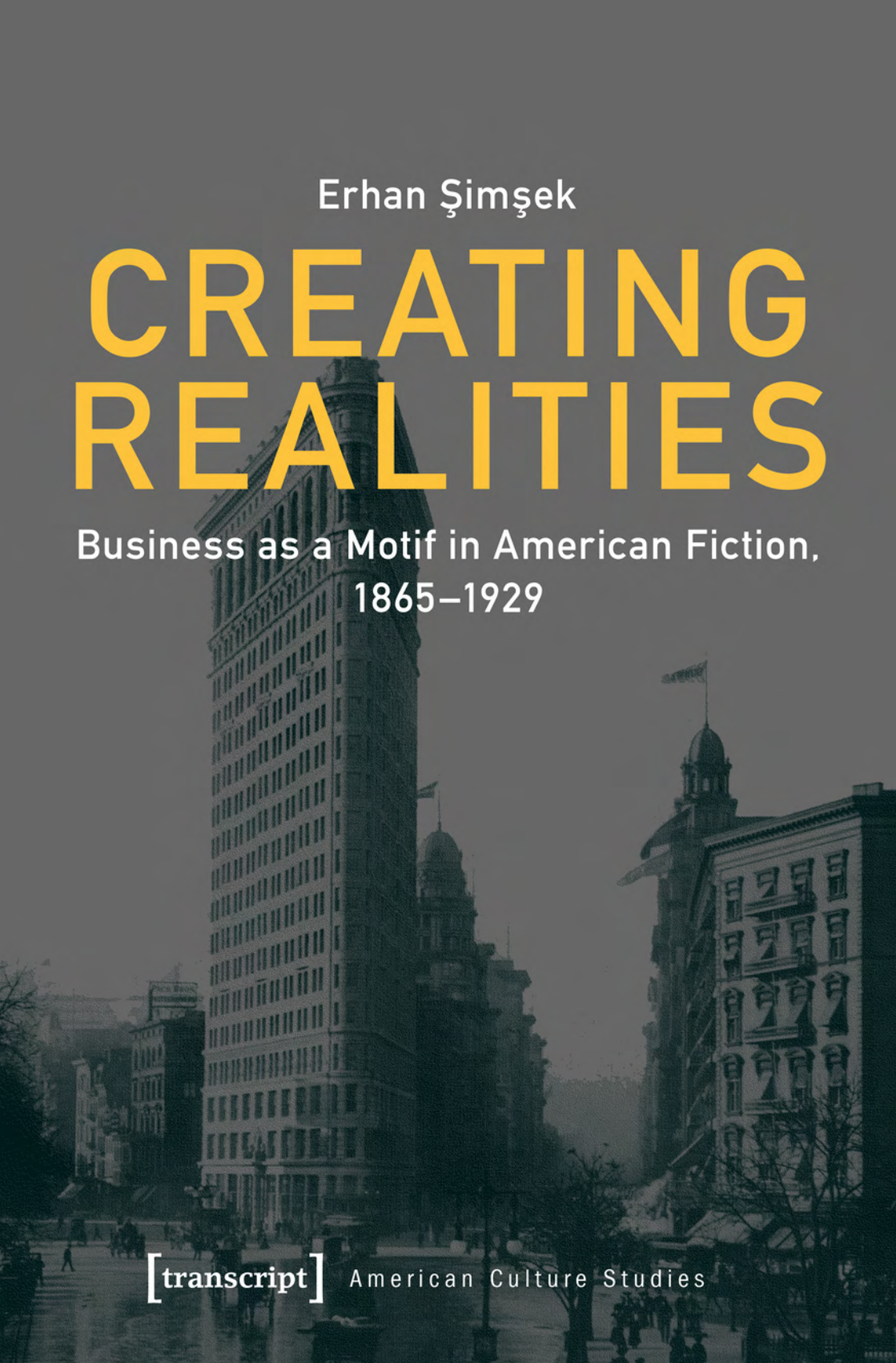
Erhan Şimşek
CREATING REALITIES
Business as a Motif in American Fiction, 1865–1929
[transcript] American Culture Studies

# From:

*Erhan Şimşek*
**Creating Realities**
Business as a Motif in American Fiction, 1865–1929

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Business is woven into the very fabric of American life, yet rarely surfaces in the nation's literary history. Even in novels about business, it proves an elusive motif that fails to mirror actual business organizations.

This book argues that literary representations of business remain ineffable because business serves potential aesthetic functions, subtly yet meaningfully impacting readers. Exploring the complex representation of business in realist, naturalist and modernist works, Erhan Şimşek reveals these functions by analyzing how the motif intertwines with social developments, literary movements and author biographies. He thus illuminates the motif itself while highlighting the utility of a focus on the changing functions of literature.

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# Introduction

In January 1925, Calvin Coolidge remarked, "After all, the chief business of the American people is business." When he said that, he was not making an argument, but was defining the daily lives of Americans from all walks of life. In July 1929, a few months before the notorious Black Tuesday that marked the start of the Great Depression, American historian James Truslow Adams took Coolidge's definition one step further. He stated that America "has come to be almost wholly a *business man's civilization*." Instead of feudalism, aristocracy and other social institutions that set standards of civilization as in England, "a business man's standard of values has become that of our civilization at large" (10, 15). In the absence of aristocratic institutions, businessmen became the aristocrats that the public looked up to, envied, and imitated. Americans showed business off as an activity worthy of pride and imitation, as Benjamin Franklin emphasizes in several instances in his autobiography.[1] Accordingly, business dominated the public sphere: even Tocqueville saw that "Americans carr[ied] their businesslike qualities" into "agriculture" and "other pursuits" in their social activities (168).

1 In his *Autobiography*, Benjamin Franklin illustrates the pride he takes in his business activities and the virtues they bring by saying, "In order to secure my Credit and Character as a Tradesman, I took care not only to be in Reality Industrious and frugal, but to avoid all Appearances of the Contrary. I drest plainly; I was seen at no Places of idle Diversion; I never went out a-fishing or shooting, a Book, indeed, sometimes debauch'd me from my Work; but that was seldom, snug, and gave no Scandal: and to show that I was not above my Business, I sometimes brought home the Paper I purchas'd at the Stores, thro' the Streets on a Wheelbarrow. Thus being esteem'd an industrious thriving young Man, and paying duly what I bought, the Merchants who imported Stationary solicited my Custom, others propos'd supplying me with Books, and I went on swimmingly" (54).

In fact, Coolidge points to a deeper truth about the dominance of business in his speech. He says that Americans "are profoundly concerned with producing, buying, selling, investing and prospering in the world." More than an external economic activity, business was an important concern for Americans. As much as they were engaged in business, they were also preoccupied with it. Adams agrees with Coolidge in saying that "most of the energy, ability, and ambition of the country has found its outlet, if not its satisfaction, in business" (14). In other words, as an endeavor that could bring respect and envy to its practitioners, business pervaded the American psyche. As George Washington prophesied, "commerce" had a deep influence not only on "society in general" but also on "human manners" (194).[2] No one who observed the country in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries could deny that the United States was socially and mentally a nation of business *par excellence*.

Notwithstanding the fundamental omnipresence of business, American writers were not always open to incorporating it as a theme into their works. In fact, this pervasiveness obliterated authors' interest in the topic for the majority of American literary history. Before the 1860s, business was not a popular theme among American writers. Occasional works that focused on business appeared throughout the colonial period and sporadically thereafter, but business did not become a popular theme until the 1860s. Until the Civil War, business was like an imperceptible lens behind the eyes, through which American writers observed the nation in that it was pervasive and thus not explicitly articulated. In contrast, the period between the Civil War and the Great Depression saw the proliferation of business fiction: writers wrote numerous novels on different aspects of the topic ranging from farming to finance in an attempt to make the lens perceptible and converse with the reader about the topic. Except during the 1950s, when the theme of business management gained some popularity, the subsequent decades reveal the gradual fading of this concerted effort. Having lost its versatility, the topic was no

2 Thoreau summarizes this dual omnipresence of business for Americans from all walks of life by saying, "This world is a place of business. What an infinite bustle! I am awaked almost every night by the panting of the locomotive. It interrupts my dreams. There is no sabbath. It would be glorious to see mankind at leisure for once. It is nothing but work, work, work. I cannot easily buy a blank-book to write thoughts in; they are commonly ruled for dollars and cents. An Irishman, seeing me making a minute in the fields, took it for granted that I was calculating my wages. If a man was tossed out of a window when an infant, and so made a cripple for life, or seared out of his wits by the Indians, it is regretted chiefly because he was thus incapacitated for business!" (347).

longer comprehensive and the second half of the twentieth century saw the publication of fictions of business only occasionally. The period between the Civil War and the Great Depression – the period of the business renaissance – stands as the only period when business was not taken for granted, but discerned, explored and debated in American literary history.

This book explores the images of business in American fiction written during this period of business renaissance. In this study, I embark on a journey where I delineate the motifs of business in various literary works as well as account for their rising appeal for the writers of this period. I argue that the writers of the period utilized the motif of business because of the pragmatic possibilities the motif offered in responding to readers' needs. In other words, the motif became useful for realists, naturalists and later for modernists through the much-needed effects it could potentially leave on the reader. A quintessentially realist work like *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885) by William Dean Howells offers moral and social orientation through the motif of business. Written almost three decades later, Theodore Dreiser's *The Financier* (1912) uses the world of finance to create the effects of intensity and shock. In *The Great Gatsby* (1925), business reveals the impossibility of accessing social and external reality in line with the communicative agenda of American modernism. From a broader perspective, the evolution of the motif of business coincides with the evolution of American literature – an evolution that becomes palpable and articulable through the motif of business.

## What is Business?

In fact, when Coolidge called business a "concern," he unknowingly revealed the origin of the word as well. Etymologically, there are two possible paths through which the word business could have evolved. First, in Northumbrian English, the word *bisig* indicated "careful, anxious, busy, occupied, diligent" and "later 'continually employed or occupied,' cognate with Old Dutch *bezich*, Low German *besig*." The word *bisig*, which indicated a state in contrast to a pastime, later evolved to "busy." The noun form of the word *bisignes* indicated "care, anxiety, occupation" (*Online Etymology Dictionary*). The alternative account illustrates that in the Anglo-Norman language, there were words such as *bosognes*, *busuines*, *busuinnus*, which indicated "busy, occupied; attentive," among others. *The Oxford English Dictionary* says, "It is unlikely that there is any connection between [former word] and Anglo-Norman *bosognes, besognes, busuines*, etc. (plural) in the sense 'affairs, business' although it is possible that the two words were occasionally associated with one another." Still, both the Germanic and the Anglo-Norman genealogy were obviously used to indicate "concern" in the beginning.

Gradually, the word changed from expressing a mental state to adopting the meaning of occupation, profession or job. According to *The Oxford English Dictionary*, as early as the fourteenth century, the word business meant "A pursuit or occupation demanding time and attention; a serious employment as distinguished from a pastime," among others. In time, the word combined the meanings of occupation and trade – the occupation of trade. As early as the late 1400s, the word connoted commercial activity. For instance, the *OED* lists a sentence written in 1478 (quoted with the original punctuation): "I wyll ye com home,..for there schall be no besynese at Caleys thys marte tyme." In other words, the word business started as "mental busyness" and later adopted the meaning of profession, and lastly the idea of commerce as a profession. When Coolidge delivered his talk in 1925, he was surely unaware of these implications, but his statement unwittingly recalls the origin of the word.

Today, *The Oxford English Dictionary* lists more than twenty-three meanings for the word business. The meaning that was probably the most popular not only during Coolidge's time but also in the nineteenth, twentieth and twenty-first centuries is "Trade and all activity relating to it, esp. considered in terms of volume or profitability; commercial transactions, engagements, and undertakings regarded collectively; an instance of this. Hence more generally: the world of trade and commerce." Simply put, in today's world, business means, primarily, commercial activity. Accordingly, business literature or literature of business refers to fictional works that have commercial activity or institutions and people who deal with commercial activities such as companies and businessmen as dominant themes in their plots.[3] Novels like *The Rise of Silas Lapham* by William Dean Howells and *The Financier* by Theodor Dreiser are good examples of this genre: while the former novel represents a businessman involved in transactions around a paint business, the latter describes the banking and finance world of Philadelphia after the Civil War through the eyes of a financier.

## What is Function?

The discrepancy between the omnipresence of business in American life and its fluctuating representation in fiction reveals that there is no referential relationship between literary texts and actual realities – between actual business and business-

3 Interestingly, business fiction (*keizai shōsetsu*) and industry fiction (*kigyo shōsetsu*) are quite popular genres in Japanese literature. See Tamae K. Prindle, *Made in Japan and Other Japanese "Business Novels,"* M. E. Sharpe, 1990.

men and their image in literature. Rather, the representations of business are constructs. This was the case even in the period in which fictions of business proliferated in the US. In 1898, Henry James said that business is "as special and occult [as] Arctic exploration" (*Literary Criticism* 655). Like all "American things […] it will yield its secrets only to a really *grasping* imagination" (*Theory of Fiction* 46). James not only considered business obscure and esoteric, but he also needed "a really *grasping* imagination" to write about business – crucially, in a period when business organizations were booming in the American economy. Seemingly paradoxical at first glance, James's statement clearly confirms that writers did not incorporate the representation of business to mirror the social or mental reality mimetically, but constructed their texts independent from actual realities. Rather than duplication, writers such as William Dean Howells and Theodore Dreiser were engaged in *Darstellung*, which "brings about something that hitherto did not exist as a given object" (Iser, *Prospecting* 236).[4] Put differently, writers did not merely represent business, but constructed, performed, staged and figured it as a literary motif. This lack of referentiality did not amount to arbitrary images though: fictional businesses had a direction and followed specific patterns. I argue that the images of business were constructed in line with the potential aesthetic functions these fictions of business serve.

The concept of function – the function(s) of a literary work – is an underdefined concept, particularly in the Anglo-American scholarly tradition. Since it is a crucial concept for my study, let me briefly explain what I mean by the term before delving into the motif and its affective functions. Literary works have social and political functions. For instance, American literature at the turn of the century was dominated by naturalist novels which drew attention to specific social causes. Upton Sinclair was able to impress President Theodore Roosevelt with his reformist novels: after reading *The Jungle*, the President wrote, "radical action must be taken to do away with the efforts of arrogant and selfish greed on the part of the capitalist" (qtd. in Auchincloss 50). Similar to Sinclair's novel, many other influential works of fiction have led to social and political changes. Most of the time, however, it is empirically impossible to trace the social and political consequences literary works lead to. And these concrete social and political functions that literary works serve as in the case of *The Jungle* are not the functions I mean. Rather, function denotes a heuristic category in this study. To say that a work of fiction has functions is to assert hypothetically that it has a semantic *Funktionspotential*:

4 In this study, *Darstellung* and "representation" are used interchangeably. For more information, see Wolfgang Iser, *Prospecting: From Reader Response to Literary Anthropology*, Johns Hopkins UP, 1989.

an aesthetic potential of effects that can be "concretized" or "realized"[5] by the reader.[6]

*Funktionspotential* is not a particularly common term in literary scholarship. Nor is substantiating the semantic and aesthetic functions of a literary work a mainstream approach among literary scholars. Exploring the idea's roots in literary theories helps to illustrate the attractiveness of the business motif. Eagleton states that we can "very roughly periodize the history of modern literary theory in three stages: a preoccupation with the author (Romanticism and the nineteenth century); an exclusive concern with the text (New Criticism); and a marked shift of attention to the reader over recent years" (64). The aesthetic functions of a literary work have to do with the latter – the effects of a literary work on the reader. It is commonly agreed that literary texts "do" something: they trigger emotions, create reactions and leave an indescribable effect on readers. Among literary scholars, audience-oriented literary theories such as reader and response criticism and reception aesthetics (*Rezeptionsästhetik*) are utilized to unveil these effects of a literary work on its readers.

The fact that there are multiple theories exploring the functions of literary texts on readers is telling: what happens to readers during the process of aesthetic experience and how they receive and realize a literary work is not easy to discern. In fact, just like the social or political consequences literary works lead to, the exact effects a literary work on readers is difficult to trace and translate. Readers' actual aesthetic experience is unique: even though they read the same literary work, they go through different aesthetic experiences due to their unique histories and perceptions. Notwithstanding this difficulty, it is possible to come up with assumptions and hypotheses about the potential functions of a literary text – about what a literary text "does" to its readers – by exploring the mechanics of its reception.

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5 According to Roman Ingarden, the reader "concretizes" the places of indeterminacy (*Unbestimmtheitsstellen*) while reading a literary text. For a discussion of concretization, see Roman Ingarden, *The Cognition of the Literary Work of Art*, Northwestern UP, 1979. Wolfgang Iser repeats a similar but a more nuanced idea when he argues that the reader "realizes" the indeterminacies (*Leerstellen*) in the process of reading. See Wolfgang Iser, *The Implied Reader: Patterns of Communication in Prose Fiction from Bunyan to Beckett*, Johns Hopkins UP, 1974. For a comparison of these two terms, see Peter V. Zima, *The Philosophy of Modern Literary Theory*, Athlone Press, 1999, pp. 55-80.

6 For a detailed discussion of the concept of function, see Roy Sommer, "Funktionsgeschichten. Überlegungen zur Verwendung des Funktionsbegriffs in der Literaturwissenschaft und Anregungen zu seiner terminologischen Differenzierung" in *Literaturwissenschaftliches Jahrbuch*, vol. 41, 2000, pp. 319-341.

Among other elements, an analysis of the interplay between a literary text and readers in particular can productively expose the functions of a literary text. As Lane says for reception aesthetics, "neither text nor reader has autonomy: the text depends on the reader for its meaning to be realized, and the meaning produced by the reader is controlled by the text" (282). If the reader and the text are dependent on each other, then an analysis of this interaction is all the more helpful in hypothesizing about the potential functions of literary works. Having emerged in the 1970s in West Germany as a part of reception aesthetics, this attempt to identify the *Funktionspotential* of literary works has been systematized in German-speaking countries as *Funktionsgeschichte* – "history of the changing functions of literature" (Fluck, "Why We Need Fiction" 376). Less known outside of German-speaking academia, this approach offers the theoretical background through which I explain not only the emergence but also the poetics and hermeneutics of business in American fiction between the Civil War and the Great Depression.

In this complex process of reception, the crucial element is the text: the unchanging textual design of a literary work gives hints about its potential functions. Unlike many reader and response critics such as Stanley Fish who emphasize the independence of the reader from the text during the process of aesthetic experience,[7] scholars of reception aesthetics such as Wolfgang Iser and Winfried Fluck ascribe a pivotal role to the text in shaping the reading process and how a literary text functions. Literature, as Iser argues, "constitute[s] an organization of signifiers which do not designate a signified object, but instead designate[s] *instructions* for the *production* of the signified" (*The Act of Reading* 65). I agree with Iser: the reader is not free from the text in the reception process as Fish implies. However, I contend that a literary text does not have a fixed effect that is the same for all readers, either. Rather, the text operates like a rough guideline in the construction of effect, limiting the scope of aesthetic experience. In other words, although individual readers' actual aesthetic experience is unique and thus untranslatable, the textual design of a literary work roughly outlines the contours and range of potential aesthetic experience. Iser summarizes the relationship between the text and the reader by saying, "the stars in a literary text are fixed; the lines that join them are variable" ("The Reading Process" 287), to be drawn by the reader individually.[8]

7 Rather than the text, "interpretive communities" determine readers' aesthetic experience. For more information, see Stanley Fish, *Is There a Text in This Class*, Harvard UP, 1980.

8 This duality, which Stanley Fish considers amorphous, was at the basis of his disagreement with Wolfgang Iser in the early 1980s. For more information, see Stanley Fish, "Why No One's Afraid of Wolfgang Iser," *Diacritics*, vol. 11, no. 1, 1981, pp. 2-13;

Put differently, it is neither possible to interpret a work of literature in one single way nor in an infinite number of ways, because the textual design of a literary text limits readers' reception to a finite range ("joining the lines").

If "stars" in a literary text limit the range of reception, it is possible to discern the possible effects literary works emanate by looking at its very textual design, where its potential functions are inscribed and prestructured. As Iser says, "the order and the formation of structures depend on the function that the text has to fulfill" ("The Current Situation of Literary Theory" 11). Function precedes the text; the author creates the text according to the effects the texts serve. Similarly, Fluck argues that in order to serve specific communicative functions, writers have "a particular organization of the text" or "a particular structure of aesthetic effect" ("Why We Need Fiction" 378). If the potential effects of a literary work are already inscribed into the text ("the stars"), it is possible to infer these functions by looking at the specific ways the literary work is structured. The components of a literary text such as its plot, subjects, themes, topics, motifs, devices, tropes, genres and other elements – the "stars" – constitute the *Funktionspotential* of a literary work. In other words, such components of a literary text have functions and they, in turn, shape the effects of the literary works on the readers. Significantly, the motif of business greatly shapes the potential aesthetic functions of the literary works I explore. In this study, you will read a *Funktionsgeschichte* of the motif of business and how the motif creates the potential aesthetic functions of these works of fiction.

Uncovering what literary texts "do" to readers is an ambitious challenge and several scholars' attempts to this end reveal the pitfalls of *Funktionsgeschichte*. Two major such pitfalls are the multiplicity of functions and the level of functional analysis.[9] First, literary texts have multiple functions inscribed into them and affect readers in various different ways. Although the text guides and to some extent conditions the aesthetic experience, it does not determine this process. Saying that a motif or a work of fiction has one function does not exclude other functions. Rather, focusing on a motif such as business and its contribution to the functions of a literary text is a way of foregrounding the specific functions relevant to the motif and putting other potential functions of a literary work in the background. Rather than homogenizing the multiplicity of functions in literary works, my approach aims to put a "spotlight" on specific functional aspects while bracketing other aspects, which does not mean that other possible functions do not exist.

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and Wolfgang Iser, "Talk Like Whales: A Reply to Stanley Fish," *Diacritics*, vol. 11, no. 3, pp. 82-87.

9 See Sommer, p. 324.

Clearly, if the spotlight falls on other parts of a literary text, numerous other functions will emerge.

Similarly, scholars of reception aesthetics tend to use the term "function" on at least three different levels without making the differences among these levels explicit. First, they explore functions of literature writ large such as the "functions of literature in the nineteenth century" or "functions of the historical novel in the antebellum period." Works like Iser's "Changing Functions of Literature" or Fluck's seminal *Kulturelle Imaginäre* explore literature from a very broad perspective, investigating literature in general terms. The latter, for instance, explores the functions of genres such as the historical novel in American literature over a long period of time. Second, they analyze the functions of singular works, often in different periods and spaces,[10] which makes a *Funktionsgeschichte* approach surmountable in a study. Third, scholars investigate the smaller components such as motifs and tropes within a single literary text and how these constitute the functions of a literary work. In line with his commitment to the continental tradition which tends to keep ideas and concepts amorphous, these levels often remain unmentioned and unexplored in Fluck's abovementioned study. Nevertheless, an awareness of these latent assumptions and articulation of the differences among them are necessary to clarify the concept of "function" and to expose the potential aesthetic functions of literary texts.

This study delves primarily into the last-mentioned level through its focus on the motif of business in singular literary works. Explorations at the level of the motif lead to conclusions on the other two broader levels as well: the functions of the motif of business for singular literary texts and for literary movements such as realism, naturalism and modernism. For instance, an exploration of the ineffable nature of Gatsby's business activities reveals that the motif in the novel subjectivizes readers, leading them to their own personal realities. A deeper view into contemporary literary works demonstrates how other writers offered a similar model of individualization by using other themes. Exploring the functions of the

10 Margaret Mitchell's *Gone With the Wind*, for instance, became a popular book in the Eastern part of Germany right after the unification of Germany. Fluck explains the reasons for this as follows: "the temporary identification of some East Germans with the fate of the American South right after German unification when historical phenomena like the carpetbagger or the myth of a lost cause appeared as plausible concepts to make sense of present-day developments. Although the feudal social structure of the Old South and the ideology of socialist egalitarianism of the GDR are miles apart, the representation of the Old South in *Gone With the Wind* could thus function as host for the articulation of feelings of loss and historical defeat" ("Imaginary Space" 35-36).

motif of business with an awareness of different functional levels and their intertwinement not only sheds light on the American literature in the period, but it also offers a way of avoiding theoretical pitfalls and ambiguities.

## How Do We Reveal Functions?

As previously indicated, uncovering functions of literary texts is epistemologically challenging, yet not impossible. I utilize a broad and innovative variety of materials, tools, methods and texts for that end. This study explores literary texts and their interplay with the reader, the author and the dominant literary modes of the period. If, as explored above, the text shapes the *Funktionspotential* of a literary work, limiting the way readers' reception range, an analysis of the text is inevitable. A close reading of the image of business in a number of singular works from the pre-Civil War period to the post-Depression period lies at the center of this study. Exploring the relationship between the motif and the plot – to be precise, the contribution of the motif to the evolution of the plot – reveals how a novel executes its pragmatic functions. In the novels I explore, the motif is what makes the plot possible in the first place. Silas Lapham's paint business ensures his financial failure and moral rise, which offers the reader social and moral orientation; Frank's financial activities in *The Financier* enables him to rise, fail and finally triumph in Philadelphia, which shocks the reader; and Fitzgerald utilizes Gatsby's shady business activities to illustrate that there is no common reality and to subjectivize the reader.

Elucidating how the motif of business evolves with the plot and thereby creates potential effects in a literary work is central to understanding the motif of business; however, the reading public – their social, cultural, economic and mental state – is also significant. If readers "concretize" a literary work, it is necessary to apprehend how they go through aesthetic experience. Writers are rarely disconnected from their readers and this was the case between the Civil War and the Great Depression as well. In fact, readers – their demands, expectations, dreams, habits and fears – had a major impact on the literary production in the period and how literary works were written. A deeper look at economic, social, cultural and mental history of the reading public in the period (as in Chapters 1 and 4) reveals unfathomable feelings of longing for various forms of reality. Business was the "real" thing: as an activity that Americans from all walks life witnessed in their daily lives, the motif was a versatile tool in compensating for the absent realities.

Moreover, although "the death of the author" was announced decades ago and has been repeated by scholars of reception, if the text is the source that conditions the aesthetic experience as explored above, an investigation of how the author

composed the text and constructed the motif of business yields useful insights into its potential functions as well. Like the interplay between the text and the reader, a deeper insight into writers' (auto)biographies and their interaction with their texts confirm the hypothesized functions of the literary works in question, including the functions of the motif of business. For instance, the motif of business in *The Rise of Silas Lapham* cannot be understood without understanding Howells's personal views. As his writings reveal, his social, ethical and religious beliefs – such as his belief in the perfectibility of man – motivated him to construct his literature in order to "perfect" the reader and facilitate the process through which the reader's true potential could be realized. In *The Rise of Silas Lapham,* business allows Howells to reveal what is "bad" by showing how a character confronts moral conflicts, gradually gaining moral and social integrity, to orient the reader accordingly.

Likewise, Herman Melville's biography reveals that he, in a quite modernistic fashion, distrusted general, common and shared knowledge. This made him emphasize the uniqueness of reality and knowledge in different ways in his stories. In "Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall-Street," he criticized and even attempted to refute the universalism of transcendentalists such as Emerson. Business, for Melville, was the ideal motif to criticize transcendentalism and hence the romance tradition in "Bartleby." Authors' personal writings include several helpful details regarding how they came up with the idea of writing about business and more importantly, for what ends. In order to fathom what the motif of business "does," this study sheds light on the interplay between the text and writers' lives and "deep structures" (Eagleton 51) of their minds with a focus on their literary imageries.

In addition to the text, the reading public, and the author, the particular ways through which writers interacted with dominant literary practices shaped writers' texts and thus motifs of business profoundly. An analysis of broader literary movements such as realism, naturalism and modernism reveals that writers like Howells, Dreiser and Fitzgerald were not alone in their attempts to ascribe specific functions to their works; their contemporaries' works trigger a similar aesthetic experience, if not always with the motif of business. Mark Twain's regionalism, for instance, like Howells's plots of social integration, introduces the reader characters from other parts of the country – a similar attempt at brotherhood and social gathering. If Theodore Dreiser utilizes finance in *The Financier* to create intensity and shock, Stephen Crane triggers a similar aesthetic experience in *Maggie* through the motif of broken family.

From a broader perspective, this study reveals that literary movements such as realism, naturalism and modernism are concerted venues of pragmatic functions.

American realists mainly stage bland, "middle path" realities in order to orient the reader towards an idealized social and ethical society. American naturalists also stage realities, but specifically those realities that American realists avoided, in an attempt to shock the reader through the "scandal" they bring about. Works under the rubric of American modernism, on the other hand, repudiated the possibility of a shared and common reality and attempted to induce readers to look for their own subjective reality.[11] Even though literary movements are performative tendencies in flux rather than solid, tangible or reified literary constructions, there is no question that they exist. Seen in this light, such dominant literary practices help to elucidate the performative functions of literary texts,[12] including the particular motifs such as business and businessmen.

Detailed descriptions of the latter two – authors' biographies and literary movements – might seem long and irrelevant at first sight; yet, they are essential in uncovering the potential functions of the motif of business and the literary works. As indicated earlier, by functions, I do not mean social or political functions but possible potential aesthetic effects of a literary text. These possible functions, however, cannot be laid bare using quantitative methods. Rather, we can come up with hypotheses about their *Funktionspotential* and we need evidence for strong hypotheses. Probably the most paramount evidence is the "negative" of a

11 See Winfried Fluck's analyses of American realism and naturalism in *Das Kulturelle Imaginäre: Eine Geschichte des Amerikanischen Romans 1790-1900*, Suhrkamp, 1997; "Declarations of Dependence: Revising Our View of American Realism" in *Victorianism in the United States. Its Era and Its Legacy*, edited by Steve Ickingrill and Stephen Mills, VU Press, 1992, pp. 19-34; and "Beast/Superman/Consumer: American Literary Naturalism as an Experimental Literature" in *Romance with America? Essays on Culture, Literature, and American Studies,* edited by Laura Bieger and Johannes Voelz, Winter, 2009, pp. 199-217. For Wolfgang Iser's understanding of modernism as "an art of reflexivity," see *The Act of Reading: A Theory of Aesthetic Response*, Johns Hopkins UP, 1997.

12 The idea of performativity was especially important for writers of the late nineteenth century. Dow describes novels such as *Life in the Iron Mills, Maggie,* and *McTeague* – key texts of the late nineteenth century – as performative texts that do not "define the world," but stage "the appearance of something that cannot be manifest or completed, that cannot admit any final limits" (34) like other texts in the period. For more information, see "Performative Passages: Davis's *Life in the Iron Mills*, Crane's *Maggie*, Norris's *McTeague*" in *Twisted From the Ordinary: Essays on American Literary Naturalism. Tennessee Studies in Literature*, edited by Mary E. Papke, U of Tennessee P, 2003, pp. 23-44.

literary text: authors' biographies and the literary movements, like the "negatives" a photo, mirrors the functions of the motif of business and literary texts. If negatives are inversed images, where the lightest objects appear darkest and the darkest objects appear lightest, looking at the negatives would help us delineate the positive image – the functions of business. In line with Iser, who says that the critic's "object should […] be not to explain a work, but to reveal the conditions that bring about its various possible effects" (*The Act of Reading* 18), a comprehensive analysis of the interplay between the literary text, the motif of business, authors' biographies and literary movements is essential for blueprinting the functions of business in the American fiction in the period, thus explaining the *raison d'être* of the motif.

## Why These Novels?

This theoretical and methodological grid shapes the selection of business fictions explored in this study. Between the Civil War and the Great Depression, many novels that included business were written. However, only some left a long-lasting "afterimage," to use another visual metaphor. That is, only some of the literary texts make a reconstruction possible by revealing information about the interplay between the text and the reader, the author and the dominant literary discourse. If components such as readers' reactions, contemporary and later critical acclaim and scholarly interest make an analysis of the functions of business possible in the first place, it is difficult to hypothesize about works that did not make an effect on the reader by lesser-known authors whose autobiographical information is obscure and which did not play a major role in the dominant literary discourses of the period. In short, more popular and critically-acclaimed works written by relatively popular authors who shaped the literary landscape of their period pave the way for a thorough reconstruction of the functions of the motif of business by looking at the "afterimage."

The fictions of business explored in this study are the ones that have left the longest and deepest "afterimage" both on the reader and the critic. *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, like the *Ragged Dick* series, was a bestseller in the decade it was published. The novel even had a deep impact on architecture and interior design of the period, as Chapter 3 reveals. Since its publication, it has been recognized as one of the central realist novels in American literary history. Theodore Dreiser was a major American writer with a literary career spanning four decades. In ad-

dition to its first edition in 1912, his novel *The Financier* was revised and published again in 1927.[13] Moreover, it has been translated into several languages. The depth of the afterimage *The Great Gatsby* left is without question: even though the novel was not immediately successful, after World War II, it became one of the greatest and most popular novels of American literature. Americans read these novels; they have been affected by them, shaped by them and, if I may say, culturally constituted by them, which open them to analysis from a *Funktionsgeschichte* perspective.

13 Fifteen years later, in 1927, Dreiser revised *The Financier* and published a version shorter by 227 pages. This study utilizes the 1927 edition of the novel not only because it is markedly closer to the text Dreiser actually wanted to publish in the first place, but also because it was appreciated as a better novel by contemporaries as well as later readers. Even though the 1927 edition was shorter, it included new text that was not in the 1912 version. However, many of the inserted parts were not really new: they were the parts that Dreiser had in the page proofs of the 1912 edition, which were taken out in the published 1912 edition due to editorial pressure (Mulligan 585). While Dreiser could not resist editors' demands before the publication of the novel in 1912, he was more adamant in 1927 and reinserted these original passages into the later edition of the novel. Seen from this perspective, the 1927 version of the novel arguably represents Dreiser's original vision of the novel.

Moreover, notwithstanding the fact that the 1927 edition of the novel is the only version that has been widely available in print, the later edition of the novel has been accepted as "superior to the original version" (Ziff xviii). Pizer thinks that "its fictional pace is swifter and its characterizations sharper" (*Theodore Dreiser* 165). Mulligan reiterates a similar idea, saying, "the plotting is swifter and the characters appear bolder" (585) in the newer edition. Accordingly, despite its positive reception among critics, the sales of the 1912 novel disappointed Dreiser and the publisher in contrast to the 1927 edition. Understandably, the economic optimism of the 1920s appreciated a powerful character overcoming financial obstacles. Furthermore, the novel appeared in Russian and German in 1928 and in Spanish in 1930, which confirm the positive reception of the later edition. From a reception aesthetics perspective, the omissions in the 1927 edition were not even crucial. Although the novel became substantially shorter in the latter version, the plot did not change much: Dreiser primarily cut the long and detailed descriptions, while the events stayed nearly the same. Accordingly, there was no great difference in the pragmatic functions the novel served, while the book became more readable. For more information on the composition of the novel, see Roark Mulligan's comments in *The Financier: The Critical Edition*, U of Illinois P, 2010, pp. ix-xi and 557-646.

## Why Another Book?

Surprisingly, although business has always been an essential component of American life and a major motif between the Civil War and the Great Depression literature, there are surprisingly few monographs published on the motif.[14] Moreover, only a few essays and articles were published. Neither the books nor shorter studies, which appeared mainly in the early decades of the Cold War, do the motif justice, though. A short chronological overview of the previous research not only demonstrates why a new monograph written without the constraints of the Cold War is justified, but it also reveals the general weaknesses and one-sidedness of recent literary scholarship on American literature in general. For most scholars, just like most authors, business was nothing special – a backdrop, not a player.

Before World War II, there were only sporadic interest and hence little academic dialogue around the image of business and businessman in American fiction.[15] By contrast, the few decades following the war witnessed the proliferation

14 George Lyman Kittredge elucidated the earliest American research on the image of business and businessmen in fiction in a speech entitled "The Business Man and Literature," which he delivered before the Boston Commercial Club in 1911. Interestingly, Kittredge's research features no American writers. Instead, he starts his discussion with piracy, which he sees as "one of the most ancient businesses among mankind" (3), its reflection in Julius Caesar's narrative, its appearance in Nordic mythology, and its "survival in culture" until the 1910s (3). He also discusses how poets like Shakespeare and Bacon handled trade and art as a trade, and the patronage system in England. In addition to Kittredge, Vernon Louis Parrington and Granville Hicks explore the theme of business on the axis of social and political inequality and democracy. F. O. Matthiessen, on the other hand, celebrates Dreiser's social realism "beneath the surface" (154) in his business novels. Other relevant works on the topic from pre-WWII period are as follows: John Erskine, "American Business in the American Novel." *Bookman*, vol. LXXXIII, July 1931, pp. 449-457; Charles R. Walker, "Business in the American Novel." *Bookman*, vol. LXVI, December 1927, pp. 401-405; and Edward E. Cassady, "The Business Man in the American Novel: 1865 to 1903." Diss. University of California, Berkeley, 1939.

15 The primary reason was that in contrast to British literature, American literature had not been established in American universities as a research field for a very long time. Even though there were courses in American literature as early as 1875, research in the field was not perceived positively by scholars of English. In fact, some scholars shared the belief that "there is no such thing" as American literature, "unless the pictorial scratchings of aborigines on stones and birch bark are to be classed as literary productions.

of academic discussion on the topic. Nevertheless, the discussion was driven by the anxieties Cold War brought about – anxieties that prevented scholars from delving into the topic from a critical point of view and thus grasping the complexity of the motif. Americans were anxious about issues impacting the American identity: issues such as individualism, market economies, political liberalism, patriotism and communism. The vehemence of these anxieties, which eventually led to McCarthyism on the political level, also manifested itself on the cultural level in discussions of American literature. These anxieties are reflected nowhere better than the editorial of *Life Magazine* in 1955:

> Ours is the most powerful nation in the world. It has had a decade of unparalleled prosperity. […] Yet, it is still producing a literature which sounds sometimes as if it was written by an unemployed homosexual living in a packing-box shanty on the city dump while awaiting admission to the country poorhouse. (48)

Clearly, Americans were uncomfortable with the mismatch between an unparalleled prosperity and the "unsmiling" images of wealth, capitalism and liberal economy in American literature. In an atmosphere that was harbinger of the subsequent Red Scare, many scholars were worried that a negative view of America in American literature was playing into the hands of Soviet Russia and communism. This atmosphere made previously neglected topics such as the image of business and businessmen in American literature an important topic for discussion about American culture. Business was never "only" business: doing research about the topic almost always had broader implications about the liberal market economy, capi-

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Every piece of literary work done in the English language by a man or woman born to the use of it is a part of that noble whole which we call English literature" (qtd. in Graff 211-2). As a result, early scholars of American literature were apologetic about their research and focused strongly on New England, which still had a strong cultural and intellectual connection to Britain. For instance, while drawing *A Literary History of America*, Wendell states that "in literary history New England is so predominant that, at least for the moment, we may neglect the other portions of the country" (28). However, even when they did research on New England, they were selective. Their research foci stood strongly against the material side of American culture, inducing them to study topics like New England idealism. This focus anti-materialism made themes such as trade and commerce unfit for their research.

talism and indirectly even communism. In an age when it was traitorous to condemn capitalism, business fiction became one of the controversial topics which scholars continuously tested against the official doctrine of liberalism.[16]

Accordingly, the two decades subsequent to World War II witnessed the publication of a significant body of criticism on the motif of business. These studies reveal that critics' anxieties soon turned into expectations and standards about the images of business and businessmen in American literature. As Henry Mumford Jones symptomatically illustrates, "businessmen are by no means the admirable creatures theory requires them to be" (21).[17] Jones's statement reveals a broader trend in the period: while business was a positive activity to many contemporary critics in the period, writers described it in rather negative terms,[18] which rendered the representation "a little unrealistic" (Jones 21),[19] creating misrepresentation. As Henry Nash Smith later illustrated, for critics, "It was difficult to find the elements of an acceptable code of values within the system" ("The Search for a Capitalist Hero" 86) in business novels. Accordingly, both academic and non-academic discussions revolved around the negativity of the motif in American literature in general.[20]

16 Interestingly, in one of the rare studies carried out on the topic in the German Democratic Republic, an important Americanist and translator of numerous American writers, Karl-Heinz Schönfelder, repeats the same pattern in his analysis. In a speech he delivered at a conference on the American novel in East Berlin in 1981, he argued that the image of businessmen in American literature in the period between Benjamin Franklin and Theodore Dreiser went from "affirmation and adoration to negation and contempt" (217). That is, to Schönfelder, while business was represented unrealistically in the beginning, writers gradually portrayed the motif more "realistically" in the course of time – realistic (and thus negative) from an anti-capitalist standpoint.

17 Originally published in *Harvard Business Review*, vol. 31, no. 1, January-February 1953, pp. 133-142.

18 These discussions were so powerful that Linda Barnes Gardner Jobe wrote a thesis entitled "The Businessman in the American Novel: Evidence of the Novelists' Sympathetic Treatment" in 1970.

19 Noting this discrepancy, Robert L. Souders wrote a thesis entitled "The Successful American Business Man, 1865-1900: A Discrepancy between Image and Reality" in 1958.

20 The rising interest among students led to numerous theses on the topic in the period, such as Albert L. Lemen's "The Business Man in the American Novel" (1941), Margaret J. Tibbets's "The Business Man in American Literature from 1865 to 1915" (1941), Margaret Hunt's "The Business Man As Presented in Representative American Novels

John Chamberlain initiated the discussion by problematizing the businessman's image in American literature as "a villainous creature" (134) in 1948. A few years later, Commager expressed the same discomfort, saying, "most authors portrayed an economic system disorderly and ruthless, wasteful and inhumane, unjust alike to workingmen, investors, and consumers, politically corrupt and morally corrupting" (16).[21] Similarly, Seligman perceived the businessman in American literature as a "ruthless and rapacious tycoon, consumed by ambition and devoid of ethics" (23).[22] Van R. Halsey Jr.[23] called these fictional businessmen "immoral scoundrels of the worst sort" (32).[24] For Ludwig von Mises, the businessman was "a barbarian, a gambler and a drunkard" (72). Such anxieties about the negative image of business and businessmen were so powerful that scholars like Jones berated writers of business fictions for their misrepresentations harshly: "if there is any calling in the world which is occupationally rife with frustration, gossip, innuendo, backbiting, back-scratching, and jealousy, it is the trade of being a writer" (21). To many critics in the 1950s and 1960s, writers who failed to represent business positively not only disqualified themselves from being good writers but also sullied their own reputations!

The declining vehemence of the Cold War in the subsequent decades diminished the influence of the Red Scare, but it did not kill existing anxieties. In 1982, Emily Stipes Watts published one of the first monographs on the topic, entitled *The Businessman in American Literature*. In her book, she explores the image of the businessman from the pre-Colonial period to the 1980s. Notwithstanding its immense historical scope, which makes depth impossible (she devotes only a few

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During the Period 1873-1918" (1952), Robert A. Kavesh's "Businessmen in Fiction: The Capitalist and Executive in American Novels" (1955), Charles R. Lown's "Business and the Businessman in American Drama Prior to the Civil War" (1957), Elizabeth Kahr Jacobs's "The Business Man in the American Novel Since 1920" (1958), Donald C. Wall's "The Concept of the Businessman in the American Novel" (1960), William J. Roach's "Theodore Dreiser's Fictional Treatment of the Business Man" (1960), L. P. Brown's "W.D. Howells' Portrayal of the American Business Man" (1961), and James H. Wood's "The Image of the Businessman and the Conception of Success in the Modern American Businessman Novel" (1965).

21 Originally published in *The American Mind: An Interpretation of American Thought and Character since the 1880's*, Yale UP, 1950, pp. 247-76.

22 Originally published in *Fortune*, vol. XLVI, no. 6, December 1952, pp. 111-126.

23 He also wrote a dissertation in 1956 entitled "The Portrait of the Businessman in Twentieth Century American Fiction" at the University of Pennsylvania.

24 Originally published in *American Quarterly*, vol. XI, no. 3, Fall 1959, pp. 391-402.

pages to highly complex business novels like *The Rise of Silas Lapham* or *The Financier*), it is impossible to miss the bothersome persistence of Cold War anxieties in her book. She says, "Indeed, so pervasive is this negative image of the businessman, especially in American literature, that it can be labeled a syndrome" which she calls "Scrooge syndrome" (2). Throughout her study, she explores how writers of American literature – regardless of the period – handled the motif critically. Setting "the positive values of American capitalism" (151) as the standard against which to evaluate the novels, Watts explores fictions of business and businessmen in such an anxious way that a more suitable title for her study would be "The Anti-Business Bias in American Literature."[25]

In the post-Cold War period, interest in the topic continued to dwindle. Still, Watts's 1982 study reappeared in 2004. In 2009, the Northeast Modern Language Association held a session about the businessman in literature. In 2010, the proceedings were published under the title *Merchants, Barons, Sellers and Suits: The Changing Images of the Businessman through Literature* by Christa Mahalik. The volume combines papers that analyze "the changing image of the businessman throughout literature" (1). Even though the papers focus on the image of the businessman rather than on the image of the business as an organization, the variety of the approaches to the topic makes coherence difficult. Similarly, 2014 saw the publication of *Exploring Capitalist Fiction: Business through Literature and Film* by Edward W. Younkins. He sees a didactic potential in business fiction. As he

25 Other works reiterate scholars' positive-negative approach when exploring the motif of business. In 1977, Lorne Fienberg submitted a dissertation which later appeared as a book with the title of *A Cuckoo in the Nest of Culture: Changing Perspectives on the Businessman in the American Novel, 1865-1914* (1988). Fienberg's study explores the "implied author" and the "vision du monde" in the novels which "expresses the world view of a specific social group which necessarily shapes his portrayal of the business sphere" (1), revealing his objective to apply contemporary theoretical tools to the topic. Despite this theoretical approach however, he comes to the conclusion that novelists become more and more sympathetic to the businessman towards the early decades of the twentieth century. Other works continue the trend: in 1982, John R. Cashill wrote a dissertation entitled "The Capitalist as Hero in the American Novel," which reveals the latent desire to find a capitalist hero in American novel – the need which dominated the aftermath of World War II. Similarly, in 1988, Clare Virginia Eby wrote a dissertation with the title "Representative Men: Businessmen in American Fiction, 1875-1914," and argued that writers of business novels attempted to portray the businessman as the representative man of America. Like Cashill's study, Eby's project reveals the latent but ongoing anxiety about the negativity of the image of business among literary scholars.

argues, "It is likely that people who read business novels and plays and watch movies about business will continue to search for more of them as sources of entertainment, inspiration, and education" (xiii). Interestingly, the starting point for both Mahalik's and Younkins's studies were literature courses designed for business students. In other words, fictions of business were attractive to these scholars due to their utility: they could teach different topics in business and management departments such as business ethics by using fictions of business.

The Cold War ended decades ago and we live in a quite different world today, where it is easier to lead creative discussions about the motif of business without talking about Cold War dichotomies such as liberalism, capitalism and communism. This major change in the geopolitical situation and civil society has opened up a new and less fraught space where the topic can be critically explored. The more tolerant social and academic environment in the past three decades has been quite inviting for diverse approaches in American Studies. It is not a coincidence that the transnational movement in American Studies followed the Cold War. The end of the Cold War has made it easier for non-American scholars, who used to be hesitant to venture into hotly debated issues of the Cold War, to join discussions, as the field is no longer the purview of American scholars only. It also led established scholars of American Studies to take non-US scholars' approaches seriously. This process of diversification has opened up new possibilities for younger scholars unencumbered by older anxieties, rejection, and resistance, but the fictions of business have still been neglected.

Both this new methodology and the new social and temporal space situate the contributions of this study firmly within transnational American studies.[26] For one thing, even though reception aesthetics have many pillars including "empirical" research, *Funktionsgeschichte* is deeply embedded in the German tradition – the continental side of reception aesthetics – which has not received much attention

26 In fact, transnational experiences were crucial in US-based research into the images of business and businessmen in literature, if not specifically in American literature. The first monograph written on the topic reveals a profoundly surprising fact: an analysis of the businessman in Russian literature in the US precedes an analysis of businessmen in American literature. In 1937, Louis Perlman published his dissertation entitled *Russian Literature and the Business Man*, which he submitted to Columbia University. Perlman's interest in the theme may have been personal as his Vita at the end of his dissertation reveals: born in Russia, he attended Russian schools before coming to the US (238). Still, it was this transnational experience that apparently made Perlman realize what was omnipresent in American society and induced him to combine it with his experiences in Soviet Russia.

among literary scholars in the US. To Thomas, *Funktionsgeschichte* is a largely ignored but important way of carrying out transnational research in the field. He argues that "such an engagement" with scholars of reception aesthetics such as Winfried Fluck and Wolfgang Iser who emphasize *Funktionsgeschichte*, "might make a difference in how we relate works of literature to history" and it does, indeed. It can "open up new possibilities for the study of American literature" ("The Fictive and the Imaginary" 8) if scholars really aim for transnational approaches, which includes delving into other traditions of doing scholarly research. Business in American fiction between the Civil War to the Great Depression allows us to delve into the aesthetic and thus affective grid inscribed in the literature of the period from a continental perspective.

## Other Possible Approaches

Leaving the simplistic outlook previous research adopts aside, scrutinizing the motif of business from a phenomenological point of view, i.e., probing the apprehensible aesthetics of the motif of business, is only one way of analyzing it. It is possible to wear other glasses, use different lenses and look at the topic from many other perspectives. If one leaves the path taken (genealogically) by Kant, Husserl, Iser and Fluck, and follows a more Hegelian track, one could come up with a "conceptual" account of business in American fiction in the period of business renaissance.[27] If such an approach were applied to business, the focus would lie on the essence of business rather its appearance, on the idea rather than its aesthetics, and on the Hegelian "monosemic or univocal unity" of art over the Kantian concept-less polysemy of literary works (Zima 7). The Hegelian lens would be a completely different but a legitimate outlook with its own virtues, offering insight into visions of business in American fiction from a contrasting perspective.[28]

The Hegelian conceptualization of art denies the autonomy of literary works and underscores their totality. Accordingly, this theory emphasizes the production over reception and the author over the reader in Eagleton's simple taxonomy. As authors express "historical consciousness" and "historical content" (Zima 6) in their literary works in this approach, a more conceptual analysis would shed light on authors' *Weltanschauung* and their understanding of the world, including business. Focusing on the essence of business would also lead to a more thorough

27 For instance, post-1980 scholars of American naturalism tend to see the movement either as a formalist writing practice or as "the episteme of consumerism" (Den Tandt, "Refashioning" 416), which are Kantian and Hegelian respectively.

28 See Zima, Chapter 1.

definition of business as authors conceived of it (though glossing over the indeterminacies literary works typically include, from a reader-oriented perspective). An interesting undertaking would be to explore the concept of commerce in the eighteenth century as it is manifested in literary works. The prioritization of the concept of business over its appearance would also make room for non-literary works, e.g. the social theory of business or the works of economists like Henry George and Thorsten Veblen. In fact, following a Hegelian path would pave the way for a combination of literary works and social and economic writings on business, thus leading to a fuller picture of the concept of business in a specific period of time in history. Political discussions on the gold standard during the Gilded Age and literary works dealing with the gold standard would theoretically result in a thorough spirit of history à la Hegel, for instance.

To come up with such an alternative, totalizing account, however, a fairly high price has to be paid: in an attempt to delineate the concept of business, the literary qualities of a work of fiction have to be peeled away. Works of fiction have many literary devices that escape easy conceptual definition – not only imageries, rhymes and euphemisms, but also tropes, themes and motifs. A conceptual approach would downplay these literary qualities, leading scholars to analyze literary works, simply put, in the way they explore other forms of non-literary writing like the works of George and Veblen. The literary residue would be a nuisance clouding the concepts, while works expressing ideas on business more philosophically, clearly and transparently (that is, in a non-literary manner) would be more valued.[29] This downplaying of the literariness of fictional works makes it difficult to concentrate on business in the first place, because business is a literary device – a motif – and it belongs to the "expression plane" rather than the "content plane;" it escapes a univocal concept ("ohne Begriff") (Zima 7). As a result, a Hegelian attitude cannot hover over the motif of business for long and spills almost automatically over to the idea of economy, which is a major component of the "base," hence historical consciousness. It is almost impossible to talk only about "commerce in the eighteenth century;" the topic quickly becomes "economy in the eighteenth century," with the "aesthetics" of business being cleansed through the "idea" of business.

In all likelihood, a conceptual analysis of the idea of business cannot be done without the temptation to refer to the economy or rather to carve the economic component out of the business element in literary works. For instance, critics such as Amy Kaplan and Walter Benn Michaels use the motif of business to come up

29 Therefore, Hegel postulated that philosophy, as "the highest manner of comprehending the Absolute Idea," will eventually overcome art (qtd. in Zima 7-8).

with an "economic" argument: they put forward that cultural artifacts not only describe capitalism in different ways but also participate in the economic structures they describe. As a motif only "related" to economics, business is especially prone to the attempt to reveal how cunningly literary texts hide or accommodate dominant but elusive socioeconomic structures. Michaels's *The Gold Standard and the Logic of Capitalism* (1987) explores business novels such as Frank Norris's *The Octopus* (1901) and *The Financier* and argues that the dominant but not ineffable ideology of the period was the gold standard. Kaplan explores Howells's and Dreiser's novels and concludes that realism is "a strategy for imagining and managing the threats of social change" (10). As a result, neither Michaels nor the scholars in this tradition focus on the phenomenology of business; instead, the motif of business becomes a tool to reach the spirit of the age. In the best case, business remains a minor motif in a ground sweep of literary-economic philosophizing. The legacy of Hegel is presumably one of the reasons why there are so few monographs on business in American fiction, even though exploring the relationship between economy and fiction is a popular research endeavor among scholars of American literature.[30]

Rather than an undesired distraction, the literary "residue" of fictional texts is what makes aesthetic experience possible in the first place. For many readers, the aesthetic potential of literature is not only the starting point but also the main reason behind their incessant desire for fiction. Today, people choose to read a work like *Main Street* (1921) by Sinclair Lewis over *The Mind in the Making: The Relation of Intelligence to Social Reform* (1923) by James Harvey Robinson – both bestsellers of their period – primarily because of the aesthetic potential of the former. Unfortunately, this starting point – literary aesthetics – is neglected in many English departments in the English-speaking world. If the literary potential is so vital for people's ceaseless desire to read fiction, it is worth analyzing the aesthetic

30 The roots of Michaels's and Kaplan's "ideological" approach is even more revealing about the need for a different American Studies. Often, behind scholars' ideology-oriented studies, there are underlying romantic ideals which America is judged against. Put very simply, to many scholars like Michaels and Kaplan, the ideal America is, among others, democratic, egalitarian, free of oppression, and diverse. Whenever America is represented differently, scholars will intervene and detect any digression to these ideals. In other words, being a scholar of American literature is like being an explorer of where America fails its ideals. Surprisingly, although recent scholars of American Studies such as Michaels and Kaplan are outspoken opponents of narratives of American exceptionalism, they reiterate the basic tenets of American exceptionalism in their attempts to see American cultural artifacts from an idealistic point of view.

potential of literary works and the components that make up their aesthetic potential. In this book, my goal is to tease out exactly these aspects of *The Rise of Silas Lapham*, *The Financier* and *The Great Gatsby* via the motif of business and its literary functions.

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In Chapter 1, I explore the social developments in the second half of the nineteenth century and explain how the need for an externalized form of fiction – realism and naturalism – gradually took hold in the US. In Chapter 2, I investigate Romantic and realist aesthetics through the theories of Erich Auerbach, Georg Lukács and Ian Watt. This chapter analyzes the transition from American Romanticism to American realism through the motif of business in works such as Edgar Allen Poe's "The Business Man" (1840), Timothy Shay Arthur's *Riches Have Wings: A Tale for the Rich and Poor* (1847), Herman Melville's "Bartleby, the Scrivener: A Story of Wall-Street" (1853), Horatio Alger's *Ragged Dick; or, Street Life in New York with the Boot Blacks* (1868) and Elisabeth Stuart Phelps's *The Silent Partner* (1871). Chapter 3 explores the motif of business in William Dean Howells's *The Rise of Silas Lapham* (1885). I argue that the *Darstellung* of the business organization in the novel is shaped by Howells's emphasis on moral and social orientation.

The subsequent two chapters are devoted to the image of business in American naturalism and modernism, respectively. Chapter 4 explores the motif of business in Theodore Dreiser's *The Financier* (1912). The protagonist Frank Cowperwood's financial activities in the novel reveal Dreiser's attempts to come up with a "truer and better" reality, which shocks the reader ultimately. In Chapter 5, I argue that the image of business in *The Great Gatsby* (1925) is persuasive but ineffable – inarticulable – because American "high" modernism, rather than attempting to convey writers' preconceptions about social reality to the reader, offered alternative ways of reaching personal, unique and subjective realities. Lastly, the Conclusion looks at the development of the motif in the post-Depression era and the implications of this motif-based study for literary research in general. From a broader perspective, the literary works this study explores as well as their authors are not only brilliant representatives of their respective movements, but they also shed light on the evolution of American literature between the Civil War and the Great Depression.