together in the meaning of Hanno's day: freedom is the reckless voyage to the horizon, the edge of the world, that boldly carries on despite the awareness that there will only ever be more waves.

The following chapter is a kind of epilogue: a highly clinical and objective description of the fatal course of typhoid. Hanno's name is never mentioned, but we of course know

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52. For Simmel, the life of the will can be seen as two aspects: as undivided whole and as particular acts. For the latter to be imaginable under the condition of the former, Simmel evokes the image of a wavy sea: "The act is one, because life rises out of itself to a certain intensity of will and application of power, sharpening to a crest with which it projects above its leveled, unpunctuated gliding through the course of the day." Freedom, he argues, is the ability to be wholly one thing at one time and wholly another at a different time, for instance, wholly good now and wholly evil later, on account of the fact that each differentiated act represents the whole, in the same way that, also for Simmel, the adventure, no matter what the content, represents the whole of life. "That this possibility of life, to be really entirely good or really entirely bad, exists; that we are not inwardly divided into layers of different ethical-metaphysical depths of being so that the one act falls unalterably into the fundamental, the other into the superficial—this is human freedom" (Simmel, *The View of Life*, 112, 133).

that the cold objectivity conceals his own experience. The style is directly opposite to that of the previous chapter, and it thereby demonstrates the meaninglessness of Hanno's death taken as a determinate event. Hanno will not return to the unity of Schopenhauer's will following the event of his death, because he has already lived that unity in his poetic way of life. Through his poetic sensitivity and prayerful dreams, as well as through his musical improvisations, Hanno has lived along the axis that rises above the serial orderliness of institutional life. He has done so not through any special philosophical insight, but rather through the practice of affirming the transcendence of limits. While Hanno denies this possibility in his dialogue with Kai, he unwittingly affirms it in his prayers and in his music. This affirmation is repeated by a background character at the very end of the novel. Tony is lamenting the deaths of her family members, including Hanno, the most recent:

> "Hanno, little Hanno," Frau Permaneder went on, and the tears ran down those downy cheeks that had lost their glow. "Tom, Father, Grandfather, and all the others. Where have they all gone? We shall see them no more. Oh, how hard and sat it all is."
>
> "We shall see them again," Friederike Buddenbrook said, folding her hands firmly in her lap; she lowered her eyes and thrust her nose in the air.
>
> "Yes, that's what they say. Oh, there are times, Friederike, when that is no comfort. God strike me, but sometimes I doubt there is any justice, any goodness, I doubt it all. Life, you see, crushes things deep inside us, it shatters our faith. See them again – if only it were so."
>
> (730)

Tony, who has only ever really known the superficial life inherited from her family, perhaps felt the axis of freedom during her summer with Morten, but it has been forgotten, and life seems to her nothing but a dead end, sending loved ones into an oblivion. But Sesame Weichbrodt, the now very old teacher of Tony in her youth, who is present at this session of mourning, suddenly speaks up:

> But then Sesame Weichbrodt raised herself up to the table, as high as she could. She stood on her tiptoes, craned her neck, rapped on the tabletop – and her bonnet quivered on her head.
>
> "*It is so!*" she said with all her strength and dared them with her eyes.
>
> There she stood, victorious in the good fight that she had waged all her life against the onslaughts of reason. There she stood, hunchbacked and tiny, trembling with certainty – an inspired, scolding little prophet.
>
> (730-31)

Weichbrodt expresses as a religious affirmation the transcendence that Hanno affirmed in his prayers and musical practice. Faith, for Mann, seems to be less about believing in God, and more about living life as though it were a persistent question, treating limits as openings onto new adventures, and encountering the other beyond their utility. Weichbrodt demonstrates that this faith is not a matter of measurable or calculable knowledge, not a matter of pure reason. Faith is reached by daring to look past the horizon.

4 Charles Dickens's *Sensus Communis*

Communal Interpretation

The notion of a common sense, or *sensus communis*, with which Kant concludes his analytic of taste, is anticipated by the first three moments of taste.[1] Disinterestedness, subjective universality, and purposiveness without purpose all prepare the individual subject for a sociability of aesthetic judgment. The negation of sensual interest grants the subject a distance from its object necessary to a public presentation of it. Subjective universality describes the contradictory quantity of an aesthetic judgment, a dialectical intimacy between the one and the many, or the inner and the outer, which is also the quantity of society. Finally, the indefinite purposive form of the aesthetic image lends itself to the point of view of an ever-changing and endlessly self-contradicting plural social discourse. The *sensus communis* is not a particular faculty, like the imagination or understanding, but rather an attunement to the axis of transcendence I described in the last chapter; but in this instance, rather than noticing mere transcendence of form, the common sense takes into account the multiplicity of individual subjects who populate the axis. In other words, the axis of transcendence is an axis of alterity, or a point of view that confronts an infinite difference of perspective.[2]

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1. Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 85-90.

2. I am departing from any plausible strict reading of Kant here. Kant says very little about the *sensus communis*, and what he does say points to a theory of rational consensus rather than dialogical hermeneutics. "For although the principle is only subjective, it would still be assumed as subjectively universal (an idea necessary for everyone); and so it could, like an objective principle, demand universal assent insofar as agreement among different judging persons is concerned …"(Kant,

For Kant, the philosophical need for the concept of a *sensus communis* arises from the everyday problem concerning how we communicate our aesthetic judgments when these are only inner feelings arising from an obscure process of the cognitive faculties, and, furthermore, how we may justify our tendency to believe that other individuals ought to reach the same conclusions of taste we do. The *sensus communis* is a constitutive principle inferred from the fact that we do communicate our aesthetic judgments and that we do reasonably expect others to agree with them. More than psychological egotism, the desire to socially objectivize the inner movements of the soul consists in the practical imperative bound up with the intuitive knowledge that these movements correspond to something external, that the playful figures traced by the imagination and understanding in the darkness of the subject's depths echo the patterns of the external universe, even those far beyond the limits of the physical senses.[3] But more than just an inner representation of outer

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Critique of Judgment, 89). But given that the subject arrives at an aesthetic judgment through a free play of the faculties, and given that the judgment does not represent an objective principle, I infer that the only reasonable form of a *sensus communis* would involve the transcendental possibility of communicating the judgment through open dialogue rather than a declaration that "requires everyone to assent," as Kant claims (Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 86).

3. In his analytic of the sublime, Kant argues that an experience of the sublime causes reason to see itself, that is, to see its intellectual conception of the universe as a rational totality, in sensible nature, even if this mirror image is only an illusion. "The sublime can be described thus: it is an object (of nature) the presentation of which determines the mind to think of nature's inability to attain to an exhibition of ideas. If we speak literally and consider the matter logically, ideas cannot be exhibited. But when in intuiting nature we expand our empirical power of presentation … then reason, the ability to [think] an independent and absolute totality, never fails to step in and arouse the mind to an

phenomena, taste feels, communicates, and urges a respect for these images. The particular liking that constitutes taste, the feeling for beauty, can be characterized as a respect that preserves the image in question as singular and valuable in itself.[4] Thus, the practical imperative of taste that urges assent upon others is not simply an insecure plea for agreement but rather an insistence that others join in solidarity to preserve the value of that which escapes the attention of the calculative mind. This means that the *sensus communis* is a point of access to a community of individuals who gather together in freedom to keep safe the openness of possibility, depth of meaning, and fundamental ambiguity that characterizes the aesthetic image.[5]

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effort, although a futile one, to make the presentation of the senses adequate to this [idea of] totality" (Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 127-28).

4. Kant at least thinks that respect accompanies aesthetic judgment toward the moral good, although since all judgments of taste converge in the harmony of the concepts of nature and freedom, we may infer that respect lurks behind every such judgment, even if it does not directly concern the moral good. (Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 131-32).

5. Kant does not directly say this about the *sensus communis*, but in his essay "What Is Orientation in Thinking?" which deals with the sort of thinking that, like aesthetic judgment, is unable to make use of determinate concepts, he stresses the importance of this sort of thinking taking place between the members of a community. "But how much and how accurate would we think if we did not think, so to speak, in community with others to whom we communicate our thoughts and who communicate their thoughts to us! We may therefore conclude that the same external constraint which deprives people of the freedom to communicate their thoughts in public also removes their freedom of thought, the one treasure which remains to us amidst all the burdens of civil life, and which alone offers us a means of overcoming all the evils of this condition" (Kant, "What Is Orientation in Thinking?" in *Political Writings*, 247).

Charles Dickens's novels invite a public readership to reflect on and perhaps develop a respect toward images that interpret the society which that public comprises. In this way, Dickens's novels attempt to preserve society through their images of it, not as a rigid structure, but as a malleable form vibrating with potential energies. Engaging social issues and attempting to follow them through to the limits of their contemporary possibilities, Dickens lets appear in his images extreme situations of abjection, greed, and slavery, alongside redemptive moments of joy, charity, and freedom. But the freedom that Dickens, like many other social novelists, is attempting to preserve, and asking his public to help him in preserving, is not located in those moments in the plot in which some character experiences freedom; rather, it is found in the aesthetic mode of interpretation as a whole, in the image as such. For whether he is depicting someone who has gained personal freedom or someone bound to servitude, Dickens presents each scene through a lens of potentiality in which the source of all freedom is located. The lens is nothing more and nothing less than the inspirited narrative itself, which introduces us to people, tells us about events, and shows us objects, all along the axis of the *sensus communis* in which multiple intentional perspectives intersect.[6] The narrative is like a mind, in that its presentations are given meaningfully, but it

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6. Thus, for Bakhtin, "the novel as a whole is a phenomenon multiform in style and variform in speech and voice." The individual word itself "enters a dialogically agitated and tension-filled environment of alien words, value judgments and accents, weaves in and out of complex interrelationships, merges with some, recoils from others, intersects with yet a third group …" (Bakhtin, *The Dialogic Imagination*, 261, 276). I am thinking this idea together with Simmel's idea that freedom is the realization of different, and even opposing, intentions, desires, actions, and significations through a nonetheless unified personality (Simmel, *The View of Life*, 133). The novel

is not pragmatic like the ego. The experience of reading involves a negation of our usual selfish orientation, because the contents of this experience cannot be immediately integrated into the network of our everyday practical life.[7] The chair we are told about in a particular scene in no way links up with the chair we are sitting on while reading, and we are not for a second confused about whether or not the same self who now reads could stand up and sit on that chair that Mr. Boffin just got up from. At the same time, the abandonment of pragmatic self-absorption is also not identical to that involved in conversing with another person. When we extend ourselves outward to the other, as in the Buberian I-You relationship, we do move along the axis of alterity, but not in the same way that we do while reading a novel. In speaking to another, although a concern for the self is relaxed in favor of openness to another perspective, we nevertheless remain on the continuum of everyday pragmatic reality. Reading a novel does not wholly disconnect us from this reality, but it does fully shift our mode of relation to it. In the same way that a sports game, a brief adventure, or a love affair seem to be completely detached from our lives outside them, while they yet somehow take up the contents of everyday life and present them in a meaningful order, so too the novel is related to and yet transcends life.

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expresses a multitude of discursive perspectives through an integrated form, thereby showing society to be full of contradictory potentials but not arbitrary and chaotic.

7. "There is a broad range of feelings that release no incentives toward action. These are the feelings by which artistic enjoyment is produced. Such enjoyment derives from the fact that the objects of these feelings are removed from the context of reality in which our will intervenes. Processes that otherwise would incite us to action do not disturb us in our nonvolitional attitude" (Dilthey, *The Formation of the Historical World in the Human Sciences*, 78).

The logic of fictional narrative is very unlike the logic of real life, although the two are not entirely unrelated. The former crystallizes elements of the latter that are important but that tend to scatter themselves beyond recognition. The desire, for instance, to make sense of one's own life is often thwarted by the loss of view of a general integration between the contents of that life, an integration that sinks beneath an overwhelming morass of disconnected experiences and thoughts. And yet through a faculty that may very well have found an apt description in Kant's notion of a reflective judgment of taste, the individual is occasionally able to recover a general sense of self-integration through brief experiences which, though seeming to stand apart from the usual flow of life, appear to summarize some aspect of one's life as a whole. Thus, in Simmel's interpretation, an adventurous weekend trip, though often taken for a mere playful recess from the actual seriousness of the business of living, can actually provide an experience that illuminates meaningful patterns in the usually meaningless stream of our life. Perhaps by summoning resources of ourselves that we do not often use, or by surprising us with unusual phenomena that cause us to turn back on ourselves and examine our presuppositions, or by offering experiences that are intense yet short enough to cause us to see a form which then stays, as it were, burned onto our retina, allowing us to match that form to other parts of life—in any case, an adventure often leaves a person pensive about more than what factually happened during the brief experience. A work of art can function for us in the same way, presenting us with something removed from the stream of life, and yet bringing out the larger forms of that life which passed hitherto unnoticed.[8] Our concern in this chapter is with how Dickens evokes a

8. "Here, above all, is the basis of the profound affinity between the adventurer and the artist, and also, perhaps, of the artist's attraction by adventure. For the essence of a work of art is, after all, that it cuts out a piece of the endlessly continuous sequences of perceived experiences, detaching it from

meaningfulness of social life through the aesthetic social adventure on which he takes his reader. The adventure in question does not concern merely the psychological experience of an individual, but rather an experience that transcends the individual and takes place at the dizzying level of a social concert of multiple voices and their different perspectives. Thus, the experience of reading *Our Mutual Friend*, the novel which this chapter examines, ought to teach us something not merely about ourselves, but about our social selves, and about those aspects of society that transcend the self.

The novel, then, not only engages the *sensus communis* in that it is a point of access for a community of readers to come together and preserve what the aesthetic image values in a singular way. It is also potentially a transcendent microsphere of a community, playfully and adventurously imagining the forms of social life through narrative, echoing back to the readers' social lives a new understanding of what it means to belong to a community. The *sensus communis* would not only name our ability to share aesthetic judgments, but also to receive from art new configurations of sociality. This addition marks the departure from Kantian aesthetics that Dickens makes. In Kant, the *sensus communis* allows individuals to potentially share an agreement concerning the contentless form of a beautiful object, because the faculties of imagination and understanding, and their mode of interaction, are presumably identical in each rational subject.[9] But novels, the formal aspects of which are

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all connections with one side or the other, giving it a self-sufficient form as though defined and held together by an inner core. A part of existence, interwoven with the uninterruptedness of that existence, yet nevertheless felt as a whole, as an integrated unit—this is the form common to both the work of art and the adventure" (Simmel, "The Adventure" in *Simmel on Culture*, 223).

9. In judgments of taste, we abstract from ourselves the formal structure of the faculties, and we abstract from the aesthetic object its own form, in order to presume necessary agreement among all

not separable from their content, offer another kind of formal distance suitable for intersubjective interpretive practices. Rather than presenting merely formal configurations that apply to no content in particular, novels lift up the content of ordinary life to a detached sphere that is not quite abstract and not quite concrete. This is the realm of adventure in which a logic of unexpectedness rules. Contents are no longer bound to the technical and practical requirements of everyday business, but instead shimmer with the potential of an imminent transformation. This realm is where people are able to come together and partake in mutual understanding, because selfish or technical interest, monologism or naive universalism, and determinate purposefulness all give way to the freedom of thinking that potentially binds us together.

Contingent Associations

The social content from which Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend* draws its material is pervaded by the laws of a concrete money economy. The people of this world give up their value, meaning, energy, and existence in exchange for either the ability to afford basic physiological necessities or the greedy accumulation of abstract power. Whether poor or rich, Dickens's characters often give up something essential when they receive money. Buyer and seller each suffer from the loss of meaning in their fading bond to one another. The more society takes

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others. "We compare our judgment not so much with the actual as rather with the merely possible judgments of others, and [thus] put ourselves in the position of everyone else, merely by abstracting from the limitations that [may] happen to attach to our own judging; and this in turn we accomplish by leaving out as much as possible whatever is matter, i.e., sensation, in the presentational state, and by paying attention solely to the formal features of our presentation or of our presentational state" (Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 160).

care of its needs and desires through the medium of money, the weaker its structure of meaning becomes. This is precisely because money does not consist of meaningful relationships between the people and things that it ties together. Money does not show us why one thing is exchangeable for another, nor does it reveal any eternally valuable insight about the relationship between two individuals who have come together to do business. The relations that money draws between persons and things are entirely accidental and empty.[10] Aesthetic judgment, on the other hand, suggests a kind of felt necessity in the relations it forges. This is the necessity that the judgment of taste urges others to assent to through the *sensus communis*: not a logical or physical necessity, but rather a feeling that because a given

10. One of Simmel's main arguments is that while the money economy has dissolved the feudal structure of inescapable bonds, indentures, apprenticeships, guild memberships, etc., our liberation has come at the cost of losing many of the rich, timeless, and sure meanings that must have attended that system. "Since so many objects continuously detached by money lose their direction-giving significance for us, there develops a practical reaction to the change in our relationship to them. If that insecurity and disloyalty in relation to specific possessions which is part of the money economy has to be paid for by the very modern feeling that the hoped for satisfaction that is connected with new acquisitions immediately grows beyond them, that the core and meaning of life always slips through one's hand, then this testifies to a deep yearning to give things a new importance, a deeper meaning, a value of their own. They have been worn away by the easy gain and loss of possessions, by the transitoriness of their existence, their enjoyability and their change. In short, the consequences and correlations of money have made them void and indifferent" (Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, 407).

relation is singular (unique, non-exchangeable, inexhaustible), then imagining or willing its non-existence is to violate the sanctity of its value.[11]

And yet Dickens is not exactly hostile to money, as though it were a force that did not belong in the universe and ought to be removed. Money represents, in Dickens, a fundamental force of the modern phenomenal world. Money functions, as I have just mentioned, as a relation of accident. It brings persons and things together for no meaningful reason, but through a force as chaotic, from the perspective of subjective feeling, as the interactions of subatomic particles. Taste would not be the creative force it is were there not opposed to it this force of accident.[12] Aesthetic judgment, or the broader faculty of

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11. "A propensity to wanton destruction of what is beautiful in inanimate nature (spiritus destructionis) is opposed to man's duty to himself; for it weakens or uproots that feeling in man which, though not of itself moral, is still a disposition of sensibility that greatly promotes morality or at least prepares the way for it: the disposition, namely, to love something (e.g. beautiful crystal formations, the indescribable beauty of plants) even apart from any intention to use it" (Kant, *Metaphysics of Morals*, 237).

12. Baudelaire claims that contingency and necessity are both equally important to modern art. "By 'modernity' I mean the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent, the half of art whose other half is the eternal and the immutable" (Baudelaire, "The Painter of Modern Life" in *The Painter of Modern Life and Other Essays*, 13). In Poe's "The Man of the Crowd," the chaos of the crowd and the wild play of the light from the gas-lamps are conditions of the narrator's being able to read meaning out of the scene. "The wild effects of the light enchained me to an examination of individual faces; and although the rapidity with which the world of light flitted before the window, prevented me from casting more than a glance upon each visage, still it seemed that, in my then peculiar mental state, I could frequently read, even in that brief interval of a glance, the history of long years" (Poe, "The Man of the Crowd" in *Poetry and Tales*, 392). Similarly, the historical, aesthetic, or hermeneutic

interpretation, selects, weaves, and discovers narrative connections out of a heap of otherwise silent material. Contingency appears to be the law of the world, not only prior to our interpretive intervention, but even persisting through and beyond that intervention. The historical narrative or the work of art struggles to hold its elements together lest they fall back into their accidental relations. This is the condition of the eternal value of singular aesthetic productions: their eternity is haunted by death, by the collapse into contingency. To be sure, there is a truthful and real aspect to interpretive constructions, since they constitute the only visible reality we know and are able to arrive at agreements about; but hidden, and yet intuitively known, behind these constructions is an always threatening void.[13] Beneath the constant chatter, everyday routines, cultural developments, scientific feats, and all the rest of the activity that constitutes the bustle of human society, is the silence of absolute destruction, the uncanniness of death, the stillness of a meaningless universe. This silence not only lies *beneath* human activity, as though the latter had conquered the former, but it also rises up through the human world as an annihilating vapor. Our words are meaningful, but they are also meaningless; our constructions have permanent value, but they will also be

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method that Walter Benjamin outlines in the Arcades Project places chance at its foundation. "Comparison of other people's attempts to the undertaking of a sea voyage in which the ships are drawn off course by the magnetic North Pole. Discover this North Pole. What for others are deviations are, for me, the data which determine my course.—On the differentials of time (which, for others, disturb the main lines of the inquiry), I base my reckoning" (Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 456).

13. Badiou means something close to this in his thinking of the void. Inconsistency would be the lack of integration that I am calling contingency. "The proper mode in which inconsistency wanders within the whole of a situation is the nothing, and the mode in which it un-presents itself is that of subtraction from the count, the non-one, the void" (Badiou, *Being and Event*, 58).

gone and forgotten one day; our minds are unique souls of infinite depth, but they are also droning brain matter. Money, itself a cultural construct of human activity, does not merely symbolically represent this notion of the—often invisible—contingency that rules the universe, but it acts as an effective outlet for the very real force of contingency. In the same way that the body and its decay are a portal through which contingency is able to pull our attempts to lead meaningful lives into its void, so too money busies itself with the task of burning the bridges of qualitative relations and constructing an endless network of empty technical connections.

J. Hillis Miller, in his phenomenological study of Dickens, *Charles Dickens: The World of His Novels*, argues that money, in *Our Mutual Friend*, is the symbol of the total humanization of the world, that is, the eradication of the mystery of transcendence.

> Money, the ascription of nominal value to what has no value in itself, is the central symbol in *Our Mutual Friend* of the successful humanization of the world. … Other people are immediately comprehensible as worth so much money, and a man is his own bank account, or what he can sell himself for. Dominated by the universality of money, the world becomes transparent, without mystery or depth. It becomes a vast system of interchanges of coin for coin, the same for the same, in which, in the end, individualized persons and objects no longer exist, only the monetary simulacra which make them all equivalent or reduced to common measure." (Miller, *Charles Dickens*, 294-5)

The recovery of mystery is what, for Miller, constitutes the redemptive moment toward the end of the novel, when Bella Wilfer realizes that the transparency of money is false and that the true world is never fully comprehensible.

> Bella must be brought to see that her acceptance of 'money, money, money,' as the only goal of her life, has been acceptance of what is illusory and empty. She is brought to see this by being introduced into an altogether false and deceptive world, a world in which the good Mr. Boffin is apparently transformed into a miser, and in which nothing is what it seems. She must be brought through this experience to accept John Harmon for what he is in himself without any reference to his place in society, and she must accept without question all that is equivocal and inexplicable about her husband. The climax of this experience is a recognition of the strangeness and mystery of the world around her." (Miller, *Charles Dickens*, 326)

My own argument in this chapter will in many ways take off from this basic insight of Miller, that money and mystery stand somehow opposed to one another, just as I have argued throughout the previous chapters that the precision of money and the ambiguity of aesthetic experience are at odds with one another. However, I take issue with Miller on some points, and want to follow certain paths that he suggests but does not pursue himself. In the first place, it seems to me that money is better understood apart from a language of "humanization," since, while money is historically the product of human intellect and labor, it equally appears as an independent system with its own logic, which is often alien to the logic of unabridged human thought. Second, although I have suggested, like Miller, that money strives toward a certain clarification of relations between persons and things, I want to add in this chapter that money also creates a perplexing tangle of relations. Even while it reduces the ambiguity of any given person, thing, or relation, money, on the whole, effects a new confusion in the senseless and knotty mass of relative means and ends. Third, I want to follow up on Miller's implied suggestion that the deceptiveness of the world in which Bella finds herself is a result of the money economy, but that an awareness of deception leads Bella, along with other characters, to appreciate the complexity and ambiguity inherent in

social relations. The deceptiveness of money is related to the ambiguity of human relations. An individual may be confused with another, owing to the homogenizing and formalizing function of money, but this confusion points to a deeper truth, which is that human society, considered apart from money, already lends itself to such confusion. I will, then, consider money not as a humanization of the world, but as a force of contingency that mixes up relations in all sorts of unexpected and puzzling ways. In turn, I will argue, this tangle of accidental relations offers to adventurous interpreters an opportunity to make of this meaningless chaos a meaningful order.

The central plot of *Our Mutual Friend* runs as follows. John Harmon, a man returning home to lay claim to his deceased father's fortune, has been murdered. The body is found in the Thames by Gaffer Hexam, a waterside man, and his daughter Lizzie. A strange man calling himself Julius Handford shows up to identify Harmon's body, but then quickly disappears. The fortune descends to Mr. and Mrs. Boffin, former servants of Harmon's father. Feeling undeserving of their inheritance, the Boffins invite Bella Wilfer—a young woman whom John Harmon was to marry as a condition for receiving the inheritance—to live with them in their newly acquired estate and share in the fortune which would have belonged in part to her. Mr. Boffin hires two men: Silas Wegg, who is to read to the illiterate Boffin in the evenings and thereby help him to improve his intellect; and John Rokesmith, a secretary to help Boffin manage his money. Rokesmith, the narrator reveals to us at a relatively early point in the novel, is in fact John Harmon. One of his shipmates had drugged Harmon and stolen his clothes, only to be soon after killed by thieves. It was this shipmate whose body had turned up, wearing Harmon's clothes, in the river. Harmon, upon waking up, decided to take advantage of the situation by disguising himself as Rokesmith in order to observe Bella Wilfer before agreeing to marry her. Harmon does fall in love with Bella, but

the latter, obsessed with money and status, rejects the poor secretary. Boffin, in the meantime, appears to have grown increasingly greedy and mean-spirited, owing, it seems, to the influence of biographies of misers Wegg has been reading to him. Boffin begins to treat Rokesmith badly, and Bella, always a witness to these scenes, becomes dismayed at the terrible change in personality of this man who was once kind and gentle. She begins to hate Boffin and feel sorry for Rokesmith, eventually coming to feel a strong affection for the latter. When Boffin, having learned of Rokesmith's earlier confession of love toward Bella, threatens to dismiss the secretary, Bella resolves to leave the Boffins's home and marry Rokesmith. Meanwhile, Wegg—who has been set up in the Boffins's former residence, which was also a property of the elder Harmon on which he stored his dust heaps, the sifting of dust for valuable material having been the Harmon business—Wegg begins to scour the property, including the dust heaps, for treasure, which, also owing to the influence of the misers' biographies, he has come to believe the old Harmon hid somewhere. Wegg finds a will, dated later than the one executed, which excludes both the Boffins and the son from the vast portion of the money and property, leaving it instead to the Crown. Wegg decides to blackmail Boffin. John Harmon, still disguised as Rokesmith, and Bella, in the meantime, are happily living their married life, until the lawyer, Mortimer Lightwood, who was present when Harmon, under the alias of Julius Handford, had identified the body, runs into Rokesmith on the street and recognizes him as Handford. Lightwood sends the police to pay a visit to Rokesmith, who is then forced to explain the whole thing in front of Bella. He then takes Bella back to the Boffins in order to reveal a further surprise: the Boffins were in on it nearly the whole time. Realizing early on that he was not who he said he was, Mrs. Boffin, along with Mr. Boffin, decided to help Harmon win the heart of Bella. Knowing that Bella was overly greedy, Mr. Boffin schemed to pretend to become a miser, in order to

demonstrate to Bella the follies of greed and turn her affections toward the good-hearted Harmon. Wegg, who arrives on this scene, interjects that none of them are entitled to anything on account of the latest will, but Boffin reveals that he is in possession of an even later will, one which leaves the entirety of the fortune to the Boffins. Boffin, however, tells Bella and John that, because they truly deserve it, he is going to give the whole fortune to them.

Besides this main plot, there are three or four loosely connected subplots, quite extensive in themselves. I will also refer to these subplots and to characters from them, because thematically they are of extraordinary importance. I wanted, however, to outline the main plot because it demonstrates the backbone of the book's social logic by which individuals are impersonally brought together by money, are subsequently embroiled in a chaos of mistaken identities, but are finally able to reconfigure the meaningless chaos of their contingent organization into a moral order of relations between essentially ambiguous and dynamic personalities. Harmon, Bella, the Boffins, Wegg, and many others, are brought together by the legal mechanism of a will. The author of the will has died prior to the start of the novel. No one speaks for the document; it is a mute force which effects involvement among those who would otherwise be unconcerned with one another. The will, of course, represents money, and no one would be susceptible to its force of involvement if it did not. No matter the personality, whether avaricious, as Bella and Wegg are, or modest, as Harmon and Boffin are, each person summoned by the will, directly or indirectly, pays heed to its universal call. No one can be entirely uninterested in money, as Dickens demonstrated in *Bleak House* through the child-like Harold Skimpole who claims to have no interest in or even knowledge of money but sponges off others at every turn. The concern for money is universal, but it is not innate, which is why some, like Skimpole, may be subjectively

uninterested but objectively dependent on it.[14] There is probably no inborn desire for money, but rather society forms the individual to respond to money favorably.[15] Because the individual response toward money is formal—i.e., represents a function of the social structure rather than a qualitatively unique impulse of the personality—social groups assembled by force of monetary interest can consist of the most varied types of person. Urban centers are perhaps the most obvious example of this phenomenon:[16] cities are, in

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14. Harold Skimpole "had no idea of money. In consequence of which he never kept an appointment, never could transact any business, and never knew the value of anything! Well! So he had got on in life, and here he was! He was very fond of reading the papers, very fond of making fancy-sketches with a pencil, very fond of nature, very fond of art. All he asked of society was to let him live. THAT wasn't much. His wants were few. Give him the papers, conversation, music, mutton, coffee, landscape, fruit in the season, a few sheets of Bristol-board, and a little claret, and he asked no more. He was a mere child in the world, but he didn't cry for the moon. He said to the world, 'Go your several ways in peace! Wear red coats, blue coats, lawn sleeves; put pens behind your ears, wear aprons; go after glory, holiness, commerce, trade, any object you prefer; only—let Harold Skimpole live!'" Nevertheless, Skimpole is in debt and his friends generously offer to give him the money he needs. Skimpole gladly accepts it, despite his having no idea of money (Dickens, *Bleak House*, 82, 90).

15. Money may, however, latch on to certain basic psychological complexes. See, for example, Freud, *From the History of an Infantile Neurosis*, 72ff.

16. "There are a large number of occupations in modern cities, such as certain categories of general and trading agents and all those indeterminate forms of livelihood in large cities, which do not have any objective form and decisiveness of activity. For such people, economic life, the web of their teleological series, has no definite content for them except making money" (Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, 437).

essence, concentrated nexuses of the circulation of money. People flock to them in order to participate in a livelihood energized by the precision, formality, and absolute power of money, escaping from lives led slowly and dimly through a labor dependent on the arability of land. Anyone, it seems, can go to the city to stake out their fortune, and the result is a mass of variegated individuals, from different classes and temperaments, bound together by their common sense for the value and importance of money. Indeed, this particular *sensus communis* binds persons, considered as wholes, together by accident only; the reason for their assembly is to pursue money, which constitutes the object of their calculative faculties but not necessarily of their more personal intentions.[17] Just as the passengers on a subway train avoid each other's glances, so too the shareholders of a joint stock company each seek their own interest with only as much regard for others as will benefit themselves. Such association, from a moral perspective rather than a financial perspective, is contingent and chaotic.

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17. "Money not only renders the relations of the individuals to the group as a whole more independent, but also makes the content of that particular association and the relationship of its members to it undergo a completely new process of differentiation. … The money economy has made possible innumerable associations that either only take money contributions from their members or tend to pursue merely monetary interests. … This is particularly true of the joint stock company whose shareholders are united solely in their interest in the dividends, to such an extent that they do not even care what the company produces. The objective lack of connections between the subject and the object in which the individual has a merely monetary interest is reflected in his personal lack of connection with other human subjects with whom he shares only money interests" (Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, 345).

The social gatherings organized by the Veneerings, a somewhat peripheral pair of characters in *Our Mutual Friend*, exemplify this sort of indifferent society. Governed by a technical practicality toward socio-economic ends, the life of Mr. and Mrs. Veneering is bereft of qualitative depth. As their name suggests, their existence is a veneer of integrity, thinly concealing a lack of real wealth, power, or respect. The material life of the Veneerings is straight off the assembly line; it has roots in neither an aristocratic nor an industrial family. Everything is "bran-new" but of the sort that, because it must vanish before long, can never become old.

> Mr. and Mrs. Veneering were bran-new people in a bran-new house in a bran-new quarter of London. Everything about the Veneerings was spick and span new. All their furniture was new, all their friends were new, all their servants were new, their plate was new, their carriage was new, their harness was new, their horses were new, their pictures were new, they themselves were new, they were as newly married as was lawfully compatible with their having a bran-new baby, and if they had set up a great-grandfather, he would have come home in matting from the Pantechnicon, without a scratch upon him, French-polished to the crown of his head.
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> For, in the Veneering establishment, from the hall-chairs with the new coat of arms, to the grand pianoforte with the new action, and up-stairs again to the new fire-escape, all things were in a state of high varnish and polish. And what was observable in the furniture, was observable in the Veneerings—the surface smelt a little too much of the workshop and was a trifle sticky. (Dickens, *Our Mutual Friend*, 6)

The new in question here opposes itself not to the old that it will one day be, but rather it opposes itself to a whole system of material life belonging to bygone days. The solid thing of

tried and tested use, or full of slowly accumulated sentimental value, gives way to a blur of commodities rushing out of the factories, through bourgeois homes, and then straight to the Benjaminian refuse heap of history.[18] As Dickens points out, this systemic newness affects not only lifeless objects, but the owners of those objects as well. The Veneerings themselves become bran-new, since they define themselves through their possessions; but they therefore are also committed to the same short life-span. There is an understanding throughout the

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18. The new, for Benjamin, constitutes a state of eternal return in which each returning 'same' also claims to be the newest thing. This commodified present seems to ward off death, but in fact is death itself, since the truly new, that which could welcome a new interpretation, has become impossible. It is perhaps for this reason that the news of an actual death proves so interesting to the members of the Veneerings' party. They see their own condition reflected in it and they listen with horrified fascination. "The singular debasement of things through their signification … corresponds to the singular debasement of things through their price as commodities. This degradation, to which things are subject because they can be taxed as commodities, is counterbalanced … by the inestimable value of novelty. *La nouveauté* represents that absolute which is no longer accessible to any interpretation or comparison. … The final voyage of the *flâneur*: death. Its destination: the new. Newness is a quality independent of the use value of the commodity." "To grasp the significance of *nouveauté*, it is necessary to go back to novelty in everyday life. Why does everyone share the newest thing with someone else? Presumably, in order to triumph over the dead. This only where there is nothing really new." "The 'modern,' the time of hell. The punishments of hell are always the newest thing going in this domain. What is at issue is not that 'the same thing happens over and over,' and even less would it be a question here of eternal return. It is rather that precisely in that which is newest the face of the world never alters, that this newest remains, in every respect, the same.—This constitutes the eternity of hell. To determine the totality of traits by which the 'modern' is defined would be to represent hell" (Benjamin, *Arcades Project*, 22, 112, 544).

novel that the Veneerings will imminently be nobodies. The "bran-new," then, opposes itself to a system of life poorer in abstract money but richer in memorial relations. It is the increased reliance on the constant circulation of money that renders necessary the artificially high value of newness as such.

If this capitalist requirement were limited to the sphere of things, then no inner conflict would ever arise in the subject, but only perhaps an external fatigue. The individual, however, is not merely externally related to the things he gathers around himself, but is internally related to them as well: that which is not sensible in the object, but which constitutes the meaning of its existence, namely, the mode of production that led up to the final product, is reciprocally coordinated to that which is not sensible in the human being, but which constitutes the meaning of his or her existence, namely, the configuration of the soul.[19] Thus, the owners of commodities—the essence of which are to be new and to give

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19. For Lukács, modern consciousness is infected by the reification of commodities through the workplace and other capitalist mechanisms that dominate both the material thing and the subject. Thus, even our perception is affected by the logic of the commodity. "The more deeply reification penetrates into the soul of the man who sells his achievement as a commodity the more deceptive appearances are (as in the case of journalism)." Even the exchange process itself has its effect on consciousness. "Thus the subject of the exchange is just as abstract, formal and reified as its object." It is especially through rationalized work methods that consciousness is really transformed. "With the modern 'psychological' analysis of the work-process (in Taylorism) this rational mechanisation extends right into the worker's 'soul': even his psychological attributes are separated from his total personality and placed in opposition to it so as to facilitate their integration into specialised rational systems and their reduction to statistically viable concepts" (Lukács, *History and Class Consciousness*, 172, 105, 88).

way to other new things once they have become old, for the sake of a swiftness of circulation, which in turn drives the growth of capital—must themselves move about swiftly, dwell not too long on any one particular thing (unless it coincides with the universality of the capitalist system itself, as money does), change their outward appearance frequently, speak in a fashionable way, and keep friends only as means toward the upkeep of this way of life.[20] A conflict, then, emerges between, on one hand, the socio-economic requirement that one flit about from one fashion to another, and, on the other hand, the deeper impulse to attend to one thing long enough to both absorb it into one's being and also pour oneself into it. This is especially evident between individuals: if the virtue of devoting meditative attention to nature has become an all too quaint activity in modern life, then at least we have not ceased to feel that our attention to other human beings, in ethical or amorous matters, ought to be taken more seriously than capitalism would encourage. Dickens aims his critique here too, as he shifts the terms, new and old, to describe attempted calculations of friendship.

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20. Simmel, discussing the frenzied lifestyle of metropolitan life, observes that the constant influx of new pleasures eventually wears out the nerves and results in the blasé attitude. Of course, the new is also required precisely because of the bored state of the modern individual. "A life in boundless pursuit of pleasure makes one blasé because it agitates the nerves to their strongest reactivity for such a long time that they finally cease to react at all. In the same way, through the rapidity and contradictoriness of their changes, more harmless impressions force such violent responses, tearing the nerves so brutally hither and thither that their last reserves of strength are spent; and if one remains in the same milieu they have no time to gather new strength. An incapacity thus emerges to react to new sensations with the appropriate energy" (Simmel, "The Metropolis and Mental Life" in *Simmel on Culture*, 178).

> The abyss to which [Twemlow] could find no bottom, and from which started forth the engrossing and ever-swelling difficulty of his life, was the insoluble question whether he was Veneering's oldest friend, or newest friend. To the excogitation of this problem, the harmless gentleman had devoted many anxious hours, both in his lodgings over the livery stable-yard, and in the cold gloom, favourable to meditation, of St. James's Square. Thus, Twemlow had first known Veneering at his club, where Veneering then knew nobody but the man who made them known to one another, who seemed to be the most intimate friend he had in the world, and whom he had known two days—the bond of union between their souls, the nefarious conduct of the committee respecting the cookery of a fillet of veal, having been accidentally cemented at that date. Immediately upon this, Twemlow received an invitation to dine with Veneering, and dined: the man being of the party. Immediately upon that, Twemlow received an invitation to dine with the man, and dined: Veneering being of the party. At the man's were a Member, an Engineer, a Payer-off of the National Debt, a Poem on Shakespeare, a Grievance, and a Public Office, who all seem to be utter strangers to Veneering. And yet immediately after that, Twemlow received an invitation to dine at Veneerings, expressly to meet the Member, the Engineer, the Payer-off of the National Debt, the Poem on Shakespeare, the Grievance, and the Public Office, and, dining, discovered that all of them were the most intimate friends Veneering had in the world, and that the wives of all of them (who were all there) were the objects of Mrs Veneering's most devoted affection and tender confidence. (7)

Twemlow cannot understand how it is that those who by all evidence had only been acquainted with Veneering a short time could nevertheless appear to be his oldest friends. This is a problem for him, because, not understanding the social logic that organizes those in the Veneering circle, Twemlow is unable to grasp his own place within that society. He is unsure of where he stands and therefore unsure of who he is. His bond to Veneering, a

"union of souls" as Dickens wryly puts it, is initiated by a shared experience regarding a fillet of veal, an event "having been accidentally cemented at that date." The point here is that their friendship is founded on nothing substantial, a chance event which has served as an excuse for Veneering to build up a social circle that will eventually bring him enough status to run for political office. Twemlow does not directly bring money to him, but he does contribute to the moneyed appearance of Veneering's life (Twemlow is rather weakly connected to the aristocracy). From the perspective, then, of the interest in money and the associated powers and privileges that attend money, the union of Veneering and Twemlow is reasonable. Indeed, it fully accounts for the union of all the strangers at the Veneerings' dinner party. The rationality of money, however, is so universally operational as to be hidden from sight, so that to someone who cares at all to examine the situation, the social gathering appears strange and without reason. Perhaps naively, Twemlow assumes that friends ought to have something in common and should share a tangible past with one another, a past full of experiences that have drawn them to one another through a dialectic of responses that allowed each to perceive and appreciate the other's personality. But when Twemlow looks around at the dinner party, he does not see people opening up to one another, but only unrelated abstract social types, most of whom are as nonplussed about their presence there as Twemlow is.

Personally meaningless, bereft of moral reason, apparently accidental when observed along the axis of ethical relationality—the social gathering at the Veneerings produces all sorts of absurd and comical interactions. Twemlow is mistaken for Veneering by a newly arrived guest, another supposedly old friend of Veneering.

> It is questionable whether any man quite relishes being mistaken for any other man; but Mr. Veneering having this very evening set up the shirt-front of the young Antinous (in new worked cambric just come home), is not at all complimented by being supposed to be Twemlow, who is dry and weazen and some thirty years older. Mrs. Veneering equally resents the imputation of being the wife of Twemlow. As to Twemlow, he is so sensible of being a much better bred man than Veneering, that he considers the large man an offensive ass. (8)

So disconnected from one another are these people, that not only is it possible to make such a basic social blunder as to mistake a guest for one's host, but those who are mistaken are sickened by the comparison. Veneering and Twemlow are of such different social classes, one traditional and the other modern, that they do not even compare themselves to the other on the same scale. Veneering considers himself superior, because he has such a beautiful and costly cambric shirt on, while Twemlow considers himself superior, because of his aristocratic breeding. Neither wants to be the other for reasons stemming from very different and in many ways incommensurable social backgrounds. This little scene demonstrates a fundamental rift in their social connectivity: it is not just that they do not like one another, but they are unable to even understand one another. Again, when taken from a moral viewpoint, as both Veneering and Twemlow do take the event in this scene, the gathering is contingent and absurd. From the viewpoint of money, on the other hand, it is sensible and even necessary to Veneering's goals. There is no reason, from this latter perspective, not to confuse Twemlow and Veneering: the oldness or the newness of the wealth or dignity of either is of no consequence. Each is present, or ought to be anyway, for the purpose of extending economic power, and they are equals in this sense. Yet no one can ever completely lay aside the system of manners that includes considerations of rank, gender,

duration of acquaintance, personal compatibility, amorous feelings, pride, and so forth.[21] The interruption of a nuanced and reflective *sensus communis* disturbs the purity of any networking event that pretends to involve only determinative judgments. Thus, a conflict emerges between, on one hand, the calculated organization of this gathering, forced into taking place

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21. Simmel's analysis of the sociable gathering notes that taken in its pure form this sort of assembly tolerates neither distinction of rank nor pecuniary interest. If a free play of social relations is the purpose of a dinner party, a dance, a salon, etc., then an abstraction from both hierarchy and material interest is necessary. "Riches and social position, learning and fame, exceptional capacities and merits of the individual have no role in sociability or, at most, as a slight nuance of that immateriality with which alone reality dares penetrate into the artificial structure of sociability." But this only holds of the ideal form of sociability; in reality, personal qualities and economic interests necessarily enter the picture to greater and lesser extents, especially depending on the willingness of the attendee to give himself up for the relaxed pleasure of the event. And what can we make of a networking event, which straddles the line between sociable gathering and business meeting? "Where a connection, begun on the sociable level—and not necessarily a superficial or conventional one—finally comes to centre about personal values, it loses the essential quality of sociability and becomes an association determined by a content—not unlike a business of religious relation, for which contact, exchange, and speech are but instruments for ulterior ends, while for sociability they are the whole meaning and content of the social process." The Veneerings' gathering is in tension between free association and an instrumental logic, but surely its implied business nature urges a reservation of personal distinction far more severe than what a sociable gathering requires. For even though Simmel identifies a reservation of individuality in sociability, at least a light version of one's character must appear in order to interact in a way that is both genuine and amusing. Most of the Veneerings' guests, painfully aware of the artificial and forced nature of the gathering, withdraw their personalities completely. (Simmel, "Sociology of Sociability" in *Simmel on Culture*, 122-23.)]

by an all too narrow fixation on appropriating oneself to the power of abstract social institutions, and, on the other hand, the desire to distinguish oneself personally rather than quantitatively from others for the purpose, not of overpowering them, but in order to form genuine bonds. The conflict manifests itself as an ironic stance, an intentional distance taken from the situation, an awareness that if one were to let oneself get too naively involved, one would disappear into the network of fully exchangeable, because contingently related, persons. The narrator himself takes on this ironic stance: the chapters that concern Veneering's circle are narrated in a terse voice in the present tense. "Revived by soup, Twemlow discourses mildly of the Court Circular with Boots and Brewer. Is appealed to, at the fish stage of the banquet, by Veneering, on the disputed question whether his cousin Lord Snigsworth is in or out of town?" (9). Ironic distance is a readily available means by which the subject, faced with the possibility of being mistaken for someone else at every turn, is able to recover some sense of himself. By withdrawing one's earnestness from the social situation, and thereby of course also perpetuating the problem of personal exchangeability, the subject can feel that he stands above the problem in some way.

The problem is not confined to this one initial social blunder, but pervades the entire evening.

> Now, Twemlow having undergone this terrific experience, having likewise noted the fusion of Boots in Brewer and Brewer in Boots, and having further observed that of the remaining seven guests four discreet characters enter with wandering eyes and wholly decline to commit themselves as to which is Veneering, until Veneering has them in his grasp;—Twemlow having profited by these studies, finds his brain wholesomely hardening as he approaches the conclusion that he really is Veneering's oldest friend, when his brain softens again and all is lost, through his eyes encountering Veneering and the large man linked

> together as twin brothers in the back drawing-room near the conservatory door, and through his ears informing him in the tones of Mrs. Veneering that the same large man is to be baby's godfather. (9)

The comedy of errors at the Veneerings foreshadows the greater, and more serious, plot concerning mistaken identity. The absence of an inner necessity to the gathering at the Veneerings, the domination of relationships contingent on arbitrary financial connections—this social organization repeats itself in the Harmon plot I have outlined above. As in the Veneering circle, mistaken identities run rampant among Harmon and those who enter into his life by way of his father's will. Unlike at the Veneerings', however, the mistaken identities of the Harmon plot are often the results of willful deception or an attempt to pass counterfeit identities as one would pass counterfeit money.

Personal Identity as Currency

Harmon wants to know Bella without her knowing him, and, just as one would purchase something for nothing by passing counterfeit bills, Harmon introduces himself to Bella with a counterfeit identity. He is thus able to gain an intimate and up-close knowledge of Bella while he, in the meantime, need not appear to her at all as who he really is. Money is involved in this process in two ways. To begin with, Harmon accomplishes the fraudulent introduction by renting a room in Bella's home. He pays upfront and thereby excuses himself from providing a personal reference. "I think that a reference is not necessary; neither, to say the truth, is it convenient, for I am a stranger in London. I require no reference from you, and perhaps, therefore, you will require none from me. That will be fair on both sides. Indeed, I show the greater confidence of the two, for I will pay in advance

whatever you please, and I am going to trust my furniture here." Bella's father replies: "money and goods are certainly the best of references" (39). Money is of course not the best of references to the character of an individual, but it can compensate for the absence of trust. In other words, Bella's father takes Harmon's money in exchange for Harmon's reserving of his right to remain effectively anonymous. This is a crucial point, because the mistaken identities of *Our Mutual Friend* are not necessarily a result of gullibility, but rather are gaps in evident truth, tacitly understood as such, and compensated for by filling those gaps in with cash. False identities, then, often must be bought at some price.[22] The second and broader way in which money has brought Harmon to identify himself falsely involves the will itself, the initial motivating force for the entire plot. The will, and the money it represents, has brought together Harmon, Bella and her family, the Boffins, and many others; but, as I have already discussed, it brings these people together contingently. There is no spiritual destiny working either at the level of an overarching fate or at the level of the individual souls themselves. In fact, it is perhaps the way of all modern novels, and even all

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22. This is the principle of insurance, which offers partial or total financial responsibility for the future course of a given factor, in exchange for a fee based on the degree of uncertainty involved in that factor. The insurance company allows for its lack of precise knowledge or total confidence concerning the truth of the factor, so long as the representative of the factor compensates for this with a certain amount of money in advance. According to Weber, there is a "resistance of many Lutherans to entering into insurance contracts, on the ground that such action would manifest an irreligious distrust of God's providence" (Weber, *Economy and Society*, 569). Conversely, since not fate but abstract financial considerations has brought them together, an entirely rationalized association of persons sees no reason to put any faith in providence. If no spiritual meaning undergirds the association, then surely no spiritual meaning will guide its future.

of modern life, that people are brought together contingently through objective institutions rather than by spiritual necessity.[23] An effect of this contingent organization is to incite the individuals who are part of it to conceal what they feel to be their real selves. Not really knowing who these people are, and not fully understanding the meaning of their being brought together, Harmon disguises himself in order to protect himself. Exposing one's inner self in such a situation is not a neutral matter, but can be rather dangerous, since the interest of others is free to be indifferent to one's own possible injuries. The principle of this attitude: "Have no antecedents, no established character, no cultivation, no ideas, no matters; have Shares. Have Shares enough to be on Boards of Direction in capital letters, oscillate on mysterious business between London and Paris, and be great. Where does he come from? Shares. Where is he going to? Shares" (114).

Counterfeit identity, then, in various ways is founded on genuine currency. The one falsity is counterbalanced by the other truth. And yet the contingent system of money and false appearances is not structured in such a way that the former rests securely on the bottom while the latter circulates on top, but rather both money and false identities circulate together in all directions. Actual money, then, need not in fact back up a false identity, and the latter may supply the very same effects as real money. As an example from the novel, pretending to be busy in public can result in a real and profitable reputation for oneself. "Many vast vague reputations have been made, solely by taking cabs and going about. This particularly obtains in all Parliamentary affairs. Whether the business in hand be to get a man

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23. "Money has provided us with the sole possibility for uniting people while excluding everything personal and specific. … Today there probably exists no association between people that does not include some monetary interest, even if it is only the rent for a hall for a religious association" (Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, 347).

in, or get a man out, or get a man over, or promote a railway, or jockey a railway, or what else, nothing is understood to be so effectual as scouring nowhere in a violent hurry—in short, as taking cabs and going about" (250). It is more accurate to say, then, that while ordinary money must often back up the absence of a guarantee of truth for various psychological reasons, certain false appearances logically function in the same manner as money and therefore can often take its place altogether. Money itself is, after all, a false appearance, that is, a mere representation of the true thing-in-itself.[24] But if all things-in-themselves and all personalities are only commodities and interested motives, i.e., are exchange relations, then of course all things and persons function like money. The logical endpoint of the increasing importance of money is that nothing would be distinguishable

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24. Money, commodities, and social status are all interrelated masks, according to Nietzsche; only "spirit," which he would probably later identify as the will to power, can infuse these things with some manner of truth. "Only he who has spirit ought to have possessions: otherwise possessions are a public danger. For the possessor who does not know how to make use of the free time which his possessions could purchase him will always continue to strive after possessions: this striving will constitute his entertainment, his strategy in his war against boredom. Thus in the end the moderate possessions that would suffice the man of spirit are transformed into actual riches—riches which are in fact the glittering product of spiritual dependence and poverty. They only appear quite different from what their wretched origin would lead one to expect because they are able to mask themselves with art and culture: for they are, of course, able to purchase masks. By this means they arouse envy in the poorer and the uncultivated—who at bottom are envying culture and fail to recognize the masks as masks—and gradually prepare a social revolution: for gilded vulgarity and histrionic self-inflation in a supposed 'enjoyment of culture' instil into the latter the idea 'it is only a matter of money'—whereas, while it is to some extent a matter of money, it is much more a matter of spirit" (Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 283-4).

from money, and all things would circulate through these apparently false exchange relationships. The resistance to this situation derives not from a metaphysical naivety about appearance and reality, but rather from the conviction that there is an ethical or an aesthetic demand for a relationality that exceeds the dialectic of appearance and reality.[25]

The good, however, or the beautiful for that matter, is difficult to find in such a world as Dickens presents, since even the values of good and evil are used for indifferent financial ends. Take Fledgeby, probably the most mercenary figure in the novel, who divests himself of moral responsibility by employing a Jewish moneylender, Mr. Riah, to do his dirty work. Riah is himself an indistinct, easily mistakable figure. "Riah went into the fog, and was lost to the eyes of Saint Mary Axe. But the eyes of this history can follow him westward, by Cornhill, Cheapside, Fleet Street, and the Strand, to Piccadilly and the Albany. Thither he went at his grave and measured pace, staff in hand, skirt at heel; and more than one head,

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25. Again, for the early Nietzsche, reality consists in a web of appearances that he compares to coins whose value we have forgotten is arbitrary. "Truths are illusions of which we have forgotten that they are illusions, metaphors which have become worn by frequent use and have lost all sensuous vigour, coins which, having lost their stamp, are now regarded as metal and no longer as coins." Nietzsche's solution in this early essay is to celebrate the falsity of appearance as artistic expression instead of exploiting the relations of appearances for their usefulness—a dominance of a free aesthetic play over restricted technical praxis. "Where the man of intuition … wields his weapons more mightily and victoriously than his contrary, a culture can take shape, given favourable conditions, and the rule of art over life can become established; all the expressions of a life lived thus are accompanied by pretence, by the denial of neediness, by the radiance of metaphorical visions, and indeed generally by the immediacy of deception" (Nietzsche, "On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense" in *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, 146-53).

turning to look back at his venerable figure already lost in the mist, supposed it to be some ordinary figure indistinctly seen, which fancy and the fog had worked into that passing likeness" (421). Associated in Victorian England with cunning avarice, Riah's Jewishness is signified by his deceptive and mysterious appearance. He moves about town quickly, pursuing one piece of business after another. He deals mildly but firmly with everyone who owes, putting aside any questions of morality his own character might consider. Riah, however, is only the employee of Fledgeby, the man whom these debts actually concern. "I am but the representative of another … I do as I am bidden by my principal. It is not my capital that is invested in the business. It is not my profit that arises therefrom" (424). Fledgeby disguises the fact that he is the creditor to his debtors, even at one point promising one desperate debtor to put in a good word to Riah, whom he pretends is the real creditor. This shifting of identity is finally accomplished by taking advantage of the negative value society already assigns to Jews in respect of money, accusing Riah of an innate and disgusting greed, while Fledgeby meanwhile absolves himself of the sin. Fledgeby constantly accuses Riah, for instance, of stealing from him: "'I suppose,' he said, taking one [of the sovereigns] up to eye it closely, 'you haven't been lightening any of these; but it's a trade of your people's, you know. *You* understand what sweating a pound means; don't you?'" Riah, however, retorts that Fledgeby knows just as well, and then continues, with an impudence unusual for his character: "Do you not, sir—without intending it—of a surety without intending it—sometimes mingle the character I fairly earn in your employment, with the character which it is your policy that I should bear?" (423). Fledgeby replies that he does not care to make that inquiry into himself. "Not in justice? … Not in generosity?" Riah asks. "'Jews and generosity!' said Fledgeby. 'That's a good connexion!'" (422-23). Fledgeby, then, dissimulates his own avarice by mediating it through Riah (in exchange for a wage), who is

used not only for his moneylending services, but for the prejudice against his racial identity as well. It is vital to Fledgeby's dissimulation, if he himself is to believe it, that he have a moral scapegoat, and Riah fulfills that purpose nicely. Thus, even moral value, the very thing that might offer an escape from the world of cold exchange relations, is converted into an exchange value. Good characters like Riah can then be mistaken for bad characters like Fledgeby. Where, then, is the good that cannot be exchanged? Where is the justice and the generosity to which Riah appeals?

Finitude, Imagination, and Ethics

The problem, for Harmon, with having assumed two false identities, is that he has become a sort of ghost, unable to make any significant imprint on the world. His story is unable to really take off until he reveals to us, by way of a scene in which he wanders the city while dwelling on the key events of his recent past, the truth of his identity. He is after that point able to take action and tell Bella how he feels about her, and although she rebuffs his declaration, this decisive agency nevertheless sets in motion a complex elaboration of his character and its effects on others. But what is the "truth" of his identity? It is nothing so simple as that he is in fact John Harmon, the rightful legatee of the elder Harmon's will. Rather, we are given to feel that the truth of Harmon is found in the subtlety of his introspections and the resultant ambiguity of his character. Harmon is thus able to proceed from an interchangeable set of shallow identities to an ambiguous multiplicity of possible ethical configurations. In other words, Harmon goes from being a mercenary shapeshifter to a moral experimentalist. In each case, his identity is multiple, but in the latter, the ambiguity

is in the thoughtful adaptability of his moral character rather than in a venal exchangeability.[26]

Trying to trace his steps back to the scene of his drugging, Harmon becomes lost, and his geographical disorientation reverberates through his existential alienation from himself. "He tried a new direction, but made nothing of it; walls, dark doorways, flights of stairs and rooms, were too abundant. And, like most people so puzzled, he again and again described a circle, and found himself at the point from which he had begun. 'This is like what I have read in narratives of escape from prison,' said he, 'where the little track of the fugitives in the night always seems to take the shape of the great round world on which they wander; as if it were a secret law'" (365). Harmon's assumption of false identities has produced an existential circle, constructed in the hope of leading somewhere, but only leading back to the sameness of an exchangeable identity. The very attempt to make his identity otherwise than it was has led it to become only more similar, that is, only more empty. "For John Rokesmith, too, was as like that same lost wanted Mr. Julius Handford as never man was like another in this world" (366). The narrator suggests that Harmon's false

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26. In his philosophical autobiography, Nietzsche turns the Delphic maxim, know thyself, upside down, suggesting that one's essence consists in those things which seem inessential about one's life. One comes to define oneself only in making oneself questionable, in making an experiment out of oneself. "To become what one is, one must not have the faintest notion what one is. From this point of view even the blunders of life have their own meaning and value—the occasional side roads and wrong roads, the delays, 'modesties,' seriousness wasted on tasks that are remote from the task. All this can express a great prudence, even the supreme prudence: where nosce te ipsum [know thyself] would be the recipe for ruin, forgetting oneself, misunderstanding oneself, making oneself smaller, narrower, mediocre, become reason itself" (Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* in *Basic Writings*, 710).

identities are more similar to one another than an authentic individual is similar to himself. The individual of many false identities is like so many coins, each perfectly identical in aspect and function. The authentic individual, however, is self-differentiated by an ethical experimentation that is possible only through facing the groundlessness of existence, that is, one's own death. Harmon's search for himself, for the truth of his past, on this night becomes a search for his own death. "'I have no clue to the scene of my death,' said he. ... 'It is a sensation not experienced by many mortals ... to be looking into a churchyard on a wild windy night, and to feel that I no more hold a place among the living than these dead do, and even to know that I lie buried somewhere else, as they lie buried here. Nothing uses me to it. A spirit that was once a man could hardly feel stranger or lonelier, going unrecognised among mankind than I feel" (366). Harmon quickly comes to realize that his search for his own death cannot be merely through the streets of London, but rather must proceed through thought and memory. "'But this is the fanciful side of the situation. It has a real side, so difficult that, though I think of it every day, I never thoroughly think it out. Now, let me determine to think it out as I walk home. I know I evade it, as many men—perhaps most men—do evade thinking their way through their greatest perplexity. I will try to pin myself to mine. Don't evade it, John Harmon; don't evade it; think it out!" (366). The death in question is of course, literally speaking, fake, but it stands figuratively in Harmon's reflections for death as such. It has obliterated his real personality, but has also given him to reflect on the general void that makes possible the sorts of self-annihilations that lend people and things to a meaningless interchangeability. What he comes to see is that this void contains another possibility: his death, rather than disseminating a meaningless proliferation

of external identities, can also generate a dialectic of multiple inner possibilities, that is, possibilities explored through the meaningful risks taken by an ethical being.[27]

Harmon is, for a moment, able to perceive the void of his being within the memory of a beating he received upon being drugged.

> 'Now I pass to sick and deranged impressions; they are so strong that I rely upon them; but there are spaces between them that I know nothing about, and they are not pervaded by any idea of time.
>
> 'I had drunk some coffee, when to my sense of sight he began to swell immensely and something urged me to rush at him. We had a struggle near the door. He got from me, through my not knowing where to strike, in the whirling round of the room, and the flashing of flames of fire between us. I dropped down. ... I saw a figure like myself lying dressed in my clothes on a bed. What might have been, for anything I knew, a silence of days, weeks, months, years, was broken by a violent wrestling of men all over the room. The figure like myself was assailed, and my valise was in its hand. I was trodden upon and fallen over. I heard a noise of blows, and thought it was a wood-cutter cutting down a tree. I could not have said that my name was John Harmon—I could not have thought it—I didn't know it—

27. I am combining Heidegger's idea that death reveals "one's ownmost and uttermost potentiality-for-Being—that is to say, the possibility of authentic existence" with Nietzsche's notion of moral experimentalism, which involves facing death at every turn, "continually shedding something that wants to die" (Heidegger, *Being and Time*, 307; Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, 50). In both cases, death is transformed from something that would delimit an identifiable life into a pervasive impulse to live for unexpected possibilities and thereby make of one's existence something risky, uncertain, and ambiguous.

> but when I heard the blows, I thought of the wood-cutter and his axe, and had some dead idea that I was lying in a forest.
>
> 'This is still correct? Still correct, with the exception that I cannot possibly express it to myself without using the word I. But it was not I. There was no such thing as I, within my knowledge.' (369)

The initial loss of memory, the feeling that his real identity had fallen into the Thames somewhere along the way, lent Harmon the impulse to give himself over to a calculated series of false identities. The reflective remembrance, however, of this abyssal moment allows Harmon to realize that the self must not be something taken for granted as fixed and stable. Life, he comes to see, consists of uncertain decisions, risky experiments, questioning of presuppositions, and endless moral deliberation. Thus, he turns from the abyss of his past toward the more difficult abyss of the future. Requiring more than remembrance, the ambiguity of the future requires thoughtful action.

> 'To think it out through the future, is a harder though a much shorter task than to think it out through the past. John Harmon is dead. Should John Harmon come to life?
>
> 'If yes, why? If no, why?'
>
> 'Take yes, first. To enlighten human Justice ... To come into possession of my father's money, and with it sordidly to buy a beautiful creature whom I love ... What a use for the money, and how worthy of its old misuses!
>
> 'Now, take no. The reasons why John Harmon should not come to life. Because he has passively allowed these dear old faithful friends to pass into possession of the property. Because he sees them happy with it, making a good use of it, effacing the old rust and tarnish on the money. Because they have virtually adopted Bella, and will provide for her.

> Because there is affection enough in her nature, and warmth enough in her heart, to develop into something enduringly good, under favourable conditions. Because her faults have been intensified by her place in my father's will, and she is already growing better. Because her marriage with John Harmon, after what I have heard from her own lips, would be a shocking mockery, of which both she and I must always be conscious, and which would degrade her in her mind, and me in mine, and each of us in the other's. Because if John Harmon comes to life and does not marry her, the property falls into the very hands that hold it now.
>
> …
>
> 'What course for me then? This. To live the same quiet Secretary life, carefully avoiding chances of recognition, until they shall have become more accustomed to their altered state, and until the great swarm of swindlers under many names shall have found newer prey. By that time, the method I am establishing through all the affairs, and with which I will every day take new pains to make them both familiar, will be, I may hope, a machine in such working order as that they can keep it going. I know I need but ask of their generosity, to have. When the right time comes, I will ask no more than will replace me in my former path of life, and John Rokesmith shall tread it as contentedly as he may. But John Harmon shall come back no more.
>
> 'That I may never, in the days to come afar off, have any weak misgiving that Bella might, in any contingency, have taken me for my own sake if I had plainly asked her, I WILL plainly ask her: proving beyond all question what I already know too well. And now it is all thought out, from the beginning to the end, and my mind is easier.'
>
> (372-73)

The initial ambiguity of Harmon's existence concerns which among a finite number of stable identities is the real one. The ambiguity into which he now passes concerns his existence as

such and its possibility of non-being. Out of this ambiguity springs an infinite number of concrete possibilities relating to himself and those around him. If he resurrects John Harmon, he could do a service to the justice system, acquire his fortune, and win over Bella. If he leaves Harmon dead, the Boffins get to keep the money, and he spares Bella the mockery of marrying him for money. What is interesting about this scene is not so much the list of pros and cons that Harmon figures out, but rather the fact that facing an existential question of mortality has prompted him to an ethical deliberation. The finitude of the self immediately implies ethical relations to others, because if we are limited, if we are pervaded by an ever-threatening abyss, then we must gain our existence through a network of dependencies in which we both receive from and give to others. Human existence is not absolute; it is relative, which means that it has its being through relations. We may choose to negotiate our relationship to other persons and things through a simple exchange system, but this only keeps alive those parts of us that can be priced. To retain the fullness of existence, it is necessary to establish an economy in which we give and receive what is singularly valuable.[28] For Harmon, such values include the Boffins' happiness, his love for

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28. Maurice Godelier speculates on the applications of our anthropological knowledge of gift economies, first gained through Marcel Mauss, to contemporary capitalist society. He suggests, without discussing how it could be applied, that it at least speaks to the limit between, on one hand, what is exchangeable or contractually negotiable, and, on the other hand, what constitutes the deeper bonds between individuals. "We live in a society which, by the very way it functions, separates individuals from each other, isolates them within their own family, and affords them advancement only by opposing them to one another. We live in a society which liberates, as no other has ever done, all of the forces, all of the potentials slumbering within the individual, but which also encourages people to make their own way by using others. Our society lives and prospers only at the

Bella, and justice. These things cannot be negotiated through simple exchange; they must be ethically worked out through the slow process of thinking past the limits of the self, followed by decisive action. In this scene, then, Harmon's identity becomes ambiguous insofar as it becomes futural, that is, open and in need of working out. Its openness is not toward other identical selves, but to the radical difference of others and the ethical demands that concern this otherness. Futurally working out the self, then, means committing oneself to an endless, and necessarily ambiguous, practice of ethical deliberation.[29]

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cost of a permanent deficit of solidarity. The only new solidarities it can imagine are in the form of negotiated contracts. But not everything can be negotiated: there remains all that goes into the bonds between individuals, all that comprises their relationships …" (Godelier, *The Enigma of the Gift*, 209-10).

29. For Gadamer, Aristotle's concept of phronesis captures the idea that moral "knowledge" does not consist in teachable principles, but rather in a lived deliberation that can never achieve full certainty but that nevertheless results in a purpose and decision that are more meaningful for having been worked out concretely by the subject as a whole. "Aristotle explicitly refers to the mistake of people who resort to theorizing and, instead of doing what is right, just philosophize about it. Thus it is certainly not true, as sometimes appears to be the case in Aristotle, that phronesis has to do with finding the right means to a pregiven end. This concrete moral deliberation defines the 'purpose' for the first time by making it concrete …. Kant is certainly right to view the ideal of happiness as an ideal more of imagination than of reason, and to that extent it is completely right to say that no determinate content can be specified for the determination of our will that would be universally binding and capable of being defended as a moral law by our reason. Yet we need to ask whether the autonomy of practical reason—defending the unconditional nature of our duty against the persuasions of our inclinations—represents nothing more than a check upon our caprice, and is not determined by the entirety of our moral being, which whole (permeated by the patency of what is

Moral engagement is not simply a matter of rational deliberation; it requires imagination too. Dickens's nineteenth-century worldview, according to which sympathy and imagination are the province of women, leads him to exemplify the moral role of the imaginative faculty in *Our Mutual Friend* through female characters alone. This gendering of the faculty is significant, but my concern here will confine itself to the connection drawn between imagination and ethics apart from its localization in the feminine. The imagination, rather than retreating from reality, dives into and experiments with it. It alters values, remaps relational networks, and, in general, takes for its basis the essential ambiguity of the moral world.[30] Reality, as far as the imagination is concerned, is precisely inescapable because its

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right) comports itself practically in each case whenever it chooses what to do." Gadamer elsewhere says that it was through existential philosophy that he "became aware of the ambiguity of the task of philosophical ethics" (Gadamer, "On the Possibility of a Philosophical Ethics" in *Hermeneutics, Religion, and Ethics*, 30-31; "The Ethics of Value and Practical Philosophy", 108).

30. I am drawing on Kant's notion that the imagination is not merely a faculty by which we produce unreal images, but the faculty that, with the aid of the concepts of the understanding, assembles the data provided by sensibility and intuition into a meaningful whole. The imagination structures reality itself. "That the imagination is a necessary ingredient of perception itself has, I suppose, never occurred to any psychologist. This is so partly because this power has been limited by psychologists to reproduction only, and partly because they believed that the senses not only supply us with impressions, but indeed also assemble these impressions and thus bring about images of objects. But this undoubtedly requires something more than our receptivity for impressions, viz., a function for their synthesis" (Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, 168 n. 150). The structure of reality is not given by the senses, but is constructed by the imagination under the necessary concepts of the understanding. But the imagination, for Kant, can also play freely with the understanding. "In judging the beautiful, we present the freedom of the imagination … as harmonizing with the lawfulness of the understanding"

constituents already exist beyond themselves.[31] For this reason, the imagination is often employed by Dickens's characters in quite serious ways.

The most startling instance of this involves Jenny Wren, a child of uncertain age with a mild physical disability. She works as a dolls' dressmaker to support herself and her dysfunctional alcoholic father. Mr. Cleaver, the father in question, is employed in a minimal capacity, but Jenny exerts authority over even his own wages. There is, then, a reversal in the usual filial role of financial dependence: Mr. Cleaver is subordinate to Jenny to the point that he must shamefully answer to her stern reprimands about how he is to spend his money. "'Come, come!' said the person of the house, tapping the table near her in a business-like manner, and shaking her head and her chin; 'you know what you've got to do. Put down your money this instant'" (242). Jenny even addresses her father as her son: "'Here's but seven and eightpence halfpenny!' exclaimed Miss Wren, after reducing the heap to order.

(Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 229). My own conception of the imagination goes further than Kant, suggesting that if the imagination can freely construct an object of sense as beautiful, then it may experiment with the structure of reality, beyond the strict rules of the understanding, in other ways. We may think of the free imagination as the faculty with which Nietzsche's experimentalist is to "just try the experiment of doing it, and fantasise no longer," that is, live out the experiment of altering reality's value structure instead of merely imagining it in a private fantasy (Nietzsche, *Daybreak*, 138).

31. The elements of reality, for Nietzsche, are beyond themselves insofar as they are ambiguous, capable of being seen otherwise, or even thought beyond the limits of our horizon of meaning. To see reality as fully understandable through strict concepts is to mathematize it. "Do we really want to demote existence in this way to an exercise in arithmetic and an indoor diversion for mathematicians? Above all, one shouldn't want to strip it of its ambiguous character: that, gentlemen, is what good taste demands—above all, the taste of reverence for everything that lies beyond your horizon!" (Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, 238).

'Oh, you prodigal old son! Now you shall be starved.'" And, finally, she threatens her father-son with punishment: "'If you were treated as you ought to be,' said Miss Wren, 'you'd be fed upon the skewers of cats' meat; only the skewers, after the cats had had the meat. As it is, go to bed.'" Jenny, of course, is not a cruel person; she is merely working at her wit's end to reign in her father's self-destructive behavior. But how is such an extreme reversal of roles psychologically possible? The emotional conditions are certainly found in Mr. Cleaver's desperation and Jenny's frustration, but the institutional condition appears to lie in the use of money. Money, as we have seen, disregards traditional roles, possibly making either a creditor or a debtor out of anyone. All sorts of individuals—according to an endless variety of criteria, virtues, or chance occurrences—can come into money. In fact, money does not favor any one personal criterion—avarice, responsibility, frugality, intelligence, diligence, or even dynamism—but rather always contingently favors whatever happens to work in a given situation. Thus, money cannot guarantee a stable or even logical hierarchy, but, in the end, can only throw people together in a rather unpredictable way.[32] Yet despite this, traditional structures continue to exist, always vying with money's entropic tendency. The relationship between Jenny and her father has not fallen into utter contingency, because the felt necessity of the traditional roles resists the transformation. The impersonality of money is not a sufficient condition for the individual to participate in such dramatic transformations of value. Too much of the personality is tied in too many directions to the present configuration of its world to immediately give way to radical structural changes. Jenny, in order to make private sense out of the reversed economic situation, employs not her reason,

32. "Wherever increasingly large numbers of people come together, money becomes relatively that much more in demand. Because of its indifferent nature, money is the most suitable bridge and means of communication between many and diverse people" (Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, 511).

since this faculty proceeds according to an objective normative logic, but rather her imagination, the faculty capable of generating its own norms. In the same way that Kant's reflective judgment can posit a normative explanation for an undocumented organism's function, without having recourse to any mathematical or physical certainties, so too Jenny's imagination is capable of bringing to her unusual situation a new interpretation that she feels is suitable.

Again, unlike reason, which relies on stable axioms, the imagination assumes a general ambiguity of existence in the first place. The imaginative person, then, is attuned to the ambiguity of particular things and persons, because she is in general attuned to the ambiguity of her own existence as such. Like Harmon, who could only approach ethical problems in a thoughtful manner once he had contemplated his own mortality, Jenny too feels intimate with her death. But whereas Harmon was only able to see how death exists within life by undergoing an experience that staged the existential concept, Jenny grasps the idea intuitively through her imagination. While relaxing on her friend Mr. Riah's rooftop, Jenny engages Fledgeby, who has just dropped by, in a strange discourse on death.

> 'We are thankful to come here for rest, sir,' said Jenny. 'You see, you don't know what the rest of this place is to us; does he, Lizzie? It's the quiet, and the air.'
>
> 'The quiet!' repeated Fledgeby, with a contemptuous turn of his head towards the City's roar. 'And the air!' with a 'Poof!' at the smoke.
>
> 'Ah!' said Jenny. 'But it's so high. And you see the clouds rushing on above the narrow streets, not minding them, and you see the golden arrows pointing at the mountains in the sky from which the wind comes, and you feel as if you were dead.'
>
> The little creature looked above her, holding up her slight transparent hand.

> 'How do you feel when you are dead?' asked Fledgeby, much perplexed.
>
> 'Oh, so tranquil!' cried the little creature, smiling. 'Oh, so peaceful and so thankful! And you hear the people who are alive, crying, and working, and calling to one another down in the close dark streets, and you seem to pity them so! And such a chain has fallen from you, and such a strange good sorrowful happiness comes upon you!'
>
> Her eyes fell on the old man, who, with his hands folded, quietly looked on.
>
> 'Why it was only just now,' said the little creature, pointing at him, 'that I fancied I saw him come out of his grave! He toiled out at that low door so bent and worn, and then he took his breath and stood upright, and looked all round him at the sky, and the wind blew upon him, and his life down in the dark was over!—Till he was called back to life,' she added, looking round at Fledgeby with that lower look of sharpness. 'Why did you call him back?'
>
> 'He was long enough coming, anyhow,' grumbled Fledgeby.
>
> 'But you are not dead, you know,' said Jenny Wren. 'Get down to life!'
>
> Mr Fledgeby seemed to think it rather a good suggestion, and with a nod turned round. As Riah followed to attend him down the stairs, the little creature called out to the Jew in a silvery tone, 'Don't be long gone. Come back, and be dead!' And still as they went down they heard the little sweet voice, more and more faintly, half calling and half singing, 'Come back and be dead, Come back and be dead!'
>
> (281)

Jenny does not see life in the way that Fledgeby does. Fledgeby's concern is with the bustle of ordinary life that resembles the activity of bees that the lawyer Eugene decries earlier in the novel: "they work; but don't you think they overdo it? They work so much more than they need—they make so much more than they can eat—they are so incessantly boring and

buzzing at their one idea till Death comes upon them …" (94). The life that does not recognize death sees everything as accumulation and progression without considering its meaning. Death, for this blind sort of living, suddenly comes upon it, as an event of annihilation. For Jenny, however, death is nothing more and nothing less than the openness of possibility given by the sky. The clouds are like Jenny's imaginative constructions, unmindful of the strict configuration of values that governs life on the ground. Death feels to Jenny like a "sorrowful happiness," an ambiguous feeling of both limitation and possibility. She does not escape into the clouds to enjoy unmitigated bliss, but rather knows that her sorrowful lot on Earth is illuminated by a transcendent grace from the sky, the aura that indicates the possibility of being otherwise.[33]

Jenny's imagination is not a means of escape but a keen ability to reshape otherwise contingent and meaningless configurations into forms she judges appropriate to the situation. Her imaginative experimentation with possibility does not entail whimsical and arbitrary manipulations of reality, but instead an attentiveness to the dimension of meaning that cannot be read off from reality as mere data. Thus, when the lawyer Eugene Wrayburn becomes semi-comatose after a violent attack, Jenny is the only one who is able to interpret the subtleties of his murmurings and facial expressions.

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33. In Andrew Mitchell's reading of Heidegger's "fourfold," the sky is "the space wherein things appear and through which they shine," or "a medium … filled with relations." The clouds "keep the sky from pure appearing, preserving its distance" (Andrew Mitchell, "The Fourfold" in *Heidegger: Key Concepts*, ed. Bret W. Davis [Durham: Acumen Publishing, 2010]). Jenny's sky is filled with relational possibilities; her imaginative play draws its temporary limits in the light closures of clouds.

> The dolls' dressmaker, all softened compassion now, watched him with an earnestness that never relaxed. She would regularly change the ice, or the cooling spirit, on his head, and would keep her ear at the pillow betweenwhiles, listening for any faint words that fell from him in his wanderings. It was amazing through how many hours at a time she would remain beside him, in a crouching attitude, attentive to his slightest moan. As he could not move a hand, he could make no sign of distress; but, through this close watching (if through no secret sympathy or power) the little creature attained an understanding of him that Lightwood did not possess. Mortimer would often turn to her, as if she were an interpreter between this sentient world and the insensible man; and she would change the dressing of a wound, or ease a ligature, or turn his face, or alter the pressure of the bedclothes on him, with an absolute certainty of doing right. The natural lightness and delicacy of touch which had become very refined by practice in her miniature work, no doubt was involved in this; but her perception was at least as fine. (739)

Out of what is non-sensible, uncertain, transcendent, Jenny is able to hazard an interpretation that is not arbitrary. She focuses the same imaginative faculty that she uses to make her dolls (her "miniature work") on the ambiguous dimension of expression in which Eugene's wavering life now dwells, working out through feeling and keen perception a meaningful construction that will translate into appropriate action. Committing to her interpretation, she can then act with absolute certainty, having drawn that certainty, with a method that cannot be analyzed, out of the essential uncertainty of Eugene's condition. The attention displayed by Jenny's hermeneutical-imaginative practice stands in opposition to all of the flighty, bored, inattentive characters obsessed with money. The early Bella, prior to her conversion, claims to see no reality besides money. "'Talk to me of love!' said Bella, contemptuously … 'Talk to me of fiery dragons! But talk to me of poverty and wealth, and

there indeed we touch upon realities"' (321). She equates a lack of money with a general poverty of existence: "I love money, and want money —- want it dreadfully. I hate to be poor, and we are degradingly poor, offensively poor, miserably poor, beastly poor"' (37). She thinks of money endlessly: "I have money always in my thoughts and my desires; and the whole life I place before myself is money, money, money, and what money can make of life!"' (460). And yet Bella, like Jenny, displays great power of imagination. Bella is herself an ambiguous character, even from the beginning, hovering somewhere between avarice and generosity, calculating and imaginative. "Why am I always at war with myself?" she asks (471).

Obsessed with money, evaluating her suitors in terms of their financial worth, Bella nevertheless loves her poor father unconditionally. Taking a stroll with him through London, she begins to dream out loud of her future wealth, but narrates it principally in terms of her father's happiness. She imagines her and her father in all sorts of roles:

> Now, Pa, in the character of owner of a lumbering square-sailed collier, was tacking away to Newcastle, to fetch black diamonds to make his fortune with; now, Pa was going to China in that handsome three-masted ship, to bring home opium … silks and shawls without end for the decoration of his charming daughter. Now, John Harmon's disastrous fate was all a dream, and he had come home and found the lovely woman just the article for him, and the lovely woman had found him just the article for her, and they were going away on a trip, in their gallant bark, to look after their vines, with streamers flying at all points, a band playing on deck, and Pa established in the great cabin. Now, John Harmon was consigned to his grave again, and a merchant of immense wealth (name unknown) had courted and married the lovely woman …. (318)

So it runs on for a couple of pages, seamlessly moving from one fantasy to another. The scene mirrors Harmon's ethical deliberation, now supposing himself dead, now alive; but for Bella this less serious fancy produces no resolution because it does not involve her agency. She alters her identity, as well as her father's, but not in order to work through the ethical quandaries of her interiority. Her alterations of possible identities are external, involving only the superficial aspect of what it means to be a person. Now she is married, now she is not, now she is on a voyage to Newcastle, now to China—but in each case, the purpose of the identity concerns a quantitative increase in material wealth. Bella does not confront the possibility of her non-existence, thereby conceiving of the openness of identity, but instead only browses through the external possibilities of financial circumstance. At the same time, however, her father is included in these fantasies as a non-exchangeable element. Her love for him, and her desire for his happiness, confers a value upon him that is not given in terms of other quantitative values. He is the spark of singularity that redeems Bella's imaginative impulse by the end of the novel.

Bella's transformation is from an experience measured quantitatively to one of qualitative complexity. The passage occurs through her learning how to love others in the same way that she loves her father. Eventually, this love is fulfilled in her relationship to John Harmon, but before that she develops an affection for the poor Lizzie Hexam. It is important that the characters she comes to love (her father, Lizzie, John Harmon as Rokesmith) are without money; their poverty forces Bella to evaluate them in new ways. After meeting with Lizzie for the first time, Bella remarks that she has been experiencing time itself in a peculiar way.

> 'Can you believe, Mr. Rokesmith,' said Bella, 'that I feel as if whole years had passed since I went into Lizzie Hexam's cottage?'
>
> 'We have crowded a good deal into the day,' he returned, 'and you were much affected in the churchyard. You are over-tired?'
>
> 'No, I am not at all tired. I have not quite expressed what I mean. I don't mean that I feel as if a great space of time had gone by, but that I feel as if much had happened—to myself, you know.'
>
> (530)

Time, to Bella's astonishment, has not passed in a way that accords with its objectively measurable units. Only a few hours have passed, but the feeling of time exceeds that measurement. Bella's experience has been so bound through attentive affection to the qualitative singularity of another person that the temporal dimension of her experience has lost all formality and become part of the qualitative fabric. She has no attention left to count away the minutes, to even glance at a clock, because all her attention is absorbed in a dimension of otherness that suffers neither scale nor grid.[34]

Bella revisits her imaginative faculty, after having married Rokesmith, again in reference to wealth. This time, however, the mode of her imagination's engagement with reality is quite different. Rokesmith has not yet revealed to Bella that he is Harmon, nor then does she yet know about the fortune that the Boffins are to bestow on them. Harmon asks

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34. For Levinas, the time that is not merely measured time always takes place between the self and the other. "The situation of the face-to-face would be the very accomplishment of time; the encroachment of the present on the future is not the feat of the subject alone, but the intersubjective relationship. The condition of time lies in the relationship between humans, or in history" (Levinas, "Time and the Other" in *Time and the Other and Additional Essays*, 79).

Bella if she does not wish that they were rich, to which she replies that, after having seen what money did to Mr. Boffin, she would probably not like to be rich. Harmon replies that he wishes he could give to Bella all the material wealth that she deserves. "I shouldn't like it for its own sake," she replies, "half so well as such a wish for it. Dear John, your wishes are as real to me as the wishes in the Fairy story, that were all fulfilled as soon as spoken. Wish me everything that you can wish for the woman you dearly love, and I have as good as got it, John. I have better than got it, John!" (681). Bella no longer uses her imagination to escape reality. Instead, her imagination allows her to include non-exchangeable invisible objects, like Harmon's expressed intentions, in the class of objects that belong to reality. Whereas previously only money and what can be bought for money counted for Bella as real, now things that must be interpreted in order to be seen take their place alongside determinate entities. Harmon's wishes for Bella are not only of value to her because they express her husband's love, but they work toward reconstituting her world in a very real way. Bella can only really enjoy the material wealth that she will later receive because she has first come to see the world as laden with values that derive from human intentions that lie much deeper than the impulse to quantify things.

Generosity

Imagination is one aspect, or one possible mode, of the *sensus communis* through which individuals work out together the interpretation of a thing, person, or situation. In *Our Mutual Friend*, ethically ambiguous situations function as the principal objects demanding communal response. Rather than promoting some sort of mutually beneficial exchange as the prototypical solution to any moral dilemma, Dickens, through his characters, urges the generosity of the gift. The gifts that Dickens's characters give to one another are usually

former objects of dispute. Giving these objects out of generosity infinitely multiplies their value, since they are no longer discrete units of possible exchange between anonymous parties, but rather media of thick interpersonal relations. The gift can transform a situation from a complex technical problem into a rich network of communal bonds. Giving as a communal response, then, is a commitment to the ambiguity of binding and vital relations rather than to a clean solution from which all parties may then walk away. The gift strengthens the community's togetherness through the difficult situation.[35] Let us first consider the child adoption problem in which the Boffins find themselves early on in the novel. Having recently come into the money, and already feeling somewhat uneasy about it, the Boffins decide to adopt a child, with the help of the Reverend Milvey and his wife, to honor the memory of the presumed-dead John Harmon. They find, however, that the orphanages are run like stock markets.

> Either an eligible orphan was of the wrong sex (which almost always happened) or was too old, or too young, or too sickly, or too dirty, or too much accustomed to the streets, or too likely to run away; or, it was found impossible to complete the philanthropic transaction without buying the orphan. For, the instant it became known that anybody wanted the

35. Mauss derived from his anthropological observations that the members of a gift economy are not disinterested. Giving is not a selfless act. Rather, gift exchange involves the self in the economy to a much stronger degree than does commodity exchange. The personal obligations thus created are what bind the community together, even if the underlying or explicit sentiments are aggressive. Gift economies demand more from the person as a whole. "The gift is thus something that must be given, that must be received and that is, at the same time, dangerous to accept. The gift itself constitutes an irrevocable link especially when it is a gift of food. The recipient depends upon the temper of the donor, in fact each depends upon the other" (Mauss, *The Gift*, 58).

> orphan, up started some affectionate relative of the orphan who put a price upon the orphan's head. The suddenness of an orphan's rise in the market was not to be paralleled by the maddest records of the Stock Exchange. He would be at five thousand per cent discount out at nurse making a mud pie at nine in the morning, and (being inquired for) would go up to five thousand per cent premium before noon. The market was 'rigged' in various artful ways. Counterfeit stock got into circulation. Parents boldly represented themselves as dead, and brought their orphans with them. Genuine orphan-stock was surreptitiously withdrawn from the market. It being announced, by emissaries posted for the purpose, that Mr and Mrs Milvey were coming down the court, orphan scrip would be instantly concealed, and production refused, save on a condition usually stated by the brokers as 'a gallon of beer'. Likewise, fluctuations of a wild and South-Sea nature were occasioned, by orphan-holders keeping back, and then rushing into the market a dozen together. But, the uniform principle at the root of all these various operations was bargain and sale... (195-96)

Dickens is always critical of the British orphan system, and here he is no less biting when it comes to the venal way in which the adoption process works. England has attempted to solve the problem concerning orphans, a problem of the community, through impersonal technical means. The situation's complexity is enormously increased in a technical manner, allowing personal communities to absolve themselves of responsibility. Meanwhile, the system appears increasingly brutal and inhuman. Society, with a shocking lack of imagination, attempts to solve its orphan problem through an apparatus identical to that used to mediate shares in corporations.[36]

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36. Andrew Miller has argued for a contradiction in Dickens's social critiques. Dickens deplores atomization, the sort of contingent and meaningless relationships formed by the money economy, but often rationalization as the solution. Thus, Dickens criticizes the sort of atomizing rationalistic

Finally, the Boffins are put in touch with a Mrs. Betty Higden, a grandmother caring for a child of her daughter, who has recently died. Too poor to keep the child, Betty is putting the child up for adoption. Loving her grandson too much to submit him to the money-based system of adoption, Betty deals with the Boffins directly and offers them the child as a gift.

> 'If I could have kept the dear child, without the dread that's always upon me of his coming to that fate I have spoken of, I could never have parted with him, even to you. For I love him, I love him, I love him! I love my husband long dead and gone, in him; I love my children dead and gone, in him; I love my young and hopeful days dead and gone, in him. I couldn't sell that love, and look you in your bright face. It's a free gift.' (203)

Betty's situation, like the situation of anyone else in a position like hers, is ambiguous in two senses: first, it is unclear what she should do since her desires conflict with her

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methods used in schools, or in the orphan system, but supports calculative and invasive methods of policing the city. Miller argues that detective work, in particular, allows Dickens to satisfy his desire for both rational order and the sort of subjective freedom—the detective's freedom, that is, but usually no one else's—that I have been tracing throughout this study. "Atomization and the circulation of commodities, dramatically rendered by the mysterious paper currency circulating throughout London, was the complementary moment of the increasingly ordered arrangement of urban society; Dickens saw rationalization as the remedy for fragmentation, whereas as Lukács suggests, it can also be seen as its cause. … Detective work allows Dickens the pleasures both of routinized, systematic organization and of individual achievement, the exercise of individual will; it mediates in a satisfying way between a centralized power and individual activity" (Miller, *Novels Behind Glass: Commodity Culture and Victorian Narrative*, 125, 128).

circumstances; second, her situation transcends itself, bearing on seemingly unrelated components of her life. As to the second sense, Betty cannot part with her child, because he bears within him the experience of her whole life, the traces of her dead relations; in short, he is a nexus for the relational complex of her memory and affection. But this second sense of ambiguity is the reason for the first sense, the undecidability of the situation. No clear solution presents itself, because the problem bears on an infinite number of different concerns in Betty's life. It bears, indeed, on her life itself, and there is never a solution to such problems any more than there is a way out of death. The potential loss of her grandson is, for Betty, the loss of her existence. Rather than seeking a solution, then, Betty attempts to make a meaningful necessity out of her loss, out of her death, rather than submitting it to the contingency of the adoption system. Instead of having to equate her loss with a value no more meaningful than that of public stock, Betty makes a gift out of her loss. She thereby increases the meaning of her grandson, as well as of her life and her death, by extending the relational ambiguity of the total situation toward the Boffins, including them in the meaning-complex of her life. Since a gift is always given by a particular person, whereas a commodity is exchanged between parties who might as well be anonymous, then the reception of that gift must take the personal relation that comes with it as well.[37] A bond is thereby formed between giver and receiver and preserved through affective memories. Moreover, the newly formed relation is ambiguous also, insofar as the bearer must forever ponder the unsolvable problem of honoring the gift. There is, in the act of giving, a general commitment to ambiguity involving a potentially endless chain of members of the community.

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37. "If things are given and returned it is precisely because one gives and returns 'respects' and 'courtesies'. But in addition, in giving them, a man gives himself, and he does so because he owes himself—himself and his possessions—to others" (Mauss, *The Gift*, 44-5).

The central object of ethical dispute throughout *Our Mutual Friend* is, of course, the fortune left by John Harmon's father. The "many wills made by [John Harmon's] unhappy self-tormenting father" (787) were purposeful for him alone, and even then in a seemingly vacillating and arbitrary way. To the Boffins, John Harmon, Bella Wilfer, and Silas Wegg, the will's orders are unfortunately legally binding but nevertheless of a contingent and meaningless nature. The situation, again, is technically complicated, pervaded by legal issues, but without meaning to anyone involved. A clear solution presents itself in the discernment of the one legitimate will, but this still seems unsatisfactory to all of the ambiguous demands of the real moral situation. The money is left by this last will to the Boffins, but this only marks the end of the situation's mechanical unfolding and the beginning of the potential for human involvement. Thus, in order to give ethical significance to the situation, the Boffins immediately decide to give the entire fortune to Mr. and Mrs. Harmon.

> 'You supposed me just now to be the possessor of my father's property.—So I am. But through any act of my father's or by any right I have? No. Through the munificence of Mr. Boffin. … I owe everything I possess solely to the disinterestedness, uprightness, tenderness, goodness (there are no words to satisfy me) of Mr. and Mrs. Boffin. (788)

Harmon comes into possession of the property, not through legalistic and impersonal rights, but through the personal act of the Boffins, who will forever leave their mark on that property. Harmon considers himself indebted to the Boffins, but not in such a way that he could repay them with money, even an equal amount or more. Rather, the essence of the debt has its origin in the gesture of giving itself, a gesture that, it is noted, exceeds even words. The extension and enrichment of a relational network of singular gestures, beloved

persons, and invaluable objects takes place through this event, and we leave the story feeling that a community has been formed out of what began as a set of contingent relations.

The novel's concluding chapter returns to the Veneering circle gathered together for another dinner. The conversation turns to the recent marriage of the middle-class lawyer Eugene Wrayburn to the poor waterside man's daughter, Lizzie Hexam. The majority of the company scoffs at the mismatch and mocks Lizzie's low station. "I hope she steered herself, skiffed herself, paddled herself, larboarded and starboarded herself, or whatever the technical term may be, to the ceremony?" Eugene's friend, Mortimer Lightwood, is present to defend the absent couple. "However she got to it, she graced it" (816). But the issue is pressed by the indignant Lady Tippins until she calls for the moral opinions of the whole table. "Now I am Chairwoman of Committees … And this … is a Committee of the whole House to what-you-may-call-it—elicit, I suppose—the Voice of Society. The question before the Committee is, whether a young man of very fair family, good appearance, and some talent, makes a fool or a wise man of himself in marrying a female waterman, turned factory girl" (817). Tippins claims to have access to the true voice of society through the form of a tribunal. She intends to prove the status quo by appealing to this very impersonal and disconnected group of individuals supposedly representative of society as such. "My gorge rises against such a marriage … it makes me sick." "Every such man should look out for a fine woman as nearly resembling herself as he may hope to discover." "Madness and moonshine … A man may do anything lawful for money. But for no money!—Bosh!" (816-18). In addition to the traditional impoliteness of marrying across classes, the modern concern also objects on the grounds that such a marriage makes for an imprudent financial choice from the husband's point of view. In short, the possibility of an ethical discussion is reduced to the affirmation of present cultural limitations and calculations of quantitative

value. Finally, however, Mr. Twemlow, the man of mistaken identity from the first gathering, speaks up.

> Good gracious! My Twemlow forgotten! My dearest! My own! What is his vote?
>
> Twemlow has the air of being ill at ease, as he takes his hand from his forehead and replies.
>
> 'I am disposed to think,' says he, 'that this is a question of the feelings of a gentleman.'
>
> 'A gentleman can have no feelings who contracts such a marriage,' flushes Podsnap.
>
> 'Pardon me, sir,' says Twemlow, rather less mildly than usual, 'I don't agree with you. If this
>
> gentleman's feelings of gratitude, of respect, of admiration, and affection, induced him (as I presume they did) to marry this lady—'
>
> 'This lady!' echoes Podsnap.
>
> 'Sir,' returns Twemlow, with his wristbands bristling a little, '*you* repeat the word; *I* repeat the word. This lady. What else would you call her, if the gentleman were present?'
>
> This being something in the nature of a poser for Podsnap, he merely waves it away with a speechless wave.
>
> 'I say,' resumes Twemlow, 'if such feelings on the part of this gentleman, induced this gentleman to marry this lady, I think he is the greater gentleman for the action, and makes her the greater lady. I beg to say, that when I use the word, gentleman, I use it in the sense in which the degree may be attained by any man. The feelings of a gentleman I hold sacred, and I confess I am not comfortable when they are made the subject of sport or general discussion.'
>
> 'I should like to know,' sneers Podsnap, 'whether your noble relation would be of your opinion.'

> 'Mr Podsnap,' retorts Twemlow, 'permit me. He might be, or he might not be. I cannot say. But, I could not allow even him to dictate to me on a point of great delicacy, on which I feel very strongly.'
>
> Somehow, a canopy of wet blanket seems to descend upon the company, and Lady Tippins was never known to turn so very greedy or so very cross. Mortimer Lightwood alone brightens. He has been asking himself, as to every other member of the Committee in turn, 'I wonder whether you are the Voice!' But he does not ask himself the question after Twemlow has spoken, and he glances in Twemlow's direction as if he were grateful. When the company disperse—by which time Mr and Mrs Veneering have had quite as much as they want of the honour, and the guests have had quite as much as *they* want of the other honour—Mortimer sees Twemlow home, shakes hands with him cordially at parting, and fares to the Temple, gaily.
>
> (819-20)

The voice of society is, in one sense, the mind expressed through the rigid forms of objective social norms. To this extent, the members of the Veneering circle who dissent against Eugene's marriage are speaking from the perspective of society as determinate objectivity. Mortimer Lightwood is, however, listening for another voice, the original subjective voice responsible for the creation of new social forms and the transformation of old. For inasmuch as society is objective, rigid, and normative, it nevertheless also draws a dynamic energy from creative subjects, allowing it to change slowly over time or suddenly in a revolutionary instant. The creative voice resists the rigidity of social forms, not because of the opinions they represent, but because of an interest in gathering a thoughtful and generous community, the bonds of which are alienated by objectivity's logic of exchange. It is apparently inevitable that even the radical thoughts of a limit-crossing community will

eventually congeal into objective forms of exchange; nevertheless, endless resistance is imperative lest objective rationalization should overpower the inner subjective motor of critical thinking.[38] Twemlow, then, may be considered a living and active voice of society, in conversation with other such active voices; while the other guests represent a recorded voice of society, firm and sure of itself yet growing overplayed and wanting in energy. Mortimer sees in Twemlow a true member of his community, one who brings a generous interpretation to the table, opening up possibilities for others rather than closing them off. They shake hands in the end as though to affirm for one another this mutual concern for the preservation of what they consider singularly valuable in their community, against the rational compulsion to sell it for a few pounds.

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38. A strong premise for a philosophy of critical thinking is present in Simmel's concept of the "tragedy of culture": "Formulated most succinctly and generally [the tragedy of culture] is this: that as its immediate manifestation life at the level of consciousness produces objective creations in which it expresses itself and which for their part, as life's containers and forms, tend to receive its further flows—yet at the same time their ideal and historical determinacy, boundedness and rigidity sooner or later come into opposition and antagonism with ever-variable, boundary-dissolving, continuous life. Life is continually producing something on which it breaks, by which it is violated, something that is necessarily its proper form but yet, by the very fact of being form, in the deepest sense conflicts with the dynamic of life, with life's incapability of any actual pause" (Simmel, *The View of Life*, 103). Thus, when we assert critical thinking against oppressive structures, it is essential to, first, be aware that those structures are products of a thinking that was once critical and reflective, and, second, that our own present resistances may one day also congeal into rigid forms that will be unacceptable to a future society.

Conclusion

There is a relationship of affinity between the free market, democracy, and aesthetic realism. Each participates in a leveling of mass experience. The extremely wealthy have more, but they do not experience life through different economic or social forms altogether. Each citizen's vote counts for no less and no more than one, and the leaders are themselves citizens bound by the same laws. Narrative art, in novels, films, and on television, tends to deal with the everyday life of bourgeois society, because, it seems to proclaim, there is nothing else. It would appear that because everyone exists through the same economic, political, and aesthetic forms, that each individual is quantifiable in relation to the others. Thus, consumer price indices measure our spending habits, voting statistics provide us with political climate maps, and popular media give us clean frameworks in which we can measure our relative attractiveness, determine our personality type, and solve our moral dilemmas.[1]

In each of these aspects of modern life—economics, politics, and aesthetics—there is a possibility of transcending measurement. It is evidently more difficult to do so in the first two than it is in the third. This dissertation, then, without speaking directly to political

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1. "The principle that the minority has to conform to the majority indicates that the absolute or qualitative value of the individual voice is reduced to an entity of purely quantitative significance. The corollary of the presupposition of this arithmetical procedure whereby the numerical majority or minority of unspecified units expresses and guides the inner reality of the group is the democratic levelling where everyone counts as one and no one counts for more than one. This measuring, weighing and calculating exactness of modern times is the purest reflection of its intellectualism which, however, on the basis of abstract equality, also favours the egoistical impulses of the elements" (Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, 448).

or economic questions as such, has tried to examine possibilities of subjective transcendence over objective quantification in four examples of realist literature. Part of the leveling tendency of the three spheres is for each sphere to include the other two, since they are formally alike in so many ways. The state is not an entirely separate entity from the market and vice versa. Modern works of art, similarly, represent political and economic content. Thus, in examining the novel, it was necessary to touch on questions from the other two spheres of social life, although I focused on the economic. My overall concern, then, has been with the subjective transcendence of economically quantified forms through aesthetic judgment and form.

It was necessary to think the logic of aesthetic form itself, and its relationship to economic form, if it was to be possible to think about transcendence. Kant, probably the greatest thinker of form, was therefore indispensable. His four moments of aesthetic judgment—disinterestedness, subjective universality, purposiveness without purpose, and the *sensus communis*—still capture the unified meaning of the enigmatic entrance of a free and irreducible aesthetic form into a world structured by causal chains. Kant is able to think the form of the aesthetic object, and its corresponding subjective judgment, crossing the limits of theoretical understanding, but he is unable to think the aesthetic form's ability to exceed itself. Concerning the possible aesthetic form of the world, beauty is the absolute limit, beyond which there is nothing. And yet Kant, in his analytic of the sublime, shows a dim recognition that this nothing is not nothing. The sublime names the transcendence of

aesthetic form, but Kant affords it no reality except in the deepest need of reason within the thinking subject.[2]

The need to transcend limits proclaims the possibility of doing so, not in a logical but in an ethical sense. Just as political revolution is never primarily a question of logical or even material possibility, but rather of a spiritual possibility connected to an ethical imperative, so too the impulsive need to let expression transcend rigid boundaries has corresponding to it an existent possibility.[3] Simmel was aware of this correlation of need and

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2. "We express ourselves entirely incorrectly when we call this or that object of nature sublime, even though we may quite correctly call a great many natural objects beautiful; for how can we call something by a term of approval if we apprehend it as in itself contrapurposive? Instead, all we are entitled to say is that the object is suitable for exhibiting a sublimity that can be found in the mind. For what is sublime, in the proper meaning of the term, cannot be contained in any sensible form but concerns only ideas of reason, which, though they cannot be exhibited adequately, are aroused and called to mind by this very inadequacy, which can be exhibited in sensibility." The need of reason, which Kant discusses in "What Is Orientation in Thinking?" is the feeling of a deficiency in reason's urge to totally systematize experience. Reason's feeling of sublimity seems to correspond to this need, since both concern an "unboundedness … while yet we add to this unboundedness the thought of its totality" (Kant, *Critique of Judgment*, 98-99).

3. "Even if for a theoretical aim reason's ability is not sufficient to establish certain propositions affirmatively, while indeed they also do not contradict reason, as soon as these same propositions belong inseparably to the practical interest of pure reason, it must assume them—although as a foreign offering not grown on its soil but yet sufficiently authenticated—and seek to compare and connect them with everything that it has within its power as speculative reason." The propositions to

possibility of transcendence deep within the individual. "Our deepest shock is the growing emotional awareness of treasures that lie within us as in a locked chest, over which we have neither the key nor the power of decision, and which we therefore take with us to the grave."[4] His point is that no rational approach is capable of disclosing these treasures, because they already transcend rational limits. Nietzsche identifies the same inner phenomenon, the control over which he attributes to artists and philosophers. "The thinker, and the artist likewise, whose better self has taken refuge in his work, feels an almost malicious joy when he sees how his body and his spirit are being slowly broken down and destroyed by time: it is as though he observed from a corner a thief working away at his money-chest, while knowing that the chest is empty and all the treasure it contained safe."[5] Both Nietzsche and Simmel compare the transcendent depths of the soul to stores of money.

The transcendence of form is both radically different from the original form, and almost indistinguishable from it. The truly new does not try to distinguish itself from everything else, since this would only relate it to the old forms all the more strongly; rather, it becomes new in its sensitivity to the meaning of a slight change in perspective. Adorno, for example, compares the possibility of a communist utopia to the everyday world from the perspective of having just come home from a vacation.

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which Kant refers involve the immortality of the soul, the existence of God, and freedom itself (Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, 154ff).

4. Simmel, *The View of Life*, 168.

5. Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*, 97.

> To a child returning from a holiday, home seems new, fresh, festive. Yet nothing has changed there since he left. Only because duty has now been forgotten, of which each piece of furniture, window, lamp, was otherwise a reminder, is the house given back this sabbath peace, and for minutes one is at home in a never-returning world of rooms, nooks, and corridors in a way that makes the rest of life there a lie. No differently will the world one day appear, almost unchanged, in its constant feast-day light, when it stands no longer under the law of labour, and when for homecomers duty has the lightness of holiday play.[6]

Similarly, Nietzsche and Simmel view money, in these two fragmentary moments of writing, as hidden treasure. The internalization and concealment of money inverts its quantitative nature from, what Hegel would call, a bad infinity to a good infinity. No longer is money an endless series of identical quantitative units, but rather it has become the internal possibility of changing perspective. Indeed, ordinary money already pretends to offer infinite possibilities to the subject, but these possibilities are inevitably external and deficient in meaning. In the treasure metaphor, however, money relinquishes its endless extension and instead achieves the capability of infinite internal possibility. What is at stake for Nietzsche and Simmel is a new conception of value capable of leaping across, rather than merely repeating, form.

As I have tried to show in this dissertation, the transcendence of the form of quantitative value often occurs in everyday moments experienced through the lens of a kind of aesthetic or reflective judgment. The assertion of the soul in its transformative power occurs in the midst of everyday life, not above it.

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6. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, 112.

> The small daily events of the intellectual, cultural and political life, whose sum total determines the overall picture of the historical scene, rather than the specific individual acts of the leaders, have now become the object of historical research. Where any prominence and qualitative incomparability of an individual still prevails, this is interpreted as an unusually lucky inheritance, that is as an event that includes and expresses a large quantity of accumulated energies and achievements of the human species. Indeed, even within a wholly individualistic ethic this democratic tendency is powerful and is elevated to a world view, while at the same time the inner nature of the soul is deprecated. This corresponds to the belief that the highest values are embedded in everyday existence and in each of its moments, but not in a heroic attitude or in catastrophes or outstanding deeds and experiences, which always have something arbitrary and superficial about them. We may all experience great passions and unheard-of flights of fancy, yet their final value depends on what they mean for those quiet, nameless and equable hours when alone the real and total self lives.[7]

Thus, in Zola's *La Curée*, Aristide Saccard transcends mere financial accumulation in an aesthetic moment of imaginative spatial reorganization. In James's *The Wings of the Dove*, Milly transforms her money into an infinitely open ethical question. In Mann's *Buddenbrooks*, young Hanno cuts off his family's historical line of profit and decline, success and failure, in a moment of ecstatic musical summation. And finally, in Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend*, John Harmon breaks through a series of determinate identities, each bound in some relation to a financial legacy, setting free an ambiguous and generous self through an existential

7. Simmel, *The Philosophy of Money*, 279.

confrontation with death. The moment, cut off from the rest of experience and yet drawing it in as a whole, gathers the potential of the individual to redeem the everyday.

Freedom is the capacity to discover and take on new perspectives, all the while remaining gathered around the unique but indeterminate center of one's subjective existence. Modern commerce opened up the seas to facilitate international exchange, thereby breaking through limits hitherto imposed by rough terrain. For some time now, a felt need to break through the restraining barriers of economic forms has compelled individuals to seek a new ocean, a medium to facilitate the relations that are diminishing under capitalism.

> *In the horizon of the infinite*.—We have forsaken the land and gone to sea! We have destroyed the bridge behind us—more so, we have demolished the land behind us! Now, little ship, look out! Beside you is the ocean; it is true, it does not always roar, and at times it lies there like silk and gold and dreams of goodness. But there will be hours when you realize that it is infinite and that there is nothing more awesome than infinity. Oh, the poor bird that has felt free and now strikes against the walls of this cage! Woe, when homesickness for the land overcomes you, as if there had been more *freedom* there—and there is no more 'land'![8]

Since no objective structures can provide a sure sense of direction, oceanic freedom calls on the inner center of the human subject for an orientating compass. Only by drawing on singular resources can the individual find a path amid infinite possibilities.

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8. Nietzsche, *Gay Science*, 119.

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