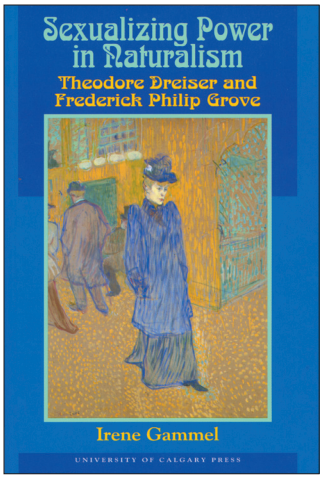

SEXUALIZING POWER IN NATURALISM: THEODORE DREISER AND FREDERICK PHILIP GROVE

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IV. Eroticizing Bourgeois Power

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The Male Body of Power: *The Titan*

So far this study has mainly focused on naturalism's sexualization, co-optation, and on the complicitous docility of the female body in the social network of power. The next chapters, in contrast, will be devoted to the role and representation of the male "body of power" in naturalist fiction. *Sister Carrie*, I have argued, presents the reader with the spectre of the disintegrating male body in George Hurstwood, whose vulnerable physicality symbolizes his loss of social power. The feminization of Clyde Griffiths' body in *An American Tragedy* signifies his failure in writing his own history and his ultimate victimization as he moves through America's judicial institutions. In *A Search for America*, Grove adds a somewhat different twist, in that Branden's feminized body also suggests an androgynous challenge of naturalist gender boundaries. Though in these novels the male body is victimized, in their business novels, the Cowperwood trilogy and the *Master of the Mill* respectively, Dreiser and Grove conceptualize centralized capitalist power in terms of male power and dominance. They do not, however, inscribe this male power on the male body, but represent it in displaced forms, such as the female body or art objects. Conceptualizing submission to bourgeois power in sexualized terms, Dreiser describes the robber baron Frank A.

Cowperwood as a fantasy figure of male power, an imaginary construct, whose power wraps itself around the body of whole cities, "penetrating" and subduing them in a pleasurable embrace.

Dreiser's representation of the power of monopolist capitalism, to be sure, is related to historically specific developments. The Cowperwood trilogy is based on the life of the famous American robber baron and philanderer, Charles Tyson Yerkes Jr. (1837–1905), who made his name as a traction king, financier, and art collector in Philadelphia, Chicago, New York, and finally in London, England.[1] The trilogy presents an exploration of the art of manipulative speculation and fictive transactions at a time that marked both the triumph of the American robber barons and America's growing legal and political resistance to capitalist monopoly. In the first volume of the trilogy, *The Financier* (1912), Frank Algernon Cowperwood loses his entire fortune (including city money entrusted to him) in the stock market panic of 1871, only to regain it in true speculator fashion through the equally spectacular fall of another famous businessman, Jay Cooke, in the crash of 1873. The second volume, *The Titan* (1914), traces Cowperwood's rise as a street railway magnate in Chicago in the 1880s, an event that is followed by his downfall after Chicago's citizens and local politicians organize a popular crusade against him. The third volume, *The Stoic* (1947), describes his business ventures in England and his death in 1905.

Dreiser's treatment of big business capitalism raises some crucial questions concerning his naturalism's ideological underpinnings. The focus of the trilogy is not on the exploited "underdogs" (as they are represented in *The Titan* in Chicago's democratic populace), but on the robber baron, who emerges in *The Titan* in heroic stature, as an oxymoronic bourgeois *Übermensch*, continually appealing to the reader's sympathy and admiration. The question we have to raise, then, is to what extent naturalism's traditional claim to social criticism and solidarity with the working class "yields" to the seductive embrace of the robber baron in Dreiser's fiction. This issue, I will argue, highlights a deep tension within Dreiser's naturalism. The trilogy foregrounds naturalism's "entropic vision" in Cowperwood's unscrupulous business

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1 For a discussion of Charles T. Yerkes's biography in relation to Dreiser's trilogy, see Gerber, 87–110, as well as Gerber's article "The Financier Himself: Dreiser and C.T. Yerkes," *PMLA* 88 (1973): 112–21; see also Pizer, *Novels*, 153–200. For a historical evaluation of Yerkes's spectacular business transactions in Chicago, see Sidney Roberts, "Portrait of a Robber Baron: Charles T. Yerkes," *Business History Review* 35 (1961): 344–71.

methods, which include the bribing of politicians, the overriding of other people's property rights, the overcapitalizing of stocks, and even blackmail. Yet the novel also suggests that the superman falls according to the logic of Dreiser's "equation inevitable" that brings down those who rise too high. While the trilogy condones the manipulative speculator's contempt for social and legal conventions, Cowperwood's capitalist excess appears to carry with it the seed of its own destruction, a point most clearly articulated in the second volume of the trilogy, *The Titan*, which will be my focus of analysis.

Continuing the displacement of sexuality onto economic relation that Dreiser had initiated in *Sister Carrie*, *The Titan*'s "entropic vision" deliberately interweaves Cowperwood's anarchic business methods with his equally "anarchic" sex life. As in the life of Dreiser's female "soldier of fortune," kinship and family alliance have been replaced in the capitalist's life by the deployment of sexuality and an economy of promiscuity. After his disastrous business failure and his scandalous affair with Aileen Butler in *The Financier*, Cowperwood displays a cold indifference to family alliances in *The Titan*: "He had a prison record to live down; a wife and two children to get rid of – in the legal sense, at least."[2] After his move to Chicago, Cowperwood's first family indeed disappears from the narrative as if they had never existed. Concepts such as genealogy, blood relations, or loyalty are nothing but obstacles to the financier's desire to create a new life for himself in Chicago's expanding economy.

As in *Sister Carrie*, this lack of family alliance is deliberate, allowing the author to highlight that modern bourgeois power is based less on lineage and paternalistic responsibility than on an eroticization of continually shifting power relations. Carrie Meeber's lack of true loyalties, combined with her characteristic high "self-interest," is echoed in the male speculator's equally narcissistic "I satisfy myself" (*T* 9). Dreiser, by the way, borrowed this formula directly from a newspaper interview with Yerkes: "Whatever I do," Yerkes declared, "I do not from any sense of duty, but to satisfy myself, and when I have satisfied myself, I know that I have done the best I can."[3] Dreiser shows that the modern technologies of sexualized power are not primarily interested in enslave-

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2 Theodore Dreiser, *Trilogy of Desire, Vol. One: The Financier* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1974); *Trilogy of Desire Vol. Two: The Titan* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell, 1974) 9. All further references to these works will appear in the text with *The Financier* abbreviated *F*, *The Titan T*.

3 *Journal*, January 29, 1898, quoted in Roberts 351.

ment of others but in "self-assertion." "Selfish" and "self-centred," Cowperwood "refuses to be a tool for others," and if the businessman's "I satisfy myself" echoes the American tradition of self-sufficiency, as Lois Hughson argues,[4] Cowperwood's pragmatic and manipulative strategies are more a parody than a confirmation of Emersonian virtuous self-reliance. Indeed, the deliberately masturbatory implications of Cowperwood's principle of action highlight how much the partners of his business life (like his sexual partners) are only "tools" in his quest for self-satisfaction. Endowed with a "magnetic" body, which has less to do with his real, physical body than with the power fantasy projected into it, he attracts men and women alike: women "yield" to his sexual seduction, men "surrender" in business transactions, a defeat that is always accompanied by the typically naturalist sadomasochistic mixture of pleasure and pain.

The primary goal of self-satisfaction in business and private action encapsulates what Foucault has termed bourgeois autosexualization. Dreiser's fiction thus instances Foucault's argument that the bourgeoisie should be seen not as a class that denies its sexuality, but as one that makes clever use of it. In its historical establishment as the dominant social class, the French bourgeoisie, for example, gave itself a body that it cultivated and cherished, endowing itself with a class-specific sexuality. Foucault explains:

> Let us not picture the bourgeoisie symbolically castrating itself the better to refuse others the right to have a sex and make use of it as they please. This class must be seen rather as being occupied, from the mid-eighteenth century on, with creating its own sexuality and forming a specific body based on it, a 'class' body with its health, hygiene, descent, and race: the autosexualization of its body, the incarnation of sex in its body, the endogamy of sex and the body. (*HS* 124)

Dreiser expresses the same point aesthetically in his fictional exploration of America's late-nineteenth-century big business capitalism. It was probably Yerkes's highly publicized, scandalous sex life that led Dreiser to translate his story into naturalist aesthetics. Thus the trilogy's very structure highlights that mechanisms of economic, bourgeois power are interwoven with sexual concerns: chapters dealing with economic

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4 See Lois Hughson, "Dreiser's Cowperwood and the Dynamics of Naturalism," *Studies in the Novel* 16 (Spring 1984): 52–71.

power, with manipulation, speculation, and appropriation alternate with detailed descriptions of the protagonist's sex life.

Furthermore, Cowperwood's hyperactive sex drive is not only devoid of intimacy, but is a direct reflection of his poker-faced business life, as John O'Neill has noted: "In this sense his sexuality is linked to the abstract excitement he experiences in business, where he manipulates symbols whose meaning can never be entirely lost. Sex is energy, and it is not, in the end, very personal."[5] Indeed, despite the novel's emphasis on the protagonist's sexuality, Cowperwood indulges in very few bodily pleasures: he enjoys neither drink nor smoke, nor does he appear to relish food very much. It appears that in his willingness to suspend bodily pleasures Cowperwood is not very different from other famous contemporary capitalists: "I never had a craving for tobacco, or tea and coffee," John D. Rockefeller declared, "I never had a craving for anything."[6] While Cowperwood and Rockefeller may be psychological inversions of each other in the sense that Rockefeller was a saver, Cowperwood a spender, as Walter Benn Michaels has argued, Cowperwood echoes Rockefeller's emphasis on body control and will power. Just as Carrie's sexuality has an abstract quality and is mainly explored as a construct, Cowperwood's sex drive has the function of giving his economic power play an erotic charge that is reflected in the "magnetic" quality of his body image.

Focusing on promiscuity in *The Financier*, Walter Benn Michaels has argued that "Cowperwood's sentimental relations are hardly incompatible with his financial ones." The mistress and sexual promiscuity, Michaels argues, represent the speculator's mental manipulations and "fictitious dealings." Thus Michaels creates a binary opposition between Cowperwood's first wife, Lillian, "whose 'lethargic manner' and 'indifference' convey to [Cowperwood] a sexually charged sense of absolute security." But since, for Cowperwood, marriage allows no possibility of mental alteration or change, the financier turns to the mistress, to Aileen Butler, whose vitality and sexual generosity represent the instability and erratic quality of stock market speculation. Just as the mistress "gives" without attaching her gift to the idea of exchange, so the

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5 John O'Neill, "The Disproportion of Sadness: Dreiser's *The Financier* and *The Titan*," *Modern Fiction Studies* 23 (1977): 421.

6 Quoted in Walter Benn Michaels, "Dreiser's 'Financier': the Man of Business as a Man of Letters," *American Realism: New Essays*, ed. Eric J. Sundquist (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins UP, 1982) 284.

stockmarket rejects the idea of security (implied in formal marriage ties).[7]

Despite Michaels's intriguing insights, the opposition between wife and mistress, between mental manipulation and production of tangible commodities, is not as clear cut in the trilogy as Michaels's reading suggests. Even more problematic is Michaels's monological equation of the narrative voice with the whole (deeply dialogical) text, as well as his assertion that the reader should not be concerned with whether or not Dreiser approved or disapproved of his economic culture, since it "seems wrong to think of the culture you live in as the object of your affection."[8] This somewhat categorical postulate is particularly puzzling in light of Dreiser's trilogy, which insists on conceptualizing monopoly capitalism in terms of love and hate, sexual conquest and sexualized yielding, seduction and rejection, always already cathecting power relations with deeply sexualized emotions. Indeed, the trilogy insistently points out that we cannot not think of our cultural economy without strong emotional reactions, since this economy appeals to human desire, continually awakening but also frustrating consumer fantasies of power and pleasure. Dreiser highlights this point by showing that even the narrator is, in part, drawn into Cowperwood's seductive economic universe. The readers, in turn, are presented with Cowperwood as a seductive icon of power that they can either "yield" to, by joining the narrator in a vicarious enjoyment of the robber baron's ingenious power play, or choose to distance themselves from, by reading "against the grain" of the narrator's comments and by focusing on the marginalized figures in the text.

While *Sister Carrie* is concerned with the seductive power of modern consumerism, *The Titan* translates naturalism's traditional social Darwinism into an eroticization of modern power, in which the bourgeois capitalist triumphs through techniques of seduction. In fact, Cowperwood's principle of domination is based not on a crude repression of the opposition, but on a clever appropriation of the people's interests, as the novel repeatedly underscores. When Cowperwood arrives in Chicago in the 1880s, the customers of the Chicagoan street railways are genuinely disgruntled with the bad quality of the service and the conservative owners who refuse to modernize Chicago's traction system. Cowperwood cleverly appropriates this public concern to his advantage. With the help of a powerful Irish "underworld" politician, the Democratic McKenty, he "infiltrates" the ranks of the representatives of the public "in order to

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7 Michaels. "Dreiser's Financier," 279–80, 293.

8 For Michaels's full argument, see *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Naturalism: American Literature at the Turn of the Century* (Berkeley: U of California P, 1987) 18–19.

discredit the present management" of the street railway companies, who are opposed to his aggressive modernization scheme (*T* 179). Soon complaints are voiced and publicized by local aldermen, creating the impression of a "public uprising" against the bad quality of the railway service, a move that more or less forces the owners to sell out to Cowperwood. Donald Pizer interprets Cowperwood's consolidation of the Chicago street railways as the "paradoxical position of a man whose use of the Public for his own gain also eventually benefits the Public."[9] Thus, *The Titan* anticipates Foucault's point that capitalism's future and ever-increasing power is based not on "fighting against" but on appropriating the *élan* of the opposition.

Yet despite such accommodations of the opposition, the racist implications of Cowperwood's social Darwinism do not disappear behind such forms of sexualized power structures: on the contrary, Foucault explains that in the historical process of establishing its economic and social hegemony, the French bourgeoisie adopted a new kind of racism vis-à-vis the underprivileged classes, a racism very different from that manifested by nobility: "It was a dynamic racism, a racism of expansion, even if it was still in a budding state, awaiting the second half of the nineteenth century to bear the fruits that we have tasted" (*HS* 125). Racism also characterizes Cowperwood's relationship with the masses in *The Titan*. Although "temperamentally he was in sympathy with the mass more than he was with the class" (*T* 27), he also has an undisguised disdain for the masses that is expressed in his rejection of the working people as an externalized Other: "They were rather like animals, patient, inartistic, hopeless. He thought of their shabby homes, their long hours, their poor pay" (*T* 187). Cowperwood's universal denigration of the ethnically heterogeneous working class goes hand in hand with his misogyny, whereby his second wife, Aileen Butler, is presented as a double of the democratic mass. Not only is she linked to the people through her Irish background, but Cowperwood eventually sees her as "inartistic" and "slave-like" in her willingness to sacrifice herself for him. By conflating the Chicagoan people with Aileen, Dreiser highlights that both submit to Cowperwood's power (or rebel against it) in a very similar fashion; they are attached to Cowperwood in a love-hate relationship, always already yielding in oxymoronic pleasurable pain.

"What leads to power being desirable, and to actually being desired?", Foucault asked in an interview. For "the eroticizing to work," he an-

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9 Pizer, *Novels*, 196.

swered, "it's necessary that the attachment to power, the acceptance of power by those over whom it is exerted, is already erotic."[10] In Dreiser's universe, those who are "weak" are magnetically, that is sexually, attracted to the strong, even to the social Darwinistic Machiavelli, who is "without a shred of true democracy": "Raw, glittering force, however, compounded of the cruel Machiavellianism of nature, if it be but Machiavellian, seems to exercise a profound attraction for the conventionally rooted. Your cautious citizen of average means, looking out through the eye of his dull world of seeming fact, is often the first to condone the grim butcheries of theory by which the strong rise" (*T* 189). This is how the narrator conceptualizes and universalizes the eroticization of power that creates Cowperwood's success in Chicago's booming economy: seduced like Aileen, the average (male) citizen surrenders his resistance to the eroticized fantasy of power projected by Cowperwood.

If there is a note of social criticism in Dreiser's trilogy, it is in the attention he draws to the construction of Cowperwood's fantasy image of power, which creates, shapes, and perpetuates the material reality of power relations. Lois Banner has described the evolution of such body images in her cultural history *American Beauty*. The American businessman in the 1860s was a "portly rotund male" who displayed prosperity in his figure, Banner writes, and continues: "By midcentury he was heavy and solid, even fat, a reflection in physique of the success for which American men strove."[11] At the turn of the century, America found its male models in businessmen and industrialists, who preferably represented themselves in their working place: "Writing about Newport society in the 1880s, George Lathrop described the industrialist's library as a private 'temple' of his religion of business. His immense desk was the 'high Altar,' and the 'incense of a cigar' was a regular tribute to the 'established cult.'"[12]

A photograph of Charles Yerkes (reprinted in Sidney Roberts' "Portrait of a Robber Baron") reflects a similar image. (The cigar smoke, though, is absent, reflecting the businessman's new health consciousness.) Yerkes sits at a wooden desk, so massive that it almost dwarfs his own enormous physique. Thus, despite Yerkes's imposing looks, the photograph inevitably exposes the physical human-ness of a man with a stout constitution and a pot belly who, sitting down, appears belittled by the massive paraphernalia with which he surrounds his body.

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10 Michel Foucault, "Films and Popular Memory," Lotringer, 101.

11 Banner 112.

12 Banner 241.

Dreiser's trilogy translates this point into his naturalist aesthetics: the speculator's status as an eroticized icon of abstract power inevitably collapses when the viewer is confronted with the body's all-too-human reality. The only time Cowperwood's body is described in extensive physical detail is, significantly, when we witness his loss of power in *The Financier*, after his incarceration on a conviction of technical embezzlement. Once Cowperwood is imprisoned, the narrator dwells on his looks, which are filtered through the warden's inspecting eye as he notices the prisoner's silk clothing, his leather shoes and his manicured hands. Under the warden's gaze, the convicted embezzler strips naked to take a bath, after which his body is weighed, measured, and inscribed in the penitentiary's record book. Being thus "specularized" and reduced to his physicality costs the erstwhile speculator his sense of self-possession and identity. Alone in his cell, we see him for the first time look at himself in order to recognize what he has become and, like the metaphorically emasculated Hurstwood who is about to commit suicide, Cowperwood "stretched himself wearily on the bed" (*F* 442), adopting, if only for a few moments, the position of the naturalist victim.

Given the dangers involved in such acts of physical "specularization," it should come as no surprise that Cowperwood's body is absent over large parts of the trilogy. While this absence may be surprising in light of Cowperwood's obsession with self-representation, the disappearance of his body has to be seen primarily as a strategy of (patriarchal) power, as Jane Gallop's feminist theory suggests: "By giving up their bodies, men gain power," Gallop writes, "the power to theorize, to represent themselves."[13] Or, as Foucault explains the political-historical dimension of this phenomenon:

> Power in the West is what displays itself the most, and thus what hides itself best. What we have called "political life" since the nineteenth century is (a bit like the court in the age of monarchy) the manner in which power gives itself over to representation. Power is neither there, nor is that how it functions. The relations of power are perhaps among the most hidden things in the social body.[14]

The absence of Cowperwood's physical body in Dreiser's naturalist fiction, then, presents an aesthetic comment on the nature of modern power,

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13 Quoted in *Refiguring the Father: New Feminist Readings of Patriarchy*, ed. Patricia Jaeger and Beth Kowaleski-Wallace (Carbondale: Southern Illinois UP, 1989) xii.

14 "End of the Monarchy of Sex," in Lotringer, 147–48.

which cannot be adequately represented in one (unified) body, since it is often anchored in polymorphous "economic infrastructures."

More specifically, the absence of Cowperwood's (physical) body is directly connected with his role (and power) as a speculator, a role that requires that he should never become a (sexualized and identifiable) spectacle himself. Whenever Cowperwood is in his element as a manipulating speculator, it is not his body but only his "deceptive eyes," which are "unreadable" yet at the same time "alluring," on which the trilogy dwells. Etymologically linked to "seeing" and "spying,"[15] speculation is based on an elaborate spy and surveillance system, in which everyone is engaged in collecting information about everyone else because the successful speculator-manipulators are those with some advance information over their competitors. *The Titan* is saturated with references to detectives who are hired to spy into the private lives of public figures because the gathering of information about those who are "the cynosure of all eyes" (*T* 334) means having power over powerful politicians, not so much in the sense of oppressing these people but in order to make use of them, to assign them a place and put them to work in Chicago's "Panopticon." After all, in "the Panopticon each person, depending on his place, is watched by all or certain of the others," as Foucault writes: "You have an apparatus of total and circulating mistrust, because there is no absolute point" (*PK* 158). Similarly, Cowperwood does not possess a god-like "eye of power," but is tied into a network of spying, inevitably being the subject and object of spying at the same time. While he operates successfully by keeping his name out of the business affairs he conducts, he suffers tremendous setbacks in Chicago when his enemies bring to light his Philadelphia past, his prison incarceration and his scandalous divorce from his first wife Lillian. In the social fabric's net of power, the status of the supposed superman is inevitably limited.

If Cowperwood's power relies on seduction rather than repression, on seeing without becoming the object of sight, this principle of mobile power cannot be adequately represented in his physical or sexualized body. According to the logic of Dreiser's naturalist aesthetics and ideology, the material body is always already a feminized, weak, and docile body – the antithesis of Cowperwood's immaterial body of power. Since his power principle is based on variability, his imaginary

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15 Latin "speculator" means to spy, to scout; "speculor" means to observe, to spy out, to watch, to examine, to explore; to wait for.

and ever flexible body construct relies on a continual representational displacement of the capitalist's power into other material bodies: the city's body, the female body, and the body of his art collection. Exploring these displacements, *The Titan* highlights the power politics of capitalist self-representation as one of its *leitmotifs*.

Given Dreiser's naturalist conceptualization of male power as a net wrapped around a feminized, yielding body, it should come as no surprise that Cowperwood inscribes his power on the city's body, when taking control of Chicago's traction field in the 1880s and 1890s. In the course of his conquest, various parts of the city are absorbed and assimilated into his "body of power": "Within eight months after seizing the La Salle Street tunnel and gobbling four of the principal down-town streets for his loop, Cowperwood turned his eyes toward the completion of the second part of the programme – that of taking over the Washington Street tunnel and the Chicago West Divison Company" (*T* 221). Just as Cowperwood's power is conceptualized in Dreiser's naturalist aesthetics in spatial terms, so Foucault has emphasized the role of space as a key to modern procedures of power: "A whole history remains to be written of *spaces* – which would at the same time be the history of *powers* (both these terms in the plural) – from the great strategies of geo-politics to the little tactics of the habitat" (*PK* 149). In taking control of Chicago's public transportation system, Cowperwood lays down the city's spatial arteries, regulating the flow of people through the city, determining their pace and economic welfare. The traction lines spreading across Chicago's "body" become Cowperwood's material self-representation that make him very quickly "an attractive, even a sparkling figure in the eyes of the Chicago public" (*T* 223).

The construction of Cowperwood's eroticized body of power thus always depends on the appropriation and assimilation of an "alien" body and its simultaneous externalization as a sexualized "Other." Upon entering the windy city, Cowperwood perceives it in terms of a masculine body, as it is metonymically represented in a group of male workers that capture his attention: "Healthy men they were, in blue or red shirt-sleeves, stout straps about their waists, short pipes in their mouths, fine, hardy, nutty-brown specimens of humanity. Why were they so appealing, he asked himself. This raw, dirty town seemed naturally to compose itself into stirring artistic pictures" (*T* 4). What is striking in this scene is that Cowperwood, who professes to despise the workers as a class, endows their physical bodies with an homoerotic attraction. While this scene echoes Hurstwood's encounter with Drouet in Chicago's Fitzgerald and Moy's, it also foregrounds the ideological concern of Dreiser's naturalism with exposing the principles of eroticized power.

Homoeroticism is put in the service of Cowperwood's "I satisfy myself," as he anticipates the male bodies' "yielding" to his "embrace"; "penetrated" by his magnetic power, they, in turn, become his physical "arm of power."

Even more important to the construction of Cowperwood's magnetic body construct is the female body. Lois Banner has observed that in the late nineteenth century, American "men of great wealth were not the focus of the popular press" since "their complex businesses required the analytic skill of an Ida Tarbell, unravelling the doings of Standard Oil in a muckraking journal. Absorbed in the details of the intricate corporate structures they had created, they left the balls, parties, and other leisure-time activities of high society up to their wives." Indeed, the popular press featured "the wives and especially the daughters" of wealthy capitalists.[16] Thus it is no coincidence that the three "major" women in Cowperwood's life correspond to a succession of nineteenth-century American beauty icons. The financier's first wife, Lillian Semple, who possesses the "beauty of a vase," evokes what Banner describes as the beauty icon of the 1850s – a lady-like, frail, and delicate type of beauty. This American hothouse lily was challenged in the second half of the nineteenth century by a fleshy, voluptuous popular beauty icon. This is the very beauty that is reflected in Cowperwood's second wife, Aileen Butler, a true Venus figure, whose innate sensuousness displaces Lillian in Cowperwood's life by the end of *The Financier*. When in the 1890s the athletic, "natural" woman replaces the voluptuous beauty as the predominant American beauty icon, Cowperwood turns from Aileen to Berenice Fleming, who is both athletic and assertive, but "yields" her body to the speculator in the same way as Aileen and Lillian before her. Presented in such a line of heterogeneous beauties, the boundary between the role of the wife and the mistress becomes blurred, as Cowperwood cleverly appropriates the women's sexualized bodies into his power play.

This point is exemplified in *The Titan*, where Cowperwood's second wife Aileen, "truly beautiful herself – a radiant, vibrating *objet d'art*" (*T* 36), is presented to the "spectators" of Chicago, the socially prominent who comment and judge her as a representation. To emphasize the notion of the female as a representational art object even further, Cowperwood has Aileen's picture painted while she is "still young" and in the prime of her beauty, and this picture becomes part of his art

16 Banner, "American Beauty," 164.

collection, hung opposite "a particularly brilliant Gerôme, then in the heyday of his exotic popularity – a picture of nude odalisques of the harem, idling beside the highly colored stone marquetry of an oriental bath" (*T* 68). Gerôme's nudes are a very apt mirror image of Aileen's picture as well as of the real Aileen. Just as Gerôme's harem suggests a cornucopia of sex for the male potentate so its complement-mirror image, the picture of Aileen, celebrates sexual vitality and draws a whole number of male spectators – Cowperwood's business friends and rivals, who dream of sexual pleasure with her but are at the same time made conscious of the "lack" of this pleasure in their own lives because they feel that they are "chained" into "conventional" relationships with "cold" and "possessive" wives. The juxtaposition of the two visual representations draws attention to what is really absent in both pictures: the male as owner of the picture as well as "master" over the female body. Cowperwood triumphs over all the male spectators present, who are aware that he is the only one to have access to the beautiful body they admire in the picture. As the owner of the gallery, Cowperwood represents himself as a lover of beauty at the same time that his role as a powerful master-accumulator-owner is inscribed in the gaps of the representations he owns.

At the same time, Dreiser draws attention to the danger of being the centre of a representation, as Aileen is in the beginning of the *The Titan*. After Cowperwood's first social event in Michigan Avenue, in which Aileen is offered as the representational "centre-piece" (in a chapter that is significantly entitled "A Test" [*T* 66–73]), it is Aileen who is dismissed by Chicagoan society as "too showy" and "vulgar," and is cut in society. The Cowperwoods' social failure is repeatedly attributed to Aileen and she is sacrificed not only by the socially prominent but by Cowperwood as well, who distances himself from her. It is Aileen who becomes a social outcast, while her husband is occasionally excused and invited alone by Chicago's rich. Cowperwood's imaginary body of power survives, while Aileen, as his "official" wife, finds herself entrapped in the fate of the naturalist courtesan, who is reduced to the physicality of her aging body. By the end of *The Titan*, she is ostracized and is sexually no longer desirable.

Cowperwood's long line of mistresses and wives, suggestive not so much of sexual but of aesthetic variety, not so much of erotic intimacy but of sexualized power play, assumes the same function as the continually changing "body" of his art collection. Indeed, the trilogy makes a connection between power and art, since it is, as Berenice Fleming observes, "the spirit of art that occupied the center of Cowperwood's iron personality," just as Cowperwood recognizes that "the ultimate end of

fame, power, vigor was beauty" (*T* 440, 470). Filling his houses with art collections from different periods and countries, while the houses themselves are built as works of art, he surrounds himself with museum-like interiors: not with a home but with an abstract body of art. On one level, his artistic representations are an intricate part of capitalist activities: Cowperwood knows very well that "the great pictures are going to increase in value, and what [he] could get for a few hundred thousand now will be worth millions later" (*F* 162).

Yet more importantly, Cowperwood anticipates the politics of capitalist self-representations of our own *fin de siècle*, most notably of Donald Trump. In his autobiography with the telling title *The Art of the Deal* (1987), Trump defines himself not as a lover of money but as a lover of art: "I don't do it for money. I've got enough, much more than I'll ever need. I do it to do it. Deals are my art form. Other people paint beautifully on canvas or write wonderful poetry. I like making deals, preferably big deals. That's how I get my kicks."[17] Similarly, Trump describes his fetishized obsession with collecting beautiful buildings in sexualized terms, echoing Cowperwood's sexual and aesthetic ethos. Making a personal statement with a hotel "can arouse passions faster than other possessions,"[18] Trump writes, celebrating the purchase of the New York Plaza Hotel as the acquisition of a sensualized and feminized "masterpiece – the Mona Lisa." Though Cowperwood is painfully aware of how much his success is based on what Trump calls "image-management," both financiers' strategy is to show the public their artistic side, one that yearns for aesthetic beauty and anarchic freedom. While obsessed with image management, both financiers profess not to care about public opinion.

And yet, *The Titan* exposes that the capitalist's self-representation as an "artistic center" and a "lover of art" is a double-edged sword, since the financier's fetishist obsession with accumulating works of art in his desire for a positive self-representation simultaneously draws (public) attention to capitalism's very principle of acquisition and accumulation. Cowperwood, like Donald Trump, cannot help but expose in the sheer excess of *objets d'art* accumulated over his life time the mechanics of his power. His chase for ever more sophisticated works of art becomes a circle of repetition, a bourgeois *idée fixe*, a collectomania that seems to

17 Donald Trump with Tony Schwarz, *Trump: The Art of the Deal* (New York: Warner, 1987) 1.

18 Donald Trump with Charles Leerhsen, *Trump: Surviving at the Top* (New York: Random House, 1990) 114.

ask for control and cure and is easily exploited by his enemies and rivals, quickly used as a tool against him. Indeed, Cowperwood's Chicagoan opposition eventually conflates the capitalist's spectacular – visible and physical, since excessively growing – body of *objets d'art* with his gargantuan body of power. Cowperwood's obsessive conflation of business and art thus deconstructs itself, exposing the mechanism behind his aestheticized and eroticized power play.

Much of *The Titan* is devoted to emphasizing the dynamics and flexibility of Cowperwood's bourgeois power. If Dreiser's *Titan* illustrates anything, it is Foucault's point on the instability of power, which refuses to stay in one fixed locus. As Foucault puts it: "The omnipresence of power: not because it has the privilege of consolidating everything under its invincible unity, but because it is produced from one moment to the next, at every point, or rather in every relation from one point to another. Power is everywhere; not because it embraces everything, but because it comes from everywhere" (*HS* 93). Since modern power energizes itself through appropriation of the opposition, Foucault argues that a chasm has opened up between the centralized monarchical power of the Middle Age feudal system and the modern power of the bourgeoisie: "This new type of power, which can no longer be formulated in terms of sovereignty, is, I believe, one of the great inventions of bourgeois society. It has been a fundamental instrument in the constitution of industrial capitalism" (*PK* 105). This new type of power "presupposes a tightly knit grid of material coercions rather than the physical existence of a sovereign" (*PK* 104).

While *The Titan* images this very point through numerous reversals and shifts of power, Cowperwood eventually emerges in the opposite image of the feudal-monarchical power, the titan, a construction that looms larger than life and, in its static greatness, makes a perfect target for oppositional attacks. With his art collections, mansions, and spectacular wives, he emerges as an ancient monarch-potentate who rules through his physical and spectacular presence and constitutes an exotic, alien body that can easily be turned into a scapegoat figure. Concerned with monopoly and the "trustifying" of companies in an advanced stage of capitalism, Dreiser, groping for an adequate metaphor to translate the modern phenomenon of centralized economic power, takes recourse to the popular metaphor of monarchical power, which, when framed within a naturalist narrative, carries with it the seed of the protagonist's destruction. John O'Neill appropriately discusses Cowperwood the titan as an "epic hero," while Donald Pizer writes that Cowperwood is "cast in a much more heroic role in *The Titan*

than in *The Financier*."[19] Like a romance hero, Cowperwood becomes a static figure who polarizes people: for some an eroticized love object, he is for others an object of passionate hatred. In fact, *The Titan* culminates in a confrontation between what appears to be a spectacular monarchical power versus the mass of the people in a wild, rebelling mob. The newspapers, realizing that they can "increase their circulation, by attacking him" (*T* 528), manage to exploit this imperial stature and set up a public image of him as an ancient tyrannical emperor, who turns the democratic mass into slaves. Reading the newspapers, Cowperwood's new "feminine ideal" Berenice Fleming falls in love with the aging Cowperwood because "he came by degrees to take on the outlines of a superman, a half-god or demi-gorgon" (*T* 527). As she falls in love with his imperial stature, so does Cowperwood himself.

At the height of his power, in a chapter entitled "Mount Olympus" (*T* 422–35), Cowperwood becomes aware of his "inability to control without dominating personally" (*T* 438). He manages to triumph over his Chicagoan competitors by appearing like a sovereign king in person in front of all his rivals and threatening them from a position of majesterial greatness and power. But by using his body image to suppress and subdue his rivals rather than "seduce" them, Cowperwood provokes his own downfall. Cowperwood's fall is already anticipated in the novel's title, *The Titan*, which evokes the defeat of the mythological giants in their struggle with an even higher godhood. Assuming the status of a hero in Dreiser's naturalist world automatically dooms the protagonist to fall, according to the inexorable logic of the "equation inevitable" and the genre's plot of decline.

Cowperwood's magnetic, eroticized body of power, then, carries with it the seed of its own destruction, whereby the Mephistophelian seducer becomes seduced by his own image. By the end of *The Titan*, his self-image becomes his own narcissistic object of desire. His monumental houses turn into sepulchres, in which Eros merges with Thanatos, swallowing the titan alive. When the socially prominent refuse to frequent his Chicago mansion, it becomes a "costly sepulcher in which Aileen sat brooding over the woes which had befallen her" (*T* 381), masochistically waiting for (and perpetuating the fantasy of) Cowperwood's phallic love. Dreiser illustrates this point even more explicitly in *The Stoic* (1947). The narrator describes Cowperwood's funeral as the speculator's last and most spectacular self-theatricalization that raises a last – static – monument to his narcissistic-masturbatory love for himself:

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19 O'Neill 419; Pizer, *Novels*, 189.

> Above the doors of the tomb, in heavy square-cut letters, was his name: FRANK ALGERNON COWPERWOOD. The three graduated platforms of granite were piled high with flowers, and the massive bronze double doors stood wide open, awaiting the arrival of the distinguished occupant. As all must have felt who viewed it for the first time, this was a severely impressive artistic achievement in the matter of design, for its tall and stately serenity seemed to dominate the entire area.[20]

Although orchestrated from beyond the grave, Cowperwood's spectacular funeral presents the spectre of the male body frozen in its imperial greatness. Even more importantly, the tomb that awaits Cowperwood's body is represented through Aileen's perspective and evokes the image of a *vagina dentata*, as Elaine Showalter has described it: "the spectre of female sexuality, a silent but terrible mouth that may wound and devour the male spectator."[21] Dressed in Aileen's (revengeful) fantasy, the funeral scene in *The Stoic* thus ironically echoes the ending of *Sister Carrie*. Like Hurstwood, Cowperwood is supplanted by women, by Aileen and Berenice who survive him.

"'Endure! Endure! Endure!'" (*S* 272) are the ironic words that go through Berenice's mind at Cowperwood's funeral. The point of the trilogy is that nothing survives in capitalism – except the machinery of power itself. After Cowperwood's death, his fortune is quickly dismantled in legal battles; his last important business transaction has to be completed by others. *The Financier* and *The Stoic* present powerful scenes in which Cowperwood's carefully accumulated properties and art objects are auctioned off, the first after his downfall in Philadelphia, the second after his death. These fetishized objects are not suspended above time as representations of Cowperwood's power, but reenter the economic circle, immediately becoming signifiers of somebody else's success. By the end, Cowperwood's eroticized body of power inevitably collapses, exposed as a fantasy construction through Dreiser's naturalist aesthetics.

In her (Marxist) re-reading of the novel, Arun Mukherjee has argued that Cowperwood should not be mistaken for Dreiser's mouthpiece. Emphasizing the trilogy's contribution as a naturalist form of social criticism, she has pointed to the narrative's parodic undercurrents that

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20 *Trilogy of Desire, Vol. Three: The Stoic* (New York: Thomas Y. Crowell Company, 1974) 272. Further references will appear in the text, abbreviated *S*.

21 Elaine Showalter, *Sexual Anarchy: Gender and Culture at the Fin de Siècle* (New York: Penguin, 1990) 146.

undermine Cowperwood's fictitious claims to heroism.[22] Yet these undercurrents should not mislead the reader into turning a blind eye to the narrator's deep complicity with Cowperwood's eroticized power play. While the *Titan* culminates in the robber baron's defeat by the Chicagoan people, the narrator's sympathies are not with the people: by the end, the narrator, like Berenice, has surrendered his critical tools to Cowperwood's eroticized body of power. This narrative bias is all the more important if we consider the historical context treated in the novel. Cowperwood/Yerkes embodies monopoly capitalism and the corruption of municipal authorities. At the turn of the century, Yerkes appealed to the state legislature for a fifty-year extension of his street railway franchises, a move that would have allowed him to establish himself as a monopolist of national, if not international, stature had it been successful.

The narrator is complicitous with the monopolist's perspective when describing Chicago's democratic movement. While *Sister Carrie* pulls all the strings of empathy with the bad working conditions faced by Hurstwood, *The Titan*, in contrast, glosses over the public hazards of Yerkes's street railways. It has to be remembered, however, that Yerkes's railways were a public hazard, killing forty-six and injuring three hundred and thirty-six people through poorly strung overhead wires, which Yerkes refused to improve.[23] Furthermore, the narrator presents the protesting people as a disorganized, violent mob, echoing the capitalist's contempt for the masses in his description of "those sinister, ephemeral organizations which on demand of the mayor had cropped out into existence – great companies of the unheralded, the dull, the undistinguished – clerks, working-men, small business men, and minor scions of religion or morality" (*T* 539). What the text relegates into its margins, then, is the fact that Chicago's democratic movement against the unscrupulous traction king was successful in its spontaneous rebellion because it managed to appropriate the speculator's own strategies. Its strategy of success consisted in "specularizing" the speculator, in presenting him in the negative image of the capitalist as boodler and thief. The movement also singled out the corrupt politicians, naming them in public, displaying their names and faces on posters and pamphlets; its members became powerful spectators at the council meetings, levelling their newly empowered gaze on the (corrupted) members of the legislative house.

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22 Arun Mukherjee, *The Gospel of Wealth in the American Novel* (London: Croom Helm, 1987) 96–97.

23 Roberts 352.

When retelling the Yerkes/Cowperwood story in *The Titan*, the narrator, thus, "yields" to his protagonist's seduction and is co-opted by the dominant power principle, dressing the defeated Cowperwood and his forces in heroic terms: "His aldermen, powerful, hungry, fighting men all – like those picked soldiers of the ancient Roman emperors – ruthless, conscienceless, as desperate as himself, had in their last redoubt of personal privilege fallen, weakened, yielded" (*T* 548). While Cowperwood's bribed politicians are thus elevated to the level of imperial soldiers, Chicago's democratic movement is dismissed as a violent mob and the anti-Cowperwood politicians satirically degraded to "a petty band of guerrillas or free-booters who, like hungry swine shut in a pen, were ready to fall upon any and all propositions brought to their attention" (*T* 533).

Yet despite the narrator's ideological bias, the novel is deeply dialogical, as it turns around to expose the narrative bias from within, from its margins. *The Titan* represents a somewhat different – much more positive – side of the democratic movement by significantly reducing narrator interference towards the end of the novel. Dreiser incorporates, for example, a page-long pamphlet that asks citizens to "Arouse and Defeat the Boodlers" (*T* 540). In order to represent this polyphonic voice of democratic resistance, Dreiser relies on naturalism's generic heterogeneity, as the novel moves from its prose discourse to the conventions of a dramatic play in order to convey a sense of the public debate in the city council:

> *Alderman Winkler* (pro-Cowperwood). "If the chair pleases, I think something ought to be done to restore order in the gallery and keep these proceedings from being disturbed. It seems to me an outrage, that, on an occasion of this kind, when the interests of the people require the most careful attention – "
>
> *A Voice.* "The interests of the people!"
>
> *Another Voice.* "Sit down. You're bought!"
>
> *Alderman Winkler.* "If the chair pleases – " (*T* 544)

Although the narrator interferes to provide information in parenthesis, Dreiser reduces the narrator's input to a minimum, and thus the three-page dramatic debate brings to the fore the dialogic heterogeneity of a democratic group united by their common goal to fight against exploitative capitalism and corrupted politicians.

David Baguley has argued with Philippe Hamon that in the novel's "lieux stratégiques," such as the beginning and the ending, the naturalist text strategically undermines a sense of mimetic order. In naturalism, "the conclusion of the text certainly does not fulfill the same familiariz-

ing function" that we find in realist texts.[24] The typical naturalistic endings are frustrating, as Baguley illustrates by identifying naturalism's predilection for the deprivation ending, the banal ending, and the sententious ending. *The Titan* fits into this pattern in that it does not resolve the Babel of ideological voices presented in the last chapters. As a result, it is virtually impossible to determine whether the novel is "for" or "against" capitalism. This is not to say, however, that this issue is suspended: rather, it is rendered problematic, leaving the reader with questions rather than answers, with different dialogical positions rather than with ideological solutions. The hero's fall is more ironic than tragic, in that the titan-protagonist does not undergo a significant *anagnorisis* or change, but is revealed to be caught in the naturalistic law of the "eternal equation – the pathos of the discovery that even giants are but pygmies" (*T* 551). The equation inevitable, which determines that the capitalist's spectacular rise is inevitably followed by a downfall, has often been attributed to Dreiser's reading of Herbert Spencer. But the "equation inevitable" can be re-read in Foucauldian terms. A power relation automatically creates its own opposition, so that there is no power without resistance or some form of freedom.

Finally, in the trilogy, and particularly *The Titan*, Dreiser is confronted with his naturalism's ideological self-contradictions. As the object of a naturalist novel, Cowperwood becomes inevitably "fixed" under the narrator's and the reader's gaze. Operating in a naturalist framework, the narrator cannot help but turn the speculator into a specularized body, whose eroticized power also turns him into the narrator's (homoerotic) object of desire. Thus specularized, the ever-flexible, cunning, and promiscuous speculator becomes frozen in an imperial stature and predictably falls like the stone stature in *Don Juan*. Caught in naturalism's conventions, even the superman is brought low, since everything in naturalism tends towards degraded repetition, parodically undermining any serious notion of heroism. What deserves further attention, though, is the implication of the male narrator's attraction to, as well as his problematic complicity with, Cowperwood, which will be the focus of the next chapter.

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24 Baguley, "The Lure of the Naturalistic Text," 278.