Introduction:
Recreation &
Representation

How does the raw material of immediate experience come to be the theoretical structure we call history?
Georg Simmel, "How Is History Possible?"

THIS MATERIAL MAY BE PROTECTED BY COPYRIGHT LAW (TITLE 17, U.S. CODE)

It is history which is the true unconscious.
Emile Durkheim, *The Evolution of Educational Thought*

Writing for *Century Magazine* in 1884, Edward Eggleston assailed the notion that "we" Americans "are an overworked race, incapable of amusing ourselves." Writers of the day, he complained, "assure us that we are incapable of merry-making, that our attempts at fun are cumbersome failures, and that, as a people, we are quite incapable of play." Warning the "future social historian" not to trust such "propositions about the character of the American people," Eggleston might have enumerated the rural pleasures that his novels, above all *The Hoosier Schoolmaster* (1871), had comically and quite famously documented. Instead, he renders a scene of "outdoor recreations" and "indoor games" enjoyed at a Lake George resort by "many thousands," and he recounts the advent of baseball, rowing, lacrosse, and especially football at Harvard. Indeed, Harvard appears as the arena in which "Americans at play" play most convincingly. The "gymnasium is more prominent than the library," the college has hired "a professor whose business it is to teach athletics," and sports stars "have somewhat eclipsed the renown of the great teachers." The venerable locus of American education now stages a pageant of American recreation. But in "vain," Eggleston laments, "will the historian of the future look for any reflection of all this."

Twenty years later, in his capacity as social historian and in the role of "revisiting spirit," Henry James found an embodiment of "all this" in Harvard's football stadium. In autumn, at dusk, he stands on the bank of
the Charles River, the scene “brist[ling] with merciless memories,” only to discover, “beyond the river and its meadows, the white face of the great empty Stadium star[ing] at [him], as blank as a rising moon—with Soldiers’ Field squaring itself like some flat memorial slab that waits to be inscribed.” Having “seen it inscribed a week or two before in the fantastic lettering of a great intercollegiate game of football”—a “documentary [of] the more multitudinous modern hum”—James omits “all the reflections it prompted” and reflects instead on the “old names,” inscribing, as it were, the initials “J. R. L.” on the slab of memory. As the first chapter of The American Scene (1907) draws to a close, James, struggling to conjure the ghost of James Russell Lowell, feels and figures the “tragic intensity” of America’s “new differences and indifferences” as the decline of “literary desire” at Harvard and the rise of the desire named “football,” a “portent of the more roaring, more reported and excursionized scene.” What for Eggleston is a sign of triumph, a nation abandoning its Puritan heritage, becomes for James a sign of loss, a nation abandoning its heritage of letters.

Between these accounts intercollegiate football surfaces less visibly but no less momentarily in the text that would become America’s canonical war novel, Stephen Crane’s Red Badge of Courage (1895). After Henry Fleming returns to the front, the regiment’s subsequent charge unfolds in the imagery of a football game. The troops become “a wedge-shaped mass,” as though deployed in the most notorious college formation—the “flying wedge,” designed at Harvard in 1892—and the youth runs toward the enemy “as toward a goal.” As the “scurrying mass” proceeds across the “field,” the analogy finally makes itself explicit: “The youth ran like a madman to reach the woods before a bullet could discover him. He ducked his head low like a football player” (W, 2:108). While much of the novel is restricted to the protagonist’s point of view (impressing both its original and subsequent readers), this particular trope remains unfocalized. It is also anachronistic—and in more than the detail of the “flying wedge.” The very game from which the trope derives, Association football, developed only after a team from McGill University had introduced rugby at Harvard in 1874. The narrator (or, better, the narrative) thus imagines the Civil War soldier as the soldier himself could not. And making such a distinction means recognizing that here the novel itself, not its protagonist, seems vulnerable to any charge of “moral deficiency” that derives from the impulse to spectacularize war. At the very least, we are left facing the possibility that this famously realist account of the Civil War may depend for its reality effect on the conflation of war and sport rather than, say, on some intertextual legitimation from Tolstoy, Zola, Grant’s Memoirs, or Century Magazine’s Battles and Leaders of the Civil War. Indeed, Crane would seem to authorize such a conclusion in a later letter to London’s Daily Chronicle, “How Americans Make War,” in which he reviews the nature of warfare in Cuba and the Philippines in 1898: “This is not poetic war; but men do not go to war to be picturesque, I hope. They play to win” (W, 9:230). It is not simply the telos of war but the modality of waging it that shifts: it is not “fighting” but “playing” that overcomes the aestheticization of warfare to triumph as the real.

For Eggleston’s “future historian,” then, Crane’s novel becomes a curious “reflection of all this”—or, more precisely, not a reflection, and not James’s “documentary” of the “modern hum,” but an instance of the refracted literary-textual incorporation of the American recreational scene about which Eggleston waxes so enthusiastic. For James the problem with the college sport spectacle (which had emerged during his twenty-year absence from America) is its power to supplant American literature. For one of the best-selling novels of the day, the spectacle serves to refugue American military history. While Crane’s excruciating attention to psychological trauma seems to provide a defamiliarizing counterhistory of war, The Red Badge of Courage nonetheless deploys the trope with which the idea of war (past and future) had become increasingly familiar. Such an incongruity, I will argue, produces the space for exploring the dynamics by which, for Eggleston’s “Americans at play,” play serves as a newly privileged mode of encounterment, encoding, or effecting cultural change.

This study has three objectives. The simplest is to represent Stephen Crane as a writer who, however consciously preoccupied with portraying war and the “extreme situation,” demonstrates a sustained engagement, both conscious and unconscious, with what I call the “recreational,” a generic name for the many sites where we seek physical and psychic pleasure publicly, where our pleasure often derives from our being-in-public. Although Crane depicts recreational scenes that could be productively aligned with other important depictions—the scene of theatrical spectatorship in Sister Carrie, the “variety show” and picnic outings in McIntyre—my original interest in his work had far more to do with a ubiquity of passing reference to recreational forms that, as in The Red Badge of Courage,
are specifically not integral to the plot, not the object of the text's diegetic address. It was less through the realist transparency and more within moments of obliquity and opacity that specific questions about conflicting cultural pressures became apparent. It was not so much the Bowery portrayed in Maggie: A Girl of the Streets (1893) as an impression of the Bowery unpredictably recorded by The Monster (1898) that seemed to require explanation. I begin my explanation by considering such impressions a kind of excess signification, undermotivated by manifest theme or plot, that nonetheless becomes intelligible (and intelligible as the ground of a new intelligibility) once framed by another story that Crane's texts have to tell.

That is a story of the American 1890s, wherein the problems and possibilities of the recreational assume pivotal importance in the way Americans conceive and experience their daily lives and public selves. My second objective, then, is to precipitate, through a critical encounter with Crane's work, a somewhat different account of the closing decade of the century—different not least because the literary here mediates between "experience" and "the theoretical structure we call history," because literature has the capacity to preserve (however marginally) residues of phenomena that remain in some sense unrecognizable (if not unrepresentable) in our existing historiographic genres. Within literature the detritus of history lingers, lying in wait. Thinking seriously about the referential excess in Crane's work means reimagining the American 1890s because that excess records how casually and thus powerfully both the theory and the practice of recreation impressed themselves on the literary in this decade.

Finally, I have formulated a notion of the "material unconscious" as a way of explaining how my account of Stephen Crane and my account of the American 1890s have come to seem indistinguishable. Most simply, the "material unconscious" names literature's repository of disparate and fragmentary, unevenly developed, even contradictory images of the material everyday. It demonstrates the pressure that such materiality (e.g., the material production, reproduction, and consumption of sport) exerts on literary texts. And it demonstrates the formalizing pressure those texts exert on the heterogeneity of lived life. A materialist hermeneutics seeks to retrieve those images not as the historical context that explains (away) the idiosyncratic details of the literary artifact but as a historical text that relations between such details allow us to write. The archival/archaeological task, as I understand it, consists of developing a chain of associations that seem, retrospectively, to have converged already in the literary work. The analytical task consists in representing that convergence as an image that freshly elucidates the signifying structures and material changes of everyday life—the task, in other words, of producing the history that lingers within neglected images, institutions, and objects. Much of the point amounts to understanding how literature helps us to understand the unconscious as material history and history as the unconscious, as the necessarily repressed that can be rendered visible in sites of contradiction or incomplete elision. Leaving such sites unexplored amounts to recirculating the dominant cultural memory.

There are obvious and immediate pleasures that such a project affords: there is, most simply, the pleasure of reference, the pleasure of discovering how certain referents in Crane's work—observation wheels, the Mexican tourist trade, cash registers, toy stoves, Kodak cameras, minstrels, and freaks—can revise or complete readings of his best and least-known texts. Recuperating material reference (in either the diegetic or rhetorical register) provides a point of access to the knowledge that literature can energize. But this is merely a juncture from which to begin thinking how, as it unconsciously accretes and figures sociohistorical fragments, literature rewrites relations between the particular and the general, the material and the conceptual, the synchronic and the diachronic, the local and the national. By now we understand how the "historiographical operation" as such entails a complex set of literal dislocations, a set of transcriptions dislodging words from one context (the designated archive) and rearranging them in another (the text of "history"). But we have really just begun to understand how our engagement with literature can produce an alternative space of elaboration wherein ephemera that have yet to attain historicity might be assigned significance within—or alongside—the master narratives of, for instance, American realism, American modernity, and American modernism.

Economies of Play

By taking seriously the idea that a material unconscious itself preserves the history that literature allows us to write, this book develops incremental images rather than unfurling a single historical backdrop. Still, by way of introduction I should say that it everywhere demonstrates (and hence
nowhere argues) how a typical list of upheavals faced by the Gilded Age and the Progressive Era—urbanization, immigration, industrialization—shows through a palimpsestic list of recreational changes: the park and playground movements, the invention of basketball, the professionalization of boxing and baseball. Borrowing the key phrases with which the fields of American history and American studies have characterized the era, we could say that sport alone is a salient feature of the “reorientation of American culture” against “overcivilized life,” part of an “antimodern” quest for “experience,” and a specific antidote to (male) “nervousness.” And recreation becomes a means of “incorporating” the child and the immigrant into the American mainstream, a mode of satisfying the “search for order.”

Despite Eggleston’s fears that the recreational scene would remain invisible to future historians, they have not neglected his “Americans at play.” Indeed, though Foster Rhea Dulles, in America Learns To Play (1940), begins by insisting that the first “settlers” had “the same drive for play that is the common heritage of all mankind,” the very title of his book suggests that this Spieltrieb was not quite instinctual but that a cultural change took place, and he toolocates that change in the closing decades of the nineteenth century. Whether one wishes to attribute this change to an increase in leisure time or to a decrease in the meaning and personal fulfillment derivable from work (or both), the change belied what Eggleston no doubt found the toughest images to combat: the persistent ghost of the Puritan restriction against “idleness,” on the one hand, and, on the other, the famous English accounts of a lust for wealth that deprived the American population of any pleasure. In a speech delivered at Delmonico’s, New York’s most fashionable night spot, Herbert Spencer revouched the account in 1882. Americans, he said, have “not that abandonment to the moment which is requisite for full enjoyment.” The eyes of England’s preeminent sociologist, who was also the preeminent theorist of play, American pleasure seemed a constitutional impossibility.

But as Eggleston’s article intimates in its distrust of writers, what a nation supposedly “learned” may have had more to do with an emerging production of “play”—the appearance of play in institutional, commodity, and discursive form. The “sports page” invented by William Randolph Hearst in 1896, the photographs of college athletes in Harper’s Weekly, the elaborate illustrations of the resort scene: these conferred on recreation an unprecedented visibility. Whereas the 1840s witnessed an “amusement explosion” in New York, the 1890s witnessed a confluence of the massification of leisure with modern advertising and new graphic and reduplicating technologies that could make the world of amusement appear an integral part of American daily life and the mode through which daily life had become public.

The bicycle alone, a perennial subject in the new art poster, inspired lavish magazine illustrations and advertisements. In his syndicated article titled “New York’s Bicycle Speedway” (1896), Crane reports not just that the “bicycle crowd has completely subjugated” the Western Boulevard, but also that the bicycle itself has subjugated the billboard: “The cafes and dining rooms of the apartment hotels are occupied mainly by people in bicycle clothes. Even the billboards have surrendered. They advertise wheels and lamps and tires and patent saddles with all the flaming vehemence of circus art . . . [Y]ou are sure to confront a lithograph of a young person in bloomers who is saying in large type: ‘Yes, George, I find that Willowrun always refreshes me after these long rides’” (W, 8:371). The “flaming vehemence” with which the advertisement exhibits the latest cycling accoutrements shows recreation producing the passion for fine differences, performing what Thorstein Veblen would call “the fabrication of customers.” And by pointing out the consumer’s need for further refreshment in the midst of the refreshment provided by recreation, it shows recreation performing capital’s requisite multiplication of “needs.”

Crane wonders at “that machine which has gained an economic position of the most tremendous importance”: “Stores are crowded with bicycle goods. There are innumerable repair shops. Everything is bicycle” (W, 8:373, 371). The actual wonder performed by the bicycle’s “economic position” was its resolution of a particular manufacturing crisis. Those sewing machine manufacturers who lost their share of an increasingly monopolized market began to produce the safety bicycles that inspired the craze of the 1880s and 1890s. They inaugurated not just the system of mass manufacture but also modern marketing strategies, anticipating the production technique of the automobile as well as its sale as a specifically recreational vehicle, meant, as Ford said of the Model T, to provide the “family the blessing of hours of pleasure.” At the center of a tariff controversy as early as 1882, the bicycle went on to demonstrate how new recreational
forms could transform (however transformed by) dominant modes of production, mediation, distribution, and consumption.¹⁵

The vitality of the recreational within this circuit emerged alongside a mutually constitutive (if at times antagonistic) discursive production of play, in which Eggleston’s article participates. This production of nonproductivity intensified in the journals of the era—in the arguments about football in the Nation, in the new flurry of recreational magazines such as the Wheelman (1882) and Recreation (1894)—where increasingly specialized (and scientized) knowledges were multiplied and commercialized as the source of further pleasure. But this production of play intensified no less within the academic (and professionalizing) discourses of the period. For C. S. Peirce, whose exposure to philosophy began with Schiller’s Aesthetic Letters, the “Pure Play of Musement” discloses the attractiveness of “God’s Reality”; in The Principles of Psychology (1890) William James includes “play” among the fundamental human instincts; and games foster an ideal sociality for John Dewey in The School and Society (1899).¹⁶ When Franz Boas included games alongside religion and folklore in a single section of the ethnological exhibit of the Columbian Exposition (1893), he did so convinced of their importance for understanding “culture.”¹⁷ And A. F. Chamberlain (the nation’s first Ph.D. in anthropology, working with Boas, whom G. Stanley Hall had hired at Clark University), in The Child: A Study in the Evolution of Man (1900), devoted himself to demonstrating Hall’s elaborate recapitulation theory of play while stating that “the orator, the poet, the artist, the seeker after knowledge ‘play’ as surely and as naively as the child.” At Harvard, George Santayana had already authorized such a conviction in The Sense of Beauty (1896). Recognizing an “undeniable propriety in calling all the liberal and imaginative activities of man play,” he recodes “play” as “our most useful occupation.”¹⁸ By the century’s turn, then, Eggleston might have come up with a decidedly different conclusion: in the absence of play, “culture”—in either its anthropological or its Arnoldian sense—would be an impossibility. Play, not work, appeared to be the mode through which a culture expresses itself.

This ethos of play predictably captivated the nation’s avant-garde economists. Charlotte Perkins Gilman assails the condition of women, relegated to the role of “non-productive consumers [of] ornaments and amusements,” who are denied access to authentic “play.” Thorstein Veblen derides gambling and football as signs of America’s atavistic return to a primitive state. And Simon Patten celebrates the transformation of a “pain or deficit economy” into “a pleasure or surplus economy” that permits “amusement” for the masses. Only “the course of consumption expanding by orderly process,” he argues, “enables society to increase its output and to broaden its productive areas.” To guarantee the continued efficiency of production and the success of American society as a whole, he advocates lessons in “pleasure.” “It is the primary task of education,” he argues, “to arouse” the worker to participate in “the amusements and recreations of parks, theatres, ‘Coney Islands,’ department stores, settlements, free lectures, and socialized schoolhouses.”¹⁹

On the one hand, this is to say that the worker must be taught the “desire” that drives consumer capitalism. But on the other, and despite the fact that both Veblen and Patten have become convenient markers for the emergence of a “culture of consumption,” the presence of “settlements” in Patten’s list suggests how recreational forms might rechannel that desire, how one might try to “standardize pleasure,” as Jane Addams put it, writing
about the Hull House settlement she founded in 1889.\textsuperscript{20} For Jacob Riis, implicitly borrowing Spencer’s surplus-energy theory of play (itself borrowed from Schiller), recreation could redirect the youthful energies that had found the “wrong outlet” on the streets of New York.\textsuperscript{21} The characteristic American impulse to spatialize economic problems—to answer socioeconomic questions with spatial reconstructions—invests recreational space (parks, playgrounds, gymnasiums) with the capacity to solve both local and national problems, from petty theft and immigration to what John Muir called the “stupefying effects of the vice of over-industry.”\textsuperscript{22}

Above all, Progressive ideology went on to imagine that organized recreation would solve the problems provoked by unorganized consumption. The Exploitation of Pleasure (1911), a “study of the commercial recreations in New York City,” admits that public policy belatedly follows a path that the amusement industry had already trod, “learning, in a new field, what was taught by the economic world a generation ago; like industry, recreation has become a matter of public concern.”\textsuperscript{23} The Annals of the American Association of Political and Social Sciences, in a special issue (1910) working to transmute nonproductive pleasure into productive form, declares that in public recreation “lies the beginning of the social redemption of the people.”\textsuperscript{24} While “work” had become an object of knowledge that prompted the discourse of scientific management, “play” had become an object of multiple knowledges that framed recreation as a governable realm, a sphere for regulating a population’s happiness.\textsuperscript{25} This is to argue that the theorization of play became the ground for making pleasure visible and differentiable.

Just as some versions of play became appropriated as modes of “redemption,” others were deployed as modes of reimagining the nation, to the point where journalists were eager to report not just that an interest in sport is the “Zeitgeist that animates our generation,” but also that the Spanish-American War showed how “play has given [the American] self-reliance, courage and endurance.”\textsuperscript{26} “Democracy” seemed to “[take] a newer and more vigorous form” in bicycling and canoeing; the bicycle alone seemed “peculiarly adapted” to Americans, obtainable by “nearly everyone,” a practicable form of exercise for a population “in a hurry.”\textsuperscript{27} Poker, in Owen Wister’s best-selling novel The Virginian (1902), serves as a metaphor for American democracy: it is the trope with which the narrator (learning from his Virginian friend, a latter-day Jefferson) can redeclare an independence that acknowledges “the eternal inequality of man,” making “true democracy” and “true aristocracy” simple equivalents, and establishing the promise of social Darwinism within a national frame.\textsuperscript{28} And the perennial certification of baseball as the “national game of America” became a mode of fantasizing supposedly American traits.\textsuperscript{29} In short, America had begun to think itself through its recreational pursuits.

When Horatio Alger died in 1899, his rags-to-riches formula and its accompanying ethic of work had already been contested by a different kind of adolescent achievement, the heroics of the athlete Frank Merriwell. Making their first appearance in 1896, Frank and his brother throw the winning pitch in over 200 dime novels, establishing baseball as a new arena for staging national and international heroism, an arena of performative rather than productive American male success.\textsuperscript{30} In addition to showing how powerful sport had become as a mode of materializing the “abstract ideal” of masculinity, the novels work to repair the ruptures that sport had supposedly effected, such as the new mobility and sexual license that the bicycle provided young women, or, more generally, the liberties that inspired more than one commentator to report that athletics accomplished for women what “conferences unnumbered” and “movements’ beyond the possibility of counting” had failed to achieve.\textsuperscript{31} In other words, just as play could appear to debilitate or rehabilitate the city or the nation, and just as one form of amusement could appear as the answer to another, so too could sport appear as both a feminist and a masculinist phenomenon.

It is within this ideological matrix, where the nonpurposive is repeatedly instrumentalized, that I situate American amusement as registered and specified in the Crane corpus, thus complicated by a thematics of vision and visibility, technology, and embodiment. Crane’s work seems to occupy a highly charged space between an idealization of “play” and its material correlative, commodified amusement. Alternatively, his work seems to refract American amusement into conflicting economies of play, conflicting circuits through which play attains new value at the close of the nineteenth century. Political economy, broadly understood, has preserved “play” as a site of transgressive possibility, where a nonproductive human impulse seems to resist the ethic of progress and to reject the oppressive reproduction of relations that delimit human pleasure.\textsuperscript{32} But though play has a history of exceeding theoretical structure in (or as) the margin of unpredictability, the dynamics of capital have a history of converting any such excess into
surplus value. Still, if we recognize capital itself as an incomplete (permanently developing) system, then we can understand its recreational pleasures as strongly marking, while masking, the paradoxes of capitalist life. Crane’s work defamiliarizes this all too familiar process within one social formation. And it suggests how the most powerfully commodified elements of modern life mediate the most powerful issues of the era: racial segregation, organized labor, imperialism.

The task of literary criticism is to formulate questions that the text has already answered. The questions I have asked while writing this book were asked with a localizing and particularizing inflection, but not without a desire to make the microhistorical make sense on a larger scale, and a desire to bring the pastness of the past into proximity with our present. Confronted with the protean nature and history of “play,” “leisure,” and “sport,” as meanings and as activities, I make no attempt here to adjudicate between such terms, whose lability, visible enough in the Crane corpus, continues to trouble schemes in which “play” and “game,” or “recreation” and “amusement,” or the “play-of-the-word” and “play-in-the-world,” are posited in opposition. The questions to which Crane’s work responds are questions in which “play” can refer all at once to activities engaged in, in arenas set apart from work, and to the playful oscillation between syntactic and semantic orderings of the materiality of language.

The historian of the future may understand better than we what to make of the more recent production of “play” in several disciplinary sites, from the postwar American sociological concern with the field of leisure, best remembered as David Riesman’s interest in preserving “autonomous play” against a homogenizing field of commodified pleasure; to the increasing legitimacy of leisure, recreation, and sport as objects of historiography, fostered by the English conference “Work and Leisure in Industrial Society” (1964) and subsequent work by E. P. Thompson and (in America) Herbert Gutman; to the centrality of “play” and “carnival” in American literary criticism, underwritten by the work of Jacques Derrida, the Roland Barthes of S/Z, and M. M. Bakhtin. Whereas Eggleston and James witnessed the way recreation encroached on the academy, a century later the academy has fully incorporated “play,” in its several manifestations, as a privileged object of knowledge. From Veblen’s point of view this would amount to a manifestation of higher education’s effort to preserve its inutility, its difference from the “discipline of everyday life,” and thus its pecuniary value. We might instead imagine the humanist and posthumanist effort to preserve ludic freedom in the discursive field as a response to accounts of such freedom’s disappearance in the field of the social, to the instrumentalization of “game theory,” or, most simply, to the unpredicted and unprecedented decline of American leisure. Fredric Jameson’s claim that “play” has lost meaning as “an alternative experience” (because even children’s “free time” has become so thoroughly organized and commodified) may sound too simply lapsarian, just as Jackson Lears’s claim about the “idiocentric rebellion embodied in play” sounds, while echoing Riesman, too simply romantic. But they provide compelling instances of how the charged significance of “play” persists—naming both a possibility and an impossibility—in our own century’s closing decade.

For Thompson and Gutman, Marxist historians bent on elaborating the importance of cultural forms, the point of studying “culture” was to track popular cultural resistance to the demands of industrialism, a point inseparable from an account of how emerging leisure industries homogenized and standardized free time. The cultural studies paradigm that emerged (in part) from Thompson’s work remains most recognizable as the study of subcultural formations, documenting a sociality that fosters group identity and as a challenge to the status quo. The question whether or not the transformative potential of play lingers in the field of commercial pleasure remains a question. To the degree that “poststructuralism can be seen as the revenant of modernism in the guise of theory,” as Andreas Huyssen has argued, a certain deconstructive turn seems to have transformed the mass cultural artifact into a phantasmatically modernist text, with patent formal radicality supplanted by latent politico-textual complexity. This book proceeds rather differently: it imagines literature as a recreational form that, in its conscious and unconscious relation to other recreational forms, discloses their liberating and restricting contradictions.

The Material Unconscious
In his effort to provide some sense of how cultural products provide us access to the past, and to the presentness of the past, Walter Benjamin records a claim made by André Monglod: “The past has left behind in literary texts images of itself that are comparable to the images which light imprints on a photosensitive plate. Only the future possesses developers
active enough to bring these plates out perfectly.” I take Benjamin’s attraction to this photographic metaphor to be inseparable from his attraction to photography itself, and his belief that the media of photography and film provide access to an “optical unconscious”—not just the visualization of the inconspicuous physical details of everyday life but also the consequent revelation of how modernity constitutes the human subject. As the Mongloid quotation makes clear, literary texts might provide such access only through a sufficiently active development (which is a sufficiently active materialization) of their own inconspicuous impressions. Although I have no faith in the “perfect development” of the literary “plate,” I do understand the activity of developing images of the past in and out of literary texts to be an experiment in imagining what a material unconscious might be. Like any unconscious, it must be analytically produced by a certain kind of attention, concentration, or inhabituation that is unwilling to understand the seemingly inadvertent as genuinely unmotivated. Irreducible to either an authorial or a cultural unconscious, the “material unconscious” is a concept I put into play when, granting dimensionality to a passing reference or impression of Crane’s, I confront an image of the past that otherwise inexplicably renders the text as a whole, and its moment in history, newly legible.

Of course, to posit such a thing as a material unconscious also means thinking within a tradition established by Pierre Macherey and Fredric Jameson. Macherey understands the unconscious of the literary work, signaled by and residing in instances of the text’s self-contradiction, to be simply “history”—“the play of history beyond its edges, encroaching on those edges.” More formally, he means that by transforming its raw material—language, “the vehicle of ideology”—into aesthetic form, the literary work provides us with knowledge of that ideology’s limits: while ideology perpetuates a fantasy of coherence, the fissures in the literary text expose the fantasy for what it is. Despite his indebtedness to Macherey, Jameson distinguishes his work from the Althusserian school principally by naming literature itself a form of ideology (indeed a privileged form since ideology inevitably implies narrative). Literature functions to invent “imaginary or formal ‘solutions’ to irresolvable social contradictions” in the act of restructuring “a prior historical or ideological subtext,” a subtext made legible by the text itself (and thus not genuinely “prior”). Simultaneously, the literary text allegorizes a set of conflicts within a given social

formation and compensates for those conflicts, most potently at the level of style. If history resides in literature’s unconscious, though, I am inclined to believe that it consists not quite of “bourgeois ideology,” as Macherey would have it, nor, as Jameson would have it, of the modes-of-production and class-conflict narratives, but rather of underraptured, “subhistorical” fragments, what Siegfried Kracauer called an era’s “inconspicuous surface-level expressions.”

The notion of the material unconscious deployed in this book enjoys neither the clarity nor the rigor of those prior formulations, not least because it indulges in the prestructuralist fantasy of language’s material reference. The way I depart from those models might be measured in the moment when Jameson himself measures, in “The Realist Floor-Plan” (1985), his own departure from the (structuralist) Barthes of “The Reality Effect” (1968), an essay addressing a clause from Flaubert’s description of Mme. Aubain’s parlor at the outset of “Un coeur simple”: “An old piano supported, under a barometer, a pyramid of boxes and cartons” (“Un vieux piano supportait, sous un baromètre, un tas pyramidal de boîtes et de cartons”). Barthes isolates the barometer as a superfluous notation, a diegetically and symbolically nonfunctional detail of the sort that realism deploys in the effort not to denote a specific materiality but to connote the category of “the real,” to effect the realist illusion. The barometer becomes, as Jameson explains, an empty sign.

For Jameson realism functions within the “bourgeois cultural revolution” to inculcate the new spatial and temporal orders on which Enlightenment modernity and the modern market depend. Thus, reinserting the sentence within Flaubert’s opening description, he demonstrates how the realist text desacralizes space, reproducing it as mere horizontal extension, divisibility, and seriality: “A narrow entrance-hall separated the kitchen from the parlour . . . Eight mahogany chairs were lined up against the white-painted wainscotting.” In subsequent sentences, though, a mantel clock “designed to look like a temple of Vesta” embodies the way “culture” (albeit vacuous, kitsch culture) returns to conduct a “desperate” and futile battle to recenter and resacralize space. In this confrontation between the “ancien régime” and the regime of abstract space, Jameson’s reading of the barometer—a reading perturbed, he notes, by “a very peculiar slippage from barometer to metronome”—that is, from an object that appears in the text to an object that appears nowhere in the text—portrays it as “marking
if anything the triumph of science and measurement.” The empty sign connoting reality becomes the all but empty sign connoting (“if anything”) “science.”

But what if, in the face of two such potent and potently dematerializing accounts, we were to imagine imagining this barometer materially? We might be prompted to do so by the precision with which the barometer is located in the spatial (but not horizontal) grid. Indeed, that precision suggests just how impertinent Jameson’s alleged barometer/metrone slippage is, for it shows that, rather than being the sort of compact barometer that might sit on the piano in the manner of a metronome (that timepiece that regulates aesthetic pleasure), this barometer, if it is above the piano, must hang on the wall. This means that Flaubert’s barometer is not what in America was known as “the new French barometer,” the aneroid barometer that Lucien Vidic patented in 1844. It quite properly should not be, since Mme. Aubain’s house was decorated in the first decade of the century. By the time of her death in 1853, though, the instrument had made a medal-winning appearance at the Great Exhibition (where it was no doubt seen by Flaubert). And by the time of the tale’s publication in 1877, Vidic had become the subject of an important biography, and his barometer (after his original patent had expired) had been standardized and produced by the Naudet firm in quite extraordinary numbers: twenty thousand were sold between 1860 and 1866. For Flaubert’s original readers—at a moment when the taste for elaborately carved, oak-pedimented barometers (mercury instruments) had given way to a taste for the more accurate, compact, portable instrument—the generic technology in Flaubert’s tale may have had a less generic valence, marking, if vaguely, the bourgeois cultural capital of the past (embodied by an object that denies any schism between “science” and “culture”). At the very least, the barometer’s status as the one instrument that (as the science of the day maintained) “is independent of merely local changes and gauges the atmosphere to its upper limit” underscores the barometer’s generic capacity to materialize (to signify indexically) an absent presence. With a certain chiastic irony, then, the instrument returns to us, within literary criticism, as a present absence, the empty—or emptied—sign.

That irony would hardly be of interest were it not for the fact that over and against the abstract homogeneity that Jameson describes, the rest of Flaubert’s tale, much more than the ornate clock, stages a resistance to any such desacralization. With a fetishism that is neither Freudian nor Marxian but merely “primitive,” Félicité saturates her material world with significance, investing material objects (such as the moth-eaten plush hat, such as the stuffed parrot) with the power to make the absent (such as Mme. Aubain’s deceased daughter, such as the Holy Ghost) quite palpably and exuberantly present: “Sometimes the sun, as it came through the little window, caught [the parrot’s] glass eye, so that it shot out a great luminous ray which sent her into ecstasies.” In the space that is Félicité’s, “a cross between a chapel and a bazaar,” things exhibit a more than barometric capacity to register, to materialize, to make visible what is invisible. Alongside such an exhibition the barometer itself could wage only an apotropaic battle, lost in the present of the text precisely because, whatever materializing capacity it has, the instrument itself is so underrepresented. If, then, the barometer in its curious absence and presence encapsulates the problematic of material reference as such in “Un coeur simple,” it hardly seems surprising that what we might call the material unconscious of literary criticism registers and records this pressure point where the relation between the visible and the invisible, the material and the abstract, things in space and space itself, might be materialized.

Such a sketchy account of Flaubert’s tale does not diminish Jameson’s or Barthes’s conclusions. But it does suppose that whatever aesthetic or cultural function the tale may have, the text also preserves some trace, memorialized in the all but erased reference to the barometer, of how the scientific technologies of everyday life attained (or failed to attain) significance within the uneven development of cultural life in France. More simply, it intimates how we can imagine reference differently, with a respect for the material referent that is not simply contained by a logic of vraisemblance.

Within a study of the American 1890s, to be sure, such imagining risks merely replicating the pragmatist deference to material existence, the era’s own quest for “facts” and “the real thing,” or a modernist faith that ideas reside in things. But this risk is meant to unsettle a signal power of American ideology—its power to compel us to think of American literature in terms of “ideology,” and thus to confront “the paradox of an ideology that commanded transcendence,” as Myra Jehlen has termed it, a paradox that can always render so-called literary resistance describable as so-called complicity. As Sacvan Bercovitch notes in the case of Emerson, the most
“adversarial rhetoric” becomes a demonstration of “cultural counterdependence.”

If taking material reference seriously can retard this demonstration, clearing some literary conduit to the uneven reproduction of social existence, the point is not to privilege material history as a more suitable ground for the study of the American past. Rather, the point is to privilege literature as a mode of explaining what material history might be, and how the material past inhabited a determinate but not wholly determinant ideology or symbology. We might thus, while recognizing the “cultural work” that literature consciously strives to accomplish, look outside that instrumentalizing frame to sense how the play of the text can foreground the conditions of such “work.” Or we might thus grant that “the only relation literature as such has to culture as such is that it is part of it,”

while nonetheless discerning that the part of culture that literature is precisely that part that understands culture as a loose assemblage of disparate parts, teaching us to criticize “the term ‘culture’” and to remember “that ‘culture,’” as Thompson put it, “is a clumsish term, which by gathering up so many activities and attributes into one common bundle may actually confuse and disguise discriminations that should be made between them.”

As should by now be clear, then, the “material unconscious” functions not least as a heuristic term with which to dispose a textualization of culture that, as Carolyn Porter describes it, effaces the ‘social’ itself and renders the “social text” a text in the formalist sense.

If what came to be called the New Historicism sought to identify a discourse, logic, or rhetoric in which the literary text participates and on which its intelligibility depends, then what might be called a new materialism will investigate how the literary helps to identify the cultural illogic that exposes history’s noninevitability. This does not mean displaying the shards of the past as so many bits and pieces; rather it entails testing the limits of those shards to assume recognizable form.

While refraining from the habit of defining the logic of canonical texts as the structurally generative logic of a “culture,” I clearly have no interest in excluding those texts from an (implicit) definition of culture—no interest, that is, in pursuing an account of popular culture, mass media, or the practice of the everyday that, in order to produce its object of analysis, redivides fields of cultural production. This is not just because certain canonical texts such as *The Red Badge of Courage* were best-sellers in their day. Howells’s attempt to adjudicate popular taste from the pages of the *Atlantic* and *Harper’s Monthly*, promoting realism as an uplifting form of literary “entertainment,” like Garland’s utopian conviction that “verism” would become a generally popular and genuinely populist mode of American writing, suggests how permeable cultural boundaries remained. Chicago’s Columbian Exposition—where the “grandeur” of the White City was sequestered from “the amusing, distracting, ludicrous, and noisy attractions” of the Midway Plaisance—may have worked to ratify (by spatializing) the division between art, science, and “Culture,” on the one hand, and mere amusement, on the other. But it did so while an urban bourgeoisie, frustrated with New York’s formality, had begun to seek out less refined, darker, and more daring spheres of public pleasure. Cultural hierarchy and social hierarchy did not (and do not) necessarily coincide. To accumulate traces of such noncoincidence and permeability within the texts of the period is to begin writing a prehistory of the “great divide” that makes “modernism” and “mass culture” intelligible.

**Spacing: Realism, Recreation, Romance**

This project may seem to extend the (by now well-developed) historicist critique of a critical tradition most exquisitely formulated by Richard Poirier, for whom the American literary tradition *tout court* is characterized by a “modernist impulse” that resists, by displacing rather than criticizing, “the forces of environment that otherwise dominate the world.” Yet the very notion of a material unconscious overcomes that conviction only while preserving it, trying to imagine that such an impulse hardly prevents the literary text from simultaneously registering those “forces of environment” as materialized within the everyday. Borrowing the rhetoric of genre established by Richard Chase, for whom the “native tradition” works out “intellectual and moral ideas” by “incorporating an element of romance,” we can emphasize that such incorporation is never complete, and that the “intellectual and moral ideas” of a work such as *Moby Dick* fully depend on the incorporation of realist elements within an overarching will-to-romance.

The further point would be that realism as such exhibits such a will, as one might argue by pointing to the number of realists (including Crane) who wrote romances, to Norris’s theorization of the naturalist romance, to James’s preface to *The American*, or to a body of recent critical work that
forcefully recognizes how negotiated and renegotiated—on aesthetic, political, and ethical grounds—the dialectics of genre were. Instead, I want to concentrate on the fact that Chase's original account of the American romance, while thoroughly dismissing realism, rather curiously includes a discussion of Howells's very late novel The Vacation of the Kelwyns (1920). For the Kelwyns, summering in New Hampshire satisfies "the need" for what Chase calls "the fresh surge of impulse, the creative, genial welling-up of emotion, the relaxation of willed principle" that begins to align the novel with the American tradition as he understands it. It is as though American realism deploys recreational space to retrieve something of the liberty and intensity of the romance; it suffuses recreational space with something of the liminality that traditionally characterizes the forest, the frontier, the sea. Kate Chopin's novel The Awakening (1899), more than any Howells novel, makes this act of retrieval explicit. At the Cajun resort on Grand Isle, Edna Pontellier begins "to loosen a little the mantle of reserve that had always enveloped her," and the "world of reality" gives way to "the realm of romance and dreams." Whereas recreation provided social reform with a spatial answer to socioeconomic problems, it enables fiction to spatialize generic ones.

In other words, the recreational becomes a chronotope that by excluding those "actualities . . . so terribly insisted upon . . . in America," as Hawthorne phrased it, permits the American novel to explore romantic possibility within the perimeter of realism. Of course, narrative fiction has depended on the spatializing power of the ludic at least since the Decameron, where the brigata enjoys a domain of play free from the life of the city and the memory of the plague. And recreational space persists as a site of license that catalyzes "the relaxation of willed principle" and thus characterological and social change, from the masquerade in the eighteenth-century English novel to Miss Thorne's fête champêtre at Ullathorne in Banchester Towers (1857), the novel that secured Trollope's reputation. Described for chapter after chapter, the fête appears as a paradigmatic instance of the way that recreation, by transforming social interaction, transforms the plot. (And when Dickens dislodges recreation from its narratological function to thematize it in Hard Times, the voice of the circus becomes the voice that insists on transforming utilitarian culture: "People must be amuthed, Thquire, thomehow.") With the notable complication of Hawthorne (who will frame Chapter 1), it is not until we read the

Howells of The Landlord of Lion's Head, the Chopin of The Awakening, the James of The Sacred Fount, that the recreational assumes such narratological value in the American field.

For Henry James the world of leisure is the only narratable world, and recreation thus retains none of its ordinary differential value (its opposition to "utilitarian end" or the "real world"), which explains James's signal ability to demonstrate how recreational forms institutionalize and codify social asymmetries while seeming to naturalize them. And in The Awakening, Mr. Pontellier's insistence on leaving his wife to play billiards at Klein's shows how simply and rigidly the recreational can produce a world of men without women. But The Awakening (in a tradition that returns us to Boccaccio) more clearly deploys ludic space to produce an eroticized heterosocial sphere where, emerging from distinct private realms, men and women may meet publicly, and where, because of its difference from everyday life, other differences may become less distinct. At Grand Isle Edna Pontellier's "inward life" turns outward in the company of Robert Lebrun and Adèle Ratignolle. In the "advanced stage of intimacy and camaraderie" with the young Robert, she discovers a "self" that has remained suppressed within the urban routine of New Orleans, where she is "driven along by habit" in her roles as mother and wife. She discovers the "first-felt throbings of desire," and, taught to swim by Robert, she finds "the touch of the sea" to be "sensuous, enfolding her body with its soft, close embrace." All this is to describe the way the recreational milieu does not simply stage but exists as a precondition for the appearance of Edna's very body and her very subjectivity.

Stephen Crane's first literary mentor, his sister Agnes (who died in 1884, when Crane was twelve), shows how recreational space licenses a specifically interclass heterosociality. In "A Victorious Defeat" (1883), a city girl, the "latest rage," learns to admire a simple farmhand while she vacations at the Metter Farm. Offered a "row on the river" at dusk, the girl admires the man's physique, his tenor voice, and his romantic decision to row on to a field of violets, her "choice among all flowers." When Stephen Crane writes his one novel of manners, The Third Violet (1897), he rewrites his sister's story from the man's point of view. Hemlock Inn provides the only imaginable sites—walking trails, picnic spots, tennis courts—for a summer romance between a poor painter and a New York heiress. Crane and his sister take advantage of what an English traveler,
writing in 1841, described as the “chief attraction” of Saratoga, the “opportunity” to enjoy “the greatest variety of classes at the same time.” Fifty years later, this chief attraction of resort life fully works its way into American fiction.

If the attraction to this social license partakes of what Freud calls “the hostility to civilization,” then, with the help of Leo Marx, we might think of resort life as mediating between a residual American pastoralism and the proliferation of recreational spaces in the 1890s. To account for pastoral longing, The Machine in the Garden soon invokes Freud’s effort to map the “mental realm of phantasy” as a “domain” that “has a complete counterpart in the establishment of ‘reservations’ and ‘nature parks.’” Whereas Freud wants us to understand fantasy as “a reservation reclaimed from the encroachments of the reality-principle,” Marx is concerned with a particular “post-romantic, industrial version of pastoral design.”

Expressed in what he calls the “work of serious writers,” that design also suffuses popular descriptions of new pleasure zones, such as the “universal institution” of the trolley park. One account begins by rehearsing that primal scene of the machine’s entry into the garden: a “rusticating city dweller” suddenly finds the “sunlit meadows” violated by the “swish and hum” of the electric trolley. Despite the encounter, all “sense of vexation vanishes with a realization of what the trolley means as an instrumentality for awakening country districts from their dull life.”

The social license of Saratoga reappears here as a fully communitarian incorporation of America, with the writer stressing how the trolley “substitut[es] among men solidarity for isolation”; how it liberates “women and children” from the domestic sphere; and how it enables both the urban and rural populations to gather at the “recreation–grounds run by the street-railway company, with all sorts of attractions—band concerts, variety performances, a menagerie, swings, teet-boards, roller-coasters, fireworks, etc.” Overcoming the conflict between machine and garden with a machine-produced garden, this nexus of modernization and recreation prompts the writer to formulate a version of Eggleston’s conclusions: “The reproach that we take our pleasures sadly can no longer be made. The American people—or at least a very large part of the American people—is becoming a pleasure loving folk.”

In America, pleasure, it seems, may finally facilitate the production of a Volk. This celebration of the trolley park suggests how forcefully popular culture itself promoted an understanding of its populist potential, envisioning new modes of affiliation within a new public sphere—and thus prefiguring the desire, within the field of cultural studies, to reimagine mass culture as genuinely popular. While illustrating how capital produces new spaces to resolve its own internal contradictions (the law of diminishing returns), the rail industry produces a material “world elsewhere” and promotes a literal displacement from the economic and social structures of modern life. If an emergent mass culture thus seems to literalize American literature’s “modernist impulse,” we should hardly be surprised that its residues remain within the work of America’s protomodernists.

Stephen Crane

The first portion of this book addresses Crane’s explicit concern with recreation. Chapter 1 narrates a geography of one recreational space by situating Crane in the recreational milieu in which he grew up. Biographically best known for his work as a war correspondent in Greece and Cuba, he spent far more of his short life (1871–1900) “at play.” The mountains and the beach divided the American resort industry, and Crane enjoyed both. His family summered on the New Jersey shore, at Ocean Grove, and then moved to Asbury Park, where his career as a writer began with seaside reports for the New York Tribune. His older brother William owned land alongside Sullivan County’s Hartwood Club, a 6,000-acre mountain retreat in Pennsylvania, where Stephen was a frequent visitor, transforming his visits into “The Sullivan County Sketches” (1892), burlesques of the hunting yarm. Once serving as the starting point for discussions of Crane’s writing career, the sketches could serve here as Crane’s comic rendering of a residual male pastime that would gain new notoriety under the sign of “Roosevelt.” But I concentrate on the shore reports rather than the hunting yams because they stage the conflicts between competing uses of pleasure and expose the tension between, on the one hand, the utopian ideology with which Asbury Park was originally imagined and, on the other, the disruptions that took place once railroad service began to transform this site of bourgeois leisure into a sphere of mass pleasure. Crane’s treatment of resort life intimates how modern leisure space was to become, in the words of Lefebvre, “the very epitome of contradictory space”—“as prodigal of monstrosities as of promises (that it cannot keep).”
Chapter 2 describes how the boundaries of the recreational collapse in Crane's work. I address his representation of a traditional alternative space in America, the West, where a traditional pursuit, gambling, provokes a spectacular economy of loss and gain (over and against any economy of compensation) and a somatic economy of contagious excitation. But while seeming to map rival economies according to an East/West binary, these western stories, by my account, register specific socioeconomic disruptions in the East: neocolonialist expansion, immigration, organized labor. My emphasis, then, is not on the transformative potential of the recreational per se but on its capacity to allegorize, however unconsciously, social change. Gambling has always played an ambiguous role in America's self-image, at times censured as a social threat, at times celebrated as an essentially American version of capitalist risk. It is not this ambiguity that most significantly informs Crane's work, though, but the sense in which the particular recreation of gambling, as well as the particular literary genre of the short story, can index historical determinants while nonetheless foregrounding indeterminacy: the role of chance.

The discussion thus moves from the appearance of a modern recreational space to the virtual disappearance of a traditional one, where play, however distinct from those realities so terribly insisted upon, unconsciously records them. The book's Interlude, a reading of "The Open Boat," functions as a volta, in and after which I focus less on Crane's manifest representation of play and more on the fragments of the amusement industry that circulate through his work. Despite his early critique of resort life, that life serves to figure the human struggle for survival in this story, which commits a figural version of the mortal error that the story narrates (as the vacationers on shore mistake the men's struggle for sport). "The Open Boat" is a narrative meditation on amusement's epistemological capacity to translate any "experience" into common knowledge.

Chapter 3, ranging across Crane's war fiction and war correspondence, returns to The Red Badge of Courage and locates its "football scene" within an American history of the visualized, objectified, commodified male body—within a trajectory that moves from the Civil War stereogrd card, to the instantaneous photographs of the athlete in motion, to the filmic production of the Spanish-American War in 1898. While the novel tells the story of a youth's initiation into battle, the text begins to tell an altogether different story about the visualization of war and of sport.
phy of Crane, as the reading of Crane that the biography could not fathom. Berryman's conscious portrait of his own unconscious redeployed the fragments of a popular culture that circulate through the Crane canon, demonstrating how various obsolescent public pleasures resurface as private modernist techniques. Having begun with an account of how modernization transforms recreational space, I conclude by suggesting how such space spatializes modern mental life—allowing the subject to inhabit a materialized interiority, where fantasy and commercial recreation make sense of each other.

This book gradually builds toward a mode of reading with which it does not begin and which it does not take for granted. I think of it as a potentially generalizable mode in which textual analysis as such becomes a historiographic operation. I also recognize in Crane an overdetermined case study that may render the mode singularly productive. For one thing, interest in Crane's unconscious has a history that precedes Berryman—Garland reports that "Crane's mind was more largely subconscious in its workings than that of most men," that he "did not understand his own mental processes or resources"—while it extends to more recent critical work. Moreover, suggesting that the recreational was a central resource of Crane's gains obvious poignancy against two backgrounds: his Methodist upbringing, in particular his father's publications condemning fiction as one more morally and socially degrading amusement; and a pragmatist tradition that understands writing and reading literature as work, a form of work that the professional journalist-naturalists of Crane's era (such as Norris, Dreiser, and London) defined as "brain labor." This is to say that the convergence of certain biographical and literary-historical tensions would seem to make amusement an inevitable fixation of Crane's, a "resource" (in Garland's terms) buried yet tapped, which can return to us as (in my terms) a repository of partial (and not necessarily synecdochal) knowledges about the economy of play in America. Still, I imagine that this singular case refers to a generalized modality of incorporative disavowal (traceable at least from Hawthorne to Berryman) with which the literary confronts its place in that economy.
The Material Unconscious

American Amusement, Stephen Crane, &
the Economies of Play

Bill Brown