SLUMMING AND THE 19th CENTURY GEOGRAPHICAL IMAGINATION

by

JAMES MATTHEW TOWEILL

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ABSTRACT

The act of slumming helped define and partition the 19th century US city. Intimately

connected with slumming was its representation in prose works. By writing about slumming,

or going slumming themselves, 19th century US writers contributed to the development of a

geographical imagination, or a knowledge of territories based on how they were used or

experienced by different social classes. In most cases, this geographical imagination

reinforced the physical and ideological partitions that already existed between various classes

and ethnic groups. Works by popular writers like Osgood Bradbury, and canonical novelists

like William Dean Howells, Stephen Crane and Frank Norris, reinforced middle-class and

bourgeois conceptions of urban social space. The degrees to which existing social space was

maintained, and the processes by which it was maintained, depended on the particular

geographical features of the cities themselves and available representational strategies.

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INTRODUCTION:

SLUMMING AND THE GEOGRAPHICAL IMAGINATION

"No social group can subsist without a working knowledge of the definition and qualities of its territory, of its environment, of its "situated identity" in the world, of the spatial configurations of actually existing and potential uses (including symbolic and aesthetic as well as economic values) essential to its existence." (David Harvey, Cosmpolitanism and the banality of geographic evils)

Social space is a mercurial phenomenon, a confluence of group perceptions, abstractions, and objects moving in and through a set of coordinates that may not always remain stable. Language is a crucial component of its composition, helping to define parameters of human agency and thus the ways we understand, create and interact with spaces. Literary narratives, as they use language to represent human activity over time and places are particularly valuable for studying how we perceive and interact with particular territories. But deciding which modes of literature are appropriate for such a study has been a source of debate. In *The Production of Space*, Henri Lefebvre doubts one can isolate literary texts that are appropriate for studying social space. For Lefebvre, the problem with searching for space in literary texts is that the phenomenon is too abundant. Space in literature is everywhere: "enclosed, described, projected, dreamt of or speculated about" (15).

While this may be true, for scholars like Sara Blair, this ubiquity is an advantage. Blair argues that:

> Fictive texts, with all their tricks of resistance to the imperatives of the temporal and the teleological, are a far richer resource than literary geographers have thus far recognized for charting the 'strange effects' of space—its simultaneity, its encryptions, its dynamism and repressions (556).

Not only do literary texts chart the strangeness of space, in doing so, they make space strange, they stretch it out, make it malleable, fragment it and dislocate it from its everyday temporal existence. Such an estrangement allows one to more easily dissect the various sources and features of socially-produced space. So Blair's claim dampers some of Lefebvre's skepticism toward literary texts, but still leaves his questions unanswered—which texts are particularly useful for an investigation into social space and why?

Lefebvre's discussion of social space itself provides guidelines for answering these questions. Like any product, social space "transcends the philosophical opposition between subject and object," making it both a perceptual and physical phenomenon (71). Social space also "subsumes things produced, and encompasses their interrelationships in their coexistence and simultaneity" (73). Not simply a container for commodities and social relations, social space is itself continually produced by what it encompasses. Social space, then, can be defined as a persistence of material and linguistic relationships that are stable enough to allow us to view processes that contribute to the development of human behavior, consciousness and the manipulation of the environment.

Lefebvre also makes more specific claims about the relationship between literature and space. Without mentioning other modes, he singles out surrealism for its failure "by virtue of language alone, to make the leap from *exchange* (of goods) to *use*" (19). He claims that the surrealists' "purely verbal metamorphosis…of the relationship between 'subjects' (people) and things (the realm of the everyday life) overloaded meaning -- and changed nothing" (19). The implication here is that surrealism's oblique referentiality prevented its commodity forms (books, magazines, pamphlets), from having a discernable influence on social/spatial practices. Ultimately this is an issue of representation and its relationship to praxis. One might infer from Lefebvre's statement that rather than resembling wider social processes, surrealism resembles a particular, extraordinary phenomenology of navigating space and has less influence on wider social practices of classifying and navigating spaces.

From these insights one can infer that literary texts appropriate for studying social space will strike a balance between resembling a physical environment and abstracting it from everyday empirical perceptions. Furthermore this literature will (1) show how 'produced things' relate to one another in a given area or between areas and contribute to the construction of social space (2) show how consciousness is involved in the production of social space and (3) have been involved in the development of a praxis beyond the creation of literary texts. Literature about or produced by the act of slumming in the US fits these criteria. Through its close relationship to the broader social practice of slumming, this literature had a discernable impact on social/spatial practices through its narratives, rhetoric and ideological concerns. In other words, this literature reveals that the processes by which

meaning is made in literature were involved with the processes by which space was categorized, experienced, navigated and classified into hierarchies.

Frank Norris's short story "The Third Circle" (1897) provides a salient and disturbing example of the manner in which narrative rhetoric interacts with social/spatial practices and ideology. Referring to San Francisco's fin de siècle slumming industry, Norris's narrator claims that "there are three parts of Chinatown—the part the guides show you, the part the guides don't show you, and the part that no one ever hears of." Of course his story has to do with the last part, the "Third Circle" of an intra-city hell, or as Norris calls it, a "noisome swamp" (103). The narrator introduces Harriet Ten Eyck and her fiancée Hillegas, monied visitors from the East who go slumming in San Francisco's Chinatown on their own, without the benefit of a guide. Harriet finds one restaurant to be particularly charming: a "'dear, quaint, curious old place'" she calls it, and a "'little bit of China dug out and transplanted here" (104). Harriet's description of the place as "transplanted" is ambiguous and fraught with tension. In one sense, she means that Chinatown so closely resembles a different nation that it might as well be described as such; in another sense she means that she has literally stepped outside the territorial boundaries of the nation, into a zone where different temporal and cultural laws are operative. As proof, she cites the fact that "'…all America and the Nineteenth Century" are "just around the corner! Look! You can even see the Palace Hotel from the window!" (104). For Harriet, the visit to Chinatown represents a set of inextricable dislocations—temporal, spatial and cultural—that leave the privilege of her European, upper-class identity intact, but temporarily suspended. She becomes tourist and explorer at

the same time, both simultaneously safe and potentially in peril, and feels a thrill at the novelty of inhabiting two cultures at once. This might be called geographic interstitiality--or simply 'slumming': a present-tense, temporary and active engagement with and entrance into an area considered to be a slum.

Harriet's slumming activity depends, however, on her ability to locate herself within a matrix of identifiable signifiers, an act of geographically positioning herself within the city. Harriet doesn't merely recognize the difference between herself and ethnic others, but that this difference is predicated on geographical markers. She identifies a number of representational spaces—her aunt's rooms and the Palace Hotel, one of San Francisco's most prominent symbols of white capitalist prosperity, as beacons. Home is within sight. Domestic and financial security are their most prominent features. These locations reinforce her sense of herself as a member of a dominant group and thus her mastery over the place. She baldly articulates her colonial impulses when she exclaims to her fiancee, referring to a particular restaurant in Chinatown, "'Why, we just found it out by ourselves. It's ours isn't it, Tom, dear, by right of discovery?'" (104). Her fiancée concurs, and Harriet's assertion raises her value in his perception: "at that moment Hillegas was sure that Miss Ten Eyck was quite the most beautiful girl he ever remembered to have seen" (104). Here, slumming and its aspects of conquest reinforce social and romantic bonds.

The couple's thrill over their excursion into Chinatown depends on a deeply naïve consideration of social space. For them, space is atemporal—not produced, but there for the taking by white subjects who ostensibly know and control territory. Harriet is only partially

conscious of the "transplanted" nature of Chinatown, that this space not only contains a different set of rules that govern aesthetics, but codes of conduct as well. This misrecognition constitutes what Lefebvre calls "the illusion of transparency." This is the illusion that space can be perceived immediately as an obvious set of signifiers. The subject operating under this illusion comprehends social space

> without meeting any insurmountable obstacles, to conduct what is perceived…from the shadows into the light; it is supposed to effect this displacement of the object either by piercing it with a ray or converting it, after certain precautions have been taken, from a murky to a luminous state (28)

Harriet and Hillegas presume that their knowledge is adequate to transform this corner of Chinatown—one yet to be "heard of" or classified by the dominant culture—from an unknown quantity to a place for their leisure. They want to illuminate the area, to map it, if only privately. This naivete is the basis of the story's narrative and rhetorical movements. When Hillegas leaves Harriet alone for a moment, she disappears, and Norris eventually reveals to us that she has been kidnapped by Chinese criminals, enslaved and addicted to opium. What might have been an incisive parody of bourgeois arrogance turns into propaganda. Norris uses the slumming trip to reiterate two common fears: that white women are always in danger from nonwhite sexual predators, and that areas like Chinatown remain dangerous, mysterious and uncontrollable.

Ultimately, then, the story presents a double misrecognition. Its characters fail to recognize San Francisco's Chinatown as a social space produced, maintained and occupied by

subjects. Its narrator (and likely the author as well) misrecognizes the real factors that produce Chinatown's highly circumscribed geographical and cultural boundaries—the racism that affects settlement, occupational choices, and access to services. The irony of the story is that by showing readers and potential slum-travelers the dangers of this unknown territory, it helps reproduce a more substantial version of the mystification it ostensibly warns its audience against. Reading itself becomes a kind of slumming, a way of experiencing the thrill and potential danger of the act without engaging in it physically.

Of course, Norris's story is only one variety of slumming narrative. Not all slumming trips were undertaken strictly as tourist activities, and very few slumming trips ended in such unforeseen ways. Norris's story displays the reality of white San Franciscans' paranoia rather than the real consequences of slumming, which were ultimately more dangerous to the slum inhabitants themselves. But the rhetoric of the story and its narrative function due to a particular kind of 'realism'—the employment of language that refers to extra-literary geographical and social practices. This is its point of connection with a host of other texts and practices in the late 19th century US. The spatial recognition Harriet Ten Eyck initially makes was common to many 19th century urban inhabitants. Middle and upper-class subjects increasingly found it necessary to define themselves in relation to other classes and spaces. This 'geographical imagination' was often dependent on the concomitant maintenance and physical transgression of boundaries within the city. These boundaries were, of course, also caused by processes of immigration and the tumultuous nature of the US economy in the late 19th century—the depressions of the 1870s and 1890s, the relatively unregulated

accumulation of wealth by captains of industry and capital's frequent attacks on labor.

Because this instability created opportunities for drastic social mobility in either direction,

the period is marked by intense anxiety over social classification, in which knowledge of

social-geographical boundaries played a significant role. This anxiety is manifested in

slumming as a physical activity, one that simultaneously allowed the financially secure

subjects of the era the opportunity to recognize the extent of their own success and

ameliorate the conditions of the downwardly mobile. Not surprisingly, there is an explosion

of slumming 'realism' in this period, written accounts of slums or slumming in a variety of

print media, not limited to advertisements, newspaper articles, nonfiction exposes, poetry

and fiction.

My argument is that many slumming narratives in the latter half of the 19th century

US participated in the creation and maintenance of spatial and social boundaries—including

hierarchies related to class, race, gender and sexuality—to a degree not seen before this

period. Before the late 19th century, the city in literary fiction was often cast as a place

composed of forces, particular metaphysical qualities, or interchangeable features, like dark

alleyways, docks and clusters of homes—not as spaces to be navigated, explored and

classified based on concrete, specific and relatively stable zones and coordinates. Poe's cities,

Hawthorne's cities, Melville's cities—even if they are named, are relatively amorphous and

easily interchangeable with others. The interior spaces of US cities were of chief concern to

these writers, rather than the distances between them and the social spaces they helped

constitute. At the same time, and in contrast, popular writers were making cities and the

areas inhabited by their working-class and nonwhite subjects the explicit focus of their work. The city became a place to navigate with precision; crossing its geographically and socially organized differentials became sources of narrative. Later on in the 19ᵗʰ century, this phenomenon found its way into what we now classify as literary fiction. These novels, novelists and their reading public became intimately concerned with the relationship between a city's inhabitants and its geography. The confluence of these two types of knowledge manifested itself in literature as a component of 'realism' or a recurring feature of a number of different narrative strategies, not limited to realism as a historically specific period in the development of the novel. Or one could say that these novels share some similar attempts to ground themselves in 'the real', to various ideological ends, but ends that are always conditioned, to some degree, by the physical parameters to which they refer. In this period space and literature are necessary interlocutors.

Slumming conceptually

I appropriate the term 'slumming' as a kind of shorthand for my concerns in this project. One reason is that the term is simply convenient. 'Slumming' is much simpler than saying 'cross-class encounters across urban geographies,' or 'the bourgeois fascination with the urban other turned into praxis.' But as a caveat, I want to recognize that the term does have a recognizable cache and could be seen as pejorative, referring to a set of activities used by those of higher social status to trivialize a complex and often ethically dubious set of activities. For example, it might bring to mind Prohibition and a certain species of white Harlem nightclub patron who was there simply for the booze and sex. Or one might consider

a current connotation of the word, where slumming is used to refer to a person who becomes romantically involved with someone of much lower social status. There is also the risk that the term is too broad. In one sense the kind of activity the word slumming describes has existed as long as perceptible differences in classes. The gospels, The Canterbury Tales, and Moll Flanders, are all in a sense, slumming narratives, as they are dependent on the existence of economic inequality, the association of certain behaviors with one social class or another, spatial demarcations and interactions between classes.

For my purposes, slumming has both a historically specific and a broader conceptual meaning. The term 'slum' itself is a product of the industrial era, used to describe areas of cities blighted by overcrowding, inadequate housing, poor sanitation, pollution and the myriad physical and social problems facilitated by these conditions. This categorization was later extended to describe sections of the city where immigrant populations resided. Slumming is, in one sense, simply the act of visiting these areas. It also refers to the point at which a number of interrelated, historically specific processes meet—the production and experience of social space in late 19th century US cities, the production of class relationships in those cities and the development of city narratives in US literature. This use of the term incorporates its synchronic use in the 19th century but also expands it to include theoretical and philosophical considerations of space not available at the time of its coinage. Slumming is not only the activity of a certain class undertaken for reasons of leisure or reform, but a set of complex operations that form social knowledge. Its connection to urban inhabitants' knowledge of space has important implications for fictional works that are produced by or

represent the practice of slumming. The word slumming conceals a complex correspondence between social knowledge and processes of class formation and urban settlement patterns. It refers to an interdependence of geography, phenomenology and physical movement across a particular space. Thus slumming presupposes a great deal of social knowledge, of which individual slummers may or may not be conscious. It requires a recognition of one's superior or privileged position in a social hierarchy, some knowledge of the individual components or features that signify one's position in that hierarchy, and a recognition that those hierarchies can, to some degree, be contained by certain areas of a city. These areas may shift, but are also stable enough to be traversed, enjoyed and categorized. Slumming is, then, the collision between a personal or social narrative and active cognitive mapping. Furthermore, it is often a transgressive and reactionary act, both a flaunting of social norms and an exertion of power or mastery over a place. Harriet Ten Eyck baldly articulates this when she claims the restaurant in Chinatown by right of discovery.

Twentieth century theories of spatiality, in particular the concepts of 'social space' and the 'geographic imagination' can help to explain the nature of slumming as a physical and literary practice. Edward Soja, following Henri Lefebvre identifies socially-produced space as "a created structure comparable to other social constructions resulting from the transformation of given conditions inherent to being alive, in much the same way that human history represents a social transformation of time" (80). Though this formulation is extremely general, it directs attention to a given area's synchronic properties in relationship to their chronological development. Social space includes the way a built environment is

constructed by its human uses—lived in, visited, traversed, avoided, created and classified. What David Harvey calls the 'geographical imagination' could be considered the psychological component of social space. Such an imagination "enables the individual to recognize the role of space and place in his own biography, to relate to these spaces he sees around him, and to recognize how transactions between individuals and between organizations are affected by the space that separates them"(23). The first two aspects of this imagination are requisite for slumming. The third requires a good deal more education, either in the form of sustained experience with a place, or a knowledge of larger social, political or economic processes. This is the kind of imagination possessed by gangs, city planners, campaign managers, delivery persons, and as I shall show later, some writers. This is also the aspect of geographical imagination that the slummers in Norris's "The Third Circle" lack. They have no awareness of the matrices of exchange between the heavily ghettoized Chinese population and the rest of the city. Neither of these aspects of the geographical imagination refers exclusively to the cities—so one would need to add a further component to Harvey's formulation. This can be accomplished by invoking Sartre. In a discussion of Eugene Sue's *Mysteries of Paris*, he refers to the city as "the absolute interdependence of spots connected by their radical compartmentalization" (63). Whether or not a given city's space was actually so compartmentalized, the act of slumming relies on the supposition that such compartmentalization exists. At the same time, the act of slumming produces connections between demarcated social spaces, though these are often connections that maintain the hierarchical relationships between class zones.

How do these concepts relate to literature? David Harvey defines three mutually constitutive types of space: organic space, perceptual space and symbolic space. Organic space is the brute, extra-human physical content of a given area. Perceptual space "involves the neurological synthesis of all kinds of sense experience – optical, tactual, acoustic and kinesthetic" (28). Symbolic space is the experience of spatial relationships "vicariously through the interpretation of symbolic representations which have no spatial dimension" (28). It is this third kind of space that literary slumming is primarily constitutive of, though by no means is it in isolation from the other two. Through the methods that constitute its production of and its effects on social knowledge, it has a relationship to the perceptual, and in some cases, the organic space of a given area. If "each form of social activity defines its space," slumming accounts contribute to this space by helping to regulate social practices and further defining spatial boundaries (30).

Slumming in the nineteenth century

But one might say that the use of the word 'slumming' had already anticipated conceptions of social space. Originally the word had a more geographically specific connotation than it does at present. The term 'slumming' came into use during the mid-1880s and described the "visitation of slums for charitable or philanthropic purposes," as well as the visitation of slums for other reasons, not limited to curiosity, voyeurism, the search for sexual partners or engagement in illegal or illicit activities (OED). The origins of the term 'slum' are murkier, though it seems to have been used to describe both a psychological state and a location. Alan Mayne claims that the term was used interchangeably with 'den' and 'rookery'

in a British context, and may have also been derived from 'slumber,' as used to describe an area's working-class inhabitants (127). These two origins of the term suggest the term contains an implicit connection between space and cognitive states. To go slumming was not only to cross a physical boundary, but a psychological one, to temporarily take on the experience of 'slumber' or thankless, thoughtless routine through observation. Etymologically then, the term contains a recognition of the simultaneity of space and consciousness and the activity of temporarily losing one's sophistication. As a simultaneous description of an activity across a set of places, it crystallizes an ambiguity, a practice that binds desire for being somewhere else with hesitation. 'Slumming' would seem to describe an inoculation, a playing with fire, a flirtation with forces dangerous to privilege.

As slumming refers to a practice of industrial and post-industrial societies, it is bound up with the fear of becoming proletarian. The practice of slumming is dependent on the spatial boundaries accorded to and inhabited by immigrant, non-Anglo and working-class communities in the urban areas of these societies. In the early-to-mid nineteenth century, industrialization was key to dividing the US city into class zones based on economic production, and often in the US, non-Anglo ethnicities "made up the bulk of the factory working class" and many other less prestigious trades (Russell 57). Fashionable or upper-class residential districts were located at some distance, either vertically or horizontally from areas of industrial production, and wealthier citizens migrated further from these areas as they expanded. Ward notes that "the slums were defined as those parts of the city where the removal of the affluent had left behind a concentration of impoverished people" (14). As the

slums expanded or multiplied, so did the physical and/or epistemological distance between these and more respectable areas. Due to immigration, racial and ethnic segregation, language barriers, and financial hardship the slums of major US cities became crowded, and at times, unsanitary. Notoriously, some slum-dwellers turned to illicit or illegal activities to support themselves, though this feature of slum districts overshadows the many other kinds of labor undertaken in these districts. At the same time, wealthier urbanites became increasingly curious about the nature of forbidden or exotic parts of the city. During the middle of the 19th century, representations of slum life became increasingly popular, especially accounts of Paris, London and New York. Eugene Sue's *Mysteries of Paris* series and Dickens' representations of working-class life were among the best known of these. George C. Foster's mid-century sketches in *Gaslight New York* (1850) were sensational accounts of lower-class and criminal life, presented with a very thin veneer of moral reform. The genre was reignited in 1890 with Jacob Riis's expose of New York tenements conditions in *How The Other Half Lives*. Though these three metropolises produced the bulk of slumming literature, Alan Mayne observes that "A shared genre of slumland representation can be traced throughout the cities of the English-speaking world," and presumably many other cities with a measure of industrial development (4).

Middle-class and wealthy urbanites had a variety of motives for slumming, which more often than not overlapped with one another. According to Chad Heap, the practice of slumming was a fusion of two disparate traditions that arose earlier in the 19th century—the Protestant reform movement and the "sporting males," men visiting working-class areas for

the purposes of pugilism, gambling, liquor and prostitution (Heap 5). Another more strictly

voyeuristic form of slumming occurred on "tours" in which the slumming subject was to look

at lower-class or nonwhite objects. Most notably in New York and San Francisco, entire

intra-city tourist industries were developed to safely escort people through the slums. Often

what slumming tourists saw was performance in the strictest sense—hired actors staged

scenes as opium addicts and even gunfights for a thrill-seeking public. Slums became living

theaters and, in a sense, living fictions. This desire to look at, and thus distinguish oneself

from slum inhabitants was often concomitant with the desire to reform slum-dwellers into

'real' and proper bourgeois subjects. George Foster's sketches in the mass-produced *Gas-Light

New York* are an early example of this tension between moral reform and pleasure in

voyeurism. Foster claims that "the duty of the present age is to discover the real facts of the

actual condition of the wicked and wretched classes—so that philanthropy and justice may

plant their blows aright" (69). His use of the word "blows" to refer to the act of reforming

impoverished urban citizens suggests a violent commitment to curing social ills. But soon he

revels in false concern for the plight of "cautious libertines and women whose licentiousness

has not been discovered" (75). The frontispiece of Helen Campbell's *Darkness and Daylight

in New York* provides another salient example of this ambiguity. The book is piously

subtitled "A Woman's Pictorial Record of Gospel, Temperance, Mission and Rescue Work,"

but below this reads, "With thrilling personal experiences by day and night in the

underworld of the great metropolis." The introduction by the Reverend Lyman Abbot

reinforces the desired relationship between reformers and "the dangerous classes": "The

secret of success in all personal or voluntary work for the improvement of the outcast class, or of those who are in danger of falling into it, *is contact with men and women of higher nature*" (49, emphasis mine).

As Robert Dowling notes, endeavors like Helen Campbell's depended on a degree of financial superiority: "Crossing such boundaries…engaging the 'other half'…requires leisure time and a disposable income" (32). For those without much disposable income or the inclination to venture into slum areas for any purpose, representations of the practice were readily available, allowing people to "get a taste" of immigrant and working-class life without ever having to enter into it (Dowling 103). Slumming became increasingly visible in various types of cultural production during the period—in literature, photography, painting, newspapers, musicals and eventually film. While slumming and investigative nonfiction did help engender reforms, they simultaneously had the effects of developing or securing class knowledge and power. Alan Mayne suggests that these "slumland representations" were a response to the inability of wealthier social strata to maintain comparatively impoverished areas as "containable pockets," and this engendered "more alarming pictures of slums as vast, teeming wildernesses, which were perpetually spilling over and extending their boundaries" (130). Financially secure Anglo-Americans and other Europeans who were eventually considered 'white' actively engaged in the practice, often using slumming or its concomitant representations as "an opportunity to shore up their own superior standing in the shifting racial and sexual hierarchies by juxtaposing themselves with the women and men they encountered" (Heap 7). Slumming served as a "strategy of containment" as well as a strategy

for inoculating oneself against complete immersion in vice. One might make the case that slumming, or other analogous practices are not only constituent features of bourgeois life in the nineteenth-century US, but *necessary* for the maintenance of class and ethnic boundaries and the power to define those boundaries. At the same time, they make visible the limits and deficiencies of middle and upper-class life in the city. This suggests that the purposes of slumming endeavors were not only an expression of bourgeois or middle-class power, but were in part an expression of desire on the part of higher classes to destabilize their own boundaries, to undo, at least temporarily or vicariously, those behaviors that separated them from the lower orders. Engaging in the activity of slumming, or enjoying its representations presupposes an inadequacy, not just in one's own consciousness, but in the set of features that constitute one's social world. As Chad Heap also argues, certain forms of slumming may have also engendered progressive effects by forcing middle and upper-class whites to confront this lack in their social spheres and in the cases when they went slumming physically, they "choose to interact with the women and men who lived in the cities' socially marginalized districts" (8). Ultimately, though, this choice rests with the privileged slumming subjects themselves, as does the choice to represent slums and working-class areas as static sites of leisure, degradation or both.

Slumming and literary realism

Slumming literature then, produces a particular kind of realism, or a series of tropes that correspond closely to the features of readers' lived experiences, or experiences they would expect to have. Amy Kaplan argues that realism attempts "to present a coherent view

of a society as a whole, realists draw boundaries and explore their limits," and that realists "engage in an enormous act of constitution to organize re-form and control the social world" (10). Frequently these boundaries were based on intersections of class, ethnicity and geography. But the presentation of slumming in literature does not only conform to realism as a period in the development of novelistic technique. It relies on the recognizable correspondence between novelistic representations and the functional language used to navigate the city– place names, street names, intersections, areas of the city from the specific to the general. Readers familiar with the cities that slumming literature describes are induced to triangulate, to recognize a particular street, neighborhood or intersection as a part of the city with a certain history or reputation. Some of the language slumming literature employs conforms to external methods of navigation, to maps, both cognitive and cartographic, and thus depend on a knowledge of space not necessarily required by other literary mode.

The geographical imagination in slumming novels of the late 19th century pertained not only to language, but to the techniques by which the novels were produced. Often the practices by which writers gathered material affected the political nature of their literary products. In addition to the Protestant reformers and pure pleasure-seekers, middle-class writers, researchers and journalists tried to immerse themselves in working class and immigrant communities in the latter half of the 19th century. Their ostensible purpose was to record and transmit information about non-anglo and working-class districts to wealthier white communities. Writers of fiction often incorporated or mimicked techniques used in investigative nonfiction. Eric Shocket calls this phenomenon "class transvestism" and

explains it as an attempt "collapse the distance between subject and object into one, performative narrational body" which produces "authentic knowledge" about working class and immigrant communities (107-8). The degree to which this knowledge was 'authentic' is up for debate, but it was often considered authentic at the time. Stephen Crane provides a salient example of this phenomenon in a U.S. urban setting. His short nonfiction piece, "Adventures of a Novelist" summarizes his approach to gathering literary material. In it he recounts one late-night trip to the Tenderloin, then a seedy part of Manhattan, with two chorus girls and another woman, Dora Clark. On his way back from seeing one of the chorus girls to a cable car, the other two women are accosted by a policeman, who accuses them of soliciting passersby. The remaining chorus girl clings to Crane, claiming him as her husband and is left alone, while the other, Dora Clark is taken to the station as a known prostitute. Knowing the specific accusations to be false, Crane pleads her case at the scene, at the station, and eventually in court, where his testimony secures her release. Referring to himself as a "reluctant witness," he describes his ethical dilemma—as a man of some notoriety, he could be risking his reputation by defending a woman of such dubious status. But eventually he decides such a defense is necessary, and makes an assertion of radical equality as rare then as it is now: "a wrong done to a prostitute must be as purely a wrong as a wrong done to a queen" (237). Crane's well-documented affinity for prostitutes notwithstanding, a public defense of such actions was a serious violation of class norms. Calling himself "the reluctant witness," Crane asserts at the end of the article that he "has told this story merely because it is a story which the public of New York should know for

once." Not only was this a personal self-justification and a manifesto for literary practice, but it served as an indictment of New York's notoriously corrupt police department. These statements didn't come without punishment. Crane was excoriated in the press, advised to leave town by his colleague, Hamlin Garland, and never returned to New York on a permanent basis.

Crane's practice of slumming as an approach to literary production represents what Robert Dowling has called "partial acculturation," or a willingness to temporarily suspend one's cultural and ethical identity in order understand a community. Crane was no saint, and his portrayals of lower-class life in New York are bound up with exploitation as much as sympathy, representing the limits of moral reform, or what Lucien Goldmann has called the "maximum possible consciousness" of a class or social group, beyond which one cannot go and remain the same class (65). In this respect Crane was like many other writers of the period who represented New York. He shares a general ideological orientation with the novelists like Howells, Dunbar and Dreiser as well as reform writers like Riis and Campbell. His motives for muckraking were bound up with voyeurism and personal pleasure, and his "reluctance" signals an anxiety about visiting spaces inhabited by lower-class subjects, an anxiety he never fully explored.

Writing from the other side of the country, Frank Norris presents a strikingly different perspective on forays into working-class and immigrant areas, one rife with cultural chauvinism. In his piece "An Opening for Novelists," he asks the readers of *The Wave* to "consider San Francisco" where "'things can happen'" in "Kearney Street, Montgomery

street…of course Chinatown…The Barbary Coast…Spanish Town…Fisherman's Wharf

"(272). Displaying no concern whatsoever for the welfare of the individual citizens, the city's

own problems with corruption and poverty, Norris intensifies his pitch with all the subtlety

of a patent-medicine salesman, indicting idle writers concerned with "style," and conscience:

> While you are rounding a phrase, a sailor has been shanghaied down there
> along the water front; while you are sustaining a metaphor, another See Yup
> has been hatcheted yonder in Gamblers' Alley; a man has time to be stabbed
> while you are composing a villanelle…'Murder and sudden death say you?
> Yes, but that's the life that lives; it's reality, it's the thing that counts. We don't
> want literature, we want life (Apprenticeship 274).

Norris's invitation to literary slumming is disturbing both for its blatant racism and its

lack of regard for the subjects of his art. At the same time his statements lack the apparent

duplicity of moral reform movements. Norris's motivations are, apparently, his own

enjoyment and others' participation in his own enjoyment. Furthermore, we find no

reference to muckraking. "Life," for Norris doesn't necessarily include the responsibility for

bringing information to the public. This is the kind of perspective one might expect from a

writer of a period called the Gilded Age. And for all his puerile opinions, he was a salesman

who knew his customer base. Norris is aware that the appeal of literary representations of

the 'real' often lies in their ability to acquaint their audiences with danger. This is a

fundamentally different approach to the practice of literary slumming than Crane's though

both writers' works belong to the same period and the same genre, naturalism. What

accounts for these differences? One might offer psychological explanations, references to

Norris's education, his reading habits, his philosophical preoccupations, his education and immersion into bourgeois ideology at Harvard and Berkeley—all of these would be valid. Norris seems to offer a different explanation. He suggests that "the indefinable air about San Francisco" is suggestive of "stories at once" and is related to the city's singularity, and specifically its geographical particularity: "Perhaps no great city of the world is as isolated as we are…There is no great city to the north of us, to the south none nearer than Mexico…Here we are sat down as a pin point in a vast circle of solitude. Isolation produces individuality, originality" (273). While individuality is not a direct effect of isolation, social space in an isolated urban area is likely to have different characteristics than one part of a densely populated network. Such differences in social space find their way into the narratives of the late 19th century and testifies to the influence geography had on the politics of representation.

Overview of subsequent chapters and logic of selection

The concerns of the following essays are highly circumscribed in a number of ways. The temporal boundaries are roughly 1850-1900, with some considerations of texts in the first years of the twentieth century. This period represents an explosion of slumming as a modern leisure activity in the US and its concomitant presentation in literature. The panic of 1893 no doubt contributed to this, as economic disparities reached new statistical heights. As M.F. Dunlop notes, "Homelessness and unemployment, after 1893, were epidemic". The influx of immigration during this period, especially from places like Southern and Eastern Europe changed the character of cities, and many of these immigrant communities bore the

brunt of the economic downturn, becoming targets for moral reform movements and other slummers who were both thrilled and horrified by the squalor in which they lived. It wasn't until 1901 when a "true tenement house act to regulate light, air and sanitation" went into effect in New York, improving conditions and changing the character of slumming to some degree (Dunlop 80). In San Francisco, the 1906 earthquake completely changed the terrain of the city, and with it, the specificities of slumming endeavors.

Because my aim is not to make a totalizing argument about the function or meaning of the novels, but to show how their relationships to a particular social practice are important features of their construction and their relevance, considering the novels in their geographical specificity is important. Given its preoccupations with representing 'real' conditions, slumming literature is especially dependent on certain features of a given area – its urban density, the proximities of social and ethnic groups, patterns of immigration, government policies mandating reform or 'slum clearance,' etc. What fascinated and frightened the middle and upper classes, and the writers who translated slum experiences into literature for their benefit, depended on a large degree on the nature of the groups studied. Because cities also have different relationships to one another and to national and international economies, networks of transportation and communication, slumming in 'regional' urban areas, like San Francisco, can be of a different character than one finds in dominant economic and cultural centers. Hsuan Hsu has argued that the study of regional literature should take into account its dependence on other social, economic and political processes:

The relation between literature and regional production involves not only the production of literature about regions but also the ways in which literary works produce, reimagine and actively restructure regional identities in the hearts and minds of their readers; moreover, this latter process of regional transformation always occurs in relation to larger-scale phenomena such as migrant flows, transportational networks, and international commerce (37).

These networks of transportation, international commerce and migrant flows were highly variable phenomena. For example, one historian has noted that the process of U.S. industrialization in the 19th century was "so disjointed, in fact, that we could raise the question of whether or not economic development should be treated as a national process during that period" (Bensel 5). Edward Soja also provides a similar formulation: a "space-to-class homology can be found in the regionalized division of organized space into dominant centers and organized peripheries...the two sets of relations (the social and the spatial) are dialectically inseparable" (78). In the context of the 19th century US city, as well as in 19th century literature, two overlapping center-periphery relationships are operating—the areas occupied by the dominant classes within a peripheral area, and the influence that a dominant social, cultural and financial center (usually New York) had on that area.

Examining 'slumming' literatures in a given locality can show how those literatures participated in local processes of spatial and social organization and how that organization was related to the development of the urban novel. This is why I focus on slumming fiction in two cities with very different geographical features, class relationships and histories: New York, and San Francisco. In the second chapter I will examine novels and novellas by

canonical writers—Alger, Howells, Dreiser, Cahan and Crane—as well as minor writers of

pulp novels and documentary nonfiction accounts—George Foster, Osgood Bradbury and

Jacob Riis. I provide an alternative account of the development of the city novel in New

York based on these writers' relationships to the physical and literary practices of slumming.

I will also show how their narrative trajectories and perspectives are shaped by the

relationship between two different forms of urban representation as well as the geographic

features of class mobility. In the next chapter I discuss Frank Norris's three San Francisco

novels, *McTeague*, *Vandover and The Brute* and *Blix*, which reveal a persistent paranoia

about the proximity of class and ethnic 'others' to respectable middle and upper-class citizens

in the city. This feature of the novels is related in part, to the geographical features of the

city and its uncertain status as a regional center of economic and political power. Finally, I

will briefly discuss the political implications and limitations of slumming literature, a topic

referred to indirectly throughout the preceding chapters. I claim that Lydia Maria Child's

Letters from New York and Paul Laurence Dunbar's *The Sport of The Gods* advance a

political position on the phenomenon of slumming and slum representation not found in the

other works I have considered.

SURVEY OF NEW YORK SLUMMING NOVELS

A discussion of the ways that slumming literatures participate in the creation and maintenance of social/spatial boundaries needs to take into account the representational modes of these literatures and the ways they are already categorized. Representations of the city in 19th century US novels can be divided, broadly, into two categories. The first are abstract depictions of the city as a set of interconnected points—interior domestic spaces, extensive descriptions of a neighborhood, place names, landmarks, buildings and districts. Generally, works that emphasize this mode of representation are grouped into the category of realism, as they emphasize abstract, positivistic conceptions of the city rather than its aesthetic properties or its effects on consciousness. The geographical imagination evoked by these representations is akin to that of cartography—an attempt to represent fixed, known points in an area and their relationships to one another. The second category consists of descriptions of the city as a site where ineffable forces are at work: spectral, unmanageable, zones that can only be represented with recourse to imagery derived from nature. In this second representational mode, the perspective of the city is more akin to a Puritan or Emersonian one where a greater power is involved in all facets of experience than a rational, modern present. Generally, 19th century literary works that emphasize this mode are grouped into the category of naturalism, as an historical/aesthetic period that follows realism. Without jettisoning the divide between realism and naturalism altogether, I argue that there

are other ways to conceive of the relationship between these modes that do not rely on a strict chronological division between realistic and naturalistic periods. The act of slumming—whether represented through characters' actions, experienced vicariously by a reader, or both—and the documentary realism that were bound up with these slumming excursions provide another way to think about these novels.

The most popular slumming novels of the late 19th and early 20th centuries are generally grouped into the category of naturalism. As most of the criticism of these novels invokes naturalism in some way, it is necessary to address the relevance of the category to slumming novels as an overlapping taxonomical designation. Within the frame of naturalism, cross-class encounters and their spatial dimensions in these novels tend to be tertiary considerations. Critics of naturalism have identified a number of shared features in a constellation of writers, the core of which usually includes Norris, Crane, Dreiser, London and Sinclair; some include Paul Laurence Dunbar, Kate Chopin and a number of later writers, including James Farrell, Richard Wright, John Steinbeck and Nelson Algren. These shared features include formal considerations, "types of characterization, and strategies for sequencing narrative and producing closure" as well as shared philosophical concerns and attitudes toward the sweeping technological and infrastructural changes that occurred in the U.S. after the Civil War (Howard 30). Naturalism's philosophical determinism, and engagements with the social theories of figures such as Herbert Spencer, August Comte and Cesar Lombroso are commonly discussed. Critics of naturalist fictions also, almost invariably, comment on the prominence of urban settings in these works and their working-class or

middle-class characters. These taxonomies form a valuable analytical tool, but the possibilities they create for inquiry have been saturated.

Many critics tend to analyze characters in such fiction as determined subjects going through states of "progressive deterioration" in some kind of extra-territorial and even extra-historical space (Howard 142). Lee Clark Mitchell admonishes scholars of the period to take seriously the "narrative effects of determinism" and that we recognize the fact that the naturalist protagonist has no agency. However, Mitchell fails to address the ideological implications of that lack of agency (xi, 5). Some critics, like James R. Giles have rightly stressed the fact that naturalist works address "the startling phenomenon of the ghetto from the perspective of an outsider," without considering other non-naturalistic works that do the same (16). June Howard's excellent book, *Form and History in American Literary Naturalism,* moves toward historical materialism, relating naturalist novels to processes of class formation and technological development and makes a strong case that naturalist novels anticipate American Progressivism (127).

Yet neither Giles nor Howard put much emphasis on socially produced and coded space in these works. In *The Urban Sublime in Literary Naturalism* Christophe den Tandt identifies this problem, noting that earlier critics of naturalism, even those that historicize "do not assume that the geography of visible social space…constitutes the primary scene where power relations are established" (14). In contrast, he "reshuffles" the naturalist canon, and remains focused on "naturalist discourse" (17). His conception of the "naturalist sublime"

essentially functions as a euphemism for the fear and fascination elicited by naturalist texts, and underemphasizes that these texts share concerns about spatiality with other modes.

Still, not one of these critics draw the conclusion that on a fundamental level, 'slumming,' or crossing physical and social boundaries for the purposes of observing or interacting with communities of lower status, was inseparable from the process of literary production of these works. An examination of the relationship between the practice of slumming and these novels takes us beyond the boundaries of naturalism as an aesthetic and philosophical category, as it requires consideration of works that are considered under the banner of 'realism' as well as 'non-literary' works—novels that violate aesthetic boundaries. It also requires a consideration of slumming as a broader phenomenon connected to the material and ideological exigencies of urban development.

For all its explanatory power and usefulness as a classificatory mechanism, naturalism as a generic construct fails to take into account the significant regional variations between the works it unifies. Howard has argued that "we will want to see the antinomies of naturalism not just as abstract oppositions but in terms of concrete social conditions" (41). This holds to the degree that social contradictions were made uniform in urban environments across North America by capitalist development, and 'the city' is considered as a discrete entity with shared features everywhere. But when one examines novels set in places where conditions differ significantly from the 'core' metropolises of New York, London or Paris, different approaches are necessary. This means that an analysis of slumming

literature as a broader phenomenon has to cut across naturalism, or expand its analytical parameters.

The relationship between realism and naturalism is vexed, and even the most trenchant critics take pains to distinguish their representational strategies. Den Tandt argues that naturalism is antithetical to realism, and generally reflects "the impossibility of representing social totalities on the basis of the outward evidence of urban life" (8). Den Tandt calls this the 'urban sublime,' a "fascinated grasp of the urban world, informed by the sensibility of the gothic or of sentimentalism" (32). Yet most works about the city in the 19th century contain both of these representational modes, often within a single paragraph. In order to make sense of this, Den Tandt quotes Frederic Jameson's reading of this difference: "the coexistence of realist and supernatural elements within nineteenth-century romance fiction… constitutes the literary manifestation of a tension between industrial and preindustrial outlooks" (Den Tandt 16). Den Tandt then offers his own take, arguing that the coexistence of these elements signals "a tendency to prolong documentary exploration through the mediums of romance or the sublime" – a claim that would erase the tensions within these novels (20). Naturalism, then, can be profitably described as an attempt to assimilate an older Romantic discourse into realism, either as a way to deal with problems of representing individual experience or as a way to smuggle socially conscious realism into a more palpably aesthetic experience. Den Tandt argues that naturalism can be designated a discrete period of representation on this basis: "it is possible to sort out criteria allowing us to sort out naturalistic from realistic texts" (14). But this doesn't fully explain the fissures within

realism or why it seemingly fails in its project of reconciling an objective sociology with phenomenological considerations.

These disparate modes of representation can also be seen as a division between a geographical imagination that grasps the spatially demarcated nature of social stratification and a reveling in the frightening pleasure of the city's size and apparently infinite features. The abstract geographical imagination unleashed in urban realist texts also remains in naturalism, drives its narrative structures, remains a major source of its conflicts. The sublime becomes a way to defamiliarize and defer the geographically situated nature of social differentiation. Yet this geographic knowledge coexists with romantic descriptions of the city as an ineffable force or mind that permeates everything: "All about was the night, pulsating with thoughts of pleasure and exhilaration—the curious enthusiasm of a great city bent upon finding joy in a thousand different ways" (Dreiser 370). This is a vision of the city as a site of awe in contrast to a vision of the city as an enactment of economic regulation. In one sense, these two features complement one another in a symbiotic way—the awful nature of the city has the ability to effect tragedy, to strip one of her or his class and dignity, while the abstract model has the power to locate, situate, comfort. Still, the ideological tension between these two types of knowledge remains—the urban sublime implies a fatalism that exceeds the human and potential intervention. The realistic geographical imagination leaves the situation open—classes and classed spaces exist and can be manipulated.

Slumming, either represented within the narrative, or the absent praxis assumed by the narratorial perspective of classed spaces, unites the process of navigation and the process

of writing about navigated spaces with the perception of the city as an assimilable whole. It displays the concrete processes and fissures, the process by which the social spaces of the city can be mapped and understood. Slumming and its attendant geographical imagination unite the 'realistic' and 'naturalistic' visions of the city, which roughly correspond to attempts to totalize the city through abstract models or phenomenological experience. Works of this kind give a more comprehensive portrait of social space, which as David Harvey notes, "is as much a mental as a material construct" (244). Navigation, knowledge of boundaries and barriers are intrinsic to the act of slumming, as is fascination with, or fear of the unknown regions of the city. Den Tandt describes this as the "dialogization of familiar and uncanny social space" (31). One must, however, keep in mind that this dialogization depends on a real class differential—the coexistence of these two representational models reflect the necessary features of intra-city tourism. The fact that these modes are identifiably distinct, even in the same work, reveals anxieties about the city's social-geographical divides. The bewitching and awful qualities of the city in 19th century novels usually come from the perspective of white, middle-class subjects (or readers) who find themselves bound, if temporarily, to a new and sometimes terrifying state of things. Modernist works will, to some degree, attempt to deal with these issues by synthesizing the two modes by further 'naturalizing' realism, but in doing so they often discard the precision of the geographically situated slumming narratives in late 19th century novels and 'non-literary' texts. 'Realism' and 'naturalism,' in relation to the literature of the 19th century city, are not only novelistic modes, but styles of representation woven through realistic and naturalistic fiction, works of popular fiction and

documentary nonfiction. The way these works address the space of the city, suggests that writers approached it from a combination of 'pre- and post- industrial' viewpoints throughout the 19th century.

Novels create a biographical account, a narrative portrait of a life or a community to show how certain conditions affect their trajectories, but this is not the only form novels absorb. The 19th century novel of the city can be said to have 'developed,' in a non-teleological way by incorporating the dual logic of slumming—its abstract and phenomenological concerns—and many of the modes found in popular nonfiction and documentary exposes, which are also works of slumming literature in their own right. Using Christian den Tandt's concept of the 'urban sublime' as a reference point, we can show the 19th century novel of the city to be interdependent with other textual forms, and that these texts can be usefully categorized according to their relationship with the practice of slumming. Rather than arguing that a total re-classification of the realist/naturalist divide is necessary, I am advancing a supplementary re-framing of generic issues to deal with aspects of their complexity not addressed by other approaches.

As I shall show, these two ways of considering the city—as an assemblage of areas, sections and parts and as an ultimately ineffable, quasi-spiritual whole—bear a complex relationship to the fate of the individual citizen of the city. Considerations of the city as 'rational assemblage' often correlate with individual power over one's circumstances—but not always, just as naturalistic representations of the city as a sublime totality don't always suggest the city is an insurmountable force, a kind of gravity forcing downward mobility on

the individual subject. These ways of considering the city also do not easily correlate to particular politics of slum representation – portraying slum inhabitants as sympathetic victims of an oppressive system or wretched, inherently deficient beings often relates to naturalistic or realistic conceptions—but these are not always consistent. Geographical specificity and the urban sublime reveal anxieties about the social stratification of the 19th century city, but the specific forms of these anxieties vary considerably. Generally both modes contribute to the maintenance of boundaries in New York slumming literature of the period.

To track the development of the geographical imagination in US urban literature, it makes sense to look at works set in 19th century New York City. Since New York was the largest city in the U.S., the commercial and cultural capital and the seat of the country's publishing industry, it is no surprise that more novels were written about it than any other. New York also offers a control for the study of the relationships between classed space and urban development in the US. It is the site of the country's earliest and most notorious slum district—the Lower East Side, in which recognizable 'blighted' areas appeared as early as 1815 (Glaab and Brown). New York remained the "leading focus of anxieties about overcrowded tenements" and other discussions about urban poverty, its causes and possibilities for reform throughout the 19th century (Ward 79). The rise of government programs and institution to deal with poverty also contributed to the mapping of the city into zones. Health agencies in particular affected this process: "The growing professional prestige of civil engineering facilitated the establishment of administrative procedures for

inspection that proved to be less controversial than efforts to regulate housing construction"

(Ward 81-82). Such agencies divided the city into districts in order to conduct surveys and

accumulate census data, and in the process, named, demarcated and classified particular

areas. These endeavors were in part spurred by the efforts of social reformers and other

journalists to document conditions in the lower-income areas of the city.

Popular accounts of journeys across classed social space in New York long preceded

their novelistic counterparts, making it difficult to limit the discussion of this phenomenon

to the fairly rigid aesthetic and philosophical parameters of realism and naturalism. As

Charles Glaab has noted, "sensational works on the sinful metropolises of America began to

find a wide market as early as the 1840s" (63). Realism, naturalism and certain popular works

may be considered discrete representational modes, and are periodized as such, but all share

a similar grounding in and fascination with geographically oriented class stratification.

George C. Foster's documentary nonfiction account, *Gas-light New York* (1850)

provides an exemplary case of the burgeoning narrative depictions of slumming. The book is

in some ways an expansion of the New York section of Dickens' *American Notes* (1842),

written in a similar style, in present-tense and with frequent usage of the second person.

Dickens notes the gaiety of the slum districts and displays his indignation at the condition of

their infrastructure; Foster's portraits of various sections of the city are much more

rhetorically ambiguous. He frequently couches his project in terms of moral reform and

seems most convincing when he provides anecdotal evidence of dangerous slum temptations,

like gambling: "We know an intellectual and gifted man who night after night neglects his

wife and children to visit this miserable hole and lose his earnings among these coarse and ruffianly fellows" (110). Of course, the objects of potential moral reform here are wayward middle-class men, not slum inhabitants. Yet sections of the book, against Foster's own stated intentions, might easily serve as a travel guide for thrill-seekers looking to experience the less genteel features of the city. His descriptions of various sections of New York include precise geographical information, such as where certain forbidden entrances and alleys are located. Some of these places are described in a manner one can only assume is hyperbolic and intended to provoke both fear and powerful fascination. In his description of the infamous Five Points area, he notes "the moral geography of the place," which should "make the blood slowly congeal and the heart to grow fearful and cease its beatings." The location is "the very type and physical semblance, in fact, of hell itself" (120). But Foster advocates against doing "away with this frightful evil" as "we must…be enabled to view [the area's] licentiousness and prostitution in all their aspects" (121). For Foster, an outsiders' privilege of looking at the area's depravity was more important than improving conditions for its inhabitants. His descriptions of slum dwellers, who seem to be little different than the livestock who roam the area, reaffirms this. Most inhabitants of Five Points are "obscene night-birds who flit and howl and hoot by night, and whose crimes and abominations make them shun the light of day" (123).

For Foster, social space is homogeneous, a product of moral forces that suffuse everything rather than an unfolding process in which humans are dialectically engaged with their built environments. His descriptions of space thus often employ Romantic elements

amidst candid and colloquial language. There are passages in which he effectively 'naturalizes' the city, integrating it into the realm of non-human material processes:

> There is no virtue nor innocence of a beauteous life which is not reflected in the dark sea of licentiousness and dissipation – though an inverted position, like the green shores and pleasant trees in the turbid waters of the wild-rolling river   (124).

This vision of the city as the "wild-rolling river," characterizes it as an uncontrollable, 'natural,' phenomenon, existing outside the bounds of human agency—it is always presents, but somewhat ineffable. This is evidence that the urban sublime is not confined to either the fin de siècle period or to works given literary status. Based on passages like the above, one might classify Foster as a proto-naturalist—except for the narrative limitations of 'documentary' nonfiction, which excise or de-emphasize an individual biography. In works like Foster's, 'development' of the individual psychology or social position is rendered subordinate to the description of particular areas and scenes.

Osgood Bradbury's popular novella *Belle of the Bowery* (1852) connects slumming with a diachronic narrative of class mobility, albeit with less emphasis on geographical specificity than Foster's book. The plot of the novella prefigures Crane's *Maggie: Girl of The Streets*, and may have been a source for Crane's later work. The novel's heroine, Louise Preston, is a remarkably attractive young woman from a lower-class neighborhood in the Bowery. Her father is Richard Preston, a hopeless drunk, and her mother is dying of an unnamed disease. Due to Preston's "intemperate habits," the family is forced to move to a

neighborhood "where rents were lower, and to occupy a very mean house in a poverty-struck neighborhood" (18). Before her mother dies, a philanthropic woman visits the Prestons and offers her a 5 dollar gold piece, remarking, "I believe you are a worthy object of charity…" (24) After the death of Mrs. Preston, the philanthropic woman adopts Louise and takes her to her home, which the reader soon discovers, is a brothel for young, upper-class men. Unlike Maggie, Louise struggles to retain her virtue and marries up.

According to the rhetoric of the novella, a dissipated life in the Bowery can be overcome by internal and external beauty—when they occur simultaneously. Bradbury weds the emerging geographical imagination of the 19th century city with the temperance novel, the 18th century novel of virtue, and a bizarre crime subplot, which provides an object of further fascination for the middle-class reader. According to Den Tandt, the "enigmas" found in mid-19th century novels are "the issues of crime, confusion of social identities and political intrigue" rather the dangerous and alluring nature of the city, and this is generally the case with *The Belle of The Bowery* (55). Rather than a feature of a 'natural' system or a place immanent with evil, the Bowery is depicted as a place where those with immoral tendencies congregate, and certain virtuous persons are allowed to escape. It is a 'realist' depiction of a lower-class area, in the sense that the Bowery is configured as knowable, controllable and ultimately escapable. The dangers of the area are presented as those of individuals and their salacious ambitions, rather than as the perils of a territory where a series of unknowable and/or uncontrollable events affect the trajectory of an individual's biography.

From the 1860s to the end of the century, many novels set in New York continued to address the nature of the city. Many contained two salient features that differentiated them from earlier works. The first feature, common to most U.S. novels written about cities in this period is that they subordinate the imagination to the contingencies of urban space and its inhabitants. Imaginary possibilities are not elided in these novels, but are set within constraints that correspond to observable facts about the city. As Richard Lehan puts it, the narrative is "centripetal: life is controlled from a center of urban force" (70). The second is that their rhetoric of moral reform is intensified, and they are consistently concerned with representing conditions of poverty for reasons of reform or informing the public. These two features are interconnected, showing specific urban regions to be a constituent part of class hierarchies. Thus these novels are formally dependent on the social and geographical partitioning of New York in the late 19th century. This is related to the development of the specificity with which slum areas and other social spaces of the city were classified. David Ward notes that in the 1840s "the residential quarters of the city were well defined [but] large sections of the remainder of the city housed relatively heterogeneous populations within which the slums represented the most extreme conditions" (19). Notorious sections of the city, like Five Points were exceptions. Toward the end of the century, as immigrant areas and tenement districts proliferated, these areas became more strictly defined.

Horatio Alger prefaces his most successful novel, *Ragged Dick* (1867) with the hope that it "may have of enlisting the sympathies of his readers in behalf of the unfortunate children whose life is described…" (1). In order to drive home the problems of child

homelessness more forcefully, the novel obsessively depicts specific locations in New York and the distances between them. The first half of the novel is as much a tour through the city as a work of imagination about a bootblack's rise from rags to riches, and passages like the following occur frequently: "…about a mile from the City Hall the cross-streets begin to be numbered in regular order. There is a continuous line of houses as far as One Hundred and Thirtieth Street, where may be found the terminus of the Harlem line of horse-cars" (37). One might easily trace the narrative on a map from that period. This emphasis placed on language that designates spatial features of the city—place names, addresses, distances—is one key difference between Alger's naïve documentary realism and the New York novels that followed. *Ragged Dick*, in particular, is structured like an intra-city travel narrative, not far removed from Foster's earlier work. As in *Gas-Light New York*, the narrator becomes a guide of sorts, leading the reader vicariously through a wide range of episodes.

Ragged Dick's connection of documentary realism to reform ideology also helps bridge the gap between sensationalist documentary nonfiction and fictional narrative. Given the class nature of Alger's subjects—homeless bootblacks—space for them is not so much restricted on a horizontal axis as it is a vertical one. The boys can, and do, go anywhere in the city, but up. Thus, space is used not only to anchor the 'real' possibilities of the narrative, also as a visual metaphor for the novel's ideological concerns. Later novels would adopt the 'realism' of harsh social truths while retaining a modicum of 'authentic' spatial descriptions. These novels considered class differentials as a systemic problem so significant that to depict its amelioration, by individual effort or otherwise, would be 'unrealistic.'

William Dean Howells' *A Hazard of New Fortunes* (1890) isn't typically considered a slumming novel, and the bulk of its action circulates from one upper-middle class domestic space to another. But as Amy Kaplan has argued, the novel is intimately concerned with class differentials and "explores the way the urban community defines itself in an ongoing, if repressed, relation to the city's absent "other half" (71). That 'other half' periodically comes into focus. Basil March, the upper middle-class editor of *Every Other Week* and the novel's ideological center of gravity, moves from Boston to New York with his family. Early in the novel, during the Marches' house-hunting sequence, the couple accidentally find themselves on a slumming expedition. Unacquainted with the geographical layout of the city, the Marches stumble across economically deprived areas of the city, and are confronted with conditions of poverty they had never encountered in their native Boston. Isabel is both fascinated and repulsed by scenes of poverty. She remarks to Basil, "'Why did you see that man?'…"I saw him pick up a dirty bit of cracker from the pavement and cram it into his mouth and eat it…And look! He's actually hunting for more in those garbage heaps!" (60). Basil has an unusual reaction to tenement life, praising rather than condemning it, and muses on the way that it organizes social space. He notices that the flat "abolishes the family consciousness" while the tenements are "better and human" (59). The couple even flirt with radical ideas. When Isabel complains about the unsightliness of the slum tenements, Basil replies, "Such things are possible everywhere in our conditions." Isabel responds, "Then we must change the conditions" to which Basil retorts, semi-ironically, "Oh no; we must go to the theater and forget them…" (61). Ultimately they resign themselves to the fact that "there

was an east and west line beyond which they could not go if they wished to keep their self-respect, and that within the region to which they restricted themselves, there was a choice of streets" (51). Their experience leads Marches, and the reader, to recognize an even narrower set of acceptable parameters for habitation. It was not respectable to have a flat "above Twentieth Street nor below Washington Square" (67). Not far above Twentieth was the infamous Tenderloin; below Washington Square was an area known as "Negro Bohemia." Slumming furthers the narrative development of the characters, serving as a lesson about space and the social reproduction of class, and simultaneously initiating the characters and the reader into parameters of concern.

Published the same year as *A Hazard of New Fortunes*, Jacob Riis's *How The Other Half Lives* is the most famous account of the New York slums, and one of the most well-known slumming accounts of any period. Not only did it usher in an important wave of tenement reform, Riis's work of documentary nonfiction might be said to have accelerated the development of the 19th century geographical imagination, at least as far as New York was concerned. But even this work draws heavily on antecedent modes of representation and needs to be situated in the broader context of 19th century slumming literature.

Riis often adopts the second-person perspective used by Foster to 'lead' his reader through some of New York's poorest districts. His use of the tour guide's rhetoric reaches the extremes of representation in his direct addresses to an implied slumming subject/reader: "Be a little careful please! The hall is dark and you might stumble over the children pinching pennies back there" (29). Riis also combines these conventions with the extreme

geographical specificity used by Alger: "Leaving the Elevated Railroad where it dives under the Brooklyn Bridge at Franklin Square, scarce a dozen steps will take us where we wish to go. With its rush and roar echoing yet in our ears, we have turned the corner from prosperity to poverty" (20). Riis's descriptions depict 'prosperity' and 'poverty' as discrete zones, spaces of existence, rather than descriptions of sociological phenomena. 'Poverty' becomes a metonym for a certain area of the city, its infrastructure, its inhabitants and all of their practices, a discrete space which the slumming subject might move through, observe and emerge untainted.

At the same time, Riis's attempts to achieve realism through specificity are tinged with the naturalistic urban sublime. In order to capture the psychological effects of the tenement on the uninitiated slumming subject, Riis endows them with fantastic properties, employing realistic and proto-naturalistic conventions. Both the immensity of the city and its temporally layered features exceed the compartmentalization of realistic discourse. The Knickerbocker houses "linger like ghosts of a departed day" (20). The "unhonored age" of the old houses cries out "against you in fretful protest in every step on their rotten floors or squeaky stairs" (21).

Riis, perhaps more than any other writer of slum narratives emphasizes the geographical classification of the city based on ethnicity, levels of perceived poverty and other factors. He goes so far as to color-code areas of the city based on concentrations of ethnic groups: "Between the dull gray of the Jew, his favorite color, and the Italian red, would be seen squeezed in on the map a sharp streak of yellow, marking the narrow

boundaries of Chinatown" (19). This reference to "the map" is an especially salient example of the tendency to fix ethnicity as a series of cultural attributes carried out in a specific and concretely identifiable location. Rather than identifying this urban compartmentalization as a problem, this impulse to map ethnicities legitimizes their 'absolute' differences. Of course Northern Europeans, even immigrant Danes like Riis himself aren't associated with a color. If such a map existed, it would be of use only to wealthier 'white' citizens of the city to avoid or go 'slumming' in such areas as they saw fit. And in fact, such maps did, in a sense exist—not necessarily as abstract models, but as 'common knowledge' disseminated through textual and oral mediums.

Despite the moral agenda of documentary nonfiction exposes such as Riis's, patronizing and often racist descriptions seem to be conventions of the genre. The reform they engender is almost always paternalistic. Part of the power of fictional accounts is that their psychological and social portraits of individuals can help engender sympathy and identification with slum subjects, rather than viewing them simply as types or features of a poverty-stricken district.

Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* is also famously concerned with class relationships and their instability, but has a much less obvious relationship to slumming as a social practice or method of defining or reinforcing class boundaries. Drouet is the only character who can be said to go 'slumming' purposefully, using his superior financial and social status to seduce Carrie at the beginning of the novel. For the reader, 'slumming' primarily occurs through the third-person narrator, who allows the reader to see the degradation of Chicago factory life,

the harshness of working-class amenities and urban poverty in New York. Eventually, Dreiser gives us a larger view of Manhattan's class geography, combining the perspectives I observed in Howells and Alger above. His New York is depicted as a magnetic force, but a forbidding and demanding one. After Hurstwood arrives in Manhattan, he begins a Dantean descent through New York's strata of classes, which largely correspond to Manhattan's north-south axis. As in Howells' novel, the the characters' search for a residence plays a role in their initiation to the city and its class-coded environs. Hurstwood and Carrie begin at a flat on "Seventy-eighth street near Amsterdam Ave," in a less-than-glamorous, but perfectly respectable area of midtown Manhattan (234). Financial considerations force them to move further down to the Lower West Side, to a small flat on "Thirteenth street, a half block west of Sixth Ave" (263). The novel is largely silent about the demographics and social prestige of this area, but the fact that such precise coordinates are given shows that Dreiser intends to ground the narrative in geographical realism and New Yorkers' social knowledge of space. The reader does know, at least, that the socialite Mrs. Vance doesn't approve: "The address too," she added to herself, "They must be hard up" (284). In fact, Dreiser foreshadows this descent for those familiar with New York geography by locating Hurstwood's Warren Street saloon, in which he owns a stake, at the corner of Warren and Hudson, only blocks from the Hurstwoods' second flat on the Lower West Side. This area, while not one of the worst tenement districts, was populated by newer German and Irish immigrants: not a desirable location for a couple looking to make their way into New York's high society.

In Hustwood's transition to homelessness, he begins to take advantage of the "free" private space offered by the chairs in hotel lobbies. For Hurstwood, this is a disgrace: "Taking a chair here was a painful thing to him. To think that he should come to this! He had heard loungers about hotels called chair warmers…" (273). Here is one spatial component of the transition between a working-class person and the lumpen or unemployed: the working-class woman or man might be able to rest with dignity on the job, the other has to rely on the spatial crumbs of the rich. Eventually, and predictably, given his previous trajectory, Hurstwood ends up at a fifteen-cent hotel in the Bowery—unmistakable slum territory. The gravity of the couple's downward slide, and the tragedy that ultimately befalls Hurstwood is inseparable from the reader's ability to engage in a form of literary slumming, to approximate distance between these conditions and their own, and thus preserve their superiority and moral concern.

If New York was a dominant center in the 19th century U.S., with the rest of the nation as its periphery, Abraham Cahan's *Yekl* regionalizes New York, situates it within a system of broader processes of economics and immigration:

> "Suffolk Street is in the very thick of the battle for breath. For it lies in the heart of that part of the East Side which has within the last two or three decades become the Ghetto of the American metropolis, and, indeed the metropolis of the ghettos of the world. It is one of the most densely populated spots on the face of   the earth—a seething human sea fed by streams, streamlets and rills of immigration flowing from all the Yiddish-speaking centers of Europe" (13).

Cahan bridges the gap between local and international phenomena, noting that the way this particular Jewish neighborhood appears is inseparable from the processes that developed it. Allowing the reader to go slumming vicariously, he doesn't shy away from the unsavory features of the area: "garbage barrels rearing their overflowing contents in sickening piles, and lining the streets in malicious suggestion of rows of trees…" (13). This kind of description does feed the desire for spectacle, but moves away from Riis's ethnic/geographic essentialism. The emphasis on immigration patterns and their effect on density directs the bourgeois reader away from conclusions that these conditions were necessary features of being poor or Jewish.

At the same time, naturalistic depictions are present in *Yekl*, giving it continuity with earlier forms of slum representation: garbage barrels "rear" their contents, the trees are "malicious," the city is a seething "human sea." Again, the city takes on characteristics of the urban sublime, while emphasizing the abstract coordinates that ground the reader in the particular. Even in an 'insider' narrative, literary tourism plays on the dialectic between the concrete and the mysterious aspects of the city. As Sabine Haenni notes, in reference to *Yekl*, "as a liminal site of commercial entertainment, the ghetto is both potentially dangerous and safely classifiable within middle-class tourism" (494). These experiences of safety and danger are related to different forms of slum representation.

Den Tandt argues that Stephen Crane's *Maggie: A Girl of The Streets* is best classified as a proto-modernist novel because Crane's gaze is "classless" and "embodies a stance of radical alienation" closer to existentialism than the perspective of naturalism, which is

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"informed by the sensibility of the gothic or of sentimentalism" (31). These claims are fairly difficult to substantiate based on the text. Romantic and Gothic tropes occur commonly in the novella, often in the early scene-setting paragraphs of the chapters. In Chapter 2, the Bowery is described as an evil spectre: "a dozen gruesome doorways gave up loads of babies to the street and the gutter. A wind of early autumn raised yellow dust from cobbles and swirled it against an hundred windows" (7). Within the Johnsons' home " the remnants of a meal, ghastly like dead flesh, lay in a corner" (29). Later, the saloon is anthropomorphized, calling "seductively to passengers to enter and annihilate sorrow or create rage" (48). Shortly before Maggie's death, Crane describes the Bowery in a manner that might have been lifted from George Foster: "The pavements became tossing seas of umbrellas…An atmosphere of pleasure and prosperity seemed to hang over the throng…" (75). As grotesque as Crane makes the Johnson family, there is no reason to think that these descriptions were read as provocations to existential irony; they likely elicited a mixture of horror and sympathy from 19th century readers, and as such would have been considered as part of the rhetoric of moral reform.

The novel presents other classificatory difficulties as well. *Maggie* places less emphasis on the abstract geographical imagination found in other realist and naturalist works, and thus on the tensions between abstract and phenomenological perspectives of the city. But it isn't necessary for Crane to include the same degree of geographical specificity as his text concerns the Bowery, a district already infamous to those living within and without the city. The reader is already aware that she is slumming vicariously, based on her distance from the

district and probably has an intuition that the novel's material was gathered through acts of visiting slum districts.

Thus in Crane's novella, we see *Maggie* clearly draws on the tradition of 19th century New York slumming novels and can be seen as a composite of their various features and iterations: geographic specificity, an emphasis on naturalistic description of tenement areas, its early chapters that function as a working-class bildungsroman a la *Ragged Dick*, an orientation to moral reform through investigative expose, a plot perhaps lifted from *Belle of The Bowery*. The novella can be read as a culmination (though not in a chronological sense) of 19th century New York slumming literature and the ways it maintains social boundaries.

SLUMMING AND CONTAGION:
GEOGRAPHICAL PARANOIA IN FRANK NORRIS'S SAN FRANCISCO NOVELS

In Frank Norris's three San Francisco slumming novels, *Vandover and The Brute*, *Blix* and *McTeague,* geography becomes a narrative concern. These works express paranoia about the proximity of immigrant and working-class populations to respectable—and usually Anglo-Saxon—residents of the fin de siècle city. The paranoia featured in these novels is not merely Norris's own, but symptomatic of a relatively new elite class trying to solidify its position. As Ron Robin observes, "the legitimization of historical antecedents in California was a major preoccupation among San Franciscans. The city's economic elite" was "threatened by lack of solid legitimacy in economically perilous San Francisco" (47). The city had once been a volatile, and comparatively egalitarian refuge for budding miners and would-be entrepreneurs of all kinds, "a place where an antiaristocratic national character could express itself, unfettered by the nicities of bourgeois respectability" (Roberts 4). Distinctions between behavior and social rank were temporarily suspended. Barbara Berglund recounts an episode where a future diplomat, eating dinner at a 'respectable' hotel, reached across the table to eat pie with his fingers—unacceptable behavior at a comparable establishment in the East (24). The young city was filled with such characters who slept in upholstered bunks, frequented saloons, gambling establishments and brothels alongside men (and a few women) of various classes and ethnicities.

This rowdy but relatively egalitarian situation faded for many reasons, but deliberate attempts to tame and stratify the city undoubtedly were crucial to its demise (Berglund 21). Imported elites followed the railroads into San Francisco and consolidated their own collective interests. Crucial to this process was the rise of propriety in the historically disordered city. The most prominent symbol of the city's emerging business elite was the enormous Palace Hotel. Built in 1875, its designer William Ralston intended the hotel to be a symbol of "San Francisco's transition from a raw mining camp and disordered boomtown to an established, civilized city" (Berglund 42). By "established and civilized" Ralston meant a city with clearly demarcated ethnic and class boundaries. Occupational differences weren't enough, and elites became preoccupied with "the maintenance of proper standards of etiquette, the perils of rudeness and dread of embarrassment…" (Berglund 18). The end of the 19th century brought further industry, finance and class stratification; these caused the city's class distinctions to closely resemble those in other major US cities in the West and Midwest.

After the early years of the gold rush boom, San Francisco "developed according to a pattern of decidedly uneven prosperity" (Issel and Cherny 15). The city grew quickly, and by 1880 it had developed "more manufacturing establishments, more employees in workshops, greater capitalization, larger value of materials than all the other twenty-four western cities combined" (Issel and Cherny 23). It attracted laborers from throughout the US and the world, and its population was more than 70% foreign-born near the turn of the century (Issel

and Cherny 55). These demographics produced tension between immigrants and those who saw themselves as the true inheritors of the American project.

Due to the city's compact size, distances between well-to-do neighborhoods and impoverished areas in San Francisco were fairly short. "Only a few short blocks separated luxury and poverty, success and hardship" (Issel and Cherny 63). For example, Van Ness Avenue, a solidly upper-middle class residential district in the late 19th century, was only a few blocks away from Chinatown. Norris's novels provide fairly accurate and useful portraits of the geographical and social distances between areas of higher and lower economic status.

The objects of fear or ridicule in Norris's novels are usually ethnic others with European backgrounds. This seems to have been a deliberate and somewhat idiosyncratic choice on Norris's part, as it was Chinese immigrants who were the most consistent objects of vilification in California during the late 19th century. The demonization of the Chinese in San Francisco is heavily documented, as are the attempts to do away with Chinatown altogether through slum clearance initiatives. The preface to Dr. C.W. Doyle's popular San Francisco crime novel, *The Shadow of Quong Long* (1899) echoes this popular sentiment, asserting that "the best thing to do with Chinatown would be to burn it down; but my scheme is too utopian to be discussed in a mere preface" (7).

By the 1890s, Chinese areas in San Francisco were very well circumscribed. Their supposed threat to Anglo-American, bourgeois economic dominance had been mitigated by the anti-Chinese exclusion acts and the restrictive boundaries of Chinatown. Chinatown was as "thoroughly segregated as black districts of the South during the same time period.

Chinese could not become citizens…could not live outside of Chinatown except in laundries or as domestic servants" and Chinese children were not allowed to attend public schools outside of Chinatown until the years preceding World War I" (Issel and Cherny 73). The Chinese threat to wealthy Anglo-Saxon economic and cultural supremacy had been contained, and Norris's novels display fear from other challenges—other ethnicities and classes.

Another reason Norris might have also chosen to focus on other areas of the city was that the market for written accounts of Chinatown was fairly saturated by the end of the 1890s. Travelogues, tourist guides and maps frequently advertised Chinatown as one of the city's primary attractions. *DeWitt's Guide To San Francisco* urged visitors "not to leave San Francisco without doing Chinatown at night"(29). As Raymond Rast notes, "San Francisco's white entrepreneurs accommodated and cultivated touristic interest in authentic Chinatown during the 1890s and early 1900s. Tour guides and other promoters identified elements of depravity and danger…[and] put them on display" (33). The intra-city tourist industry helped make the district nationally and even internationally known and likely stimulated the production of first-hand, nonfiction accounts. William Bode, author of the oversized, illustrated *Light and Shadows in Chinatown* summarizes the allure: "It was with the expectation of seeing something new and strange in aspect that [sic] induced me to wend my way through the damp and deserted avenues of approach, while dark, lowering rainclouds threatened ominously overhead" (28). Visitors from abroad, like the Reverend Harry Jones of England, made sure to include Chinatown in their travelogues. Dime novels with lurid titles

like "Hop Lee the Chinese Slave Dealer" abounded. Exploitative representations of

Chinatown were big business. But as a writer with serious literary aspirations, Norris had to

turn away from such popular material, even if his subject matter was often no less

sensational.

Norris's limited concern with Chinatown in his short stories raises issues that would

concern him elsewhere. As "The Third Circle" indicates, representations of the district were

paradoxical, and indicative of the dual fascination the area held for white pleasure-seekers.

The district, often considered a "'pest hole'…was presented as confirming San Francisco's

status as a 'cosmopolitan city'" (Mayne 143). These novels, as a set, attempt to extend this

double presentation of Chinatown as charming and dangerous to the bulk of San Francisco.

The city is a somewhat dangerous, exotic place that proves to be safely navigable by properly

civilized whites as well as a source of inescapable corruption for nearly everyone else. In

Norris's novels slums and working-class or ethnic areas are sites of social and psychological

disease. This is compatible with the idea that "in America fear of pestilence was augmented

by the worry…that immigrant slums imposed an intolerable drain on private and state

charity" (Mayne 135).

Vandover and The Brute was Frank Norris's first attempt at a novel. Written in 1895

during Norris's year at Harvard, it was published posthumously in 1914. A bizarre and

uneven book, the novel is a semi-autobiographical bildungsroman that becomes an

unintentionally comic tale of atavism. Its protagonist, Vandover, is an upper-middle class

white man in his late twenties (much like Norris was at the time) who leads a double life. His

father is a real estate developer and landlord, who expects Vandover to one day take over the family business. He attempts to live up to his father's expectations, attempts to court a socialite, Turner Ravis, from an established family and develops appropriate aesthetic tastes, which he hopes to use in his career as an artist. But this process of embourgeoisment is destroyed by Vandover's slumming activities.

Drawing on the 19th century medical theories of Cesar Lombroso and other proponents of atavism, Norris characterizes Vandover as someone predisposed to "animalistic behavior," whose psychological stability and fitness for upper-class social life is in doubt. He is swayed by his environment--"his personality was not strong, his nature pliable" (13). But this brutish side is not fully awakened until he begins slumming more frequently. The vice-laden areas of San Francisco he visits are given epidemic qualities which animate the "lower animal intuition in him" (8). At a few points Vandover literally turns into a beast; even more horrifically, he finds himself in a social (and spatial) position beneath the working class.

Geography and the built environment of San Francisco become a concern early on in the novel. Vandover's father exerts some influence over the spatial-social organization of the city, scouting locations on which to build cheap homes for lower middle-class families: "real estate was flourishing in the rapidly growing city, and the new houses, although built so cheaply that they were mere shells of lathe and plaster, were nevertheless made gay and brave with varnish and cheap mill-work" (6).

Like *Ragged Dick* and *Sister Carrie*, the novel is meticulous about giving precise locations in the form of street names and intersections. Vandover has a studio on Sacramento

street but studies at a 'life-class' (where one learns to paint or draw live models) at the School of Design "on California Street over the Market" (46). The value of these descriptions is to enhance the novel's credibility, but also to serve as a device of narrative and characterization, locating the protagonist within one socially defined space or another. Both the activity—drawing nude models—and the location suggest Vandover is engaged in something salacious for a young man of his status. California intersects with Market near the waterfront vice district and is near the intersection of Kearney and Sutter, where 'The Imperial' is located. Perhaps the most important location in the novel , 'The Imperial,' is a seedy drinking establishment and restaurant with numerous 'private rooms' where sexual encounters might take easily place. The Imperial is a heavily sexualized space where bourgeois and puritan pretentions are unnecessary, perhaps a remnant of the San Francisco of the gold rush days. Its décor includes numerous symbols of the sexualized and forbidden--"a copy of a French picture representing a Sabbath, witches, goats and naked girls whirling through the air" (32). In this space, Vandover and his friends' manners change: "Their talk and their manners became blunt, rude, unconstrained, the coarser masculine fiber reasserting itself" (35).

If "to appear on Kearney Street with a girl who wore" an unfashionable "hat…and who would not put her gloves on" was "out of the question," such company was more than appropriate at the Imperial (55). This is where Vandover takes his lower middle-class date, Ida Wade in order to keep the relationship secret from his primary love interest, Turner Ravis. Knowing its reputation, Ida initially refuses, but succumbs to Vandover's pleadings. He seduces her in one of the restaurant's back rooms. Ida becomes pregnant and later,

commits suicide due to the shame, an event that is the initial catalyst for Vandover's decline (76).

After Vandover learns of Ida's death, he leaves for a two-week vacation to San Diego. He departs in luxury, but returns on a second-class ship, which symbolizes his loss of status. Vandover isn't pleased with the social space created by the ship's passengers and accommodations: "He had never been upon a second-class boat before and had never imagined that anything could be so horribly uncomfortable or disagreeable…The table was bad, the accommodations inadequate, the passengers hopelessly uncongenial…At supper, the first day out, a little Jew who sat next to Vandover, and who invariably wore a plush skull-cap with ear-laps, tried to sell him two flawed and yellow diamonds" (91). Norris's symbolism is not subtle here—Vandover is on his way down. To further reinforce this point, the ship sinks. Vandover survives, but when he returns home, Vandover finds his father dead at his desk (113). This puts him in charge of his father's finances and his real estate holdings, which he is unable to manage properly. These incidents are further catalysts for Vandover's social devolution.

Much like Hurstwood in *Sister Carrie*, Vandover's social descent is marked by changes in geographical locations and their attendant spatial interiors. Forced to rent out his family home, Vandover is obliged to look for lodgings elsewhere, in slightly less prestigious, but still fashionable areas: "As to the neighborhood, he thought he would prefer Sutter Street anywhere between Leavenworth and Powell," an area between Chinatown and Market street, a neighborhood populated by families and middle-class professionals (126-7). His

nature changes to adapt to his new geographic/spatial circumstances. He becomes enamored with "small and petty" things, like mixing tobacco and creating makeshift matches and spends his evenings drinking and feasting with his friends (134-5).

After hearing the rumors about Ida Wade, Turner Ravis breaks up with Vandover. Thereafter, his habits of slumming for pleasure become a lifestyle. From an upper-middle class man visiting areas of ill-repute his daily activities and eventually his class identity begin to match the districts he frequents: "Vandover rushed into a career of dissipation, consumed with the desire of vice…With all these Vandover kept the pace at the Imperial, at the race-track, at the gambling tables in the saloons and bars along Kearney and Market streets, and in the disreputable houses amid the strong odors of musk and the rustle of heavy silk dresses" (153). The earlier incident with Ida Wade is not yet finished. Wade's father brings a civil suit against Vandover for damages and hires Vandover's corrupt friend Geary to handle the case. Geary manipulates the lawsuit against Vandover to get him to sell his father's property—which leads him further into a downward spiral of gambling, drinking and debauchery.

No longer able to afford his fashionable rooms, Vandover moves to the "Lick House," an apartment building near North Beach, at the time a working class district of San Francisco largely populated by Italian immigrants. The narrator presents the area as a hellish and forbidding place; the description reads like a passage from Engels's *Conditions of the Working Class in England*. The view from the Lick House was a

> sordid and grimy wilderness, topped with a gray maze of wires and pierced
> with thousands of chimney stacks. Many of the roofs were covered with tin

long since blackened by rust and soot…Not far in the distance two tall smokestacks of blackened tin rose high in the air, above the roof of a steam laundry…All day and all night these stacks were smoking; from the first, the larger one, rolled a heavy black smoke, very gloomy, waving with a slow and continued movement like the plume of some sullen warrior (199).

Contrast this with another contemporary portrait of the area by Evelyn Wells: —"…and farther beyond was Telegraph Hill with shacks of Italian fishermen clinging to its steep façade. In San Francisco the poorest sections held loveliness" (13). Sentimental as it is, this view is probably more accurate than that of Norris's, which probably overemphasizes the prominence of heavy industry. Although some factories were located in North Beach, most residents of the area "were not to be found in factory work" (Issel and Cherny 74). The gap between these two representations of the area suggests that in *Vandover* a small amount of industry and a little working-class production is enough to contaminate an entire district.

The description of the North Beach factories continues, but abruptly begins to employ anthropomorphism: "..the tall and slender pipe threw off a series of little white puffs, three at a time, that rose buoyant and joyous into the air like so many white doves…They came three at a time, the pipe tossing them out with a sharp gay sound like a note of laughter interrupted by a cough" (199). This description might be intended to symbolize the apparent satisfaction of the working-class as their health slowly deteriorates. Workers 'whistle while they work' but suffer unknowingly. Yet no individual laborers are described. In Norris's world of extreme environmental determinism it isn't necessary to show them—they're already condemned to their fate. The images seem to distract the reader from having any pity

or concern for the toilers, who in Norris's world are dupes of their physical environment. Instead of muckraking, we have derision. Inside the Lick House the atmosphere is "cheerless, lamentable" (199). Status, value, and psychology are closely correlated with the neighborhood's physical attributes, both inside and outside its dwellings. Vandover, in a sense, becomes part of the slum.

Having lost the respect and attention of his former acquaintances, Vandover loses his social status and moreover "loses the ability to exert himself either to attain a goal or to hold his personality intact" (Howard 63). The result? Lycanthropy. Vandover literally becomes a dog: "Now without a moment's stop he ran back and forth along the wall of the room, upon the palms of his hands and his toes…walking about the sawdust, imitating some kind of enormous dog…Naked, four-footed, Vandover ran back and forth the length of the room" (228).

When it would seem that Vandover's degeneration could not get more extreme, he is forced to change locations once again. He moves to a boarding house near the infamous Barbary Coast where he ends up cleaning homes like those that his father owned. He takes orders from their working-class inhabitants, which evidently is the ultimate horror and indignity—and worse than becoming a dog. He is directed and chastised by a burnisher and his wife who tell him to "put a little more elbow grease" into his work. Not trusting his abilities, they steadfastly monitor his progress: "the burnisher, his wife, his sister-in-law and his little boy stood about in a half-circle behind him, seeing to it that he did the work properly, giving orders as to how he should proceed" (258).

June Howard argues that it is Vandover's "willingness to go slumming in the perilous realms of determining forces and brutality—that exposes [him] to danger…" (66). Norris does present Vandover as a character overcome by 'forces' seemingly beyond his control, but also locates these forces in very concrete spaces of the city—clubs, streets where saloons are frequent, working-class and industrial areas. And this has implications for the narrative, which is propelled by Vandover's movement to and from precise and—socially demarcated—geographical coordinates. In *Vandover and the Brute*, slumming produces a tragic fascination for the reader and a warning that San Francisco's urban geography, and thus its class distinctions, are not partitioned in ways that allow for the secure maintenance of upper-middle class life. Those without aristocratic qualifications are potentially doomed.

Blix (1899) is Norris's comedic companion piece to *Vandover*, a humorous inversion of the title character's extraordinary decline. In the novel Norris presents the redemption of a Vandover-like character by a paragon of 'proper' upper-class female domesticity. Also semi-autobiographical, *Blix* closely parallels Norris's own courtship with his wife, Jeanette Black. Its message is that encounters with tainted areas of the city can be safe, exotic and exciting—if one is carefully inoculated against their dangers. As in *Vandover*, social space in *Blix* is closely bound up with class status and influence. On the novel's first page, geography is established as a marker of class distinctions:

> The Bessemers lived upon the Washington Street Hill, almost at its very
> summit, in a flat in the third story of the building…From its window one
> could command a sweep of San Francisco Bay and the Contra Costa shore,
> from Mount Diablo along past Oakland, Berkeley, Sausalito and Mount

Tamalpais, out to the Golden Gate, the Presidio, the ocean, and even—on very clear days—out to the Farrallone islands" (7).

In the social-spatial structure of San Francisco, altitude—and breadth of vision—were roughly synonymous with wealth. Evelyn Wells puts it, somewhat grandiosely: "..society has become a serious matter in San Francisco by the nineties…a society like none other in the world laid stern lines of demarcation around several of the city's hills. Unyielding were the boundaries separating the humble from Western nobility…" (3). Altitude enables the Bessemers to keep a safe distance from the corrupting influences of working-class and non-Anglo San Franciscans.

Norris wastes no time in showing the reader that the richness of their views correlates with the Bessemer family's class status and ethnicity. Having an English name, the family are good Episcopalians. They have a servant, Victorine, and a cook who is "a most inefficient Irish person taken on for only that month during the absence of the family's beloved and venerated Sing Wo" (12). They also have a spoiled heir, Howard and a fashionable daughter-- auspiciously named Travis. In Norris's world, beautiful surroundings produce beautiful people, and Travis is an extension of San Francisco's picturesque and rugged physical properties. She is "beautiful," but "solidly, almost heavily built…she radiated health…and there was that cleanliness about her that suggested a recent plunge in the surf" (9). For all her earthiness, Travis is also exemplary of sophisticated, worldly self-control: "trig and trim and crisp as a crack yacht: not a pin was loose, not a seam that did not fall in its precise right line…" (10). Travis is the 'natural' result of Manifest Destiny, of an Anglo-Saxon ethnicity

that has claimed its 'rightful' place at the edge of the North American continent and imbued it with civilization. She represents the elegant confluence of regionalism and bourgeois respectability. Unlike her counterpart Turner Ravis, Travis—nicknamed Blix—takes it upon herself to civilize her middle-class boyfriend rather than allow him to sink into the depths of dissolution and the degradation of the Barbary Coast. To do this, she must not only rid Condy Rivers of his bad habits, but show him that the tantalizing otherness of San Francisco's lower-class and ethnic areas can be conquered.

Condy Rivers, Norris's fictional analogue, works on the staff of the San Francisco "Daily Times" and moonlights as a short story writer. He and Travis have so far engaged in the standard upper-class courtship rituals—appearing together at dances, coming-out parties and afternoon tea—but begin to form a closer bond during excursions to the city's more 'exciting' districts. Travis assists Condy on a story that takes them both to the waterfront. She's fascinated by the ships and their interior furnishings, and even more so by an old sailor who tells the pair tales of dangerous deep-sea diving expeditions. Later Rivers will convert these tales into the short stories that launch his career as a writer.

On the way back, the couple find themselves in Chinatown. Unlike Norris's protagonists in 'The Third Circle', Travis and Condy are successful slummers; they encounter nothing but "fun". They find themselves alone in the Chinatown restaurant, which Norris describes as "charming." As described, the place exists purely for the couple's pleasure, a quaint yet ostensibly authentic slice of the exotic 'orient': "...not a soul was there to disturb them. Below them, out there around the old Plaza, the city drummed through its work with

a lazy, soothing rumble. Nearer at hand, Chinatown sent up the vague murmur of the life of the Orient" (31).

After leaving Chinatown, Travis, now christened 'Blix', admonishes Condy about his gambling habits and makes him promise to give them up. At this point, the couple enters a double process of civilization, which becomes the driving force of the narrative—Blix's influence prevents Condy from sinking into vice, and Condy introduces Blix to areas of the city that allow her to escape the boredom of her social circle. Intra-city tourism becomes a way for the couple to define themselves and their romantic interest in one another. Condy slips up and gambles again, but after another conversation with Blix, he finally abandons the vice for good. Condy confesses to Blix that he hadn't played since the last incident "although there was plenty of chance. You see, this card business is only part of this club life, this city life—like drinking and—other vices of men." Blix responds, telling him that "a man ought to be strong enough to be himself and master himself anywhere" (47). More precisely, this means that a 'strong man' should be able to conquer the city, to enter into any of its environs, no matter how unfamiliar or full of vice and experience no significant impact from any of these spaces. By becoming a conquistador of the city and maintaining its social hierarchies, the strong man conquers his own deleterious impulses.

The city becomes the couple's plaything. In one of the novel's subplots, the pair become detectives and matchmakers, uniting "Captain Jack" who they met at the wharf, with "K.D.B." a woman who has placed a personals ad in the paper. During these episodes the novel becomes a veritable advertisement for the conveniences of San Francisco's ethnic

diversity. For example, Luna's restaurant in the Latin Quarter is "where," as Condy says "you get the Mexican dinners" (51). For white elites in pre-quake San Francisco, the Latin Quarter "radiated an attractive 'flavor of the foreigner,' reminiscent of the opera and other revered cultural institutions of European origin" (Robin 47). Luna's is not only enticing, it is mysterious, a synecdoche for the Latin Quarter itself. Norris's narrator turns tour guide: "it has no address. It is on no particular street, at no particular corner; even its habitués, its most enthusiastic devotees, are unable to locate it on demand…One could find it if one started out with that intent; but to direct another there—no, that is out of the question. It *can* be reached by following the alleys of Chinatown. You will come out of the last alley—the one where the slave girls are—upon the edge of the Mexican quarter, and by going straight forward a block or two and by keeping a sharp lookout to the right and left you will hit upon it…" (65). While the rest of San Francisco is composed of grids and names and rationally planned blocks, the ethnic space of the city is framed as irrational, shifting, maze-like. Not surprisingly, no attention is given to the inhabitants of the area.

In *Blix* Norris presents the slum as "showcase," or "artifice of display," a sanitized representation intended to produce pleasant affects and common in much of the literature about slums during the period (Mayne 129). The showcase is the flipside—or dialectical opposite—of the slum as the source of moral and physical contagion. Both produce fascination, and allow for upper-class representation. If working-class or non-white areas couldn't, for whatever reason, be removed through slum clearance initiatives, they could be rendered subordinate as areas of service and pleasure. San Francisco becomes a place where

"respectable white women and men" could indulge in a "taste of urban nightlife" while contrasting "themselves with the depravity and dilapidation that they associated with immigrant and working-class neighborhoods" (113). The attitudes in these novels resemble, rather than break with, prevailing political values and fears about the lack of geographically situated social distinction in the city.

McTeague may be one of the most fundamentally anti-cosmopolitan novels in the US canon; if it weren't consistent with the xenophobia in Norris's other writings, one might view it as a hyperbolically grotesque take on inter-class and inter-ethnic communities. Recent scholarship on the novel has focused on the problem created by Norris's satirical fascination with characters who lie outside the boundaries of upper-class Anglo-Saxon life. James Caron, eschewing Norris's elitism, suggests that the novel's troubling comic perspective critiques bourgeois values and that McTeague is to be read as universally sympathetic, a symbol of "everyone's necessarily incomplete socialization"(Caron 380). Cain is slightly more ambivalent, arguing that Norris "presents McTeague for our amusement" yet is drawn to him "as a man of crude force" (Cain 334). Ultimately though, for Cain, Norris uses the novel to implicate us as members of McTeague's "affected 'race'" (336). Denise Cruz further explores novel's dynamic of attraction-repulsion toward its characters, linking it to a "crossing of same-sex desire, masculinity and working-class and ethnic others" though the textual evidence she provides for her thesis isn't entirely persuasive (492). June Howard reads the novel's perspective as part of a larger trend within naturalism, a fear "of revolution and chaos, of the mob and the criminal" and of "proletarianization" (395). This view is closest to

my own. But the novel presents anxieties about middle-class self-organization and upward

mobility as well as proletarianization, and rather than presenting a universal specimen of

humanity, *McTeague* is concerned with specific ethnic and class types, and perhaps more

importantly for an upper-middle class reading public, their locations.

Norris's most famous novel fits fairly neatly into popular representations of slums

during the period. As Alan Mayne notes, "..the slumland types entertained. The

caricatures—easily recognizable as the faces of a race apart—had been popularized in

theatre, fiction, and illustration since the first half of the nineteenth century. Their effect

was to consolidate and extend bourgeois common sense" (189). Norris takes these

recognizable slumland types and places them among the middle-classes, simultaneously

parodying and revealing the supposed perils of upward mobility.

The relationship between classes, geography and types is presented early on in the

novel through a remarkable scene that chronicles the activity of Polk Street throughout the

course of a typical day. Before 1906 Polk Street was an "area of small shops and stores," one

block to the east of Van Ness, the site of numerous mansions. Norris presents Polk as an

orderly example of cosmopolitan equilibrium where each social group fulfills its proper

function. In general, groups arrive on the scene according to their status. At "seven

o'clock…the newsboys made their appearance with the day laborers" who are plumbers

apprentices, carpenters, plasterers, "gangs of street workers," and "Chinese market gardeners"

(7-8). Next come the "clerks and shop girls, dressed with a certain cheap smartness" followed

by their employers, bank cashiers and insurance clerks. "Towards eleven o'clock" fashionable

ladies from Van Ness "the great avenue a block above Polk street," "made their appearance, promenading the sidewalks leisurely, deliberately" (8). Polk Street is a site of business, of class compromise where the lower, middle and bourgeois classes can congregate and fulfill their daily activities in peace—as long as they come and go at their properly scheduled times.

All the time McTeague is watching from his dentist parlors—"a point of vantage from which he watched the world go past" (9). McTeague is an observer of this harmonious urban scene and outside of it and out of his 'proper' place. Norris goes to extraordinary lengths to establish McTeague, the former working-class Irishman as an incompetent, risible character. His greatest desire is to display, in his office window "a huge gilded tooth, a molar with enormous prongs, something gorgeous and attractive" (7). The point seems to be that upward mobility might propel those with a "sham education and plebian tastes" to arenas of ostensible respectability (20). McTeague fits the derogatory type of the dumb, brutish Irishman. His "mind was as his body, heavy, slow to act, sluggish…altogether he suggested the draught horse, immensely strong, stupid, docile, obedient"(6). In creating McTeague, Norris made use of a gruesome 1893 murder case as a key plot element. The *San Francisco Examiner*'s account of the murder of Sarah Collins by her husband Patrick takes the same sensational and judgmental tone Norris would in his own work. Collins is described as "The savage of civilization, who stabbed and hacked his wife to death." The paper cites heredity as the cause of his brutality: "Seeing him, you can understand that murder is as natural to such a man when his temper is up as hot speech is to the anger of the civilized" (Rope 253). Contemporary readers of *McTeague*, who were, as Sara Quay notes, probably not of working

or lower middle-class status, would've immediately recognized the upwardly mobile protagonist as a potential Patrick Collins (Quay 221). By making McTeague ethnically Irish and connecting him to the Collins case, Norris is making political commentary as well as advancing ideas of racial superiority, for "working class, Irish Catholics and women" tended to "complicate the political public sphere of the 1890s" (Ethington 319). Ultimately McTeague and his ethnic Irishness represents the supposed dangers of cosmopolitanism. The rest of the novel shows McTeague to be dangerously and literally out of place in his middle-class environs.

Other ethnic stereotypes abound. Among those who live in the building where McTeague's dental parlors are located are Maria Macapa, a Mexican cleaning-woman and Zerkow, a Jewish "rags-bottles-sacks man, who lived in a filthy den in the alley just back of the flat…" (23). Later in the novel the two get married and the result is catastrophic. For Norris 'mixing races' produced curious, and unfit monstrosities, as is shown in the novel when Maria and Zerkow give birth to "a strange hybrid little being, come and gone within a fortnight's time, yet combining in its puny little body the blood of the Hebrew, the Pole, and the Spaniard" (135). The death of the baby causes Maria to go mad; the madness spreads to Zerkow who eventually kills her and commits suicide, foreshadowing McTeague's murder of his wife Trina. Even Trina, who comes from a middle-class German family is doomed by her heredity: "a good deal of peasant blood still ran undiluted in her veins and she had the instinct of a hardy and penurious mountain race—the instinct which saves without any thought…hoarding without knowing why" (79).

The extreme environmental determinism that appears near the end of *Vandover* reaches new heights (or depths) in McTeague. Unable to find success in either middle or working-class areas of the city, the former miner returns to the wilderness from which he came—and like Vandover, begins to take on the features of an animal. Fleeing from the law, and suddenly guided by a mysterious instinct, McTeague enters Placer County, California, "a vast unconquered brute of the Pliocene epoch, savage, sullen and magnificently indifferent to man" (208-9). Despite its "indifference," the savagery of Placer County infects and animates everything, including man-made technology: "the crusher, the insatiable monster, gnashing the rocks to powder with its long iron teeth, vomiting them out again in a stream of wet, gray mud" (209). McTeague comes to the realization that his 'class nature' had extended to the objects involved in his dental practice: "Once it even occurred to him that there was a resemblance between his present work and the profession he had been forced to abandon. In the Burly drill he saw a queer counterpart of his old-time dental engine" (213). Geography, labor and the technology used to produce that labor are linked in a quasi-spiritual sense, through "a tremendous, immeasurable Life" (208). The social, technological and the spatial, finally, become inseparable.

In *McTeague*, the social space of the city is not suitable for the nouveau middle-class, especially if they are not white, or the proper kind of white. Thus the novel changes the dimensions of vicarious slumming, if only slightly. Instead of showing readers blighted, extremely impoverished areas ala Stephen Crane, Norris expands the category of the 'slum' to include lower-middle classes spaces—small proprietors and others with modest, but

sufficient incomes. These spaces are especially susceptible to 'infection' from undesirable

sources.

Despite the sometimes outlandish depictions of human psychology and behavior in

these three novels, and the paranoid racism deeply embedded in their narratives, they show

how spaces and class relations were mutually constitutive in fin-de-siecle San Francisco

through their meticulous attention to physical detail and a consistent awareness of social-

spatial constructs.

CONCLUSION: SLUMMING AND THE POLITICAL IMAGINATION

19th century slumming novels tended to vacillate between the often ambiguous rhetoric of urban reform and outright demonization of nonwhite and working-class subjects. Some of these works, most famously Riis's, helped spur movements toward housing reform, anti-poverty initiatives and gave middle and upper-class readers some idea of the situation of the poor in their own cities. At the same time, they reinforced bourgeois hegemony and bourgeois subjects' sense of superiority by fostering a paternalism based on pity and disgust or by fashioning the slums as sites of thrill and exoticism. The rhetoric of the novels and the personal ambitions of the writers were frustratingly unclear. A writer like Frank Norris, for example, whose anti-cosmopolitanism ran to the extremes of negative slum representation could champion Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*—clearly a far more progressive and sympathetic novel from a contemporary liberal standpoint. The geographical imagination in these works is one of parsing, dividing and conquering. Resistance to the processes that make slum conditions possible, if it is presented at all, fails.

These works help us understand the considerable connections between social-spatial awareness and ideology. They revealed the nature and location of fissures in the city and at times ascribed this to a power differential. But they all lack a certain perspective, one that would allow for an analysis of social space that would reveal the deeply contested nature of

social zones within the city. These works, again returning to Goldmann, show the "maximum possible consciousness of a class,"—a class largely composed of upper, or middle-class white men. This consciousness conceives of socially differentiated spaces either as sites of contamination or dangerous, but pleasurable zones, meant to be flirted with and ultimately conquered. The vision presupposed by slumming is limited to discovery and enjoyment of what exists—slumming does not suggest a future. Nor does the phenomenon suggest a past available for recovery as some kind of future—there is only the remorseless present of the city. Even in 'positivist' realistic novels like *Ragged Dick* where mobility is shown to be possible, the protagonist can do nothing but climb the ladder and the ladder itself is static—it is simply what exists. Those novels that suggest reform only mean to 'raise' the slums to the level of already existing petit-bourgeois conditions.

This maximum possible consciousness prevented 19th century representations of slumming, through characterization or through the person of the narrator/guide from being effective as *political* works. This is the case according to a more precise, and for some, limited definition of the political as formulated by Jacques Ranciere. For Ranciere, the political occurs when the speech and gestures of the voiceless are admitted as discourse: "the whole question, then, is to know who possesses speech and who merely possesses voice. For all time, the refusal to consider certain categories of people as political beings has proceeded by means of a refusal to hear the words exiting out of their mouths as discourse" (24). This is, of course, not a common sense approach to politics, and especially the politics of representation, but it is one way to situate slumming and its inextricable lexical representations into a much

larger field, even a universal one. Most works representing slum life, and all of those

surveyed above, fail to meet this definition of the political.

Yet there are exceptions. 'Insider' novels like Abraham Cahan's *Yekl*, which treats

tenement residents and tenement space sympathetically, can be said to meet this definition

of the political, even if the premises of slumming—physically or vicariously—and its role in

maintaining or challenging conditions of inequality remain unexamined. Paul Laurence

Dunbar's *The Sport of The Gods* and Lydia Maria Child's *Letters from New York* go even

further towards politicizing the act of slumming and slum representation.

Dunbar's novel puts slumming into relief and examines its consequences for working

class African-Americans. The novel is a form of what Ranciere calls "critical art" or "a

project which arranges, in the form of the work, either an explanation of domination or a

comparison between what the world is and what it might be" (44). Critical art does more

than represent social problems and their symptoms, it gives an account of their origins. It

"sets out to build awareness of the mechanisms of domination to turn the spectator into a

conscious agent of world transformation…" (45). *The Sport of The Gods* simultaneously

provides a critique of slumming and slum representation, making the often inextricable

nature of these two practices a key aspect of the novel's narrative. The novel concerns the

Hamilton family, a black family in the South who work for a wealthy white landowner. The

landowner's ne'er-do-well brother steals a significant sum of money, and the deed is blamed

on the Hamilton patriarch, Berry. Berry is sent to prison and the rest of the family is forced

to migrate to New York to find work. There, Berry's son Joe is introduced to the seedier side

of New York life, represented most notably by The Banner Club, which Dunbar

characterizes as "a social cesspool, generating a poisonous miasma and reeking with the

stench of decayed and rotten moralities" (101). The Banner, whose real-world analogue

would have been located in Tenderloin in lower Manhattan, as Harlem had yet to become a

predominantly black district, is described as a favorite location for white slumming subjects:

"Here, too, sometimes came the curious who wanted to see something of the other side of

life. Among these white visitors were not infrequent—those who were young enough to be

fascinated by the bizarre, and those who were old enough to know that it was all in the

game" (101).

Joe is introduced to one of these white visitors, a reporter from the New York

Universe named Skaggsy, who frequents the Banner with his girlfriend, drinking and looking

for stories. Dunbar portrays him as a ridiculous figure. He claims to be the son of a plantation

owner who "played with little darkies ever since [he] could remember," and assumes that

this gives him some kind of insider knowledge and proof that he lacks "race prejudice" (103).

Dunbar's narrator tells us, however, that he was born and raised on a farm in Vermont where

"his early life was passed in fighting for his very subsistence" (103). Though he wants to be

accepted at the Banner, he lies to prove his superior social position, to show that he is indeed

"slumming" it—preserving his status amidst the novelty of patronizing a black club in the

Tenderloin. The black members of the club tolerate Skaggsy but don't take him seriously.

Later, Skaggsy plays an important role in the narrative, writing an article that proves

Berry Hamilton's innocence. Rather than portray Skaggsy as a white savior, Dunbar shows

him as a self-interested man entirely clueless as to the ramifications of his representations. He is simply a medium between the black family and the white press. When introduced to Skaggsy, Berry is nonplussed. "What had this slim, glib young man to do with him? What had any white man to do with him after what he had suffered at their hands?" (186-7). Berry and his wife Fannie move back to the South, without their children. Berry's decade of hard labor makes his freedom bittersweet: "It was not a happy life, but it was all that was left to them, and they took it up without complaint, for they knew they were powerless against some will infinitely stronger than their own" (195). Their fates decided by white men, the Hamiltons are not allowed political subjectivity; the moral and reform engendered by white slumming and its attendant representations are inadequate to politics proper. But by writing the novel, forcing his way into the realm of discourse, Dunbar does take up the mantle of politics, in order to show how exceptional it is for a black man to do so.

Lydia Maria Child's slumming excursions in *Letters to New York* (1843) sharply contrast with most documentary nonfiction accounts of the 19th century. They meet Ranciere's definition of critical art in their refusal to consider slum spaces static entities incapable of radical transformation. Walking in one of the city's working-class districts near Wall Street, she views a "crowd of men hastening to extinguish a fire." Rather than view it as a spectacle, she discerns kernels of utopia in the scene: "I see not merely uncouth garbs, and fantastic flickering lights…but straightaway my mind is filled with thoughts about mutual helpfulness, human sympathy, the common bond of brotherhood…" (1082). She too invokes romanticism—though not the menacing variety invoked by most slum depictions. For Child,

the inhabited spaces of the city, regardless of class or ethnicity produce possibility: "Every thing [sic] seems to me to come from the Infinite, to be filled with the Infinite, tending toward the Infinite" (1081-2). Child professes deep sympathy with the poor of New York, claiming that they haunt her in her sleep, coming between "her and the morning". But Child's attitude exceeds pity and paternalistic discourse toward a more radical position, albeit one invested with pathos some readers might find cloying. She claims that "in each and all lie the capacities of an archangel: as the majestic oak lies enfolded in the acorn that we tread carelessly under foot, and which decays, perchance, for want of soil to root in" (1084). Enfolded in this metaphor is that human greatness is potentially universal, but depends on the quality and characteristics of the space in which it appears and develops.

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