What kind of work is writing? In Charlotte Perkins Gilman's *Women and Economics* (1898), it is simultaneously paradigmatic of "economic production" and, like production itself, as Gilman understands it, hardly economic at all. "Economic production," she writes, "is the natural expression of human energy"; "human beings tend to produce, as a gland to secrete."[1] In fact, the desire to produce precedes even the desire to consume: "'I want to mark!'" cries the child, demanding the pencil. He does not want to eat. He wants to mark" (116–17). Not only is production imagined here as the most primitive desire, it is imagined as in some sense more primitive than any desire can be. Children may "want" to mark, but glands don't want to secrete, and insofar as the child marking is like the gland secreting, the child's work seems more a matter of physiology than of psychology.

Gilman's polemical point in insisting on the absolute priority of production is, of course, to emphasize the unnaturalness of an economic system that denies "free productive expression" to "half the human race," i.e., to women. Women who are not allowed to mark are like glands somehow prevented from secreting. In response to the claim that woman's economic role as a "nonproductive consumer" is "natural," Gilman thus appeals to a "process" more natural even than the "process of consumption." But if the analogy between production and secretion effectively forestalls one kind of question—why do women want to work?—it raises at the same time the possibility of another—what exactly does production produce? The child wants to mark because it is natural to want to "make," but when he marks, what is he making?

Women and Economics is largely uninterested in this question; in this text, production is so normal that the notion of secretions as exemplary products seems only a fleeting oddity. But Gilman's famous short story "The Yellow Wallpaper" (1892),

[1]Charlotte Perkins Gilman, *Women and Economics*, ed. Carl Degler (New York, 1966), 116. Subsequent page references are cited in parentheses in the text.

although it too has its normalizing tendencies, is more committed to examining the naturalization of production.

From one standpoint it may be misleading to describe "The Yellow Wallpaper" as having normalizing *tendencies*, since, in Gilman's own account, the story is utterly committed to the project of normalization, having been written against S. Weir Mitchell's infamous "rest cure" ("Rest means with me . . . [the] absence of all possible use of brain and body")[2] and in praise of "work, the normal life of every human being." After her "nervous breakdown," Gilman wrote, it was only by rejecting Mitchell's advice "never to touch pen, brush or pencil again" that she saved her sanity. Although a Boston doctor characterized it as maddening to read, "The Yellow Wallpaper" was written, according to Gilman, with a therapeutic motive: "It was not intended to drive people crazy, but to save people from being driven crazy."[3] If Mitchell's rest cure meant, as he himself described it, "neither reading nor writing," Gilman's work cure required that her audience read and, above all, that she herself write.[4]

But while it is perfectly true that the seemingly crazy narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" is forbidden by her doctor husband to write, it is by no means the case that she doesn't in fact do a lot of writing. For one thing, the story is told as a kind of diary. And for another, the "dead paper"[5] on which it is written

[2]S. Weir Mitchell, *Lectures on Diseases of the Nervous System* (Philadelphia, 1885), 275.

[3]Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "Why I Wrote 'The Yellow Wallpaper,'" in *The Charlotte Perkins Gilman Reader*, ed. Ann J. Lane (New York, 1980), 20.

[4]It is in this light that Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar describe the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" as "literally locked away from creativity" and go on to read her escape from behind the wallpaper as emblemizing "the progress of nineteenth-century literary women out of the texts defined by patriarchal poetics into the open spaces of their own authority" (Sandra M. Gilbert and Susan Gubar, *The Madwoman in the Attic* [New Haven, Conn., 1979], 90, 91). Gilbert and Gubar are right, I think, to see the story as a successful search for authority; in my view, however, the narrator is not so much locked away from creativity as locked into it, and the authority she establishes radicalizes rather than rejects a poetics defined more aptly by reference to a market society than a patriarchal one.

[5]Charlotte Perkins Gilman, "The Yellow Wallpaper," in *The Charlotte Per-*

is so strikingly analogized to the "inanimate thing" (7) that is the wallpaper itself, with its "lame uncertain curves" (5), which, violating "every principle of design" (9), may come to seem unreadable as a decorative "pattern" precisely to the extent that they come to seem readable as a kind of writing—or, if that seems too strong, as a kind of marking. For the narrator's two main activities in "The Yellow Wallpaper" are both forms of marking: she makes marks on paper when she writes, and she also makes "a very funny mark" on the wall when she creeps around the room, "a long, straight, even *smooch*, as if it had been rubbed over and over" (15). Marks may be produced either by covering paper or by uncovering it. And in the course of this marking, the "dead paper," "inanimate thing," comes alive; it begins to move, it begins to smell, it begins to mark back—the "smooch" the narrator makes on the wallpaper is doubled by the "yellow smooches" (14) the wallpaper makes on the narrator. Her own body thus takes its place in the chain of writing surfaces, and she herself comes to seem an animated effect of writing; for not only does her body bear the trace of writing but also it is described as having literally emerged from the wallpaper, so that she can end by wondering if those other "creeping women" "come out of the wallpaper as I did" (18). It is as if she has written herself into her body or, more precisely perhaps, written herself into existence. "'I want to mark!'" says the child in *Women and Economics*: "He is not seeking to get something into himself but to put something out of himself" (117). Beginning with the child's desire to put something out of herself, the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" ends by writing herself into herself.

I suggest, then, that the work of writing in "The Yellow Wallpaper" is the work of something like self-generation and that, far from being a story about a woman driven crazy by Weir Mitchell's refusal to allow her to produce, it is about a woman driven crazy (if she is crazy) by a commitment to production so complete that it requires her to begin by producing herself. Weir Mitchell recommended the infantilization of nervous

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kins Gilman Reader, ed. Ann J. Lane (New York, 1980), 3. Subsequent page references are cited in parentheses in the text.

women; sufferers from "hysterical motor ataxia" were given kneepads and taught to balance themselves on all fours before learning to "creep." After creeping came walking: "following nature's lessons with docile mind, we have treated the woman as nature treats an infant."[6] "The Yellow Wallpaper" repeats and extends this treatment—not only does the narrator creep, but she also ties herself to the bed with an umbilical cord ("I am securely fastened now by my well-hidden rope" [18])—while reimagining the return to infancy as a moment of willed self-begetting.

But to put the point in this way—to characterize "The Yellow Wallpaper" as transforming Mitchell's scene of feminine infantilization into a scene of feminine self-generation, as redescribing feminine helplessness as feminine empowerment—may be to simplify the discourse of "nervous disease" and the logic of work and ownership in which it plays a part. For while Weir Mitchell did indeed think that "the mass of women are by physiological nature more likely to be nervous than are men,"[7] he did not identify this "weakness" of women with an inability to work. Rather, the physiological weakness of women inevitably makes their bodies the site of a certain kind of work. Always in danger of losing "self-control," women must make "repeated efforts" to resist hysteria, with its physical symptoms (paralysis, tremor, spasm) and, even worse, its mental ones (a "nervous" girl in one of Mitchell's novels, for example, develops an "alternate consciousness" and writes shameful love letters to a man for whom the "real" girl feels only respectful friendship).[8] Thus, to be a woman is to confront on a daily basis the physiological labor of "self-conquest."[9] And the "peculiar physiology" of women turns out to require not that they be treated differently from men but that they be treated more like them: "The boy is taught self-control, repression of emotion, not to cry when hurt. Teach your girls these things and you will

[6]Mitchell, *Diseases of the Nervous System*, 47.
[7]S. Weir Mitchell, *Doctor and Patient* (Philadelphia, 1887), 137.
[8]S. Weir Mitchell, *Dr. North and His Friends* (New York, 1900), 302.
[9]Mitchell, *Diseases of the Nervous System*, 33.

in the end assure to them . . . interior control."[10] Woman's weakness is the pretext for woman's work, and woman's work only makes visible the efforts required of every self.

The (male) child wants to mark. He wants to work, to "put something out of himself," and, by working, to guarantee control over himself. But the hysteric also wants to mark, to write passionate love letters, for example. The difference is that the hysteric's efforts seem to produce marks not of herself but of some other self. In fact, according to William James in *The Principles of Psychology*,[11] the phenomenon of "hysterical" or "automatic" writing was the "most cogent and striking" proof of the existence of what Mitchell called the "alternative consciousness." Thus Gilman's normal child wants not simply to mark; he wants to make a mark that will be identifiably *his*, for only then does that mark provide the guarantee of identity he is seeking in the first place. If the threat of hysteria is the threat of losing self-control, of sometimes becoming someone else, the point of marking is to produce evidence that you are still the same person. Your mark is a continual reminder that you are you, and the production of such reminders enforces the identity it memorializes. From this perspective, the hysterical woman embodies not only the economic primacy of work but also the connection between the economic primacy of work and the philosophical problem of personal identity. The economic question—How do I produce myself?—and the therapeutic question—How do I stay myself?—find their parallel in the epistemological question, How do I know myself?—or more specifically, as James puts it, How do I know today that "I am the same self that I was yesterday"? What does "consciousness" "mean when it calls the present self the *same* with one of the past selves which it has in mind?" (316).

Phenomenologically speaking, we can tell which past or "distant" selves are ours, James thinks, by the feelings of

[10]Mitchell, *Doctor and Patient*, 146.

[11]William James, *The Principles of Psychology* (1890; reprint, Cambridge, Mass., 1983), 202. Subsequent page references are cited in parentheses in the text.

"warmth and intimacy" we experience when thinking about them. These selves bear the "mark" of "animal warmth," and we naturally separate them "as a collection from whatever selves have not this mark, much as out of a herd of cattle let loose for the winter on some wide western prairie the owner picks out and sorts together when the time for the round-up comes in the spring, all the beasts on which he finds his own particular brand."(317). In this analysis, despite the weirdness of its Wild West rhetoric, James thinks that he differs little from what he takes to be the two most common views of personal identity, the "spiritualist" (or Cartesian) and the "associationist" (or Humean). Extending the metaphor of the herd, however, brings out what seems to him a major difference. If our selves are all bound together by common ownership, the question naturally arises as to what sort of thing or self owns them. For the "spiritualists," the answer is a "real Owner," a "pure spiritual entity," a "soul"; for the associationists, who deny the existence of any such entity, there can be no adequate answer, and indeed, the institutions of selfhood and ownership are both mere fictions. According to James, however, the "owner" of the herd of selves is neither an enduring spiritual substance nor a mere fiction. It is instead a " 'section' of consciousness or pulse of thought" (319), "namely, the real, present onlooking, remembering, 'judging thought' " (321). This "thought" sorts through the "past facts which it surveys," collecting some and discarding others, "and so makes a unity." And with this account James thinks he has produced a description of the self that explains how we can experience it both as empirical (instead of spiritual) and as real (instead of fictional).

At the same time, however, James acknowledges that there is something disturbingly counterintuitive about this scenario, since it depicts the self continually *making* a unity that common sense tells us must already be there. It is as if for the "thought" (following out the original Lockean metaphor), all the world were always America, and the separate thoughts "wild cattle . . . lassoed by a newly-created settler and then owned for the first time" (321)—whereas common sense tells us that "the past selves never were wild cattle, they were always owned," an objection that, if admitted, seems fatal to the project of avoiding

spiritualism and associationism both. For it now seems that the "mere continuity" between thoughts implied by their common mark is insufficient to account for the unity of the self, and we find ourselves forced either to postulate an "arch-ego," a soul, or to assert with Hume that the self is a fiction.

Still, the original difficulties with these positions remain: we have no experience of anything like a soul, and we do seem to have a sense of a real personal identity. How, then, can we account for the way in which the present thought establishes ownership over past thoughts? Our mistake, James thinks, has been to imagine the thought as *establishing* ownership over past thoughts; instead, we should think of it as *already* owning them. The owner has "inherited his 'title.'" His own "birth" is always coincident with "the death of another owner"; indeed, the very existence of an owner must coincide with the coming into existence of the owned. "Each Thought is thus born an owner, and dies owned, transmitting whatever it realized as its Self to its own later proprietor" (322).

While the notion of an inherited title that never lapses thus lies at the heart of the Jamesian economy of selfhood, Gilman's "The Yellow Wallpaper" begins with an explicit challenge to the exact coincidences required by selves in or as an "hereditary estate" (3). For not only do the "ancestral halls" the narrator and her husband are renting for the summer of her breakdown belong to somebody else's ancestors, their very availability for rent is a function of title disputes among the true descendants: "There was some legal trouble, I believe, something about the heirs and co-heirs; anyhow the place has been empty for years" (4). She understands these legalities as spoiling what she perceives as the "romantic" "ghostliness" of the place; but title disputes don't spoil the ghostliness, they *constitute* it: the house is "haunted" by the ghosts of competing claimants. And in this respect, of course, the house is no more than an emblem for the narrator herself, haunted, like all hysterics—and, if hereditary title breaks down, like all selves—by the ghosts of "alternate consciousnesses." The task of achieving "proper self-control" is the task of banishing the ghosts, of legitimating title.

In one version of romance, what Freud called the "family

romance," legitimation was made possible by the discovery of a secret noble line of descent. This is, in fact, the plot of Weir Mitchell's popular historical novel *Hugh Wynne*, whose young Revolutionary War hero discovers while fighting to free the colonies from Britain that he is himself descended from British nobility. The question of what it means to be an American rebel is here neatly answered by the discovery that one is also an English nobleman; the revolutionary battle for a new identity becomes indistinguishable from the reactionary battle to repossess one's old identity. Such plots had been popular in the United States at least since Hawthorne's *The American Claimant*, and it is hardly surprising that in the turmoil of the nineties they should resurface either in Mitchell's historical romance or in James's Western.

In the "colonial mansion" of "The Yellow Wallpaper," however, the moment that James's account of "herdsmen coming rapidly into possession of the same cattle by transmission of an original title by bequest" (321) leaves most opaque (the moment, that is, of the "original" "bequest") is the moment on which Gilman obsessively focuses. More Lockean—which is to say, in this context, more relentlessly bourgeois—even than James, Gilman imagines that the wild cattle really are "lassoed by a newly-created settler and then owned for the first time"; she imagines that the self can only legitimately own itself if it has worked for itself. The story of "The Yellow Wallpaper" is a story of the origin of property and, by the same token, of the origin of the self. Where the herdsman's mark identifies what is his, the writer's mark creates what will be her. In a "nursery" emptied of all children, not just the "ancestral" ones who used to live there but even her own baby ("Why, I wouldn't have a child of mine . . . live in such a room for worlds" [11])—emptied, that is, of all signs of hereditary succession—the narrator enacts her own birth. One's child is a reminder of the facts of reproduction, the inevitability of fathers and mothers, the natural foundation of inherited title. But in a nursery without children—without, that is, any *other* children—what Gilman takes to be the facts of economic life can replace the facts of sexual life: "Economic production is the natural expression of human energy,—not sex-energy at all, but race-energy. . . . Socially or-

ganized human beings tend to produce as a gland to secrete: it is the essential nature of the relation" (116). The economy of autoproduction finds its physiological basis not in the sexual organs but in organs of internal secretion, in something like the pituitary gland; the "creative impulse, the desire to make," is the desire to make something out of oneself, to make oneself out of oneself.[12]

But to put the point in this way, in a way that, I have argued, we are driven to put it by "The Yellow Wallpaper," is to suggest also the conceptual (not to mention the empirical) difficulty of Gilman's project. The child who wants to mark "is not seeking to get something into himself but to put something out of himself" (117). In the "organic life of society," "production and consumption" may go "hand in hand," but "production comes first" (116). If, however, the paradigm of production is secretion—making a mark that is not only yours but you—the difference between production and consumption, between making yourself and using yourself up, may come to seem precarious. Thus Weir Mitchell's *Wear and Tear; or, Hints for the Overworked* laments the "expenditure of nerve material" involved in mental labor and reproves the laborers for living off the "interest" of previous "accumulations of power" and for "wastefully spending the capital" as well.[13] People who work too hard

[12]It may be worth noting that James, as one illustration of what he calls "alternating personality," cites Mitchell's account of the "remarkable" case of Mary Reynolds. Mary, a "dull and melancholy young woman, inhabiting the Pennsylvania wilderness in 1811," fell into a profound and unnaturally long sleep from which she awoke with a personality changed in two ways: she was "cheerful" instead of melancholy, and she had forgotten everything and everyone, above all her family. Skills like reading and writing she quickly learned (or relearned), but she "never did learn, or, at least, never would acknowledge the ties of consanguinity." For the next fifteen or sixteen years she passed periodically from one state to the other, now becoming her melancholy self again and recognizing "parental" ties, now cheering up and denying that she was anyone's "daughter." Eventually the alternating stopped and she lived out her last twenty-five years in the second state, a "rational, industrious, and very cheerful" schoolteacher (S. Weir Mitchell, "Transactions of the College of Physicians of Philadelphia, April 4, 1888," as quoted in James, *Principles of Psychology*, 359, 360, 361, 362).

[13]S. Weir Mitchell, *Wear and Tear; or, Hints for the Overworked* (Philadelphia, 1891), 13, 8.

are here described as people who don't work at all; the terms of abuse ordinarily reserved for those who consume without producing are directed instead at those who consume by producing too much.

Against Gilman's reading of herself as a priestess of production, one might then read "The Yellow Wallpaper" as undermining the gospel it meant to preach. Marking produces a "smooch" on the paper, a residue of one's own body on the paper that is simultaneously an opening in the paper. Through that opening—itself an opening in a body, since the wallpaper is figured as skin, and the smooch is thus an orifice—emerges another body: or rather, more body, an important difference, since the narrator is giving birth not to her child but to herself. She is making herself out of her secretions, consuming her body in order to produce her body. "The creative impulse, the desire to make, to express the inner thought in outer form . . . this is the distinguishing character of humanity" (116). But when the "outer form" is the very substance of the "inner thought," creating seems less like making a body out of nothing than like reconstituting it by redistributing it, reproducing it by circulating it. Insofar as the paper you mark will turn out to be you (its surface will be the surface of your own body), and insofar as the marks on that paper will involve putting something on it *and* taking something off it, even, eventually, taking something (yourself) out of it, Gilman's distinction between making and taking (women are "forbidden to make but encouraged to take" [118]) looks pretty shaky. The child wants to mark and not to eat, but in "The Yellow Wallpaper," the desire to mark is the desire to mark oneself, just as the desire to eat, it seems to me, is the desire to eat oneself—which is why the bedstead in that internal cavity, the nursery, is "fairly gnawed" (17) and also why, although her "appetite" is said to be "better," the narrator does not gain weight. Insofar as the self is the common term here, insofar as your mark is you and you eat what you are, marking and eating cannot be understood antithetically. Thus in "The Yellow Wallpaper," marks made by putting something on are "smooches," and marks made by taking something off are "smooches" too. Any exchange of marks between wallpaper and woman simultaneously puts on and takes

off. Marking is eating under a different description. If production and consumption are not precisely identical (one's self is not one's skin), they are, in "The Yellow Wallpaper," something more than inseparable.

For Gilman, then, the work of writing is the work simultaneously of production and consumption, a work in which woman's body is rewritten as the utopian body of the market economy, imagined as a scene of circulation so efficient that exchange is instantaneous: products not only exist to be consumed, but coming into existence they already are consumed. My point here is not to insist on the utopian character of this description (although given the prolonged crisis of what in the eighties and nineties was universally understood as "overproduction," the term *utopian* is hardly inappropriate) but to emphasize the importance for Gilman of the feminine body, understood not only as an object to be exchanged—as when the newly professionalized mothers of *Women and Economics* sell their maternal skills[14]—but as the very site of exchange. In "The Yellow Wallpaper," being oneself depends on owning oneself, and owning oneself depends on producing oneself. Producing is thus a kind of buying—it gives you title to yourself—and a kind of selling too—your labor in making yourself is sold for the self you have made. There can be no question, then, of the self entering into exchange; exchange is the condition of its existence. Producer and consumer, buyer and seller, the narrator of "The Yellow Wallpaper" need not leave her nursery to follow the other creeping women out into the market; her nursery already is the market. Her nervous breakdown marks for Gilman the triumphant omnipresence of market relations.[15]

[14]For an excellent discussion of the changing status of domestic labor, see Susan Strasser, *Never Done: A History of American Housework* (New York, 1982). Like "the early home economists who were her contemporaries," Strasser writes, "Gilman recognized the fundamental historical tendency that had turned women from producers into consumers; unlike most of them, she understood that the process was continuing, as yet incomplete" (221).

[15]In her important account of Gilman's design projects, Dolores Hayden quotes the antifeminist Laura Fay-Smith's argument that "if nature had intended women to be feminists, then women of the future . . . would be born

To read "The Yellow Wallpaper" in this way, then, is to read it as narrating the genesis of the marketplace or, more specifically, the birth of what historians have come to call (with varying degrees of disapproval) the "culture of consumption." That culture, as Richard Wightman Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears have powerfully described it,

> is more than the "leisure ethic," or the "American standard of living." It is an ethic, a standard of living, and a power structure. Life for most middle-class and many working-class Americans in the twentieth century has been a ceaseless pursuit of the "good life" and a constant reminder of their powerlessness. Consumers are not only buyers of goods but recipients of professional advice, marketing strategies, government programs, electoral choices, and advertisers' images of happiness. Although the dominant institutions of our culture have purported to be offering the consumer a fulfilling participation in the life of the community, they have to a large extent presented the empty prospect of taking part in the marketplace of personal exchange. Individuals have been invited to seek commodities as keys to personal welfare, and even to conceive of their own selves as commodities.[16]

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with 'money as their only standard of value'" (Hayden, *The Grand Domestic Revolution* [Cambridge, 1981], 201). For Fay-Smith, as for Gilman herself, feminism was essentially a market phenomenon.

[16]Richard Wightman Fox and T. J. Jackson Lears, Introduction to *The Culture of Consumption*, ed. Fox and Lears (New York, 1983), xii. I cite Fox and Lears here and Alan Trachtenberg and Ann Douglas below not because they seem to me particularly egregious instances of the genteel or Progressive tradition in American cultural history but—just the opposite—because they are exemplary in their attempts to imagine alternative views of American culture. Which makes it all the more striking that they do not finally dissent from the genteel/Progressive view of important works of art as in some sense transcending or opposing the market. My further point here is that American literary criticism (even more than American cultural history) has customarily understood itself and the objects of its admiration as being opposed to consumer culture—and, with a few exceptions, continues to do so. No doubt the newly politicized proponents of "oppositional" criticism would reject this assimilation of their work to the genteel tradition. But transforming the moral handwringing of the fifties and sixties first into the epistemological handwringing of the seventies and now into the political handwringing of the eighties does not seem to be much of an advance. (It should go without saying that gentility flourishes on

From this perspective, the value of American cultural productions is understood to consist in what Lears calls their "subversive" potential, their attempt to resist "incorporation in the dominant culture."[17] The "radical critics" in whom Lears is interested "viewed consumption as a seduction, a form of captivity."[18] Moving from Veblen in the late nineteenth century to the counterculture of the 1960s, he and Fox point out that there have always been some who "rejected high level consumption and cultivated Spartan self-sufficiency."[19]

Fox and Lears are by no means alone in their sense of the fundamentally critical relation between consumer capitalism and the most powerful works of American culture, between, in effect, consumption and culture.[20] In his wide-ranging and important *The Incorporation of America*, Alan Trachtenberg laments, for example, the increasing dependency of late-nineteenth-century city dwellers on "what was marketed," a dependency that changed them from "active participants" in the culture to "passive spectators" of it, while he celebrates the "residual forms" of a production-based economy whose sur-

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the right as well as the left; distaste for consumer culture transcends what passes for politics in academia.)

[17]T. J. Jackson Lears, *No Place of Grace* (New York, 1981), xiv.

[18]Fox and Lears, *The Culture of Consumption*, x.

[19]Ibid.

[20]Thus in his interesting and ambitious "The Consuming Vision of Henry James," Jean-Christophe Agnew sets out to argue that James's career reveals "a deepening awareness of the commodity world, an awareness that becomes by the end of his life wholly critical *and* wholly complicit," but in the event Agnew produces readings of *The Portrait of a Lady* and *The Golden Bowl* that choose criticism over complicity in the usual way. Isabel Archer "recovers a serenity that has become hers by virtue of an act of self-conscious renunciation, an act that raises her above the sorts of exchange to which she is, in form, submitting by her marriage to Osmond." And Maggie Verver, heroine of "the first fully achieved literary expression of an American culture of consumption" also ends on "a note of renunciation," a note echoed by James himself who, "having realized in *The Golden Bowl* what he called the 'best' and the 'solidest' of his visions, . . . like Shakespeare's Prospero, renounces it" (Agnew, "The Consuming Vision of Henry James," in Fox and Lears, *The Culture of Consumption*, 84, 86, 91, 100). As long as the best thing to do with consumer culture is renounce it, literary criticism will be happy.

vival "represented resistance to the emerging culture of the marketplace."[21] In the fictions of realism and naturalism, he writes, a "ragged picture" emerges, "of lost hopes, hypocrisy, narrowed and constricted lives, grinding frustrations of poverty and isolation. The report is relieved . . . by acts of courage, a surviving residue of older ways. . . . But the major picture included a keen lament for the passing of an older, more secure and reliable way of life, one based on ingrained assumptions about the possibilities of freedom."[22] And in *The Feminization of American Culture*, from a perspective much narrower than, but in my view not much different from, those of Lears and Trachtenberg, Ann Douglas attacks the literature of a class (ministers and middle-class women) "defined less by what its members produced than by what they consumed."[23] In terms that reproduce the contempt of Lears's radical critics and the nostalgia of Trachtenberg's realists, she contrasts "sentimental," "consumerist" writers like Harriet Beecher Stowe to the "more serious" writers of the Calvinist tradition, interested in "producing, not consuming."[24]

But these terms do more than repeat Lears and Trachtenberg —they replicate Charlotte Gilman. In *Women and Economics*, consumption is equated with powerlessness, or "economic dependence" (109), and production is equated with power: the spirit of "personal independence" that Gilman sees embodied in the "new woman" of the nineties is a function of her economic independence, what Lears calls "self-sufficiency." If, then, Charlotte Gilman plays a role in the emergence of consumer culture, that role seems to be critical. Her feminist critique of "masculinist" culture should thus be read as an exemplary act of "subversive resistance," repudiating the "dominant" consumer culture before it even had the chance to become dominant. In Gilman's proto-Progressive paean to pro-

[21]Alan Trachtenberg, *The Incorporation of America* (New York, 1982), 121, 122.

[22]Ibid., 201.

[23]Ann Douglas, *The Feminization of American Culture* (New York, 1977), 10.

[24]Ibid., 9.

duction we find the roots of the current post-Progressive critique of consumption.

The difficulty with this reading is that Gilman's texts, at least as I have described them, resist consumer culture only in ways allowed by their radical acceptance of a logic of consumption. Their commitment to production is a commitment to production in the market—production (cooking, cleaning, mothering) *for sale*. The domestic identification of production with "self-sufficiency" or "autonomy" provokes in Gilman a kind of agrarian dread: "On wide Western prairies, or anywhere in lonely farm houses, the women of to-day, confined absolutely to this strangling cradle of the race, go mad by scores and hundreds. Our asylums show a greater proportion of insane women among farmers' wives than in any other class. In the cities, where there is less 'home life,' people seem to stand it better"(267). The city—Trachtenberg aptly calls it "the universal market"—makes production bearable because it makes production for consumption possible. Farmers' wives do not go crazy because they cannot work; they go crazy because the work they do cannot become the empowering work Gilman wants them to do. Without consumption, no production; without the market, no power. Gilman rewrites the autonomy of self-sufficiency as the autonomy of free trade. The difference between the strangling cradle and the marking paper is the difference between a society where nothing is for sale and one where everything is.

From this perspective, it seems much more plausible to describe "The Yellow Wallpaper" as an endorsement of consumer capitalism than as a critique of it, and indeed, it is just such a description (albeit of *Sister Carrie* instead of "The Yellow Wallpaper") that lies at the heart of the first essay in this series, "*Sister Carrie*'s Popular Economy." That essay was written not out of any particular interest in the cultural history of the period (I had been working mainly on epistemological questions in literary theory) but out of an isolated admiration for *Sister Carrie* and especially out of irritation with those critics who read it as an indictment of American culture and who understood Carrie's career as progressing from its preoccupation with the ma-

terial life of Chicago department stores to the "serious" theater of the "ideal" imagined for her by the young engineer, Ames. For Ames, the culture of consumption is "so much show," [25] as indeed it is for many critics who think of great literature as committed essentially to transcending it, and as it is, in some degree, even for its own historians, who think of great works of culture as committed to opposing it. But not, I argued, for Dreiser, at least not in *Sister Carrie*; *Sister Carrie*, I wrote, involved an "unequivocal endorsement" of what I called the "unrestrained capitalism of the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries."

Almost as soon as that essay was published, however, I began to feel unhappy with this aspect of its argument. While the notion that Dreiser approved of consumer capitalism seemed to me a good deal more plausible than the reverse, finally neither notion seemed very plausible at all. Not because, as Rachel Bowlby puts it, my claim that *Sister Carrie* is "not anti-capitalist" is only "broadly true," since "behind the attractive images of consumption, it clearly shows up some of the peculiar disparities created by" consumer capitalism.[26] Bowlby is surely right about this, but my own unease had nothing to do with a sense that I had overstated my claim—what bothered me was the "endorsement" itself, not whether it was "unequivocal." What exactly did it mean to think of Dreiser as approving (or disapproving) consumer culture? Although transcending your origins in order to evaluate them has been the opening move in cultural criticism at least since Jeremiah, it is surely a mistake to take this move at face value: not so much because you can't really transcend your culture but because, if you could, you wouldn't have any terms of evaluation left—except, perhaps, theological ones. It thus seems wrong to think of the culture you live in as the object of your affections: you don't like it or dislike it, you exist in it, and the things you like and dislike exist in it too. Even Bartleby-like refusals of the world

[25] Theodore Dreiser, *Sister Carrie*, ed. Donald Pizer (New York, 1970), 236. Subsequent page references are cited in parentheses in the text.

[26] Rachel Bowlby, *Just Looking: Consumer Culture in Dreiser, Gissing, and Zola* (New York, 1985), 61.

remain inextricably linked to it—what could count as a more powerful exercise of the right to freedom of contract than Bartleby's successful refusal to enter into any contracts? Preferring not to, he embodies, like Trina McTeague, the purest of commitments to laissez-faire, the freedom in contract to do as one likes.[27]

These points are no doubt obvious. Nevertheless, they were useful in making me realize that I needed to transform an argument about the affective relation of certain literary texts to American capitalism into an investigation of the position of those texts within a system of representation that, producing objects of approval and disapproval both, is more important than any attitude one might imagine oneself to have toward it. In other words, Dreiser didn't so much approve or disapprove of capitalism; he desired pretty women in little tan jackets with mother-of-pearl buttons, and he feared becoming a bum on the streets of New York. These fears and desires were themselves made available by consumer capitalism, partly because a capitalist economy made it possible for lower-class women to wear nice clothes and for middle-class men to lose their jobs, but more importantly because the logic of capitalism linked the loss of those jobs to a failure of self-representation and linked the desirability of those women to the possibility of mimesis. Carrie is desirable, in this reading, because she herself desires—"to reproduce life" (117), to make herself into a representation. And this insatiable appetite for representation Dreiser identifies with sexual promiscuity, corporate greed, and his own artistic practice.

Putting the point in this way makes clear what was wrong with the project of assessing Dreiser's attitude toward capitalism: it depended on imagining a Dreiser outside capitalism who could then be said to have attitudes toward it. But it also makes clear (and for the same reason) why any effort to bracket the question of Dreiser's (or Gilman's or Norris's) attitude could

[27]For a different view, see Brook Thomas, "The Legal Fictions of Herman Melville and Lemuel Shaw," *Critical Inquiry* 11 (September 1984): 24–51. According to Thomas, "Poor as he might be, Bartleby's persistent 'I would prefer not to' undermines the contractual ideology that dominated nineteenth century law" (36).

be only partially successful. It is easy (and essential) to stop worrying about whether Dreiser liked or disliked capitalism. But the minute you begin to think about what Dreiser did like and dislike, it becomes, of course, impossible to keep capitalism out—not only because capitalism provides the objects of fear and desire but because it provides the subjects as well. For every commodity created (on, say, the Chicago futures market), a desire can be created (in advertising, by art); for every worthless bit of paper that can be transformed into an object of desire (greenbacks), some impersonal entity can be transformed into the subject that desires it (corporations). Indeed, one must go a step further and say that the logic of capitalism produces objects of desire only insofar as it produces subjects, since what makes the objects desirable is only the constitutive trace of subjectivity those objects bear—what Dreiser calls "the voice of the so-called inanimate" (75), the exchangeability of the hog, the mark on the paper.

"The voice of the so-called inanimate"—if commodities could talk, this, according to Marx, is what they would say: "Our use-value may be a thing that interests men. It is no part of us as objects. What, however, does belong to us as objects is our value. Our natural intercourse as commodities proves it. In the eyes of each other, we are nothing but exchange values."[28] Marx's point here is not that commodities have no use-value—nothing can have *any* value "without being an object of utility"[29]—but rather that their value as commodities depends on something more than the "physical relation between physical things" that marks their value in use. The "qualities" of commodities "are at the same time perceptible and imperceptible by the senses";[30] hence, while pearls and diamonds, for example, have "physical" "qualities" that make them industrially or aesthetically useful, their value as exchangeable commodities is "physically imperceptible": "So far no chemist has

[28]Karl Marx, *Capital*, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling, ed. Frederick Engels (New York, 1906), 95.

[29]Ibid., 48.

[30]Ibid., 83.

ever discovered exchange value either in a pearl or a diamond."[31]

The commodity is thus an example of a thing whose identity involves something more than its physical qualities, but it is by no means the only example. What else, for instance, is money, which (as opposed, say, to gold) cannot be reduced to the thing it is made of and still remain the thing it is? What else is the corporation, which cannot be reduced to the men and women who are its shareholders? Or, to go beyond the economic subjects of texts like *McTeague* and *The Octopus* to their mode of literary expression, what else is that mode of expression, writing? For writing to be writing, it can neither transcend the marks it is made of nor be reduced to those marks. Writing is, in this sense, intrinsically different from itself, neither material nor ideal. And the drama of this internal division, emerging generally in a thematics of writing and, more particularly, in what Michael Fried has called a thematics of "the *materiality* of writing," is, as Fried has shown in his readings of Thomas Eakins and Stephen Crane, one of the most urgent concerns of artistic representation in the half-century between the end of the Civil War and the beginning of World War I.[32]

But to describe writing in these terms is not merely to indicate its appropriateness as a more general emblem of the problematic of internal difference in money and corporations; it is also to point the way toward a still more general formulation of that problematic: the relation of bodies to souls, the problem of persons. When, for instance, Carrie, thrilled by Ames's description of the "pathos" of her "natural look" (355)—the "shadow" about her eyes, the "peculiar" pout of her

[31] Ibid., 95.

[32] Michael Fried, *Realism, Writing, Disfiguration: On Thomas Eakins and Stephen Crane* (Chicago, 1987). Much of the reading of Gilman presented here was worked out in the context of an Institute on American Realism conducted by Michael Fried and me in the summer of 1985 under the auspices of the National Endowment for the Humanities. I am grateful to the NEH for their support, to the participants in the Institute for their critical interest, and to Michael Fried for his invaluable help in working through this material that summer and for reading several months later the penultimate draft of this essay.

lips—longs "to be equal to this feeling written upon her countenance" (356), her longing marks what Dreiser appears to think of as a constitutive discrepancy within the self. The desire to live up to the look on your face (to become what is written on your face) is the desire to be equal to oneself (to transform that writing into marks). It is, in the logic of the gold standard, the desire to make yourself equal to your face value, to become gold. But really to achieve that equality is to efface both writing as writing and money as money; it is to become not Carrie but Hurstwood, a corpse in a New York flophouse. This is why the discrepancy is constitutive—when the self becomes equal to its body, as Dreiser sees it, it dies.

And by the same token, when William James begins his discussion of self-consciousness by asking about our bodies—"are they simply ours, or are they *us*[?]" (279)—only to conclude that there can be no principle of personal identity utterly independent of the body or utterly identical to it, he too is committed to the difference of the self from itself. Ordinarily, James writes, we think that a "thing cannot appropriate itself; it *is* itself; and still less can it disown itself" (323). But in James's own account of the self as the continual transformation of owner into owned, to be itself at all the self must always be appropriating itself. Our body is *neither* us (a material thing that is itself) *nor* ours (making "us" some other *im*material thing that is itself); it is instead a figure for the irreducible fact of ownership, for a selfhood that consists neither in having a body nor in being a body but in being embodied.

Ownership for James is thus an internal relation required by the impossibility of understanding the self as a single, undivided entity, as either a body or a soul. And from this standpoint it might be argued that the discourse of naturalism, as I characterize it, is above all obsessed with manifestations of internal difference or, what comes to the same thing, personhood. Continually imagining the possibility of identity without difference, it is provoked by its own images into ever more powerful imaginations of identity by way of difference: Hurstwood's satisfied body is rewritten as Carrie's insatiable one; hogs that can exist only in one place at one time are sold many times on the futures market before they seem to exist at all;

gold turns into money; Royce's theologized communities of insurance and interpretation become Norris's monstrously human Pacific and Southwestern Railroad.

Along these lines, as along others, hysteria is an exemplary disease. With hysteria, as Carroll Smith-Rosenberg has pointed out, doctors were confronted with apparently real physical symptoms without, however, any "organic lesions": "The hysteric might mimic tuberculosis, heart attacks, blindness or hip disease, while lungs, heart, eyes and hips remained in perfect health."[33] Some doctors were thus inclined to dismiss hysteria as a moral (i.e., nonmedical) problem, while others (more sympathetic to their patients or more ambitious for their profession, or both) searched for the "organic explanation" that would, as Smith-Rosenberg acutely puts it, "legitimate hysteria as a disease."[34] On the one hand, then, we have the description of hysteria as a moral problem instead of a disease because it has no place in the body; on the other hand, we have the attempt to legitimate it as a disease by finding it a place in the body after all—the uterus, the central nervous system, or the cerebral cortex. Hysteria thus provides the doctor with the familiar opportunity to dismiss its symptoms as false representations (like *trompe l'oeil* money) or to find them a material equivalent (like gold or paper).

At the same time, however, what was most fascinating about hysteria was precisely the way it resisted the familiar reduction, since it seemed to be *in* the body (it produced real physical symptoms) without being *of* the body (the symptoms were unaccompanied by real organic damage). Thus, despite the efforts of men like Mitchell to discover the organic origins of hysteria, his own writings suggest that what interested him about hysteria was its actuality not so much as a disease of the body but as a disease of embodiment. For example, in what is apparently Mitchell's first publication, a short story called "The Case of George Dedlow," a young medical student fighting in the Civil War loses (by amputation) all his limbs and on recov-

[33]Carroll Smith-Rosenberg, "The Hysterical Woman: Sex Roles and Role Conflict in 19th Century America," *Social Research* 39 (Winter 1972): 664.

[34]Ibid., 666.

ery begins to experience not only the expected depression but some unexpected "physical changes": "I found to my horror that at times I was less conscious of myself, of my own existence, than used to be the case."[35] Understood as a purely physical phenomenon, his situation makes a certain grim sense. Having lost, as he puts it, about half the "sensitive surface" of his body (the skin), he has lost about half of himself; hence his "deficiency in the egoistic sentiment of individuality"[36] corresponds to an actual physical state of affairs, a correspondence that is simultaneously confirmed and disconfirmed by the story's horrorshow slapstick ending. Invited to a "New Church" séance, the narrator somewhat skeptically observes the usual cast of spiritualist characters summoning the spirits of dead relatives until his turn comes and he is seized with a "wild idea." He requests what turn out to be two spirits who, when asked "how they are called in the world of spirits," rap out numbers instead of letters. Called on for clarification, the spirits finally rap out some letters too: "UNITED STATES ARMY MEDICAL MUSEUM, Nos. 3486, 3487." "'Good gracious!'" the no-longer skeptical narrator cries out, "'they are *my legs! my legs!*'" and, having thus temporarily reacquired most of the rest of him, he experiences a "strange return" of "self-consciousness" that enables him to amaze his companions as he rises and staggers for a minute or two about the room "on limbs invisible to them or me."[37]

"Reindividualized" by the return of his legs, George Dedlow recovers himself by recovering his body—but the body he recovers is "invisible." Thus the séance both confirms and disconfirms the identification of self with body. On the one hand, the whole point of the story is to insist that the self does not essentially consist in anything like pure spirit; if it did, no loss of skin could ever amount to loss of self. On the other hand, as the ending also makes clear, no body can exist as body alone. Legs packed in alcohol in an Army Medical Museum live also in

[35] S. Weir Mitchell, "The Case of George Dedlow," *The Atlantic Monthly*, July 1866, 8.

[36] Ibid.

[37] Ibid., 11.

the "spirit world"; selves have spirits, and body parts have spirits too. As a rehearsal for hysteria, "The Case of George Dedlow" denies the possibility of an utterly organic etiology for the disease and instead establishes the condition of personhood—the nonidentity of self with either body or soul—that will make the hysteric's loss of "self-control" possible: "I have so little surety of being myself," the narrator concludes, "that I doubt my own honesty in drawing my pension."[38] The possibility of being oneself here depends on the possibility of not being oneself, which alone enables the project of "self-control" to emerge.

Mitchell thus imagines the loss of self-control that constitutes hysteria (like the transfer of self-control that constitutes the cure for hysteria, the rest cure) as a disease to which the healing physician is himself highly vulnerable. This remains true even in Mitchell's later writings, like the popular novel *Characteristics*, which begins with its doctor hero's temporary paralysis in the war: "For several months I lay quite powerless, all that there was of me within control of my will being the head and its contents."[39] The near indistinguishability of disease and cure is here paralleled by a near indistinguishability of patient and physician. Thus, although it is essential to acknowledge the social conditions that made it possible for men like Mitchell to rewrite their own fears on the bodies of women, it is essential also to note that Mitchell never really thought of hysteria as an exclusively feminine disease. After women, he wrote in *Wear and Tear*, "manufacturers and certain classes of railway officials are the most likely to suffer from neural exhaustion."[40] Perhaps we should regard hysteria as a disease not of women or even of doctors but of the middle-class market to which doctors and women (especially women writers), manufacturers and railway officials all belonged. "I belong to a profession," says Mitchell's Dr. North (also, like Mitchell, a writer), "I sell that which no man can weigh or measure."[41] Like the exchange

[38] Ibid.
[39] S. Weir Mitchell, *Characteristics* (New York, 1892), 6.
[40] Mitchell, *Wear and Tear*, 63.
[41] Mitchell, *Characteristics*, 70.

value of a pearl or diamond, the physician's services and the railroad officer's managerial skills are embodied without being reducible to a body. Like the writer's mark, they are bodies for sale. To be a hysteric is to be always and in principle on the market.

For Marx, the double nature of objects for sale—their perceptible use-value and their imperceptible exchange-value based on labor—was the crucial feature forgotten by classical economics, only to return, distorted and repressed, as "commodity fetishism." If we take the physical properties of commodities as determining their value, he thought, we will never understand the role played by human labor; if, however, we think of commodities in themselves as something more than their physical qualities, we find ourselves transforming a "social relation between men" into the "fantastic form of a relation between things." Commodities come to look neither like things as such nor like things that represent human labor but like things that are somehow human: "This I call the Fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labor, so soon as they are produced as commodities, and which is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities."[42]

Commodity fetishism involves ascribing to things the attributes of persons. For writers like Mitchell and Gilman, however, fetishism cannot consist in an extension of personhood to commodities, since the only way a person can get to be a person in the first place is by articulating in his or her nature the double nature of the commodity. And it is in this articulation that what I take to be the characteristic concerns of naturalism appear: appropriation, legitimation, the need to end representation, and the desire to represent. I use the term *naturalism* here rather than the more general term *realism* not to help breathe new life into the old debate over what naturalism is and how exactly it differs from realism; indeed, I hope to avoid that debate entirely and, if possible, some of the fundamental as-

[42]Marx, *Capital*, 83. The relevance of commodity fetishism to the more general question of the relation of objects to persons was suggested to me by Elaine Scarry's discussion of Marx in *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World* (New York, 1985), 243–77.

sumptions that govern it. Insofar as naturalism has been continually (and plausibly) defined as a variant of realism, it has been caught up in endless theorizing about the nature and very possibility of realistic representation: do texts refer to social reality? if they do, do they merely reflect it or do they criticize it? and if they do not, do they try to escape it, or do they imagine utopian alternatives to it? Like the question of whether Dreiser liked or disliked capitalism, these questions seem to me to posit a space outside the culture in order then to interrogate the relations between that space (here defined as literary) and the culture. But the spaces I have tried to explore are all very much within the culture, and so the project of interrogation makes no sense; the only relation literature as such has to culture as such is that it is part of it. If, then, I speak of the logic of naturalism, it is not to identify a specific relation between literature and the real, or even a specific ideological function of literature in relation to the real. I want instead to map out the reality in which a certain literature finds its place and to identify a set of interests and activities that might be said to have as their common denominator a concern with the double identities that seem, in naturalism, to be required if there are to be any identities at all. And if "The Yellow Wallpaper" is for me an exemplary text, it is not because it criticizes or endorses the culture of consumption but precisely because, in a rigorous, not to say obsessive, way, it *exemplifies* that culture. The nervous breakdown of its narrator may well be, as I have suggested, a function of her involvement in a certain political economy of selfhood, but even if, as I have also suggested, that breakdown is not a gesture of resistance to the economy, it would surely be odd to construe it as an endorsement of the economy. After all, is it not as if the narrator *likes* thinking of the self as permanently under construction; she just thinks it is. And "The Yellow Wallpaper" shows us exactly what it would mean to think that.

This is not finally to say, however, that her likes and dislikes don't matter. The child wants to mark, and in Gilman's economy of selfhood, that desire is not incidental. The desire to mark—to maintain the self by producing the self and to produce the self by consuming the self—is the primitive like that

makes the institution of selfhood possible. This very desire produces modern production and consumption; it produces, above all, the dissemination of subjectivity intrinsic to naturalism as a mode of writing. For what Gilman's child wants is to *mark*. His means of inscription into consumer culture is the desire for inscription itself, as if the very category of subjectivity—the possibility of being a subject—were an effect of writing, as indeed, in "The Yellow Wallpaper," it is.[43] Hence the impossibility of conceiving the desire to mark as simply the desire of a preexisting subject. And hence the point of the question, what kind of work is writing? Gilman's own answer is production, and in insisting on herself as a writer she means, as we have seen, to insist on the possibility of women transforming themselves from consumers into producers. But, as we have also seen, in radicalizing writing Gilman reimagines the distinction between producing and consuming, so that if the difference between them does not entirely disappear, the possibility of choosing between them does. What kind of work is writing? It is the work of at once producing and consuming the self or, what comes to the same thing, work in the market. What makes "The Yellow Wallpaper" exemplary for me is thus its determination to see the self through on its own terms, as a commodity, a subject in the market. And it is the transformations that that subject may undergo, its likes and dislikes, its various ways of making its mark, that are themselves the subjects of the following essays.

[43]To speak of the self as an effect of writing is to speak in terms made newly available in the last twenty years by Jacques Derrida. It is often said that the "new historicism" opposes deconstruction, in the sense that deconstructive critics are "against" history and new historicists are "for" it. Neither of these descriptions seems to me to have much content. In any event, the deconstructive interest in the problematic of materiality in signification is not intrinsically ahistorical, and my own account of Gilman as obsessed with the production of marks and hence with writing as the condition of personal identity is meant to be a historical one. If it is wrong, in other words, it is wrong not because I have the wrong account of language but because I have the wrong account of Gilman.