2 Referential pathways: Objects and bodies

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Core essay

Material matters:

The surfaces of realist fiction

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Abstract: The representation of objects is one of the guarantors of a particular kind of literary text being characterized as realist. The mimesis of objects, possessions, and interiors, marveled at by Henry James when writing on Honoré de Balzac, and deplored by Virginia Woolf when decrying Arnold Bennett, grounds the nineteenth-century narrative in the material and the real, making an implicit claim that the world of these novels operates according to physical, social and economic laws comparable to those which govern the world in which their readers live. Objects are inanimate but they bear meaning, signifying both the place in the world of the characters that own them (the collection of the aesthete, the scanty possessions of the laborer), and, at a wider scope, material environments are shown to shape the being and living space of these characters. At the interstice of being and the object is clothing which is employed to read and write identity across the nineteenth century. The scrutiny of codes of physical appearance also generates meaning in such further developed discourses as physiognomy and caricature. Increasingly across the nineteenth century, the meanings of objects and bodies are translatable in terms of money, both the supreme and the most insubstantial object within modernity.

Keywords: realism, object, thing, possession, environment, appearance, clothing

> "From a drop of water," said the writer, "a logician could infer the possibility of an Atlantic or a Niagara without having seen or heard of one or the other. So all life is a great chain, the nature of which is known whenever we are shown a single link of it. Like all other arts, the Science of Deduction and Analysis is one which can only be acquired by long and patient study nor is life long enough to allow any mortal to attain the highest possible perfection in it. Before turning to those moral and mental aspects of the matter which present the greatest difficulties, let the enquirer begin by mastering more elementary problems. Let him, on meeting a fellow-mortal, learn at a glance to distinguish the history of the man, and the trade or profession to which he belongs. Puerile as such an exercise may seem, it sharpens the faculties of observation, and teaches one where to look and what to look for. By a man's finger nails, by his coat-sleeve, by his boot, by his trouser knees, by the callosities of his forefinger and thumb, by his expression, by his

> shirt cuffs—by each of these things a man's calling is plainly revealed. That all united should fail to enlighten the competent enquirer in any case is almost inconceivable." (Arthur Conan Doyle, *A Study in Scarlet* (Conan Doyle 1987, 15))

1 *Surfaces: The outsides of realism*

The legible mimesis of the physical world inhabited by human beings, and of the appearance of human beings, is one of the modes by which a literary text can be identified as 'realist.' The presence of objects in the fictional environment gives such narratives weight, or at least the appearance of it, and adds credence to these fictional worlds' claim to resemblance or equivalence with the real world (Todorov 1966). More than one theorist of realism has compared the storyworld of the realist text to a child's playing with toys (Brooks 1994; Brown 1998; Freud 1959), and indeed objects can serve as the raw materials for the text's generation of the 'play' of narrative once they are lent affective weight by the needs, desires, and imaginations of the text's imaginary human beings. Peter Brooks, in *Reading for the Plot* (1992), takes Sigmund Freud's reading of the child's *fort/da* game in which an object is thrown from the child's pram, returned by an adult, and thrown out again, as lying at the origins of the narrative's answering the human need for privation, mastery and repetition (Brooks 1992, 90–112). If Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719) is to be considered, as it often is, the first modern English realist novel, Crusoe's hauling of such objects as he is able to salvage from the wreck of his ship to the island that will be the world of the next twenty years of his story provides the template for realism's representation of material objects:

> I had been now thirteen days on shore, and had been eleven times on board the ship, in which time I had brought away all that one pair of hands could well be supposed capable to bring; though I believe verily, had the calm weather held, I should have brought away the whole ship, piece by piece. But preparing the twelfth time to go on board, I found the wind began to rise: however, at low water I went on board, and though I thought I had rummaged the cabin so effectually that nothing more could be found, yet I discovered a locker with drawers in it, in one of which I found two or three razors, and one pair of large scissors, with some ten or a dozen of good knives and forks: in another I found about thirty-six pounds value in money—some European coin, some Brazil, some pieces of eight, some gold, and some silver. (Defoe 2011, 46–47; see below Section 8 for the significance of the currency)

Crusoe would never have survived his lengthy period of being shipwrecked without his taking possession of the objects he is able to salvage from the ship, the manufactured

instruments, tools and fabrics especially, and those that he is subsequently able to create.

For Virginia Woolf, the earthenware pot that Crusoe later makes from the island's clay emblematizes his dominance of his fictive colonial environment, and this mastery exemplifies for her both the beauty, and the severe limitations of the realist mode. In Woolf's account of realism, "to describe the fact is enough […] [if] the fact is the right fact." "He comes in the end," Woolf writes, "to make common actions dignified and common objects beautiful. To dig, to bake, to plant, to build—how serious these simple occupations are; hatchets, scissors, logs, axes—how beautiful these simple objects become. Unimpeded by commentary, the story marches on with magnificent downright simplicity" (Woolf 1968–2011, vol. 5, 380–81). For all of the antipathy Woolf expresses elsewhere in her work to so many of the conventions of nineteenth-century literary realism, she is quite right to identify here the narrative's selection of the items. If a realist text ekphrastically described every object in its story world, the plot would never advance: note, therefore, the importance here of the storm which prevents Crusoe from retrieving, and naming, every object in the ship. When in sail, ships are themselves an enclosed realist universe, as the detailed enumeration of the finite objects aboard the *Pequod* in Herman Melville's *Moby-Dick* (1851) shows.

Objects both enable and inhibit characters' progress through fictional worlds, invested with desire, fulfilling necessity, operating as narrative functions and goals (Propp 1958). Objects also constrain narratives, ground them, limit them, keep them within the realm of the real and the probable, and from flying off into the realm of the fantastic or the catalogue. In this essay objects portrayed in the mode of realism are considered, for the purposes of focus, to be inanimate: Dickens's consideration of objects as people and objects as if they were people, Denis Diderot's talking jewelry in *Les Bijoux indiscrets* (1748; *The Indiscreet Jewels*, 1749), through to the talking table-leg fashioned into Carlo Collodi's *Le avventure di Pinocchio* (1883; *The Adventures of Pinocchio*, 1892), Dorian Gray's magically ageing portrait in Oscar Wilde's novel *The Picture of Dorian Gray* (1890) and postmodern object novels such as Tibor Fischer's *The Collector Collector* (1997) are fantastic anthropomorphic excursions which probe at the boundaries of what is usually considered the limits of the realist universe (see the case study in this chapter, Jeremy Tambling's "Realism and allegory: Balzac, Dickens and James"). The desire to take possession of particular objects can fuel entire Balzac or Zola novels (as well as fairy tales, the *1001 Nights*, the heist movie and many other

narrative genres besides). Objects can be invested with testimony (as evidence), affect or obligation (the gift), with memory (the souvenir, keepsake or memento), with prestige (the luxury), be arranged as a map of knowledge (the *Wunderkammer* or cabinet of curiosities; at a larger scale, the museum (see Anthony Walker-Cook's case study "Curating realism in a world of objects: Collecting in Charles Dickens and Arthur Conan Doyle" in this chapter)). Even rubbish can be re-enchanted by human desire upon it, as in Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend* (1865–1866), in which the waste discarded into the Thames comes to provide the material foundation for the wealth at the novel's heart. Svend Erik Larsen's case study ""Distance avails not": Representing the modern masses" develops further how urban debris as matter blends with its imaginary potential.

At the same time, the indifference of inanimate objects in realism to human designs upon them is a reminder that the material world is not shaped according to human desires—think of the disobligingness of the physical environment inhabited by the heroes of Gustave Flaubert's *Bouvard et Pécuchet* (1881; *Bouvard and Pécuchet*, 1896), the conspiracy of gibus hat, iced pudding and player-piano that finally unmasks H. G. Wells's titular Arthur Kipps (1905) as being less than the gentleman he has desired to be, or the rivets piled uselessly far from where they are needed in Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1900–1901). Recent theorisings of the object even seek to enrol the non-human—animals, technology, environments—as possessing agency. Bruno Latour cites a driver who feels pressed to slow the car down outside a school by a speed limit sign or a speed bump (Latour 2005, 77–78); on a more abstract level Patrick Joyce gives the example of the exertion of the state, and capital on the human actant, through bureaucracy, or to use a more pertinent term, "paperwork" (Bennett and Joyce 2010, pp. 102-23).

This pre-eminence that realist fiction has long given to the materiality of its world, to this world's repletion with objects, has long been a target for realism's detractors, especially once realism's historical dominance in the nineteenth century began to give way to new canons such as the modernist. Among the objections to the realist mode from its detractors such as Woolf or Henry James, even Georg Lukács, is that the accumulation of material clutter detracts from the artistry of the text's arrangement of all of its materials (of different kinds)—that the networks of the narrative are blocked by unnecessary objects lying across them, that the free voices of the novel's human beings are hemmed in, stifled, by the needless accumulation of physical detail, even

that the full aesthetic potential of the realist text is constrained by its freighting with objects. The representation of the reality of the First World War challenged the writers' capacity to transform the cluttering of objects into a cohesive structure (see Svend Erik Larsen and Margaret R. Higonnet's core essay "Dialogic encounters in Chapter 4, Section 4.3) and catalogue became a standard form in modernism. A recent and striking example is Leanne Shapton's formally experimental novel *Important Artifacts and Personal Property from the Collection of Lenore Doolan and Harold Morris, Including Books, Street Fashion and Jewelry: Saturday, 14 February 2009, New York* (2009) tells the whole story of a courtship and a break-up in the form of an imaginary exhibition catalogue of objects (see Steen Bille Jørgensen and Margaret R. Higonnet's core essay "Dynamics of realist forms", Chapter 3, Section 6).

However, for such a theorist as Frederic Jameson, the tension between the stasis of the accumulation of stuff at the beginning of, say, a Balzac novel and the movement forward of its plot is one of the "antimonies" he identifies as characteristic of realism (Jameson 2015)—between content and form, between world-building and narration. For Gérard Genette, narration:

> is concerned with actions or events considered as pure processes, and by that very fact it stresses the temporal, dramatic aspect of the narrative; description, on the other hand, because it lingers on objects and beings considered in their simultaneity, and because it considers the processes themselves as spectacles, seems to suspend the course of time and to contribute to spreading the narrative in space. [...] Narration restores, in the temporal succession of its discourse, the equally temporal succession of events, whereas description must modulate, in discursive succession, the representation of objects that are simultaneous and juxtaposed in space. (Genette 1982, 136)

There is a long critical history of separating description from narration (as told by the material collected in Hamon, 1991; for a thought-provoking overturning of the separation, see Ronen, 1977). In "Character in Fiction" (1924), Woolf characterizes, pejoratively, the method of Edwardian realist Arnold Bennett's as beginning by describing the outward appearance of his imagined characters, and then tracing the character's material origins backward from that appearance. For Woolf, this etiology comes at cost to the effectiveness of his text's narration of an inner life that cannot be figured in the mimesis of material objects: consciousness, emotion, memory, anticipation of the future. Woolf imagines Bennett observing a Mrs. Brown in a railway carriage, and how he would tell both her story and of the superfluous details that surround her:

> Mr. Bennett, alone of the Edwardians, would keep his eyes in the carriage. He, indeed, would observe every detail with immense care. He would notice the advertisements; the pictures of Swanage and Portsmouth; the way in which the cushion bulged between the buttons; how Mrs. Brown wore a brooch which had cost three-and-ten-three at Whitworth's bazaar; and had mended both gloves – indeed the thumb of the left-hand glove had been replaced. (Woolf 1968–2011, vol. 3, 428)

For Woolf, the confinement of the realist vision to external surfaces inhibits the possibilities that the medium of fiction can achieve artistically. (Note, however, Ruth Robbins's account of the class slant to Woolf's critique—the implicit suggestion that the non- or post-realist kinds of novels that Woolf wants to write could never be about people who are obliged to work for a living (Robbins 2003, 34)).

Yet, for all of the denigration of objects in the theoretical agon that necessarily followed realism's historical period of dominance, modernism never managed to do without the material entirely (Brooks 1999): Woolf's and D. H. Lawrence's various flowers, as well as Ezra Pound's hyacinths, the shaving gear, totemic potato and lemon soap through to Ithaca's catalogue of objects in James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and the luggage and bags of the most mobile of modernists (Ridge 2017). Modernist texts too represent objects and invest them with significance (see, for instance, Nash 2013, on Woolf's own preoccupation with shoes, or the enchantment invested in a lump of glass and pieces of broken china by John in Woolf's short story 'Solid Objects' (1920)). What the opponents of the object tend to quarrel with is not so much the presence of objects as their *meaningless* accumulation: to clutter, objects, interiors and exteriors which do not bear signification, to needless paraphernalia (for further interpretation of this term, see Kingstone and Lister 2018). Modernism's handling of the object is not a refutation or a doing-without of it, but rather an intensification and heightening of the realist method in which object, interiors, clothing and bodies connote significance (Cuny and Kalck 2020).

Realism's modes, of course, survived such attacks upon them, and the representation of objects and bodies to connote kinds of meaning persists in the present-day realist text, as well as in genre fiction and other kinds of fiction (bearing whole new realms of possible meaning in visual media such as theater, cinema, or the computer game). The object has received closer attention in critical studies in very recent years (Boehm et al. 2012; Boscagli 2014; Brown 2001; Cuny and Kalck 2021; Freedgood 2006). The 'material turn' from the 1990s onward has been in part a reaction against the furthest-

reaching linguistically hermetic abstractions and extravagances of deconstruction, and consequent receding of the phenomenal, under the academy's 'theory revolution' in the late twentieth century (Brown 1998, Latour 1999). In such new critical practices, reading the object in the literary text does not close down the possibilities of the text's meaning but expands them, towards greater historical, geographical, economic and even moral spheres (on the understanding of the object in such spheres in other academic disciplines, see Appadurai 1986). Elaine Freedgood accounts for a preoccupation with furniture in Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre* (1847) thus:

> I am trying to make the furniture of Jane Eyre into what Marx would call a 'social hieroglyphic': to treat it as a complex and partly legible sign, to help us get 'behind the secret of our own social products.' The fact that furniture is not generally interpreted in all its woody splendor means that it can do lots of unapprehended symbolic work in the novel. An apparently innocent object like a mahogany dresser or a walnut panel decorates the moral and moralized space of the novel's winners, while sneaking in the true extent of their morally precarious triumph and evoking useful and self-protective memories of imperial mastery. Britons knew where their wood was coming from, especially that tropical treasure, mahogany. (Freedgood 2006, 51)

This particular recent hermeneutic turn sought to remind that, while human beings' experiences are mediated through and by language, experience is lived in the world and through the body (Butler 1993), that there might be such a practice as "object-oriented literary criticism" (Harman 2013). Literary criticism's recent greater concern with the phenomenological aligns with Théophile Gautier's declaration in 1857: "je suis un homme pour qui le monde visible existe" (I am a man for whom the visible world exists) (quoted in Goncourt 1887, 189).

Drawing on Martin Heidegger, Bill Brown has distinguished, to greatly influential effect, the notion of the "thing" as a means of theorizing the object, specifying a difference between the object and the thing. "What then is a thing? Answer: A thing is the existing (*vorhanden)* bearer of many existing (*vorhanden)* yet changeable properties" (Heidegger 1967, 34). "We look *through* objects [...] but we only catch a glimpse of things" (Brown 1998, 4). Transferring Heidegger's philosophical observation over to the field of literary discourse, Brown amplifies thus: "To use a spoon as a knife, a knife as a screwdriver, a helmet as a soup bowl, a newspaper as an umbrella, a pencil as a shoehorn, a sock as a change purse, a dictionary as a pillow—these irregular reobjectifications deform the object, however momentarily, into a thing" (Brown 1998, 954).

This essay hence concerns itself with the object more than the thing, with the inanimate being observed in the realist universe while being put to its proper use. This presence is a kind of *truth* or image of truth in the realist text, in line with Derek Attridge's contention that "the tradition of realist fiction should be understood [...] as a staging of objectivity, an invitation to experience the knowability of the world" (Attridge 2004, 97). The real world is experienced both through the presence of emotion and memory in consciousness (see Svend Erik Larsen and Patrizia Lombardo's core essay "Memories inwrought with affection: Emotion and memory in realism" in Chapter 1) simultaneously through embodied contact with, and vision of, indeed smell, taste and sound of, external objects, surfaces and environments. The realist text seeks to produce a verisimilar representation of both these processes. This essay will begin with the object, will consider clothing and bodies as objects that can also be read and narrativized; then it will consider the totality of objects inhabited by the realist self, the material environment; finally it will consider money as both an object and the code which underpins the meaning of surfaces of the realist universe.

The desire to recognize objects in literary texts as simulacra of objects in the real world is a very natural one, and is a desire that is necessary for story-worlds to exist effectively, one that dates in its critical understanding as far back as Aristotle's claim that "it is natural for all to delight in works of imitation" (Aristotle 2001, 1457). The image of the literary object, however, remains an image: an object in a written text is not made of wood, clay or cloth, but is composed of language, and imagined to be bearing these material properties within the world of the text. In this respect, objects in the realist text might be seen as corresponding to Immanuel Kant's notion of the manner in which the human mind perceives objects in the real world. The "thing in itself" exists only as a *noumenon*, and is perceived by the human mind, but filtered in a way which is apt to the mind's modes of perception.

> And we indeed, rightly considering objects of sense as mere appearances, confess thereby that they are based upon a thing in itself, though we know not this thing as it is in itself, but only know its appearances, viz., the way in which our senses are affected by this unknown something. (Kant 2004, 32)

For Stanley Cavell, Kant's claim here in the *Prologemona* (1783) and in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781) constitutes a kind of philosophical settlement with skepticism: that "experience is constituted by appearances" (Cavell 1994, 30), but that appearances can never provide full knowledge of the thing-in-itself, and, in becoming cognizant of

such, reason is made aware of its own limitations (see also Elmarsafy 2012, 111). The realist literary text admits the limits of its own ontology of the object, and makes no claim to mastery of the thing itself; rather the reader of the literary text initially apprehends the literary object after the manner of the scientific revolution (Crary 1992, 8; 88), as a phenomenon that is open to processes of enquiry, and thereby, to the inscription of meaning. Jonathan Crary has written of the creation of the nineteenth-century observer who "is one who sees within a prescribed set of possibilities, one who is embedded in a set of conventions and limitations" (Crary 1992, 6). Following the collective experience of the sense of 'disenchantment' in being in the modern world, as described by Max Weber (Weber 1963), objects become desacralized, understood less in symbolic or mystical terms than as behaving, or being behaved to, in the world according to the laws of Isaac Newton's optics or James Maxwell's equations (formulated and finalized between 1861–1884). The object possesses optical, atomic, material properties which are indifferent to human desires upon it. At the same time, the individual affective investment made by an agent in a narrative can, in effect, re-enchant the object with meaning.

If a literary text, in a metaphor used very commonly for fiction especially, has a 'point of view,' the imagined eye of the realist text has the power to choose to see what it chooses to see. It produces and bodies forth in the *sjuzhet* such phenomena as it chooses from the *noumena* in the underlying *fabula*. If description of some of the physical world inhabited by literary characters, or of their bodies, is lacking (some lack is inevitable, as description could theoretically be infinite), then this lack does not prevent those characters from existing in their storyworld. Jane Austen, for instance, does not tend to enumerate physical characteristics in the mode beloved of her Victorian successors, but her characters clearly always have and inhabit bodies; Gustave Flaubert and Stendhal do not paint the ekphrastic word-pictures of Émile Zola or, especially, Honoré de Balzac; Ivan Turgenev's work is relatively light of objects compared to that of his peers. Novels, even realist novels, are possible which consist mostly of dialogue, without any of the 'stage directions' of the mimesis of objects or environments created by the authors of the most materially freighted fiction. That which makes up the remainder of the totality of bodies and their physical environments is inferred to exist.

Hence, objects can appear, or not, and when they do, they can be invested, or not, with meaning. Objects can be assigned a narrative function, as Vladimir Propp has demonstrated (Propp 1958). Roland Barthes shows the ways in which the surface

appearances of the "readerly" (realist) text can be read through a series of codes: in *S/Z* (1970), he assigns five codes for interpreting five types of knowledge, from the hermeneutic to the symbolic (while also admitting that further divisions than five are theoretically possible: see Barthes 1990). Objects and environments are inanimate; while some objects may be considered deletable they nonetheless, he observes, connote meanings that both thicken and direct the plot:

> A unit can at the same time belong to two different classes: to drink a whisky (in an airport lounge) is an action which can act as a catalyser to the (cardinal) notation of *waiting*, but it is also, and simultaneously, the index of a certain atmosphere (modernity, relaxation, reminiscence etc.). In other words, certain units can be mixed, giving a play of possibilities in the narrative economy. In the novel *Goldfinger*, Bond, having to search his adversary's bedroom, is given a master-key by his associate: the notation is a pure (cardinal) function. In the film this detail is altered and Bond laughingly takes a set of keys from a willing chamber-maid: the notation is no longer simply functional but also indicial, referring to Bond's character (his easy charm and success with women). (Barthes 1977, 96–97)

Here, the keys are 'enchanted' by their function in each narrative. (The production of a cinematic or photographic image can exercise less control over whether an object is deictic or epideictic. The entire image can be clipped, or zoomed to close up, but must be 'filled in' between its borders.) Objects and external appearances, as realism's detractors complain, can seem dead, even anti-deictic, but they can also be animated through the human will's desire for them, and the nature or the strength of the investment of desire in the object can be a means of dramatizing and revealing character and the world it inhabits (see Asbjørn Grønstad's case study "Haptic realism: Erik Poppe's film *U-July 22* and the aesthetics of duration," in Volume I, Chapter 3, and also Georges Perec's *nouveau réaliste* hyperextension of the self into the objects of the inhabited world in *Les Choses: Une Histoire des Années Soixante* (1965; *Things: A Story of the Sixties*, 1967)).

In Thomas Mann's *Buddenbrooks* (1901; *Buddenbrooks*, 1993), the appearances of bodies and physical objects are woven magnificently into the passing of narrative and historical time, for instance, in the novel's scenic opening of the christening in Book 7 set in the family home, or Hanno's school day in Book 11. In Mann's *Der Zauberberg* (1924; *The Magic Mountain*, 1927), the recurrence of physical leitmotifs constitutes a part of the internal rhetoric of the world of the text by which individual characters announce their appearance and recurrence in it. The interactions of characters' bodies with objects such as luggage, food, different tobacco products or furniture become a

kind of visual language by which the novel's environment iterates itself and makes itself legible. In addition, in this novel, the characters' illness also compels them into a constant scrutiny of their own and each others' bodies, both at the level of social ritual and, through the technology of the X-ray, the electromagnetic and the subcutaneous (on skin as a text that can be read, see Gilbert 2019, also Benthien 2002).

This rhetoric of object, bodily gesture and social ritual is a technique of the antecedents of realism. Bodies can be both objects and agents: Pierre de Marivaux's Marianne, Josué Harari reminds us, is "on the one hand an object in the world, a body […]; on the other hand, she is a subjectivity detached from its physical expression—a transcendence" (Harari 1987, 30). Peter Brooks notes:

> As a result, the reader, like the heroine, is forced to respond to the drama of manners, to the tones of voice, gestures, and mannerisms of different characters, the moral systems which these personal styles seem to imply, and how they are correctly or incorrectly or correctly related to the structures of society. The reader's consciousness and Marianne's operate in response to the same stimuli, and undergo the same initiation into a complex and difficult world. (Brooks 1969, 134)

To be a reader of a realist text is to be educated, like so many upwardly mobile protagonists, in how one should go about reading the world: to see the histories, the ontologies, the economies, even the silences, that underlie the surfaces portrayed in the realist text.

2 *Objects: The material in the fictional*

For example, in the first chapter of George Eliot's *Middlemarch* (1880–1881), one of the nineteenth century's most replete renderings of a complex and difficult fictional universe, the Brooke sisters are first seen when opening their mother's jewel box, passed on to them by their uncle six months after her death. As they divide the contents of the casket, the intrinsic beauty of the gemstones appeals to both sisters. The worldly but practical Celia sees them as an ornament to her own beauty; the would-be ascetic Dorothea suggests the application of a different and a more problematic code for reading their value:

> "How very beautiful these gems are!" said Dorothea, under a new current of feeling, as sudden as the gleam. "It is strange how deeply colours seem to penetrate one, like scent. I suppose that is the reason why gems are used as spiritual emblems in the Revelation of St. John. They look like fragments of heaven. I think that emerald is more beautiful than any of them."

> "And there is a bracelet to match it," said Celia. "We did not notice this at first."
>
> "They are lovely," said Dorothea, slipping the ring and bracelet on her finely turned finger and wrist, and holding them towards the window on a level with her eyes. All the while her thought was trying to justify her delight in the colours by merging them in her mystic religious joy. (Eliot 1998, 12)

The narrator gently ironizes Dorothea for her over-determined interpretation of the gems, for failing to recognize truly for what it is her own sensual pleasure in apprehension of the necklace. Celia, confident that "the wearing of a necklace will not interfere with my prayers" (Eliot 1998, 13) is made to feel momentarily ashamed by Dorothea's needlessly pious self-denial, and by Dorothea's additional uncomfortable but accurate economic reading of the gems, in her awareness of "what miserable men [they are who] find such things, and work at them, and sell them" (12–13). Yet Celia's apprehension of the jewelry as valuable and beautiful is no less wise than Dorothea's well-meaning but unnecessarily puritanical self-deception about the nature of her admiration. More pragmatically, if one of the purposes of jewelry is to help the women attract a suitable husband, it would be fair to say that Celia makes a happier first marriage than her sister does when she marries the bone-dry Mr. Casaubon.

Eliot's choice of inherited jewelry for a display of the sister's wealth is particularly and deliberately gendered. Jewelry is not only decorative, but both valuable and portable for women who were historically unable to lodge wealth in the form of land or money deposited in banks (married women could not own their own property in Britain until decades after *Middlemarch*'s 1830s setting). As if recognizing the dematerializing of forms of wealth across the history of the nineteenth century (from houses and land to more intangible forms of finance), Wemmick in Dickens's *Great Expectations* (1860–1861) advises Pip to "get hold of portable property" (Dickens 1993, 201)—in the lawyer's clerk's own case, property secured from the dead or the soon-to-be dead and then invested in his own future. Pip almost, but not entirely, fails to learn from this lesson as Magwitch's fortune, except that which Pip had used to set up his friend Herbert Pocket in business, is confiscated by the State following Magwitch's arrest and death.

The risk of being separated from her own portable property is a greater threat for the female protagonist than the male, as she is alienated from financial security by the patriarchal structure of nineteenth-century institutions. Lise's carelessness towards her luggage and her shopping in Muriel Spark's *The Driver's Seat* (1970) points towards

her self-destructive end, just as Anna Karenina's severing of her connection with her red bag foreshadows her eventual suicide (on the history of the meanings held by the bag, see Knapp 2016, 48–50). The life of Guy de Maupassant's Madame Loisel in "La Parure" (1884; "The Diamond Necklace," 1924)—a story which explores the interplay between the monetary, symbolic and social codes by which this particular kind of object is interpreted and valued—is blighted for ten long years by the accidental loss of a necklace which turns out, at the end of the decade, to have been a replica.

Jewelry is also at the heart of one of the most object-obsessed realist texts of the nineteenth century, Anthony Trollope's *The Eustace Diamonds* (1871–1873). The plot of the novel turns on whether its titular objects belong to the Eustace family—and hence the male line, in which case their purpose will be to adorn the women who are exogamously brought into the family through marriage over successive generations—or bequeathed to Lady Eustace personally by her late husband, and thus her personal property. Lizzie Eustace's desire to cling on to the diamonds sees her lose a number of potential suitors, her position in society, and eventually the diamonds themselves when a second attempt by thieves to steal them is successful. The value of the necklace plays on Thorstein Veblen's notion of "conspicuous consumption" (Veblen 1994, 43): while its monetary value is estimated at £10,000, the real value of the necklace, when worn by each Lady Eustace in turn, lies paradoxically in its being a means for the family to declare itself so rich as never to need consider selling them.

> "There they are for you to look at, and there they shall remain for the rest of the evening." So saying, she clasped the string round Miss Macnulty's throat. "How do you feel, Julia, with an estate upon your neck? Five hundred acres at twenty pounds an acre. Let us call it five hundred pounds a year. That's about it." Miss Macnulty looked as though she did not like it, but she stood for a time bearing the precious burthen, while Frank explained to his cousin that she could hardly buy land to pay her five per cent. They were then taken off and left lying on the table till Lady Eustace took them with her as she went to bed. "I do feel so like some naughty person in the 'Arabian Nights,'" she said, "who has got some great treasure that always brings him into trouble; but he can't get rid of it, because some spirit has given it to him." (Trollope 1990, 252–53)

Lizzie cannot bring herself either to sell or to surrender the necklace, until she eventually loses it. For all of her tendency to pathological deceit, and her voiced self-aware worry that the argument over the diamonds would become "the prevailing fact of her life" (Trollope 1990, 419), there is nonetheless something admirable in Lady Eustace's transgressive desire to disrupt the patrilineal progress of the necklace from male heir to male heir, in holding on to the at least hypothetical possibility of making

herself a socially and economically liberated woman by converting the value of the diamonds to cash (see Section 8 below on the role of money).

Items such as jewelry have a clear monetary value, but different objects in realist fiction accrue value when desire is invested in them by the narrative's agents. The desire for objects in the realist text is as if for a desacralized Holy Grail—such as Alfred Hitchcock's notion of the 'McGuffin'—something in the storyworld which the characters want, which animates them and the plot (Hitchcock 1992, 124). The value can be either monetary or symbolic, or—characteristically in the realist text under late capitalism—or both, like, for instance, the titular object at the heart of Wilkie Collins's *The Moonstone*, 1868. For Karl Marx, Freud, Jean Baudrillard and others, the fullest possible investment of a "desire [...] for religious, economic or erotic value" (Dant 1996, 5) in an object sees it transfigured into a fetish. The value of the fetishized object is overdetermined by the imaginative investment made in, and overlaid on, it. For Marx the object is fetishized as a commodity when it enters the market and its value is estimated in terms of the object's exchange value, which is imaginary, rather than the real value, which ought to be founded on the value of the material and, especially, the labor consumed in its production. In *Das Kapital* (1867; *Capital*, 1887), Marx uses an item very commonly portrayed in realist fiction, the coat, to illustrate the production of the commodity:

> Let us take two commodities such as a coat and 10 yards of linen, and let the former be double the value of the latter, so that, if 10 yards of linen = W, the coat = 2W.
>
> The coat is a use value that satisfies a particular want. Its existence is the result of a special sort of productive activity, the nature of which is determined by its aim, mode of operation, subject, means, and result. The labour, whose utility is thus represented by the value in use of its product, or which manifests itself by making its product a use value, we call useful labour. In this connection we consider only its useful effect.
>
> As the coat and the linen are two qualitatively different use values, so also are the two forms of labour that produce them, tailoring and weaving. Were these two objects not qualitatively different, not produced respectively by labour of different quality, they could not stand to each other in the relation of commodities. Coats are not exchanged for coats, one use value is not exchanged for another of the same kind. (Marx 1906, 48–49)

Freud's notion of the fetish similarly sees the fetishizing of an object as the replacement of the object's true value or purpose with a psychic or imaginary one (Freud 1953a). One example literally named in a realist novel is what Maggie Tulliver in George Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss* (1860) calls her "fetish." A wooden doll originally

designed to be an object for a kind of play intended to interpellate the female child into her destined gender role is turned by Maggie into a "thing" by misusing it as the recipient of the violence that results from her angry discontent with the nature of that role.

For Jean Baudrillard, by the late twentieth century the fetish has become part of a grand system for the economic and symbolic production of signification which leaves the signified material reality of the object (the thing in itself) receding and forever displaced behind, obscured, by modernity's endless and self-replicating play of signs (Baudrillard 1983). According to Slavoj Žižek, late capitalism unites the erotic investment of the fetish in Freud with Marx's economic investment, suggesting "a fundamental homology between the interpretative procedure of Marx and Freud—more precisely, between their analysis of commodity and of dreams—that the latent content of dream work corresponds to use value, and its displaced appearance in the dream-world of late capitalism the over-determined value of the fetish" (Žižek 1989, 3).

Realist fiction's presentation of the object attempts to fix, or at least to make legible, under the codes by which it is read, the meaning of the commodity fetish (Plotz 2008). Realism can draw attention both to the use-value of the object, and to its fetishizing by social relations, and even to the disjunction between them. The signifying system of the realist storyworld need not strictly correspond to the model of the real world but it should appear to do so, or at least possess some kind of internal consistency, as if possessing "objectively operating dialectical laws" (Lukács 1980, 72) that correspond to the secular physical laws that govern the operation of the universe. In this way realist texts possess functioning bodily and commodity economies that distinguish their signifying systems from the more open or contingent narrative mechanics of the epic, the romance or the fantasy.

In the kinds of culture produced by a capitalist economy and portrayed by a realist text, the construction of social relations from material objects becomes not, of course, the practice solely of the wealthy, but of everyone. Such a practice was particularly accelerated by the nineteenth-century revolution in the production of consumer goods. The industrial revolution, so closely associated with the rise of realism (Watt 1957) saw an enormous proliferation of material goods and their ownership, and thus of the range of the possible meanings of material objects in social life and their encoded representation in literature. Commodity fetishism became, in effect, mass-produced. Social historian Judith Flanders notes how rare (as far as records can indicate) even the

possession of a cup that could hold a hot drink, say, would be in the majority of households in the late seventeenth century. By contrast, in the mere fifteen years between 1785 and 1800, the demand in Britain for household goods grew at twice the rate of population increase, some much more quickly, such as printed fabrics at 142 percent. "By the time of the Great Exhibition it was expected that one's quality of life [...] could be judged by the number of possessions one owned" (Flanders 2007, 25–26). The possibilities for the imaginative realm of the commodity fetish, then, are generated not only by the ideology of modern Western capitalism, but also by the variety (and hence capacity for difference, and distinction) of capitalism's (literal) products (on notions of 'distinction,' see Bourdieu 1984). When the town of Cranford receives its first red silk umbrella, not only does the object protect its owner from the rain, but it is displayed proudly as a sign of social status and personal individuation, a marker ultimately founded on industrial capitalism and on imperial domination.

Cups and saucers in Elizabeth Gaskell's *Cranford* (1851–1853) both serve as a class marker and enable the female sociability of meeting for tea (on the consumer revolution in porcelain also driving innovation in advertising, marketing and transport, see Flanders 2007, 61–75)). Kate Lennox's visit to the china factory in George Moore's *A Mummer's Wife* (1885) is a reminder to her (and the novel's reader) of the processes of production that underlie the objects whose use and existence she has hitherto taken for granted. Few realists write more extensively about the reciprocal relationship between everyday utensils and social relations than Arnold Bennett. Bennett's eleven *Five Towns* novels and short stories, a sequence which began in 1898, might be mapped as follows: humans possess the biological need to eat and drink; culture and convenience require that they should consume food and drink using saucers, plates and bowls; new technology enables the mass production and sale of these objects; a whole network of social and economic relationships is produced by this industry in the (real-life) Staffordshire Potteries, which Bennett represents and transforms in the connected storyworld of the Five Towns. From literal clay (and human need), a whole fictional realist universe is made. In a further irony, Bennett's most joylessly Weberian and evangelical characters see in the accumulation of their wealth not greater possibilities for the pleasures of consumption in the world in which the reader sees them living, but evidence of the divine grace that will see them happy in the next one.

Realism's detractors fear that freighting the text with objects retards narrative: narrative must be mobile in order to function. Since objects can express social meanings and

possessions are alienable—can pass from hand to hand—the nature of the meanings invested in these objects can therefore change. The object in the realist text is not merely pictorial, but can be narrativized through its movement in space and time: realist objects become "moving messengers" (Plotz 2008, 1) of meaning and story. As its ownership alters, the social meaning of the realist object is thus one that is socially mobile, potentially in more than one direction. The pathos, in Eliot's *The Mill on the Floss*, of Mrs. Tulliver's presentation to her family of her china and teapot, "objects represented as problematically endowed with sentimental and fiscal value simultaneously" (Plotz 2008, 7), after Tulliver is ruined, turns on the erasure of the objects' symbolic value by the family's change in economic circumstances. The presence of her initials on the teapot and the linen which have made them more sentimentally valuable, and which hitherto demonstrated higher social standing, will make them less precious as tradeable commodities, not more, when they are to be sold off to settle Tulliver's debts.

As objects take part materially in the bodily necessities of feeding, sleeping and keeping warm, they are fetishized and invested with meaning in social ritual. The social institution of the family is often key to both the material and the psychic-imaginary dimension of the object, but even the most closely intimate of institutions is connected to wider networks of space and time. (In the twenty-first century, representation of the domestic continues still to be one way by which a text is classified as 'realist.' As a nineteenth-century realist such as Stendhal places a protagonist into real historical events, the work of, say, Hilary Mantel takes a real historical figure such as Robespierre or Thomas Cromwell, and grounds them through intimate portrayal of their domestic and family lives: see Mantel 1992 and 2009). Alice Mutimer, in George Gissing's *Demos* (1886) is sent to a public house to fetch some pickled walnuts for the supper table. Scott McCracken notes:

> The trajectory of the pickled walnut is revealing. It moves from *public* house to private house, and then from public view to private mouthful, from outside to inside. This progress, culminating in the walnut's incorporation by Alice, maps the co-ordinates of a distinctive public sphere: moving between the "intersubjectivity of a self-consuming public sphere", in this case the pub, and the "subjectivity rooted in the intimate sphere", the family. In the movement of the walnut, the boundaries of public and private are not so much defined but actually produced. (McCracken 2007, 109)

In the circulation of commodities within the nineteenth-century global economy, objects can thus carry signification even across national and class boundaries, enmeshes as they are in complex networks of nature, culture and semiosis (Latour 1993). "The

nineteenth century's turn towards fully globalized capitalism engenders in the cultural realm a heightened commitment towards durable but moveable repositories of non-fiscal value" (Plotz 2008, xiv). Other kinds of object might imply further spheres, such as those of colonial domination—suppose that Alice is asked, for instance, to fetch a packet of tea (on realism and colonialism, see Dirk Göttsche, "Literary playing fields in motion: Remapping and rereading nineteenth-century realism," in Volume I, Chapter 4, Section 5). Duboslav Stechlin, in Theodor Fontane's *Der Stechlin* (1898; *The Stechlin*, 1995), can boast that his provincial estate has supplied Berlin with most of its floorboards. The merchant house in Gustav Freytag's *Soll und Haben* (1855; *Debit and Credit*, 1858) is a hub in a global network for the circulation of commodities (and indeed for smuggling across the national border between Poland and Germany). The merchant's son Anton Wohlfart excitedly notes the connection of family spheres that are on opposite sides of the world by the trading networks of global capitalism:

> "I know nothing so interesting as business. We live amid a many-colored web of countless threads, stretching across land and sea, and connecting man with man. […] When I place a sack of coffee in the scales, I am weaving an invisible link between the colonist's daughter in Brazil, who has plucked the beans, and the young mechanic who drinks it for his breakfast; and if I take up a stick of cinnamon, I seem to see, on the one side, the Malay who has rolled it up, and, on the other, the old woman of our suburb who grates it over her pudding." (Freytag 1858, 125)[1]

Mrs. Shaw, in Gaskell's *North and South* (1855), transfers to her daughter's trousseau the shawls given to her by her late husband General Shaw—that they are referred to as 'Delhi shawls' reveals these objects' enmeshing in economic networks of colonization, just as the cotton woven in the mills in the later part of the novel would have been originally grown in the slave plantations of the American South. Following Kate's marriage, the shawls yield their exchange value to use value as they are worn rather than stored up, but they continue to mark a kind of social distinction. Following the heroine Margaret Hale's displacement from the class status she occupied at the book's beginning, her shawl both protects her from the unaccustomed cold of the northern

[1] "[…] ich weiß gar nichts, was so interessant ist, als das Geschäft. Wir leben mitten unter einem bunten Gewebe von zahllosen Fäden, die sich von einem Menschen zu dem anderen, über Land und Meer aus einem Weltteil in den anderen spinnen. Sie hängen sich an jeden einzelnen und verbinden ihn mit der ganzen Welt. [...] Wenn ich einen Sack mit Kaffee auf die Waage setze, so knüpfe ich einen unsichtbaren Faden zwischen der Kolonistentochter in Brasilien, welche die Bohnen abgepflückt hat, und dem jungen Bauernburschen, der sie um Frühstück trinkt, und wenn ich einen Zimtstengel in die Hand nehme, so sehe ich auf der einen Seite den Malaien kauern, der ihn zubereitet und einpackt, und auf der anderen Seite ein altes Mütterchen aus unserer Vorstadt, das ihn über den Reisbrei reibt" (Freytag 1886, 274).

weather, and marks her nonetheless genteel status as she walks between working, lower-middle class, and moneyed districts of Milton Northern.

3 *Clothing: Presenting the self*

Fabric is an especially telling marker of meaning on the surfaces of realism. While clothing is not always described in texts, in stories set in the European climate, it is assumed that characters are clothed rather than naked—and clothing serves as a language for the social meanings presented by the human body. It is clothes which mark humanity's supposed elevation from 'barbarism' to modern civilization, as demonstrated by perhaps the most significant item of clothing in the English realist canon, the spare trousers that Crusoe gives to Friday, marking the latter's colonizing from being considered a naked 'savage' to a civilized, dressed, man. Clothing both connects the self to the social fabric, and marks its individuality and separateness within it. Additionally, until the widespread use of wood pulp for the manufacture of paper later in the nineteenth century, cloth is intimately connected to the novel as the basis of the raw material on which it was printed—Deborah Wynne also draws attention to the number of metaphors which shuttle between the production of story and the telling of a story: 'spinning a yarn,' 'following a thread,' 'weaving a plot' (Wynne 2014). Sage-writer Thomas Carlyle drew on German idealist philosophy in his work *Sartor Resartus* (1836) to formulate an entire 'Philosophy of Clothing,' which influenced a generation and more of Victorian novelists. Clothing weaves together culture, class, gender, commodity fetishism, mass production, mimesis and storytelling.

The denotation of character traits by clothing is a technique present in medieval drama and the very earliest novels, but, as with the commodity-object, its mass production expands clothing's range of possibilities to signify, in social life and in the literature which represent these forms of life. Like objects, clothes are alienable property; like the body, clothing is read by the eye of the realist mode through a set of codes which reveal information that is supposedly expressive of the being of the individual wearing it. The meaning of clothing is above all social and typological. The livery of the servant, the smock-frock of the agricultural laborer, the wig of the lawyer connote the professional role beyond the individuality of the human being who inhabits it: in a perfectly functioning social institution a different individual might occupy the uniform,

and still carry out the function the uniform denotes, to equal efficacy. Clothing thus both does and doesn't express the individuality of the self: clothes are an extension of the meanings of the physical body, but also occupy the boundary between the physical, biological body and the social and institutional role of that body's owner. The tailor in Benjamin Disraeli's *Endymion* (1847) confidently proclaims:

> "You must dress according to your age, your pursuits, your object in life; you must dress too, in some cases, according to your set. In youth a little fancy is rather expected, but if political life be your object, it should be avoided, at least after one-and-twenty. I am dressing two brothers now, men of considerable position; one is a mere man of pleasure, the other will probably be a minister of state. They are as like as two peas, but were I to dress the dandy and the minister the same, it would be bad taste—it would be ridiculous." (Disraeli 1881, 103)

In Charlotte Brontë's *Villette* (1853), the heroine Lucy Snowe, up to that point the possessor of one of the most inward-facing consciousnesses in the whole of the nineteenth-century canon, finds herself surprised at the outside legibility of her body to the commercial wider world:

> Much I marvelled at the sagacity evinced by waiters and chamber-maids in proportioning the accommodation to the guest. How could inn-servants and ship-stewardesses everywhere tell at a glance that I, for instance, was an individual of no social significance, and little burdened by cash? They *did* know it evidently: I saw quite well that they all, in a moment's calculation, estimated me at about the same fractional value. (Brontë 1990, 72–73)

Such is the accuracy of the reading of bodily surfaces in this text that shortly after, Lucy is offered a job on the strength of M. Paul's physiognomic reading of her countenance (on the significance of physiognomy to Brontë's work, see Gezari 1992).

Since, money and cost permitting, human beings have some choice in the kinds of clothing that can be worn on their bodies, the language of clothes can be not only read but also consciously written on the body. The clothing of the dandy seeks to claim its pre-eminence in the meanings that can be read on the body that it adorns (Shannon 2006, 128–60): the clothing of the prostitute advertises the body that it simultaneously reveals and conceals, and the possibility for that body to be traded in the market. Meanings read on clothing can be mobile, or can be inaccurate. The shabby clerk Akaky Akakievich in Nikolai Gogol's "Shinel" (1842; "The Overcoat," 1923) is briefly lauded by his peers when his appearance is elevated by the acquisition of a new overcoat. The unemployed tailor of Gottfried Keller's short story from the second volume of the popular collection *Die Leute von Seldwyla* (1874; *The People of Seldwyla* (selection), 1929) "Kleider machen Leute" (1874, "Clothes Make People," 2018) in possession of

a good overcoat is for a time mistaken for an aristocrat; such is the nobility of his spirit that even after the imposture is revealed, he is welcomed by those whom he had previously deceived. The social identity of a mobile middle-class character can be concealed by the adoption—by disguise, or fall from prosperity—by the donning of working-class clothing. More rare, although not impossible, is the performance of a different gender (drag, as in Rochester's successful impersonation of a Gypsy fortune teller in *Jane Eyre*, or in Anthony Trollope's "The Banks of the Jordan" (1861): see Cohen 2008, 67–75) or race (Rudyard Kipling's *Kim* (1901), or the policeman Strickland in Kipling's *Plain Tales from the Hills* (1886–1888)).

The meaning of clothing can thus be socially mobile in confessing not only wealth, poverty or mere respectability, but also movement between these states. As with other kinds of object, the piece of clothing moves through space and time and and its surface charts the passage of history. The wearing of clothes no longer new tells the story of the attrition of time: colors fade, hems fray, nap shines, bodily fluids such as sweat and blood stain permanently beyond the agency of laundry to repair (according to Peter Stallybrass, wrinkles made permanent by long wearing of clothing were called by repairers "memories," Stallybrass 1998, 196). The narrator of Fyodor Dostoevsky's *Prestuplenie i nakazanie* (1866; *Crime and Punishment*, 1885) gives a physiognomic account of the body of the once respectable but now dissolute drunk Marmeladov:

> His old black frock-coat was horribly frayed and had lost all but one button but this, with evident regard for the proprieties, he kept carefully fastened. A crumpled, stained, and dirty shirt-front protruded from under his nankeen waistcoat. The thick grey stubble on his cheeks and chin, once-clean-shaven in civil service style, revealed that it was some time since they had known a razor. (Dostoevsky 1995, 9)[2]

The supremely realist eye of Sherlock Holmes narrativizes still more ambitiously by anatomizing from the wear and tear exhibited by a client's hat that "his wife has ceased to love him" (Doyle 1994, 152).

Clothing's commodified meaning visibly enacts the subordination of the poor by the wealthy, as items too shabby to be worn by the former circulate downward to become the hand-me-down accoutrements of the latter (Shannon 2006, 69). The commutability

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[2] "Одет он был в старый, совершенно оборванный черный фрак, с осыпавшимися пуговицами. Одна только еще держалась кое-как и на нее-то он и застегивался, видимо желая не удаляться приличий. Из-под нанкового жилета торчала манишка, вся скомканная, запачканная и залитая. Лицо было выбрито, по-чиновничьи, но давно уже, так что уже густо начала выступать сизая щетина" (Dostoevsky 2019, 15).

of objects for money sees realism repeatedly resorting to the pawnshop, whose contents are suspended between the privacy of domestic space and the public space of the market (Womack, 2012). Think, for example of the scene in which Dickens's Martin Chuzzlewit pawns his watch, of the destitution in which the protagonists of *Crime and Punishment* and Knut Hamsun's *Sult* (1890; *Hunger*, 1899) begin their stories, of numerous Gissing novels and short stories. Contra Marx's claim quoted above, one might exchange a coat for a coat, or at least an expensive coat for a shabby coat and some money, if one lacks the means to pay for basics such as food and shelter.

From Charlotte Brontë's *Shirley* (1849) and Gaskell's *North and South* onwards, there is a long association between the boom of literary realism and clothing as a commodity across literatures and cultures. The eponymous hero of Charles Kingsley's *Alton Locke* (1850) and Rohinton Mistry's Ishvar and Omprakash (in *A Suitable Balance*, 1995) are tailors; Lata Mehra, in Vikram Seth's marriage-drama *A Suitable Boy* (1993), eventually marries a successful shoemaker; Juanito Santa Cruz's family money in Benito Pérez Galdós *Fortunata y Jacinta* (1887; *Fortunata and Jacinta*, 1986) derives from cloth. For those whose mobility is in the other direction and who have money to spend, the industrialization of the production of clothing and the opening up of new urban spaces allows the enjoyment of the leisure activity of shopping, especially shopping for clothing, in new and publicly visible ways. The shop window of Zola's *Au Bonheur des Dames* (1883; *The Ladies' Paradise*, 1883) invites the fetishization of its contents by the spectator, who imagines the never-worn articles of clothing as possessed with or rather devouring their own body parts (see Lubrich 2015):

> And these passions in the street were giving life to the materials: the laces shivered, then drooped again, concealing the depths of the shop with an exciting air of mystery; even the links of cloth, thick and square, were breathing, exuding a tempting odour, while the overcoats were throwing back their shoulders still more on the dummies, which were acquiring souls, and a huge velvet coat was billowing out, supple and warm, as if on shoulders of flesh and blood, with a heaving breast and quivering hips. (Zola 1995, 16)[3]

Although the connection between the realist novel and the narrative of social climbing is long-established, realism's presentation does not simply dramatize the mobile

[3] "Et les étoffes vivaient, toute une foule de passion du trottoir: les dentelles avaient un frisson, retombaient et cachaient les profondeurs du magasin, d'eun air troublant de mystères; les pièces de drap elles-mêmes, épaisses et carrées, respiraient, soufflaient une haleine tentatrice; tandis que les paletots se cambraient davantage sur les mannequins qui prenaient une âme, et que le grand manteau de velours se gonflait, souple et tiède, comme sur les épaules de chair, avec les battements de la gorge et le frémissement des reins" (Zola 1984, 25).

protagonist's change from the clothing of the class they are leaving to that of the new one. The identification of social class through clothing is dependent on the uniformity of individuals occupying a type, a taxonomy whose consequences get stricter and stricter towards the higher classes. Woe betide the attempt to appear as a Victorian gentleman without not just clean linen but also a stick and gloves, or of any kind of lower middle-class respectability and upwards without a hat. For all of the upward efforts of the nineteenth-century '*Kleidungsroman*' to dress for success, the codes by which sartorial meanings are produced are a further means by which hegemonic power structures can be kept in place (although following the "grand renunciation" of color in men's tailoring across the nineteenth century, black clothing becomes "good cover" for movement between different class registers: see Harvey 1996, 147). A gentleman should know how to dress like a gentleman, but as if purely through unconscious practice, not following the conscious acquisition of knowledge. Wells's Arthur Kipps, newly enriched and aspiring to gentility, is admonished by his bourgeois fiancée Helen Walshingam thus: "'It's possible to be over-conventional, over-elaborate. It makes you look like a shop—like a common, well-off person. There's a sort of easiness that is better. A real gentleman looks right, without looking as though he had tried to be right'" (Wells 2005, 172). The narrator of *Crime and Punishment* judges adversely Petrovich's over-equipping himself for his intended wedding to Raskolnikov's sister, "All his clothes were newly come from the tailor, and they were all very good, even if they were perhaps a little too new and too obviously designed for a particular purpose" (Dostoevsky 1995, 139).[4] As with Lady Eustace's jewels, to demonstrate true hegemonic power in possession of the valuable object it is necessary to show or feign indifference to its value when displayed.

4 *The body as object: The material of the self*

Clothing is made legible in nineteenth-century realist discourse by custom, by common agreement: members of social classes dress in a certain way because of both economics (depending on clothing's durability, cost, permeability to dirt) and culture, which of

[4] "Все платье его было только что от портного, и все было хорошо, кроме разве того только, что все было слишком новое и слишком обличало известную цель" (Dostoevsky 2019, 176–77).

course changes over time (the frock coat giving way to the lounge suit, the hooped skirt or crinoline passing in and out of fashion). The realist legibility of the physical body is allied to a grander signifying system still: to the positivistic scientific project of understanding mankind's place and meaning in the physical universe. Physiognomic taxonomy is allied to a wider epistemology, whether the Natural Theology that framed Johann Kaspar Lavater's first observations in the 1770s, or the elaborate eugenic Social Darwinism of Francis Galton's *Hereditary Genius* (Hartley 2001). Like so many nineteenth-century intellectual projects, physiognomy (and phrenology, developed from the German doctor Franz Joseph Gall's attempts to map the functions of the brain on the surface of the skull) sought to identify and ascribe material causes, even if those causes are unseen, to the seen. Lavater puts it thus in *Essays in Physiognomy* (1775): "Physiognomy is the science of knowledge of the correspondence between the external and internal man, the visible superficies and the invisible contents" (quoted in Hartley 2001, 33). "The belief that the human face and body should indicate the inner nature of the individual" (Cowling 1989, 12) was common throughout the nineteenth century (see also the case studies by Jeremy Tambling, "Realism and allegory: Balzac, Dickens and James" and Svend Erik Larsen, "Caricature in realism," both in this chapter). Science, visual art and the novel taxonomized the human body, the skull and the face especially, to externalize inner life. "The public that read Lytton and the Brontës looked at the *Derby Day* and *The Railway Station* [W. P. Frith's populous and panoramic scene-paintings] with the same psychological and physiognomic expectations which operated in life and literature" (Cowling 1989, 86). In the latter part of his career, in *The Expression of Emotion in Man and Animals* (1872), Charles Darwin even provided literal sketches (and photographs) that sought to universalize the affective meanings that could be read from facial expressions. However, nineteenth-century realism also challenged physiognomic thinking. Two case studies in this chapter analyze the limits of physiognomy within realism. On the one hand, the faceless urban mass that leaves no clues to a physiognomic approach to the bodily surface, is analyzed in Svend Erik Larsen's case study ""Distance avails not": Representing the urban masses." On the other, a radical mutilation of faces on living bodies makes physiognomy an interpretational impasse. This was the shocking experience at the sight of the survivors returning with crushed faces from the trenches of the First World War, which is discussed in Tómaš Jirsa's case study "Performing the reverse side of the face: Toward affective realism."

Viewed now as a pseudo-science, the physiognomic project in science was deeply implicated in such problematic endeavors as racialized anthropology, the evolutionary biology of supposed human degeneration, and positive and negative eugenics (see Pick 1999). In fiction, however, physiognomic readings could, if an author chooses, serve as a self-fulfilling prophecy, since both the physical appearance of a character and their inner life, their temperament and disposition are created by the author's own imaginative choices: the legibility of the character's being (in the *fabula*) can be 'truthfully' mapped onto the surface of their body in the narrative (in the *sjuzhet*).

In literature in English, such legibility appears to reach its greatest transparency in the figure of Sherlock Holmes, who is not only able to read the language of the body perspicaciously—and, as a master of disguise, to write it as well. Holmes's repeated adjurations to his companion Dr. Watson to "learn his methods" are meant to be absorbed also by the reader; here, Watson describes the client in "The Red-Headed League" (1891):

> I did not gain very much, however, by my inspection. Our visitor bore every mark of being an average commonplace British tradesman, obese, pompous, and slow. He wore rather baggy grey shepherd's check trousers, a not over-clean black frock-coat, unbuttoned in the front, and a drab waistcoat with a heavy brassy Albert chain, and a square pierced bit of metal dangling down as an ornament. A frayed top-hat and a faded brown overcoat with a wrinkled velvet collar lay upon a chair beside him. Altogether, look as I would, there was nothing remarkable about the man save his blazing red head, and the expression of extreme chagrin and discontent upon his features. (Conan Doyle 1994, 50–51)

In Watson's analysis, what distinguishes Jabez Wilson is his lack of distinguishing features; he does not appear narratable, sufficiently out of the ordinary run of his type to generate the extraordinary circumstances which will produce the plot of the investigation. Watson's reading is insufficiently perceptive, however: Holmes's more acute eye appears to see more deeply:

> Sherlock Holmes' quick eye took in my occupation, and he shook his head with a smile as he noticed my questioning glances. "Beyond the obvious facts that he has at some time done manual labour, that he takes snuff, that he is a Freemason, that he has been in China, and that he has done a considerable amount of writing lately, I can deduce nothing else." (Conan Doyle 1994, 51)

Holmes's method appears superhuman but is in fact a kind of narrative sleight of hand. Watson's first description does not in fact provide any description of the enlarged, more muscular right hand and the tattoo from which Holmes deduces (or, more accurately, induces) regular experience of manual labor and time spent in the Far East. Usually,

Watson's initial narration hints that there are details to be read in the text's *fabula*, if the reader looks hard enough to spot them, but in fact these are usually withheld from the *sjuzhet* until Holmes articulates them. Often the meanings that are supposedly legibly depicted on the surface of the realist body require a degree of diegetic gloss to be brought to light, or at least rely on a set of assumptions or knowledge shared by the author and implied reader (such as, in the late nineteenth century, a prognathous jaw or sloping forehead betokening evolutionary degeneracy).

For a character's face to be so plainly their fortune as this, however, risks inhibiting the dramatic possibilities of the plot. It is no coincidence that such a rigidly certain method as Holmes's is applied to the minor supporting characters of a collection of short stories rather than the protagonist of a more extended literary form whose bodily meanings will be less fixed and more developed over a longer passage of narrative time. The critical tradition has long associated Holmes's method with a Foucauldian form of social control: the lower orders are observed, known, and subdued by this surveillant kind of practice (Belsey 1980, 109–17; Jann 1990). Such were the realist certainties against which Bertolt Brecht rebelled in his thoughts on casting in the epic theatre: "as if all cooks were fat, all peasants phlegmatic, all statesmen stately. As if all who love and are loved are beautiful. As if all good speakers had a fine voice" (Brecht 1978, 242). The mobile protagonist of the realist novel must carry with him or her the potential for rising from, or at least evading, the certainty of the social classification from which he or she emerges (Jameson 2013, 131).

Even such an especially enthusiastic exponent of this technique as Balzac, whose use of the term 'physiognomy' can refer to the face as well as to how it might be read (that is to the data and to the methodology), chooses to hold open future narrative possibilities. Typically, in the realist text, an individual's body (and their clothing, and the environment they inhabit) are ekphrastically realized and their meanings established the first time the reader encounters them, early on in the novel. To keep open the subsequent potentialities of individual agency within the scope of the plot, the description of physical appearance is allowed freedom to hint at a trajectory that might be fulfilled, or dashed. Michu, the rascally steward of Balzac's *Une Ténébreuse affaire* (1841; *A Murky Business*, 1972) is initially sketched thus:

> His Socratic, snub-nosed face was crowned with a very fine forehead, but one so bulging that it seemed to beetle over the rest. His ears stood out and had a kind of mobility like those of wild animals, always on the alert. His mouth, half open as is quite common among country folk, revealed strong teeth, as white as

> almonds but irregularly set; thick and gleaming side-whiskers served as a framework to his countenance, white, but mottled in patches. His hair was close cropped in front but grew longer over his temples and the back of his head; with its tawny redness it threw into perfect relief everything in his physiognomy that was uncouth and faithful. His short thick neck offered temptation to the guillotine blade of the law. (Balzac 1972, 23)[5]

Michu is indeed eventually guillotined before the novel's close, but the text makes clear this fate is a consequence of his actions not of the morphology of his face. His fellow kidnappers are of higher social class and are pardoned without their necks feeling the need to offer the guillotine any such temptation. While Michu is caught because his clothing is recognized and traced to him, identity is not wholly mapped onto appearance in this novel, which features identical and almost identically dressed twins who have diametrically opposed temperaments.

In very late (and, in this case, highly sophisticated) nineteenth-century use of physiognomy, the tone of the narrative can hover between realist faith in the legibility of physical appearances and modernist skepticism towards the reliability of such codes. The plot of Henry James's *The Portrait of a Lady* (1880–1881) deploys standard realist tropes such as a country house, transatlantic visitors, an inheritance and secret parentage with a light and self-conscious irony. The narration's tone when introducing Daniel Touchett both draws on bodily description's supposed capacity to narrate the pre-history of the character, and mocks this capacity:

> He had a narrow, clean-shaven face, with features evenly distributed and an expression of placid acuteness. It was evidently a face in which the range of representation was not large, so that the air of contented shrewdness was all the more of a merit. It seemed to tell that he had been successful in life, yet it seemed to tell also that his success had not been exclusive and invidious, but had had much of the inoffensiveness of failure. [...] He was neatly dressed, in well-brushed black; but a shawl was folded upon his knees, and his feet were encased in thick, embroidered slippers. A beautiful collie dog lay upon the grass near his chair, watching the master's face almost as tenderly as the master took in the still more magisterial physiognomy of the house; and a little bristling, bustling terrier bestowed a desultory attendance upon the other gentlemen. (James 2011, 5)

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[5] "Cette figure socratique à nez camus était couronnée par un très beau front, mais si bonbé qu'il paraissait être en surplomb sur son visage. Les oreilles bien détâchées possédaient une sorte de mobilité comme celle des bêtes suavages, tourjours sur le qui-vive. La bouche entre'ouverte par une habitude assez ordinaire chez les campagnards, laissait voir des dents fortes et blanches comme des amandes, mais mal rangées. Des favoris épais et luisants encadraient cette face blanche et violacée par places. Les cheveux coupés ras sur le devant, longs sur les joux et derrière la tête, faisaient, par leur rougeur fauve, parfaitement rassortir tout ce que cette physionomie avait étrange et de fatale. Le cou, court et gros, tentait le couperet de la Loi" (Balzac 1966, 493).

James's irony questions how reliably the appearance of a face—more specifically the lines marked on a face by ageing—can reveal the honesty or rapaciousness of Touchett's career in business before his retirement. At the same time, it places in less-than-flattering juxtaposition the supposed perspicuity of Touchett's reading of the "physiognomy" of his house with the dog's affectionate but analytically empty gaze upon his own "magisterial" face. Turning to Touchett's son Ralph, the narrator almost foregoes the translation of physical features into abstract qualities for diegetic assertion, or a kind of transposed epithet, instead:

> Tall, lean, loosely and feebly put together, he had an ugly, sickly, witty, charming face, furnished, but by no means decorated, with a straggling moustache and whisker. He looked clever and ill – a combination by no means felicitous; and he wore a brown velvet jacket. (James 2011, 6)

That the combination of cleverness and illness is especially infelicitous rests not so much in the biological and physical as in the fictional: Ralph's appearance indicates that he is a 'type,' the sickly genius, the truth of which is more generic (to fiction) than it is truly scientific or positivistic.

5 *Physical beauty: Valuing bodies*

As noted above, the presence of bodies and objects is taken for granted in the realist text: they may be represented if the text wishes to invest words and effort in their existence in the storyworld, in depicting that world ekphrastically-visually, or the text may choose not to. Similarly, texts are under no obligation to represent the processes that animate those bodies. Some bodily experiences—health and illness, eating and hunger—are depicted and invested with meaning more commonly in literary texts than those—such as excretion or menstruation—which cultures have historically seen as more taboo (James 2018). Here, the meaning presented by fiction's realist bodies can connote a truth: not only are poor people obliged to wear shabby clothes, but their bodies are made thinner by hunger, and more prone to illness and prematurely aged by poverty.

The biological need most frequently dramatized on the surface of the realist text's human body is, of course, sexual desire. While occasionally characters (more commonly in other literary modes such as the grotesque, as for instance Gargantua and

Pantagruel, Gulliver, Leopold Bloom) are motivated by the need to eat and excrete, the characteristic—and often linked—twin arcs of the realist narrative are desire for worldly success, money and possessions, and the desire for a fulfilled romantic and erotic existence. Realism is not unique in its interest in and depiction of sexual attractiveness as a human trait that it selects for attention in the *sjuzhet*: the medieval romance, for instance, deploys the epithet 'fair' to denote characters who are attractive physically and morally (see Saunders 2015). Beauty is one of the canons by which nineteenth-century physiognomy chooses to read the human figure: and "the idea," for instance "that superior physical beauty was the expression of higher mental development was quite commonplace in the mid-nineteenth century" (Hartley 2001, 110). While the depiction of sexual acts and sexuality is taboo for much of the history of realism in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries (a taboo tested by court cases involving the works of Flaubert and Baudelaire in France, and Zola, Wilde, Joyce and Lawrence in Britain—see Robert Weninger's core essay "Straw man or profligate son?: Transformations of literary realism since 1900" in Volume I, Chapter 5), the presentation of autonomous beauty enables sexual desire to be present in the text as an animating motive in the plot, this a further mode by which human agency animates what lies beneath a depicted external surface. The possession of physical beauty (particularly, and most commonly, by a sexually mature female subject beheld by a male gaze) makes more possible the representation of the sexual desirability of the character who possesses that beauty, all the more so in the second half of the nineteenth century after Darwinism helps frame a more licit language for the mechanism of sexual selection. While the representation of female sexual desire is considered more transgressive of literary decorum, convention permits some signification of arousal or desire in markers of alteration in bodily states: heightened color, parted lips, shallower breathing, the touch of hands or of clothed non-erogenous parts of the body: the teenage Esther watching Pip and Herbert fight, a lock of Bathsheba Everdene's hair coming loose as she watches Sergeant Troy's phallic sword display in Thomas Hardy's *Far from the Madding Crowd* (1874).

The hyper-femininity of higher-class fashion in the late nineteenth century creates artificially inflated hips (the bustle or crinoline) or pinched waist (the corset), hence the nineteenth-century male gaze's fetishizing the reminders of the real flesh and blood body beneath: the hair and the feet. The narrator of *Anna Karenina* (1878; *Anna Karenina*, 1887) observes:

> At every step the lines of her knees and thighs were clearly visible under her dress, and one involuntarily wondered where in the undulating, bolstered up mountain of material at the back the real body of the woman, so small and slender, so naked in front and so hidden behind and below them, really came to an end. (Tolstoy 1978, 321)[6]

Zola in particular tested the limits of nineteenth-century literary propriety in his representation of bodies: his characters are self-regulating, competing, Darwinian organisms as well as moral and intellectual agents. Fredric Jameson firmly locates Zola's bodies in the passage of history and modernity:

> Zola's novels are immense accumulations of bodies in movement and intersection across such spaces, from rooms to streets, from the fetid darkness of *L'Assomoir* and the underground nightmare of *Germinal* to the rococo excesses of the most vulgar Second Empire Salons: bodies in full effervescence, paralysis, or decay, landscapes increasingly thronged with the new buildings and the wreckage of older ones, the phenomenology of History and histories caught in a dynamic of toxic expansion. (Jameson 2013, 113)

In *Germinal* (1885; *Germinal* 1894) Maheu is clearly aroused by the sight of his wife's body when he emerges from the bath that follows his physical exertion down the mine, and the couple have sex. In *Thérèse Raquin* (1867; *Thérèse Raquin*, 1887), Laurent's somatic fantasy of a circulatory system shared with his married lover Therese is clearly a not-so-coded image of his desire for their bodies to be united in sexual intercourse:

> Having grasped her hand, he clasped it powerfully in his own all the way back to the Rue Mazarine. He could feel it trembling, but it was not drawn back; instead, from time to time it gave a sudden squeeze of its own. And the two hands were burning hot, their palms damp and sticky and their tightly interlaced fingers squashed together at every jolt. It seemed to Laurent and Thérèse that their blood was circulating through their joined hands and round each others' hearts, so that their hands became the fiery focus of all their bubbling life. (Zola 1992, 71)[7]

Realist representation of the material fabric of the human body also gives a means of dramatizing a further taboo biological reality: the inevitability of death. Laurent's daily encounters, as he looks for evidence of Camille's drowning, with the corpses housed in

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[6] "Стремительность же вперед была такова, что при каждом движении обозначались из-под платья формы колен и верхней части ноги, и невольно представлялся вопрос о том, где сзади, в этой подстроенной колеблюшейся горе, действительно кончается ее настоящее, маленькое и стройное, столь обнаженное сверху и столь спрятанное сзади и внизу тело" (Tolstoy 1963, 325).

[7] "Quand il eut saisi sa main, il la lui serra avec force et la garda dans la sienne jusqu'à la rue Mazarine. Il sentait cette main trembler; mais elle ne se retirait pas, elle avait au contraire des caresses brusques. Et, l'une dans l'autre, les mains brûlaient; les paumes moites se collaient, et les doigts, étroitement pressés, se meurtrissaient à chaque secousse. Il semblait à Laurent et à Thérèse que le sang de l'un allait dans la poitrine de l'autre en passant par leurs poings unis; ces poings devenaient un foyer ardent où leur vie bouillait" (Zola 1979, 121).

the morgue are a grisly reminder of his and his beloved's embodiment, and the fantasy that comes to dominate his mind becomes instead the specter of the murdered husband that appears to the homicidal couple on their wedding night.

Beauty presents particular difficulties even to the most sophisticated realist writers: frequently the ekphrasis of beauty is accompanied by a self-denying note of romantic irony admitting the inability of language to portray effectively the desirability or aesthetic qualities of a flesh-and-blood face and figure (see James and Miller 2016 on George du Maurier's teasing his readers with the erotic/aesthetic extents of his female protagonist's physical beauty). As with ekphrastically depicted works of art or pieces of music in a literary text, the narrator has to invite the implied reader to take a diegetic assertion of beauty on trust, to imagine the aesthetic or sexual pleasure that the reader might experience were they able actually to engage optically, rather than linguistically, with the attractive people inhabiting the story world. Unlike the genre of the romance, the realist text in its more sophisticated iterations is often suspicious of beauty purely qua beauty. Here, the text seeks to value a supposedly 'natural' kind of beauty that is innate, not necessarily enhanced by objects or clothing. "Miss Brooke had that kind of beauty which seems to be thrown into relief by poor dress" (Eliot 1998, 7) claims the narrator of *Middlemarch*; Anna Karenina "stood out from whatever she was wearing […] her dress was never conspicuous on her" (Tolstoy 1978, 93).[8]

The racially othered body presents an especially rich site of contradictions for the realist text's presentation of female beauty. The narration's choice to denote a skin as dark marks the impossibility of the possessor of that body occupying a hegemonic or normative position in a racist social hierarchy which privileges the signification of whiteness. At the same time, the additional taboo around the racialized female body can see it being portrayed as still more erotically desirable, as in Bertha Mason, the first Mrs. Rochester, or Kurtz's African mistress, "savage and superb," adorned with ivory, necklaces and charms given to her by men in tribute to her 'native' beauty (Conrad 1995, 137). The female Jew offers still more possibilities for erotic masculine investment: her whiteness might allow her both to retain the cachet of the exotic and to 'pass' as white. Rebecca, in Walter Scott's *Ivanhoe* (1820) influentially embodies many of these contradictions, as witch and healer, exotic outsider and Christian bride. The

[8] "выступала из своево туалета, [...] туалет никогда не мог быть виден на ней" (Tolstoy 1963, 87–88).

narrative possibilities of, "on the one hand, the dangerous carnality of the Jewish woman, and, on the other, her exceptional spirituality and amenability to restoration, conversion or radical assimilation" (Valman 2009, 1) are revisited later in the century by George Eliot in the figure of Mirah Lapidoth in *Daniel Deronda* (1876).

Money offers a further overlapping code for the valuing of female beauty. The nineteenth-century marriage plot sees sexuality and money pass through a nexus in which the commodity of beauty is cashed in, ideally at its peak, for property (on the nineteenth-century marriage-plot and the transmission of property, see Michie 2011; see also Anne Lounsbery's case study "Russian families, accidental and other" in Volume I, Chapter 4). The male gaze, and the framing of anything of value as a commodity that can be exchanged, mean that patriarchy and capitalism in concert place a financial value on female beauty. Female hair is literarily exchanged for money in Victor Hugo's *Les Miserables* (1862; *Les Miserables* 1863), Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* (1868–1869) and Thomas Hardy's *The Woodlanders* (1887). Like clothing and furniture, the surfaces of human beauty, especially female beauty, are also subject to movement in space and time: it might blossom as characters mature, strikingly so in Sally Rooney's *Normal People* (2018), say, or suffer wear and tear. Mademoiselle Varenka in *Anna Karenina* appears "like some beautiful flower already past its bloom and without fragrance, though its petals had not dropped" (Tolstoy 1978, 234).[9] The mobile female protagonist has to manage the asset of her beauty wisely: Edith Wharton's *The House of Mirth* (1905) dramatizes with excruciatingly gradual precision Lily Bart's failure to cash in on her appealing but fading bodily good looks by marrying well (which means marrying wealth); ultimately her physical capital is exhausted, and she dies, alone.

6 *Producing the self: Environments*

The realist text is at its most ekphrastic, its most broadly pictorial, in the depiction of the material environments where the possessors of objects and bodies live. Indeed, inscribing the relationship between environments and human beings as a causal one is key to the realist method. While, as with physiognomy, the scope of a character's

[9] "похожа на прекрасный, хотя еще и полный лепестков, но уже отцветший, без запаха цветок" (Tolstoy 1963, 233).

freedom of moral action is not wholly circumscribed by the nature of the environment in which they begin, to some degree their *consciousness* is determined by their *being* in that environment.

> The sum total of these relations of production constitutes the economic structure of society—the real foundation, on which rises a legal and political superstructure and to which correspond definite forms of social consciousness. The mode of production of material life determines the social, political and intellectual life process in general. It is not the consciousness of men that determines their being, but, on the contrary, their social being that determines their consciousness. (Marx 1968, 183)

Think here, for instance, of the enormous number of realist texts which begin with the description of a setting, in particular a house: Stendhal's *Le Rouge et Le Noir* (1830; *The Red and the Black*, 1926), Theodor Fontane's *Effi Briest* (1894; *Effi Briest*, 1995), Balzac's *Cousine Bette* (1846; *Cousin Bette*, 1992), James's *The Portrait of a Lady*. Such descriptions are not mere background for the staging of the consciousness of the text's human cast: walls, roofs and furniture are the very fabric which make up the realist universe, functioning as a kind of world-building, like set-dressing on stage (Jameson 2015, 19), and form the being of the fictional humans who walk on that stage. To take a literal stage direction, by way of example, from a realist drama, Henrik Ibsen's *Et dukkehjem* (1879; *A Doll's House*, 1889):

> A room furnished comfortably and tastefully, but not extravagantly. At the back, a door to the right leads to the entrance-hall, another to the left leads to Helmer's study. Between the doors stands a piano. In the middle of the left-hand wall is a door, and beyond it a window. Near the window are a round table, armchairs and a small sofa. In the right-hand wall, at the farther end, another door; and on the same side, nearer the footlights, a stove, two easy chairs and a rocking-chair; between the stove and the door, a small table. Engravings on the walls; a cabinet with china and other small objects; a small book-case with well-bound books. The floors are carpeted, and a fire burns in the stove. It is winter. (Ibsen 1919, 5)[10]

Individual objects are visually interpreted, even unconsciously, by the audience as part of their experiencing of the whole performance as they decode the physical meanings

[10] "En hyggelig og smakfullt, men ikke kostbart indrettet stue. En dør til høyre i bakgrunnen fører ut til forstuen; en annen dør til venstre i bakgrunnen fører inn til Helmers arbeidsværelse. Mellem begge disse døre et pianoforte. Mitd på veggen til venstre en dør og lenger fremme et vindu. Nær ved vinduet et rundt bord med lenestole og en liten sofa. På sideveggen til høyre, noe tilbake, en dør, og på samme vegg, nærmere mot forgrunnen en stentøysovn med et par lenestole og en gyngestol foran. Mellem ovnen og sidedøren et lite bord. Kobberstikk på veggene. En etagère med porselensgjenstande og andre små kunstsaker; et lite bokskap med bøker i praktbind. Teppe på gulvet; ild i ovnen. Vinterdag" (Ibsen 1968, 69).

of the picture shown within the frame of the proscenium. The objects denote the nature of the daily life of the people who live among them, Torvald Helmer and Nora; props "serve as metonyms for the status quo" (Begley 2012, 239). The piano, the etchings, the *objets d'art* and the bindings denote the bourgeois culture and affluence, if not wealth, of the Helmer household. The very solidity of the construction of the nineteenth-century 'box set' (the solidity of which Brecht would later complain against) is a key part of the aesthetic of the realist theater. The internal doors imply the other rooms of the apartment—whose auditory separation from the room on the main stage is key to the plot of the play; the front door implies the solidity of the rest of the apartment block and, in turn, synecdochically the entire rest of the world into which Nora will escape following the famous slamming of that door at the play's close.

Following her awakening later in the play, Nora complains that her consciousness has been determined in too constrained a way by her being in the patriarchal environments she has lived in: first her father's, then her husband's. This kind of formation is a crucial means of understanding for the realist novel (as it would be for the nascent discipline of sociology). As Freedgood notes of the increasing use of this method across nineteenth-century fiction, "Lists of details become a kind of paradoxically dilatory shorthand for big cultural formations" (Freedgood 2006, 14). Balzac in particular notes the lineation of character by the materiality of place, and by that place's culture. Here, in *Le Père Goriot* (1835; *Old Goriot*, 1951):

> The indestructible furniture which every other household throws out finds its way to the lodging-house, for the same reason that the human wreckage of civilization drifts to hospitals for the incurable. In this room you would find a barometer with a monk who appears when it is wet, execrable engravings bad enough to spoil your appetite and all framed in varnished black wood with gilt beading, a clock with a tortoise shell case inlaid with copper, a green stove, Argand lamps coated with dust and oil so greasy that a facetious boarder can write his name on it with his finger-nail, broken-backed chairs, wretched little esparto grass mats unravelling endlessly without ever coming completely to pieces, and finally miserable foot-warmers, their orifices enlarged by decay, their hinges broken and their wood charred. This furniture is all old, cracked, decaying, shaky, worm-eaten, decrepit, ramshackle and its last legs; but its state could not be described fully without breaking the thread of the story and putting too great a strain on the tolerance of impatient people who read it. (Balzac 1951, 32)[11]

[11] "Il s'y rencontre des ces meubles indestructibles, proscrits partout, mais placés là comme le sont les débris de la civilisation aux Incurables. Vous y verriez un baromètre à capucin qui sort quand il pleut, des gravures exécrables qui ôtent l'appétit, toutes encadrées en bois noir verni à filets dorés ; un cartel en écaille incrustée de cuivre ; un poêle vert, des quinquets d'Argand où la poussière se combine avec l'huile, une longue table couverte en toile cirée assez grasse pour qu'un facétieux externe y écrive son nom en se servant de son doigt comme de style, des chaises estropiées, de petits paillassons piteux en

Again realism's use of objects here is not static, is not solely pictorial. The novel narrativizes the objects, notes their passing through time and space as they are transferred from affluent to shabby social strata, from *objets d'art* to kitsch, from raw material to commodity to junk to unraveling into raw material again. The contents of the lodging house are, like its inhabitants, socially mobile—here, downwards. At the same time, the objects aggregate to compose an environment, which not only houses those who live there, but shapes their consciousnesses. While Balzac's narrator is being playfully half-ironic, here the objects and the body are read side by side. The narrator notes the somatic effects of the boarding house on Madame Vauquer, her physiognomy both attributably caused by, and reflecting, her residence in the boarding-house.

> Her face, fresh with the chill freshness of the first frosty autumn day, her wrinkled eyes, her expression, varying from the conventional set smile of the ballet-dancer to the sour frown of the discounter of bills, her whole person, in short, provides a clue to the boarding-house, just as the boarding-house implies the existence of such a person as she is. […] Her knitted woollen petticoat dipping below the refurbished old dress which forms her skirt, its wadding escaping from rents in the ripped material, expresses the essence of the sitting-room, the dining-room and the little garden, makes you realize what the kitchen must be like, and foreshadows the boarders. When she is there the picture is complete. (Balzac 1951, 33)[12]

The narrative's initial attention to the objects in the boarding-house has a deterministic logic, embodied in one of lodgers, the poor but noble Eugène de Rastignac, who—strongly motivated by a desire to escape from the distressing boarding house—climbs his way up Paris's social strata and marks his progress with fine gloves, clean cuffs and other paraphernalia. Brooks notes of such characters "how […] [t]he presentation of desirable things, luxurious accessories, and their denial to the subject, leads to the subject's overwhelming desire for possession" (Brooks 2015, 28). Eugénie Grandet in Balzac's 1833 novel by the same name, dressed unusually well, given her father's

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sparterie qui se déroule toujours sans se perdre jamais, puis des chaufferettes misérables à trous cassés, à charnières défaites, dont le bois se carbonise. Pour expliquer combien ce mobilier est vieux, crevassé, pourri, tremblant, rongé, manchot, borgne, invalide, expirant, il faudrait en faire une description qui retarderait trop l'intérêt de cette histoire, et que les gens pressés ne pardonneraient pas" (Balzac 1965b, 218–19).

[12] "Sa figure fraîche comme une première gelée d'automne, ses yeux ridés, dont l'expression passe du sourire prescrit aux danseuses à l'amer renfrognement de l'escompteur, enfin toute sa personne explique la pension, comme la pension implique la personne. […] Son jupon de laine tricotée, qui dépasse sa première jupe faite avec une vieille robe, et dont la ouate s'échappe par les fentes de l'étoffe lézardée, résume le salon, la salle à manger, le jardinet, annonce la cuisine et fait pressentir les pensionnaires. Quand elle est là, ce spectacle est complet" (Balzac 1965b, 218–19).

chronic miserliness, is initially dazzled on first meeting by the leisurely affluence of her cousin Charles' ensemble; he, in turn, is baffled by the shabbiness of her family's clothing, and of the décor of their home, as well as by the poverty of their diet, when he knows them to be rich. Subsequently, the family wealth is mobilized from the miser to the unscrupulous entrepreneur when Eugénie makes a gift to Charles of the coins she has received from her father every birthday. He recklessly invests his cousin's patrimony in the most morally repugnant commodification of bodies into objects: the slave trade, and, having alienated Eugénie from her fortune, does not return to marry her.

The initial set-dressing of realist environments may appear merely epideictic—here, an affectless example in Theodor Dreiser's *Sister Carrie* (1900), which reveals that domestic décor also confesses a kind of physiognomy:

> The rooms were comfortably enough furnished. There was a good Brussels carpet on the floor, rich in dull red and lemon shades, and representing large jardinières filled with gorgeous, impossible flowers. There was a large pier-glass mirror between the two windows. A large, soft, green, plush-covered couch occupied one corner, and several rocking-chairs were set about. Some pictures, several rugs, a few small pieces of bric-à-brac, and the tale of contents is told. (Dreiser 1986, 88)

The tale that usually follows such a picture, however, is that of a socially mobile protagonist's desire to escape it, to fulfill their desire to outgrow such environments. Carrie resolves to resist her determination by her surroundings, by effort of will (and through her physical beauty) to place herself in an environment which will allow her consciousness greater scope of existence:

> She was being branded like wax by a scene which only made poor clothes, worn shoes, shop application and poverty in general seem more dire, more degraded, more and more impossible. (Dreiser 1986, 101)

While, ideally, fiction tends to suggest that personal moral autonomy ought not to be surrendered in pursuit of finer things, realism tends to acknowledge the more expansive possibilities for consciousness that are furnished by living in more affluent and comfortable surroundings. A dilemma dramatized frequently in many forms of narrative, but especially in nineteenth-century fiction, is the choice between wealth and the material modes of being it permits on the one hand, and a less economically profitable but more ethical course of action on the other. For female protagonists this is often framed in terms of choice of suitors for marriage. In Jane Austen's *Pride and Prejudice* (1813), Elizabeth Bennet is only half-joking in her claim that she first

believed she might be able to love Mr. Darcy after she first sees the size of his house. Nor does Austen spare the reader of *Mansfield Park* (1814) the detail of Fanny Price's discomfort following her temporary removal from Mansfield Park to her family's cramped quarters in Portsmouth. Fanny is ultimately rewarded for her virtuous resistance to the handsome and wealthy but morally flighty Henry Crawford with marriage to her cousin Edmund and lifelong residence in Mansfield Park.

7 *Framing the self: Beautiful environments*

Present-day realism is no less preoccupied with the fact of beauty and comfort's underpinning by the possession of wealth than nineteenth-century realism. In, for instance, Alan Hollinghurst's novel *The Line of Beauty* (2004), the protagonist Nick Guest is the son of an antique dealer—the antique charts an interesting trajectory of mobility for the value of the object—and is writing a PhD on Henry James. Guest is well aware of the moral shortcomings of the Feddens, the wealthy family with whom he is lodging, but also acutely conscious that, even if they lack the discernment to value them properly, rich people tend to have more beautiful things in their houses, which are consequently more pleasant habitats—since one has to live somewhere—to live in. Nick is ultimately driven from the Feddens' great places by a newspaper scandal that exposes his homosexuality and Gerald Fedden's shadiness in a deal trading property.

No nineteenth-century novelist was more wedded to the notion of the novel as itself a beautiful aesthetic object than Henry James, but James was both excited and exasperated by fiction's cluttering of the environment of the novel's "furnished houses" with objects. In an 1875 essay on Balzac he writes:

> We, for our part, have always found Balzac's rooms extremely interesting; we often prefer his places to his people. He was a profound connoisseur in these matters; he had a passion for *bric-à-brac*, and his tables and chairs are always in character. […] in his enumerations of inanimate objects he often sins by extravagance […] often when in a story he stops up your mouth against complaint, as it were, by a choking dose of bricks and mortar. The power of his memory, his representative vision, as regards these things is something amazing; the reader never ceases to wonder at the promptness with which he can 'get up' a furnished house—at the immense supply of this material that he carries about in his mind. (James 1984, 50)

James chooses the term "memory" over imagination, as if the world of the novel is not invented but real and mimetically recalled by Balzac's mind. As with the class slant of Woolf's critique of Bennett, mentioned above, there is also a classist slant in James's account of Balzac as a kind of tradesman in "getting up" a furnished house for a customer. James deplores the accumulation of objects in fiction he reads and writes about as needless and insufficiently artistic: his theoretical writing on the novel stresses restraint, economy, and restriction over the plenitude of the classic realist pictorial vision. *Bric-à-brac* for James is not an effective vehicle of meaning: what *bric-à-brac* means is to mean nothing—anathema to James's spare and psychological realism.

James himself was very deliberate indeed about the nature and purpose of the objects he allowed into his own fiction. It is better to be in a beautiful environment, such as the house, Gardencourt, whose 'physiognomy' Daniel Touchett is contemplating in the passage from *The Portrait of a Lady* above. But the novel in which this house appears warns against sacrificing human happiness or high standards of moral conduct for a collection of good pieces.

Walter Benjamin remarks in the *Arcades Project* that "one need only study with due exactitude the homes of the great collectors. Then one would have the key to the nineteenth-century interior" (Benjamin 1999, 218). In *The Spoils of Poynton* (1896–1897), later dismissed by Ezra Pound with modernist high-handedness as "fuss[ing] about social caution and conservation of furniture" (Pound 1951, 311), James weighs the aesthetic alongside the moral alongside the monetary. Mrs. Gereth has assembled a beautiful home after a lifetime of collecting, and, like James's theories of the novel, expresses horror at the clutter of the home belonging to her son's fiancée:

> In the arrangement of their home some other principle, remarkably active, but uncanny and obscure, had operated instead, with consequences depressing to behold, consequences that took the form of a universal futility. The house was bad in all conscience, but it might have passed if they had only let it alone. This saving mercy was beyond them; they had smothered it with trumpery ornament and scrapbook art, with strange excrescences and bunchy draperies, with gimcracks that might have been keepsakes for maid-servants and nondescript conveniences that might have been prizes for the blind. They had gone wildly astray over carpets and curtains; they had an infallible instinct for disaster, and were so cruelly doom-ridden that it rendered them almost tragic. (James 1963, 7)

Again, the narrator's tongue is in his cheek, but the irony is only partial. Mrs. Gereth "who thought solely and incorruptibly of what was best for the things" (James 1963, 153) in her own house, is an aesthete to the extent of being rather a pseud. The free

indirect style in the above passage both satirizes her priggish point of view while still leaving her in possession of the moral higher ground: better even to be a prig than to be as vulgar as the Brigstocks. At the close of the novel's first chapter, the heroine Fleda Vetch looks hopefully to "a future full of the things she particularly loved" (10), the ambiguity of "things" hovering over the meanings of 'beautiful objects' and 'life events.' The next chapter then opens with the sentence "these were neither more nor less than the things with which she had had time to learn from Mrs. Gereth that Poynton overflowed" (11). The narrative voice thus settles on the former meaning, and the plot of the novel winds itself around the possibility of the ownership of the things, and whether it is worth marrying for the sake of possessing a beautifully furnished house—which is then carelessly burned down in the final chapter, following Owen Gereth's marriage to the covetous but heedless Mona Brigstock.

In their being aestheticized thus, objects become 'things': to return to Brown's distinction, they are glimpsed or looked at, not looked through. China in collections is never used, as it is in Cranford or Bennett's Five Towns, for the drinking of tea; the *objets* displayed in Mrs. Gereth's home and on the set of Ibsen's *A Doll's House* are there for the purposes of decoration—in other words signification rather than utility. This aestheticization points away from the realist object and towards the modernist thing, and thence towards surrealism's and Dada's refashioning of the most quotidian objects as pseudo-aesthetic, or the *nouveau roman*'s assertion of the ontology of the object beyond the human capacity to bring it within the realm of meaning. Patricia Waugh, for example, suggests that the repeated objects in Alain Robbe-Grillet's *La Jalousie* (1960; *Jealousy* 1995), are "clues […] clues, however, to a mystery which remains mysterious. No amount of obsessive and exasperated revisiting can discover their significance" (Waugh 1983, 83). Nineteenth- and twentieth-century realism, in its commitment to the representation of the materiality of lived experience, prefers to reach for the object first over the thing, for the item in its place, a part of the texture and the sensation of lived human experience, and moving, like the individual life, through space and time.

8 *Abstracting the object: Money*

Pre-eminently in nineteenth-century fiction, money functions both as the supreme object and the supreme abstraction, universally desirable and morally abjected,

translatable into multiple kinds of value but unpalpable, simultaneously an object (the piece of currency) but no more than an object's symbolic representation (on the dematerialization of money in Conrad, for instance, see Wilkinson 2018). Crusoe's repudiation of money as being useless to him on his island exile is typical of the realist text's exposing of the imaginary status of the piece of currency's value as money; but no less typical is his taking of the money anyway, and profiting from his island exile and consequent enrichment at the end of the novel.

Money is both the most and the least of objects in realist texts—the most, because of realism's acknowledgement that in modern society, life, even fictional life, cannot be lived without money, the "unassimilable element" (Jameson 2013, 162) and the least, because money is hardly an object at all, but a stand-in, a substitute, for value, something for which objects can be exchanged, a 'promise to pay the bearer' whose fulfilment is forever suspended. Consumer economics makes the value, if not the meaning, of every object, of the clothes that surround the human, of the environments which humans inhabit, and ultimately the human body itself, translatable into monetary terms. "The universal commodification of desire" (Jameson 1981, 204) under late capitalism makes greater and greater advances into realism's depiction of the physical universe over the course of the nineteenth century. Jameson has suggested that every text possesses a 'political unconscious,' a set of ideological positions which underlie its production; internally, the realist text possesses an "economic unconscious" (James 2003, 9) that can be perceived and interpreted by a reader attuned to the translations of surface meanings into money. The nexuses of the shop, the pawnbroker's, the sale room and the auction house, even the brothel, become fixtures in the realist text; increasingly too, the stock market and the institutions of finance exercise agency over the shape of the stories that realism chooses to tell, although, given fiction's ignorance and suspicion of these institutions, they tend to do so without being directly represented (see Michie 2011).

As noted above, the shape of belief implied by nineteenth-century narrative looks to resist money's universal commodification and seeks to establish realms of value that exist as plausibly as they can from the profit motive: love, family, even the nobility of renunciation of wealth for its own sake. George Eliot's Felix Holt and Dorothea Casaubon surrender fortunes; Pip has his taken from him and he acknowledges himself morally better for it; Bella Wilfer in Dickens's *Our Mutual Friend* proves herself

virtuous by renouncing a fortune and is rewarded by marriage to the fortune's true owner.

It is difficult to think of a canonical literary text that without any reservations preaches a gospel of 'get by all means, and the devil take the hindmost.' Yet, for all realism's yearning for a higher sphere, realism and the cash-nexus share ambitions, even a method. Crary claims, in writing on vision, that "money and photography become homologous forms of power in the nineteenth century" (Crary 1998, 13); a similar homology might be claimed between money and the realist vision of the literary text. The gaze of the realist text turns towards the phenomena of the sensory world and seeks to make them intelligible, ideally coherent, preferably joined-up, even masterable. So too does capital look to resolve or reduce the phenomenal into a unified and coherent system of signs. The baron in Freytag's *Debit and Credit* reflects that money joins everything up: "What had been possible for twenty years now became manifestly an utter impossibility. The winter residence in town, the epaulettes of his son, Lenore's gauzes and laces—even the additional interest of his promissory notes, all tended to embarrass him" (Freytag 1858, 109).[13] All that is solid melts into money: in Zola's *Pot-Bouille* (1882; *Pot Luck*, 1999), the entire contents of a whole apartment of furniture can be dissolved into a more portable sum of 25,000 Francs literally overnight when Duveyrier's mistress Clarisse does a flit from where he has been keeping her.

In his essay "The Metropolis and Mental Life" (1903), the turn-of-the-century sociologist Georg Simmel claims that money's very fungibility reduces the quiddity of all things as they become mutually exchangeable. He sees the social relation that realist writers are representing as:

> a complete money economy to the extent that money takes the place of all the manifoldness of things and expresses all qualitative distinctions between them in the distinction of "how much." To the extent that money, with its colourlessness and its indifferent quality, can become a common denominator of all values, it becomes the frightful leveller: it hollows out the core of things, their peculiarities, their specific values and their uniqueness and incomparability in a way which is beyond repair. (Simmel 1903, 330)

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[13] "Was zwanzig Jahre hindurch möglich gewesen war, erwies sich jetzt als völlig unmöglich. Das Winterquartier in der Stadt, die größere Ausdehnung seiner gesellschaftlichen Verbindungen, die Epauletten seines Sohnes, die Florkleider und Spitzen Lenorens, sogar die Zuschüsse, welche er zu den jährlichen Zinsen seiner Pfandbriefe machen mußte, um die Interessen an die Landschaft zu zahlen, das alles zusammen wurde ihm unbequem" (Freytag 1886, 239).

The implication for Simmel, as he expresses in *The Philosophy of Money* (1900), is that the identities of things and people are primarily, or indeed solely, defined through their abstract, symbolic relations and interchangeability: money "is nothing but the pure form of interchangeability" (Simmel 2004, 128). While realism, focalized at is must be, through the imitation-human consciousness of narrator and characters, acknowledges qualitative and concrete individuality more than the cash-nexus does, realism's translation of meanings into codes through signifying systems too must employ a common denominator. As Brooks has it, "The great realist novelists come to understand that words, like shillings and francs, are part of a circulatory system subject to inflation and deflation, that meanings may be governed by the linguistic economies and marketplaces of which they are a part" (Brooks 2005, 14).

To take a present-day narrative example, one mode in which contemporary computer games are rendered more 'realist' in their operation is in the introduction of internal economies: objects and money are found, or looted, by the player-character and can be exchanged for each other. In-game currency (or in some games, real-world money) is spent on improved weapons, protective armor and transport which increase ease in navigating the game's narrative, or even just the aesthetic effect of the player-character's appearance—'leveling up' as this genre's equivalent of social mobility. In this medium, there is a further formal common denominator: in the game, money, object, characters and story are literally composed of 'code,' the 1s and 0s which make up the realist world of the computer game as the black ink and white spaces that make up the world of the nineteenth-century novel. Reading the codes of the surface of this text is thus the very nature of its praxis (see Paul Martin's case study "Realism at play: The uses of realism in computer game discourse," in Volume I, Chapter 5).

9 *Material does matter*

As Mads Rosendahl Thomsen's case study "Posthumanism and realism" in this chapter further shows, when novelists turn to imagining future forms of humanity beyond its present morphology, they can turn to realism's writing of meaning on that new humanity's surfaces. In the narrative art forms of the twenty-first century, realism continues to find the surfaces of the object and the body indispensable in the quest to represent the world as it is, or might be, lived in.

Modernity is frequently characterized by its excess of sensory stimuli: technology, urbanization and the ever-increasing speed of modern life place the individual consciousness in an unstable environment too replete with possible meanings for it to be processed adequately. Realism's concern with mobility in all its manifestations recognizes this instability, but also seeks to render that environment legible, even masterable, to shape it and endow it with meaning through narrative. Recognition of the new temporalities of modernity is one part of realism's new aesthetic; so too is the charting of the possibilities for material being through time and space: in the finest literary texts, to describe *is* to narrate. There are multiple ways of telling stories, but life cannot be lived immaterially, and realism's way of telling stories of how lives may be lived temporalizes and spatializes the human body and the material of the world it inhabits.

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