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Emotional Structures in American Fiction

I.

Why do we read fictional texts, although we are, as a rule, well aware of the fact that they only depict made-up worlds? Most approaches to literary criticism evade the issue by implying that the reason lies in a particular meaning which the ensuing interpretation will finally unveil. However, no interpretation has ever fully agreed with any other on what the meaning of, say, a literary text like *Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* or *The Portrait of a Lady* is. In fact, one may even argue that the whole point of literary interpretation lies exactly in this disagreement, for otherwise it would not make sense to offer yet another analysis of the same text. Similarly, non-professional readers may be happy to realize that their enthusiasm for a particular literary text is shared by others. But, most likely, they will then discover that these other readers define their positive reading experience in quite different, often idiosyncratic ways.[1] In other words: If we would read fictional texts primarily in order to get at the "true" meaning of the text, then our encounters with literature would be marked by perpetual frustration. If we read for meaning, then we are obviously quite satisfied to arrive at our own meaning. But this is only another way of saying that we actually do not read fictional texts in order to find an ever-elusive meaning but because the text provides a gratifying experience (of which the construction of our own meaning – which is always a confirmation of ourselves – is only one element).[2]

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[1] Wolfgang Iser therefore distinguishes between interpretation and reception: "In this context, we can also differentiate between interpretation and reception. The aim of interpretation, with its structure of 'double meaning' is to assemble meaning. It invests the imaginary with semantic determinacy. But as the imaginary is capable of different semantic translations, in accordance with whatever assumptions underlie the interpretation, the individual work has its own history of interpretations, just as literary theory has its own history of sequent, interdependent concepts. Reception, on the other hand, is not primarily a semantic process. It is a process of experiencing the imaginary gestalt brought forth by the text. Reception is the recipient's production of the aesthetic object along structural and functional lines laid down in the text" ("Literary Theory" 19).

[2] The claim that the possibility of constructing one's own meaning is one of the gratifications of reading fictional texts can also explain why current literary criticism is hard-

Reception aesthetics has made this observation the starting point of its study of the reader's activities. Wolfgang Iser has repeatedly argued that we are reading literature not primarily for meaning but for having an aesthetic experience. The argument rests on a distinction between aesthetic function and aesthetic value, so that the term "aesthetic" does not refer to artistic value as the basis for the experience Iser talks about but to the different attitude we take toward a text in which the point of reference is fictive. However, even if we accept that awareness of the text's fictionality changes our attitude toward the "meaning" of the text, the question remains how an aesthetic experience can be conceptualized and described that results from this fact. For Iser, a fictional text is actualized by the reader in acts of imagining in which we constantly move between the text and its "absent," unformulated reference. This places us in a state "in-between" two worlds which, in turn, results in a constant movement between different perspectives – a movement that is further enhanced by intratextual shifts between the perspectives of narrator, characters, plot and, occasionally, a reader-persona in the text. However, such a definition of aesthetic experience as a process of continuous perspectival shift, triggered by the fictionality of the text, seems to imply – as critical commentators have pointed out – that aesthetic experience derives primarily, if not exclusively, from our cognitive activities in processing the literary text.

One explanation for this cognitive reduction of the reading experience may be found in the fact that Iser's form of reception aesthetics was developed not only parallel to the literary works of high modernism but with the explicitly stated intention to develop an adequate method for the interpretation of these modernist works that defied a realist aesthetics of recognition, including the recognition of meaning. Consequently, reception aesthetics shares modernism's deep distrust of emotions, a distrust that already characterizes Flaubert's *Emma Bovary* and finds a belated, but representative expression in Vladimir Nabokov's comment on what is wrong with Flaubert's heroine:

> Emma is a great reader of romances, of more or less exotic novels, of romantic verse. Some of the authors she knows are first-rate, such as Walter Scott or Victor Hugo; others not quite first-rate, such as Bernardin de Saint-Pierre or Lamartine. But good or bad this is not the point. The point is that she is a bad reader. She

reads books emotionally, in a shallow juvenile manner, putting herself in this or that female character's place.[3]

To read emotionally is to read badly, in a juvenile manner. In contrast, A.J. Appleyard, in a study of the various stages of reading through which we go as readers, insists that the major source of literary experience is emotional.[4] Without an affective dimension, without our investing feelings, reading fictional texts would hold no interest.[5] Reading is always "emotional." To deny this – for Nabokov obviously uncomfortable – fact of life is to suppress a central aspect of the reading experience. In its stark contrast between a "juvenile" and a, by implication, grown-up and mature form of reading, Nabokov's verdict also indicates a possible reason for this suppression. Recent analyses of the critique of a "feminization of American culture" have revealed to what extent this distorting and superficial characterization served the needs of a generation of intellectuals who used a rhetoric of forceful self-masculinization in order to avoid the stigma of being in a feminine profession.[6]

Recently, however, the debate about the role of emotions in reading literature has taken a new turn and gained a political dimension that goes beyond the question to what extent a modernist aesthetics can and should become the basis for a theory of literature. Philosophers and sociologists have argued "that our emotional abilities provide us with our principal mode of access to the domain of the moral."[7] By emotional abilities, Vetlesen means the faculty of empathy specifically:

> It is by virtue of this faculty that I can put myself in the place of the other by way of a feeling-into and feeling with. Empathy allows me to develop an appreciation of how the other experiences his or her situation, empathy facilitates the first reaching out toward and gaining access to the other's experience. (8)

Martha Nussbaum has extended this argument to literature, because reading a literary text requires the faculty of empathy on the part of the reader and can

ly interested in acknowledging the crucial role of aesthetic experience in reading literature. Such an acknowledgment would mean that certain forms of cultural criticism could no longer be practiced in the way they are now – and this, in turn, would make literature far less interesting for intellectuals. Nowadays, literary criticism has become an "easy" way of practicing social and cultural criticism, without having to enter the complexities of modern societies.

3 Vladimir Nabokov, *Lectures on Literature*, 136-7. See also James Baldwin's famous dismissal of *Uncle Tom's Cabin* in his essay "Everybody's Protest Novel."
4 Cf. the first chapter of his book *Becoming a Reader*, entitled "The Affective Power of Fantasy."
5 In the following essay, I follow the definition of Arlie Hochschild in his essay "Emotion Work, Feeling Rules, and Social Structure," who uses the terms "emotion" and "feeling" interchangeably: "I define emotion as bodily cooperation with an image, a thought, a memory – a cooperation of which the individual is aware. I will use the terms 'emotion' and 'feeling' interchangeably, although the term 'emotion' denotes a state of being overcome that 'feeling' does not" (551).
6 For an analysis of the origins of this masculinization of American literary criticism see my essay on "The Masculinization of American Realism."
7 Arne Johan Vetlesen, *Perception, Empathy, and Judgment*, xi.

therefore be seen as something like a morally indispensable training ground for an ethics of public life: "In fact, I defend the literary imagination precisely because it seems to me an essential ingredient of an ethical stance that asks us to concern ourselves with the good of other people whose lives are distant from our own."[8] Literature is especially effective in this respect, because it depends on our ability and willingness to enter a fictional character's perspective and to develop an emotional investment: "On the other hand, an ethics of impartial respect for human dignity will fail to engage real human beings unless they are made capable of entering imaginatively into the lives of distant others and to have emotions related to that participation" (xvi). For Nussbaum as for the Habermas-influenced Vetlesen, emotions are therefore a crucial moral and social faculty, so that Nussbaum can say: "If we do not cultivate the imagination in this way, we lose, I believe, an essential bridge to social justice" (xviii). Fictional texts can contribute to the possibility of social justice in modern mass societies where face-to-face relations have become impossible to maintain.

The contrast could not be stronger: for modernists, to read emotionally means to succumb to one's own juvenile, immature longings for wish-fulfillment, whereas for the empathy-theory of ethics it means to train a faculty that is indispensable for moral behavior because it compels us to enter the perspective of others. Do we have to choose between these two positions? Empathy-theorists seem to provide an effective counter-argument to the modernist dismissal of "emotional reading," but at a price: They, in turn, would have to dismiss those modern and postmodern works that deny us empathy with a character because such forms of literature only reinforce a self-centered individualism against which literature is supposed to work.[9] Can a revision of the modernist view of "emotional readings" only be achieved by

going back to the 19th century? The question can only be addressed after we have clarified what it exactly means to read "emotionally."

II.

If we want to avoid the crude dichotomy between messy "emotional readings" and purified cognitive text processing and proceed on the assumption that, inevitably, emotions are an important part of any reading experience, then the question arises how we can possibly speak about this affective dimension in reading. One way to start is to pose the question why readers respond emotionally to fiction when they know that it is only make-believe. Why should we get emotionally involved with a fictive character although we know that this character never existed? The question brings up another one: What models for describing the relation between reader and fictive character do we actually have? The traditional term is that of identification. The fact that this much-criticized term does not seem to go away, although nobody seems willing to defend it, indicates that it captures an important dimension of the reader's engagement. On the other hand, the fact that the term has become theoretically disreputable indicates a skepticism about how this relationship is described. The problem lies in the implication of a complete loss of self in the fictional other, so that the boundaries between self and other become blurred or erased in aesthetic experience and any distance (and possibility of self-awareness) is lost. This, in fact, is how Flaubert (and Nabokov) see Emma Bovary reading, following a tradition of ironic comments on "bad reading" that begins with *Don Quixote.*

Since identification remains an unsatisfactory term for describing the text-reader relationship, film critics have suggested to replace it by the more neutral term "engagement." But what forms can engagement take? The two terms that seem to have taken the place of identification in describing reader or spectator engagement with a fictive character are sympathy and empathy. Often, these two terms seem to be used interchangeably, whereas Alex Neill, in his essay "Empathy and (Film) Fiction," provides a stringent attempt to distinguish between them:

> And among "other-focussed" emotional responses, we may distinguish between *sympathetic* responses (such as those in which I fear *for* you), and *empathetic* responses (for I may also feel fear *with* you) ... With sympathetic response, in feeling *for* another, one's response need not reflect what the other is feeling. ... In contrast, in responding empathetically to another I come to *share* his feelings, to feel *with* him. (175-6)

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[8] Martha Nussbaum, *Poetic Justice. The Literary Imagination and Public Life,* xvi. – Nussbaum herself acknowledges the influence of Adam Smith's *Theory of Moral Sentiments,* but an interesting point of reference is also provided by Cooley's concept of the 'sympathetic imagination,' which, in turn, was influenced by Adam Smith's looking-glass theory of the self, as David Miller points out in his book on George Herbert Mead: "Although Cooley is known as a sociologist, he was definitely influenced by Adam Smith's looking-glass theory of the self. Adam Smith stressed that, in the economic world, the seller must look at himself from the point of view of the buyer, and vice versa: each must take the attitude of the other. Or as Cooley put it, in social behavior we can, through 'sympathetic imagination,' look at things as others in different situations do, and have the feelings others have in circumstances actually different from our own. Cooley's 'sympathetic imagination' became, with modifications, Mead's 'taking the role of the other'" (xix-xx). In both cases, the emotional dimension rests in the term 'sympathetic.'

[9] Tellingly, Nussbaum's privileged example in her book *Poetic Justice* is Dickens's novel *Great Expectations.*

It is hard to imagine readers empathizing with Bigger Thomas i
Wright's *Native Son,* or with Meursault in Albert Camus's *L'Étrange*
King Kong in the movie of the same name, but on the other hand
not preclude sympathy for their fate. For Neill, empathy means to
other person's perspective, to see things form his or her point of vi
pathy differs from sympathy in this regard; sympathizing with anothe
depend on my getting her mental state" (183).

This looks like a conceptually neat and logically plausible distinctic
trying to work with it, things are not quite so simple. To start witl
Cooley and Nussbaum all use the term 'sympathetic imagination' fo
into another person's perspective, thereby implying that it makes lit
to separate sympathy and empathy artificially. The whole point of thi
and moral theories is that in order to have sympathy for anothei
whose interiority is inaccessible to me, there has to be an attempt to e
other person's perspective, to empathize with his or her situation. Mei
fate will not touch us as deeply as it has many readers, if we are not w
enter the thought experiment of being completely cut off from all soc
tions. Similarly, it is exactly the denial of easy empathy in the case ol
Thomas that allows us to look at him with fresh eyes and to experie
fate as existentially "deep" and heroic.[10] If we could not empathize \
entrapment, he would be a monster, that is, exactly that which the p
the novel – lacking the readjusting help of Wright's novel – considers
be. But even a monster might trigger sympathy, as in the case of King
where the monster's fate is anthropomorphized. Sympathy – and this is
ly the point of the empathy-theorists – requires empathy as a basis; en
in turn, comprises thus not only the ability to share feelings *with* a chi
but also the ability to imagine how this character must feel, even thou
do not share his murderous inner rage.

Interestingly, Neill defines empathy as sharing feelings *with* a cha
When we see a swimmer in a movie who is about to be attacked by a
without realizing this, we can feel sympathy with the swimmer but nc
pathy, because he does not yet have any fear which we could share
clearly, our sympathy for him depends on our anticipation of what te
fate awaits him and how terrible he must feel then, that is, it depends o1

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[10] The case can also be illustrated through the comparison between a novel like
Tom's Cabin and the typical strategies of the slave narrative. At first glimpse, th
seem to confirm a clear-cut distinction between the strongly empathetic strateg
Stowe's novel and the more sober, distanced strategies of the slave narrative whi
not insist on empathy in order to be able to create sympathy. But the sympathy w
for the fate of the slave depends on exactly that ability which Stowe's novel inten
the ability and willingness to see the slave as a fellow human being for whom bon
separation from family etc. have consequences we think we can understand.

essay. If our emotional engagement with a fictional text is not restricted to
identification or empathy with particular characters, then the whole text draws
us into an emotional engagement and, at the same time, offers ways of man-
aging the conflicting emotions that are involved in this process.

III.

This struggle with one's own emotions has a historical context. Authors such
as Norbert Elias and Albert Hirschmann have described the process of mod-
ernization in terms of a growing need for an economy of emotions.[17] In
Elias's magisterial analysis of the "process of civilization," this growing need
for an economy of emotions is explained as consequence of an increasing in-
terdependence generated by the modern, post-feudal state with its monopo-
lies of power and taxing and the new dependencies these monopolies create
for the individual. Interestingly, this development coincides with the growing
cultural importance of literature and fiction in Western societies. In effect,
one may claim that the emergence of a genre like the novel is linked with the
growing need for an economy of emotions and the processes of constant re-
adjustment and renegotiation made necessary by it. Such a view does not sub-
scribe to a simple contrast between a steadily increasing bureaucratization of
social and economic life and a complementary function of literature "to retain
and explore a range of emotional possibilities which culture seeks to contain
and refine" (Göbel 145). Literature is not the "free" or "subversive" counter-
realm to modernity but one of its institutions. Even in wildly theatrical or
sensationalist forms of literature, "outlaw" emotions are "managed" in the

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the term to denote an increasing standardization and commodification of emotions in
consumer capitalism, but as a way of dealing with emotions in order to function as an
organism and be able to act. Jürgen Schlaeger also uses the term when he calls litera-
ture "a unique tool for emotion management," although he seems to tie that function
to a contribution to cultural self-awareness: "Its capacity to create virtual spaces for
emotional release, to act out, in an 'as if' what happens when the norms are trans-
gressed, makes it a unique tool for emotion management and for giving societies a
chance to understand what price they pay for restricting and controlling the range of
permissible expressions of emotions" ("Emotions and Emotional Excess" 10).

[17] Economy here is used in its original sense of a household in which various needs and
functions have to be organized and mediated, and not in the more recent sense of a
capitalist economy in which the nature of a phenomenon is deformed by the re-
quirements of the market. In its original Greek meaning, the word "economy" means
management of the household (cf. Foucault, *History of Sexuality*). I therefore use the
terms "economy of emotions" and "emotion management" synonymously in the
following argument. It is important to note in this context that emotion management is
not to be confused with self-control, internalization, discipline, or repression –
although all of these can, of course, be forms of emotion management.

considerable anxiety about the possible consequences of such a reorientation. The new valorization of feeling reflects the realities of middle-class life.[22] But, at the same time, it is also a radical anti-patriarchal and anti-aristocratic form of cultural empowerment. For to claim that feeling provides privileged access to moral knowledge and that it should therefore be entitled to "override external forms of authority in decision-making" (Nicholson 2) is to argue against existing social and cultural hierarchies. However, the use of feeling must be measured and well-considered, if one does not want to run the risk of being overwhelmed by passion. Not every emotion can be considered a source of moral knowledge, only "virtuous" sentiments can. Feelings must be controlled by just principles, that is, they must be "managed," and the sentimental novel recommends itself as the literary form that can serve as a guide and "training-ground" for such an economy of emotions. The sentimental novel wants to encourage the reader to trust her feelings as a privileged source of moral knowledge; however, at the same time it also wants to warn her against, and protect her from, the potentially self-destructive consequences of an emotional behavior not guided by just principles. Far from being merely "sentimental," as a later prejudice would have it, the sentimental novel seeks to address the difficult question of how to elevate the role of feelings without being overwhelmed and destroyed by them.

The change can best be understood in contrast to the literature of passion, as it is exemplified, for example, by Elizabethan tragedy. These tragedies depict a world of single-minded passions and strong appetites of what has been called the "vehement self."[23] Because the tragic hero is governed by passion, his fate unfolds in sudden transitions of emotional states that remain unmediated. In contrast, the sentimental heroine strives for the continuity of her self, for only in this way can she claim "subjectivity" and social recognition as an individual. To argue that feeling can sometimes override the claims of authority is acceptable only when feeling does not turn into passion. In order to avoid this, two things have to be achieved: Passions have to be domesticated by just sentiments, and conflicting emotions have to be integrated in one co-

herent identity, so that they can be checked by other feelings.[24] The sentimental novel dramatizes this struggle for integration by juxtaposing two conflicting wishes for recognition. The offers of a socially superior man are tempting but fraught with the danger of a "fall." The recognition of the heroine's worth provided by the family is "safe," but without special social distinction. The ensuing conflict between two possible sources of self-worth stands at the center of the sentimental novel. The heroine has to learn not to follow her feelings in a first-next sequence, as the vehement self would, but to make choices on the basis of her subjectivity.

This struggle for the right choice requires an emotional household in which virtue and feelings are balanced. To achieve this – and not the idealization of a sentimental heroine or her presentation as victim –, is the actual project of the sentimental novel. This project is not defeated by the heroine's fall. On the contrary, her fall is the final step in her emotional apprenticeship as an individual – and, even more so, in that of the reader, because the epistolary form puts the reader in the position of entering the subjective perspective of the main characters and thus to judge their motives.[25] The emotion management which is supposed to become the basis for the reader's own individualization is thus not to be produced by the identification with the victimized heroine but by the reader's movement between different subjectivities. Unfortunately, however, early American versions of the sentimental novel are not yet very adept in setting up such a movement. In contrast to the Richardsonian model, they remain monologic for a number of reasons.[26] The result is an unresolved split or tension, a contradictory stance of both fascination and fear toward the power of the emotions.

Charles Brockden Brown, considered by many the first major American novelist, dramatizes this split by pushing both elements to extremes without seeking any mediation or integration between them. His gothically-inspired

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the rehabilitation the life of feeling has gone through" (283). In the same chapter, Taylor provides an extended analysis of Hutcheson's theory of moral sentiments that strongly influenced the "sentimental revolution."

[22] The process has been described often. See, for example, Stearns's summary in his essay "Historical Analysis in the Study of Emotion": "Then, during a roughly 150-year span, beginning in the second half of the 17th century, the intensity of various emotional relationships within the family increased. 'Love' became increasingly approved as a basis for courtship and marriage, and its absence a reason for dissolution of marriage ... Children were increasingly seen as recipients and providers of affection" (187).

[23] Hamlet is the first hero who is no longer capable of strong passions, of a vehement act of revenge. In the history of emotions, he signals the beginning of a cultural change and can be considered the first "modern" hero.

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[24] The argument that the way to control passions is to develop an emotional economy of "checks and balances" is advanced by Albert Hirschmann in his study *Leidenschaften und Interessen*.

[25] The extent to which a shift to the emotions radicalizes individualization (and democratization) is demonstrated by the other important novelistic genre in the early republic, the gentry-novel of satire. In the novels by Brackenridge, Royall Tyler and Tabitha Tenney individuality is still tied to a character's place in the social and cultural hierarchy, and emotions are treated ironically as a sign of immaturity. There is no possibility yet to individualize oneself through the development of a rich emotional life.

[26] In a project on the development of the focalizing figure in American fiction as a center of empathy, Martin Klepper makes the interesting point that, in contrast to Richardson, American sentimental novels failed to realize the full potential of the sentimental genre by disregarding the crucial function of its dialogic structure, as it finds expression in the epistolary genre. In *Charlotte Temple* the epistolary form is given up altogether, and at the end of *The Coquette*, Eliza Wharton ceases to correspond with her friends.

novels are therefore characterized by an emotional structure that dep;
cally from that of the sentimental novel. On the one side, his main cl
are in a state of constant feverish agitation,[27] on the other side, the
function of a guardianship that would set up a barrier against the self-
tive consequences of emotional excess has become equally unsta
following the Gothic formula, Brown's guardian figures usually turn (
pseudo-guardians in the Byronic mode who lust for power and m;
others. The effect of such a structure of unmediated opposites on th
is one of constant emotional ups and downs, a roller coaster of i
emotional stimulation and nervous suspense. In being overwhelmed
tions, we do not have the distance for empathy – and often no suita
acter to start with.

What kind of aesthetic effect can result from such a narrative? In
to the Richardsonian version of the sentimental genre, there is no at
achieve an integration of conflicting feelings, which could become
for a virtuous moral choice. This effect is enhanced by the unreliable
of Brown's gothic romances. Whereas the sentimental novel must
cerned to provide its heroine with sincerity and moral credibility, Bro
reliable narrators establish an unbridgeable distance and undermine
bilities of empathy.[29] In this world, "sympathy" can be the effect of n
tion. Whereas the sentimental novel wants to provide help for the (
of emotion management, Brown's novels reject this apprenticeship m
insist on the freedom of art to exceed the world of the bourgeois ind
The focus shifts from virtuous emotion management to strong expe
a source of individualization. However, this rejection of the appre
model patterned on the idea of gradual progress toward maturity, pr
somewhat helpless alternative – a movement between fear and fa
that very quickly assumes a rather mechanical dimension, not only
the two emotional states remain unmediated but also because this lac

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[27] See, for example, the following passage from Brown's post-sentimental n
Howard: "My astonishment and rapture were unspeakable. Such condesce
familiarity, surpassing all my fondest imaginations, from beings invested
dazzling superiority, almost intoxicated my senses" (64).

[28] For the epistemological context of this instability see Roland Hagenbücl
"American Literature and the Nineteenth-Century Crisis in Epistemo
Example of Charles Brockden Brown."

[29] I am indebted to Martin Klepper for this observation.

[30] Göbel draws attention to the rejection of the novel of education implied in
of the Gothic romance: "A Gothic romance without ungoverned passions w
ly not work. And contrary to the novel of education the Gothic romance doe
a slow improvement, but delays the development of the heroine till all poss
sive emotions, fear, terror, despair or love have been experienced, if poss
than once" (138).

official ideals of femininity, only to affirm these ideals in her own develop-
ment from tomboy to self-sacrificing sentimental heroine. The emergence of
the historical and the domestic novel in the U.S. thus presents a moment in
which the American novel not only joins literary traditions established by
Defoe and Richardson, but also begins to contribute to them in its own inde-
pendent way. In terms of emotional structure, the basis of this achievement is
a simple but skillful readjustment that can be described most conveniently in
comparison with the novels of Charles Brockden Brown. Brown's characters
find themselves in extreme states of emotion, but these states remain unre-
lated. In rapid sequence, the individual is either in one state or another, but
the two can never be integrated in one identity. The character who believes to
be in control always has a double, so to speak. What still coexists in states of
unresolved doubleness and duplicity in the novels of Brown is brought into a
causal sequence in the novels of Cooper and Warner. Whereas a rare moment
of emotional self-control in Brown only provokes a new and yet stronger
dose of terror, in Cooper or Warner it leads to successful self-assertion and is
finally rewarded by social recognition. However, this successful economy of
emotions also provoked strong hostility in the periods of high modernism
and postmodernism, fueled by a criticism that again and again draws attention
to the danger of becoming imprisoned in the "iron cage" of an internalization
of discipline.

Actually, this danger was already pointed out shortly after the formation of
this new economy of emotions. It is an important part of the growing differ-
entiation of, and specialization within, the literary system of the period that at
about the same time, influenced by the Romantic redefinition of the artist as
heroic individual, but also in reaction to the emergence and gradual consoli-
dation of a literary mass market, a new form of fiction emerged side by side
and in obvious competition with the genres I have described – a form which,
for the sake of terminological distinction, and in analogy to a concept used in
film studies, may be termed the art novel. By this term I do not mean a novel
that deals with art but one that strives to be art or is classified as art, or more
precisely, that draws on the prestige of the category of art to authorize itself
as fiction. Consequently, the art novel is the first type of novel that no longer
relies on the promise of a moral or social function of literature for its authori-
zation. For those literary historians who discuss the history of the American
novel primarily in terms of certain aesthetic achievements defined by mod-
ernism and formalism, this history therefore begins with writers like Melville,
Hawthorne, and Poe.

The art novel of the American Renaissance is the product of a newly
emerging type of social character, the alienated gentry-intellectual who turns
bohemian and literary critic in the second half of the 19th century, until he

In the Romantic art novel, the interplay between conflicting emotions is generated by the vision of a strong, exceptional individuality. In terms of cultural history, this is, I think, the basic contribution and innovation which the art novel provides: It announces and explores a new stage in individuation that goes beyond the still fairly formulaic definitions of identity offered by the tale of adventure and the domestic novel. This articulation of a radically conceived individuality, frequently and very fittingly praised for its originality and unconventionality, is characterized by two major constituents. On the one hand, the unfettered and proudly programmatic expression of such strong emotions as rage, anger, defiance, and contempt signals new and often unsatiable claims of the individual; on the other hand, the potentially destructive force of such strong emotions calls for a protection against their self-destructive consequences. Radical individuation is not good for your health! Thus, a major problem that emerges from the art novel's dramatization of radical individuality is to redefine the relation of the individual to the world against which it rebels, but on which it also depends. For Ahab, recognition of the limits to his own fantasy of power and independence results in an experience of failure and rejection which he never overcomes. And neither is the problem solved for the surviving Ishmael. As subsequent narratives by Melville show, above all *Pierre* and *Bartleby*, Melville could not find a satisfactory answer to the problem of the social place of radical individualism. This explains, on the other hand, the crucial role of Hawthorne's novel *The Scarlet Letter* in the development we are tracing here. In American literature, it is a major text because it sets out to clarify the relation between the exceptional individual, the sinner and artist figure Hester Prynne, and a society ruled by social conventions that stifle individuality.

The Scarlet Letter begins with an extraordinary event designed to create "strong emotions" in the reader. The public exhibition of the adulteress Hester Prynne and her stigmatization through the letter A remains one of the most haunting scenes in American literature and establishes a spontaneous sense of injustice on the side of the reader. However, through the many ambiguities Hawthorne creates in the novel and through a carefully controlled oscillation between an allegorical and a symbolic mode of representation, that is, between a moral allegory and a tale of Romantic transgression, the novel works against any feeling and fantasy of revenge. This is not done in the interest of an idea of civilization in which the individual has to subordinate her own desires to the greater goal, but in the interest of the individual herself. The novel manages to constantly move the reader between opposing perspectives and emotions, between feelings of defiance and social responsibility,

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motivation. This complicating role of narrative perspective in emotion management is even more obvious in the case of Poe's mad first-person narrators.

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anger and doubt, empathy and distance. But it carefully (and skillfully) avoids the danger that the alternate perspectives, modes of representation and states of emotion might neutralize one another. In the interplay between transgression and integration each side has to give. In this sense, *The Scarlet Letter* is a novel about a new, yet utopian contract in which both sides, the independent individual and a civilization shaken out of its complacence, are invited to join. Art, or, more specifically, the literary romance, becomes a privileged realm for the articulation of this contract, for only readers who have undergone the experience of a repeated change in perspective and emotional stance will be flexible enough to join in the contract established by literature.

VI.

Moby Dick was published in 1850, as were *The Scarlet Letter* and *The Wide, Wide World*. It is a defining moment in which all the elements that will shape the future of the American novel in the 19th and 20th century are in place. And so are the narrative strategies for dealing with the problem of a new emotional economy. In this context, illusionism[35] may be the single most important factor for securing an emotional engagement of the reader. Where emotions are distrusted, illusionism suffers, as is the case in the strange juxtaposition of painstaking detail and ever renewed mysteries that characterizes the novels of Charles Brockden Brown and creates a high-pitched theatricality that often has an involuntary camp-effect nowadays. On the other hand, illusionism is crucial for the adventure story and the domestic novel as a basis for the reader's participation in the "adventure" of emotional self-control. Both forms cannot accept a disturbance of illusionist consistency, nor can they be interested in foregrounding their own fictionality. This, in turn, must be the strategy of the art novel, if fiction is to be the place where a new contract is to be established in which neither side, and that also means, no mode of representation, dominates.

The Romantic art novel cannot be interested in a consistent illusion of the fictional world, because this would mean to reproduce an existing economy, whereas the claims for a re-empowerment of the individual are so far-reaching that a code in which the conflicting social and aesthetic claims could be reconciled does not yet exist and has to be explored by means of fiction.

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[35] I use the word "illusionism" here as an equivalent of the German term "Illusionsbildung," that is, the construction of a plausible fictive world that invites the reader to treat this world "as if" it were real for the time of the reading. Illusionism in this sense is not to be confused with realism.

Thus, modes of signification co-exist in an uneasy alliance in the art novel. This explains its oscillation between an allegorical and a symbolic mode, as well as its obsession with ambiguities of all kinds which hold out the promise of meaning without ever fulfilling it. The realistic novel, on the other hand, is violently anti-romantic (this is the one point where it departs most clearly from the Hawthornian model with its strong emphasis on the psychology of characters).[36] Realism insists that a new social contract and a new economy of emotions is only possible if the characters within the novel, as well as text and reader, enter a world of shared meanings. Illusionism is therefore crucial.

What is the role of the realistic novel in the ongoing search for an economy of emotions, for an effective form of emotion management? Its critique of the sentimentality of the popular romance, as it can be found in exemplary fashion in W. D. Howells's novel *The Rise of Silas Lapham,* stands in the service of a so-called economy of pain and is directed against domestic fiction's ideal of self-sacrifice. However, taking away one form of emotion management does not yet produce another, and, indeed, despite its strong criticism of the role emotions should *not* play, *The Rise of Silas Lapham* is not all too clear on how the individual should deal with her emotions other than saying that they should not have priority and be controlled by common sense.[37] Henry James's novel *Washington Square,* patterned after Balzac's *Eugénie Grandet* and often considered James's first realistic novel, is more helpful in this respect. The novel tells the prototypical realistic story of social apprenticeship: the story of an individual who develops her identity in a long, painful process of disappointment and disillusionment. But there is also an unmistakable influence by the domestic novel in its focus on the themes of courtship and marriage.[38] In following the apprenticeship-pattern, Catherine Sloper, like the heroine of the domestic novel, starts out as an ugly duckling, goes through the trials and tribulations of a courtship, and finds her identity as a grown-up in the end. However, in contrast to the domestic novel, this entry into adulthood (which is, at the same time, also the moment of successful individuation), is achieved at a painful price. It begins when Catherine realizes that her lover, for whom

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[36] On the surprisingly strong and far-reaching influence of Hawthorne on American writers of the "realist age," see Richard Brodhead's excellent study *The School of Hawthorne.*

[37] "The novelists might be the greatest possible help to us," says the Minister Sewell in his famously programmatic speech, "if they painted life as it is, and human feelings in their true proportion and relation" (Howells 183). Emotions should not be repressed but, in following realist aesthetics, represented in "true proportion."

[38] For the following argument, I am drawing on my discussion of *Washington Square* ("Das Individuum und die Macht der sozialen Beziehung: Henry James") in the two-volume collection of essays on the concept and history of subjectivity, edited by Roland Hagenbüchle, Reto Luzius Fetz and Peter Schulz under the title *Geschichte und Vorgeschichte der modernen Subjektivität.*

she was willing to sacrifice her relationship with her father, has deceived and manipulated her all along.

One of the most fascinating aspects of the work of James is his unsparing depiction of how human beings struggle for power and control over others. The lesson Catherine learns is how to protect herself against this manipulation. The heroine of the sentimental novel cannot overcome her wish for union and her fear of separation. This makes her highly vulnerable and leads to her eventual downfall. The heroine of the domestic novel learns to discipline herself only because such self-control pleases the guardian figures whose recognition she seeks. She can no longer be seduced by a promise of symbiotic fusion. But she can be guided by a superior father figure who rewards her search for recognition. Catherine Sloper resembles the heroine of the domestic novel in her search for recognition by father and lover, but in view of the inherently manipulative nature of social relations she can no longer count on being rewarded for her obedience. As a consequence, she has to derive her selfhood from her own inner sense of self-control, for only this form of self-control can prevent her from becoming a victim of her own emotions. The inner-directed "character" does no longer depend on others for her sense of self-esteem. Psychic self-regulation thus becomes the precondition for selfhood. The basis for self-discipline is no longer love but internalization. Disillusion leads to individuation, because it throws the individual back onto her own resources.

Psychic self-regulation comes at a price, then. It becomes possible only through inner retreat, if not renunciation, because these are forms that make the individual immune against the emotional manipulation of others. The individual gains independence and a sense of selfhood because she establishes a source of self-esteem that lies outside the reach of the two men who have struggled for possession over her and have become like-minded manipulators in the process. Catherine, who for a long time was acted upon, fortifies herself by erecting a wall around her inner self. It is the impenetrability of her inner life that puts her out of reach of the imposition of others. To be "inner-directed" means to be no longer dependent on the recognition of others. However, as James also reveals, this internalization can only be achieved at the price of a new, almost neurotic dependence, namely the strict observance of one's own rules of self-discipline. This pattern will repeat itself in *The Portrait of a Lady* and especially in Isabel's final return to Osmond, which, in its puzzling adherence to internalized principles of conduct, strikes many critics as "neurotic." But it only acts out the logic of internalization that is the basis of individualization for James.

Internalization as a form of emotion management that functions like an inner compass and therefore no longer depends on outside recognition brings

the literary search for an economy of emotions, which begins in the 18th century, to a culminating point. Soon this newly achieved form of emotional self-control will be redefined as repression. Already in naturalism, the pendulum seems to swing back to melodramatic emotional excess in order to tear away the thin protective veneer of civilization and expose the reader to the true forces of life. Norris has illustrated the fundamental difference between classical American realism and naturalism in a provocative characterization of naturalist aesthetics in his essay "Zola as Romantic Writer":

> Terrible things must happen to the characters of the naturalistic tale. They must be twisted from the ordinary, wrenched out from the quiet, uneventful round of every-day life, and flung into the throes of a vast and terrible drama that works itself out in unleashed passions, in blood, and in sudden death. (72)

Is this the final collapse of an economy of emotions? The goal of the realist text must be to strengthen the inner-directness of the reader, for example, by taking back the authorial voice while at the same time keeping the main characters at a distance from the reader. Although there is a lot of interiority and psychologization, it is not presented in a manner that invites our empathy; and although the realist novel often tells heart-breaking, potentially melodramatic stories of individual pain, it presents these (melo)dramas of a rise and fall in such a way that we always keep a certain distance and have to come up with our own judgments on the basis of a shared world view. "Economy" of pain here also assumes the meaning of not being overwhelmed, of being economical and measured about one's own emotional involvement. Internalization can only work if it is put in place by the individual himself/herself.

In a fine essay on Theodore Dreiser's *Sister Carrie*, Walter Benn Michaels contrasts this realist economy of emotions with Carrie Meeber's consumerist economy of desire.[39] The revolutionary aspect of Dreiser's novel is, of course, Carrie's radical liberation from internalization. Carrie, who develops as a person by looking at others and fashioning herself after their behavior and appearance, is the opposite of an inner-directed character and probably the first example of an other-directed character in American literature. Feelings are never deep with her as, for example, when she first leaves Drouet and then Hurstwood. Not accidentally, her calling is that of an actress who can slip in and out of changing identities. And yet, contrary to the image of a world of merely fleeting, shallow desires, there is one strong emotion that drives not only Carrie but also another one of Dreiser's other-directed characters, Clyde Griffiths in *An American Tragedy*. This emotion is shame and it is directly re-

lated to the liberation from internalization.[40] Carrie and Clyde experience strong feelings of shame when they look around, to paraphrase Philip Fisher, in order to see who they are.[41] In order to gain any sense of self, they look at themselves through the eyes of others, and their feeling of shame is the response to what they think these others see – and what they consequently think they are. The inner-directed character will feel shame when he has failed to control himself, the other-directed character when the "open" self believes to have failed other's expectations.

What kind of emotional structure can result from such a narrative? The novel cannot simply offer itself to the reader as an object of desire and as merely another source of self-fashioning. This would transform literature into a mere consumer object. The naturalist novel wants to analyze and study the sources of human motivation, but these can be analyzed only when the novel goes beyond merely mimicking these motivations. This explains the double narrative perspective, not only of Dreiser's novels, but of naturalism in general. Since the characters are no longer inner-directed and often, in fact, "primitive," the narrator cannot simply step back and let them speak for themselves. He has to make clear what the characters themselves do not comprehend. On the other hand, the naturalist novel fails if it does not manage to communicate a sense of the terrible power of those natural forces that exceed civilizatory control. The reader is to be shaken out of this world, but, at the same time, he is also to be placed in the position of a scientific observer. Emotional exaggeration takes on the form of a strategy and opens up a range of possibilities of emotional engagement. The naturalist novel can be read "anxiously" but also "scientifically" and with all kinds of combinations in between. And because there is no predictable response, there can also no longer be any exemplary model of emotional management.

VII.

The modern art novel has further moved away from any attempt at articulating and negotiating an emotional economy as a whole and has, on the contrary, turned into a medium for the ever more radical and experimental articulation of single states of emotion or vague "Gestimmtheiten" (i.e. moods).

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[39] Cf. Walter Benn Michaels, "*Sister Carrie*'s Popular Economy."

[40] In a chapter on "The privatising of passion" in his book *Modernity and Self-Identity*, Anthony Giddens links "mechanisms of shame" to the "'open' nature of self-identity" (167) in modern society, where shame replaces guilt that results from the internalization of social and moral rules in one's conscience.

[41] Cf. Philip Fisher's superb chapter on Dreiser's *An American Tragedy* in his book *Hard Facts*. For an excellent discussion of the crucial role of shame in Dreiser's work cf. Gogol.

Modernism itself, above all in its unsparing critique of sentimentality in literature, has often created the image of an anti-emotional literature in which strategies of cognitive defamiliarization undermine strong emotional attachments in order to liberate the reader from conventions and crippling emotional dependencies. Reading would then be a primarily cognitive activity, and the dominant theory of reading that we have, Iser's *Act of Reading*, seems to confirm this view in its emphasis on the wandering point of view and the experience of constant perspectival shifts. However, reading a wide sample of modernist literature does by no means confirm the view of an anti-emotional literature. It can, on the contrary, often provide shattering experiences. The work of many modernist artists, from Hemingway to Faulkner, or Abstract Expressionism in painting, is driven by the attempt to penetrate to an authentic emotional truth beneath cultural convention that reveals itself in existentially intense feelings like anger, rage, or aggression. This excess, in fact, is the only way to give expression to a subjectivity outside of social roles. Likewise, the seemingly further retreat of emotion in experimental postmodernism should be read not merely as retreat but as an attempt to reveal the discursive or linguistic base of the expression of emotions.[42] It may be true that in a media-saturated consumer culture, feelings have become more shallow, but certainly not because of postmodern experiments. The postmodern experiment tacitly relies on a cultural division of labor in which no single genre or medium can still represent an economy of emotions fully or in any representative way. As a consequence, each of these genres and media – postmodern literature, ethnic literature, horror movies, or contemporary popular music, to name but a few – has now been set free to maximize a particular effect, often with little or hardly any restraint left.

This raises an interesting point, namely, whether in view of these developments it still makes sense to speak of the need for an economy of emotion which is to be explored by fiction. A similar point has been raised against Elias, for in view of our current liberation of such cultural phenomena as sexuality or excessive violence his thesis of an ever increasing need for a control of the psychic apparatus no longer seems to be up to date. At a closer look, however, what we witness at the moment is not a reversal of the development toward an increasing economy of the emotions, but a new stage in cultural specialization and thus a new need for a readjustment of our emotion management. Freedom in expressing emotions may have increased, but at the same time these increased possibilities require an even greater discipline on

the part of the individual to integrate them all in one identity and life.[43] This integration, however, is no longer provided by the emotional structure of the literary work. It now has to be achieved by the individual. In our relentless search for a liberation from internalization and increased possibilities for a direct, unfettered expression of "authentic" emotions, we have placed even greater burdens upon ourselves.

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[42] On this point, see, for example Evelyne Keitel's helpful study *Von den Gefühlen beim Lesen: Zur Lektüre amerikanischer Gegenwartsliteratur.*

[43] The fact that modern Western societies may by now practice a division of labor, as Daniel Bell points out in his *The Cultural Contradictions of Capitalism*, with the economic sphere characterized by increasing requirements of self-discipline and the realm of culture by increasing possibilities for "hedonism" (as Bell calls it), cannot be used as an argument against Elias (although it may point to a need to adjust his thesis to present-day conditions). On the contrary, this new separation of spheres requires even more self-discipline. We may be able to dispense with (almost) all self-control on the techno-dance floor and thereafter, but, at the same time, we also have to learn to function in the modern economy in order to be able to afford such "hedonism." The challenge to combine the self-discipline needed in professional life and the "hedonism" of our personal lives poses a greater challenge for self-regulation and emotion management than at any stage before. Cf. Artur Bogner's and Cas Wouters's discussion of Hochschild's approach in "Kolonialisierung der Herzen?".

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