engineer to his abstract project: "The American Plan" of scientific management. Henry Ford, on the other hand, who did not "drink, smoke, gamble, or get into debt" because his mother told him not to, is identified with his most famous product, the "Tin Lizzie" (784; 808). Thus, the chapter titles reify the two resourceful engineers. Moreover, the naïve worldviews of these personages seem to insinuate that abstinence and a full understanding of the world are incompatible (note that also Brecht's Puntila [1940] cannot see half of the world when sober). Without drink, complexity seems to vanish.

Similarly, the fictional character John Ward Moorehouse "was twenty and didn't drink or smoke and was keeping himself clean for the lovely girl he was going to marry" (*USA* 157–58). At the end of *The Big Money*, he tells his protégé Richard Ellsworth Savage that he "never could get much out of drinking" and "gave it up, even before prohibition" (1181). In the course of the trilogy, the name John Ward Moorehouse contracts to J Ward, then to JW until, in the end, he is only "a name," with which does not require sympathy: "You can't feel sorry when a name gets sick" (1199). Again, non-personhood is introduced by non-drinking, reinforced by reductive reference, and substantiated by inhumanity, such as emotional coldness. His wife Gertrude cries: "You're cold as a fish" (294); and Eveline Hutchins learns that "no matter how much she cuddled against him, she couldn't get to feel really warm" (627). Moorehouse admits himself that he has "been too busy working . . . [to] ever to develop that side of [his] nature" (623). Even if Moorehouse is lying at that specific moment, he is not a person for whom emotions come first. Rather, he has consciously sacrificed his humanity for the sake of advancement in a capitalist world. Tellingly, the non-person becomes inscrutable to the characters around him: "I wish I knew what he thought about anything. I've been working for him for years now and I don't know whether he's a genius *or* a stuffed shirt," Savage muses (1177). Similarly, another character, the journalist

Jerry Burnham, sees in him "nothing but a goddam megaphone" (612). Presumably, there is nothing behind the public JW of the "handsome boyish blue eyes" (254).

Moorehouse and the other major dry characters, Eleanor Stoddard and Janey Williams, undergo a thorough transformation of their potential natural selves as sketched out in their childhood narratives. In their respective youths, Moorehouse wanted to write songs, Stoddard felt strongly about beauty and art, and Janey wanted to have a warm family life.[15] Art and love are two of the three potential ingredients to better the world according to Jimmy Herf in *MT*: "Nobody ever writes any music or starts any revolutions or falls in love" (649). Without a non-conformist, revolutionary attitude, such a project, however, seems doomed. While Emery insists on being, i.e., not behaving, Moorehouse, Stoddard and Janey adapt to perfection. They subjugate what Horkheimer and Adorno term their "natural I[s]" to their Marxian "character mask[s]" ("Introduction") to such a degree that it eventually disappears in the process. While the wet characters suffer from the incongruity between the required mask and their natural self, the dry characters embody reductionist identity-thinking. Identity-thinking merges the appearance of the object with the object itself. However, as an object (or subject) is always more than its appearance according to Marxist thought, identity-thinking is unable to grasp the complexity of reality, which includes human life. At the end of the novel, a subordinate's sententious summary of Moorehouse's life—"not drinking [got] 'em in the end" (*USA* 1199)—again explicitly establishes the association of not-drinking with not-living.

Dryness is associated with material success at the cost of lifelessness. Cowley describes the materially successful as condemned "to be hollow and enameled, to chirp in thin squeaky voices like insects with the pulp of life sucked out of them and nothing but poison left in their veins" (*USA* 141). They turn themselves into instruments of other self-serving characters higher up the social ladder. While Moorehouse becomes part of the

shaping powers of the world, the Janey narrative illustrates how the life of the lower classes is affected by the dominant worldview of instrumental reason. Public opinion tells Janey not to play with her black friend, so she no longer plays with her. She hears rumors that “very polite and generous” Mr. Dreyfus is a spy and quits her job with him (248). She enjoys the hospitality of the Compton family but thinks of denouncing them for their unpatriotic ideas. She loves her brother, but she refuses him the sociability of drinking together, as she does not “like beer” (297). She eventually deserts him because her colleagues would consider him inadequate. The Janey who once yearned for a family becomes incapable of disinterested personal relationships. She has learned that other people are either useful or harmful, “success or failure,” as Horkheimer and Adorno put it (28), and that a life free of penury has to be paid for by compliance with the dominant social norms. In her own self-concept, Janey has succeeded as Moorehouse’s respected secretary, a position that provides her with material comfort. In fact, however, she has become the perfect appendage to the machine, which has made her renounce all human yearnings. Her emotional failure shows in her “lined oldmaidish face” and her epithet “sour as a pickle” (*USA* 1184; 1197).

However, Moorehouse, Stoddard and Janey, although they are explicitly marked as dry, do drink champagne or wine, the refined drinks of the upper class, on several occasions. This can be understood as another expression of their conformity to social norms and, at the same time, of their lack of personal integrity. When Moorehouse and Stoddard seal their mutually useful friendship with absinthe cocktails, probably because of absinthe’s assumed magical powers, they cannot help but fall back on irrational rituals. Not only is pure rationality a myth, but the clear-cut symbolic divide between dry and wet, rational and irrational, success and failure, lifeless vs. suffering, becomes blurred since drink can also be instrumentalized, as much as everything else. The most obvious examples that seem to question the basic pattern as discussed so far are certainly the characters of E.R. Bingham and

Richard Ellsworth Savage. Bingham is represented as a compelling, self-serving character whose unscrupulous, almost satanic manipulations propel him to the very top. In *The Big Money*, he claims that he only drinks “raw milk” and that “coffee . . . is a deadly poison, as are alcohol, tea and tobacco” so that his rise in society is also marked by explicit abstinence (*USA* 1187 f.). In contrast to the other dries, Bingham seems to apprehend that abstinence, too (like drink and religion), is not the truth but a way that he might exploit for his own benefit. He can renounce the man-made drug, which may s(t)imulate life but which is not to be confused with the thing itself. Life is also nature, and the natural way of generating life, its productive side, lies in sex. Bingham recognizes this creative, almost God-like power, providing him with a vitality that beats the lifelessness of renunciation of the other dries. Accordingly, he tends to employ his strong sex drive, and subjects others to it (e.g., when he makes Savage entertain him in dubious clubs). By only overtly adapting his mask to society without renouncing his natural self behind it, he covertly adapts society to his desires. Not surprisingly, the mediator Moorehouse looks “small and meek beside him” (1187).

Richard Ellsworth Savage, in contrast, may be considered a socially successful drunk. According to Hemingway’s hierarchy of drunks in *The Sun Also Rises*, Savage certainly counts as a “bad drunk” (119). He opts for success and rises in society, betraying his natural I as the dry characters around him also do. However, like the wet failures in Dos Passos’s novels, he does not succeed in suppressing his self entirely. His critical intelligence keeps a sense of objective truth alive. As a result, he cannot become identical with his character mask, like Moorehouse and Janey, nor is he able to control his mask like Bingham. Drink eases the weight of the mask yet destroys his body. In this, he does not differ much from Charley Anderson, the mechanic-turned-capitalist entrepreneur. Yet through his impending marriage with Bingham’s daughter, which forces him to become abstinent, Savage has decided to sell his soul, rather than lose his biological life. Despite surface entanglements and

combinatory varieties that tend to mask the underlying conflict, the basic issue as symbolized by drink remains operative: the is of human complexity vs. the inhuman ought of instrumental reason in a capitalist society.

The micrological detail drink is part of the overall design of the novels which, in Pizer's words, attempt to "achieve a formal expression of American life" through intellectualized abstraction (17). As a worthwhile "expression of American life" requires complexity, such abstractions cannot mean a simplified, schematic juxtaposition of drink and temperance, or success and failure, merit and blame, individual and society, life and death. Accordingly, the "grim fates" of the wet characters in *MT* and *USA*, as discussed so far, partially result from both individual decisions and exterior factors—the drunken deaths are generally related to the lives that the characters lead (Hutchinson 178). Exterior conditions are perhaps most decisive in the case of Joe Williams. His life as an underdog is characterized throughout by violence, and he eventually dies when someone smashes a bottle on his head in a fight. It is the force and rigidity of the container, not the fluid drink inside that kills him. Just as Stan Emery's and Eveline's lives were neither planned nor purposeful, their deaths are not premeditated suicides. Unable to find a meaningful way to stand up against the instrumental world around them, they are simply overpowered.

Charley Anderson, the gifted engineer who loses his innocence on the way to success, dies due to technical malfunction—his car stalls at the wrong moment—but also by misjudgment. His inebriation prevents him from accurately gauging his car's and the approaching train's powers. Despite Anderson's connections with free-moving powerful airplanes, car vs. train here seems to emphasize a collision between the potential for individual mobility or agency and the irresistible force of a steam engine which, running on a network of fixed rails, will not change its course. At the moment of death, Anderson underestimates the power and destructive speed of the train; in life, he misjudged his

potential for true upward mobility—he did not arrive from a recognized station but only hopped on midway. His destructive alcoholism is thus again an expression of powerlessness: upper-class conventions prevent him from living his self-image of being “only a mechanic” and at the same time deny him full acceptance in their circles, despite his individual ingenuity and financial success (passim). He is too weak to resist the irrationality of the American Dream that presents itself as rational progress.

However, disrupting the schematic either/or pattern, it seems that even successful careers are not merely based on instrumental purposefulness. In an ironical twist, Dos Passos bases Gus McNiel’s and George Baldwin’s careers in *MT* on an accident in a state of inebriety—so failure may, indeed, become a “sublime thing” (634).

Drink in the Newsreel and Camera Eye Sections of *USA*

The interplay between its fictional life stories and biographies of historical figures and the trilogy’s other two narrative modes—in the Newsreel and Camera Eye sections—both add further dimensions to the micrological detail drink. The Newsreels are montages of prefabricated text from newspapers, advertisements, poems or song lyrics. As William Solomon notes, they integrate “the novel's many ‘others’” into the novelistic text in a way that seems freed of semantic and syntactic constraints (183).[16] However, the formal radicalism and ostensible diversity are at odds with the ideological conservatism which they promulgate. The public voice of the Newsreel turns out to be a mouthpiece for the concerns of the social elite. Thus, drink predominantly appears in connection with either the fear of proletarian violence or with the display of wealth. The anti-communist propaganda in, for instance, “LENIN SHOT BY TROTSKY IN DRUNKEN BRAWL” associates drunken dissipation with the fear of assassination, anarchy and revolution, as do several other

clippings which reflect the propaganda by nationalist temperance movements against the lower classes, emphasizing the toxic side-effects of alcoholic excess (*USA* 649).

In contrast, Newsreel 2 foregrounds upper-class splendor, associating drink with an aspirational lifestyle of conspicuous consumption:

> the luncheon which was served in the physical laboratory was replete with novel features. A miniature blastfurnace four feet high was on the banquet table and a narrowgauge railroad forty feet long ran round the edge of the table. Instead of molten metal the blastfurnace poured hot punch into small cars on the railroad. (*USA* 28)

Elsewhere, advertisements, such as "three bottles of Electric Bitters made me allright" foreground business interests as the source of capitalist wealth (150). The (ironic) artist's sigh in the "alcoholic blues" (605 f.) is the only exception to the otherwise limited perspective on the fears, pleasures and aims of the upper classes.

The Newsreels suggest that Dos Passos was consciously simulating contemporaneous techniques of media manipulation, apparently applying the strategies to "manufacture consent" demonstrated in Walter Lippmann's *Public Opinion* (1922). In the late nineteenth and early twentieth century, PR specialists like Ivy Ledbetter Lee, James Walter Thompson and Edward Bernays professionalized communication to a formerly unknown degree by recognizing the impact of the words that "hammer continually at the eyes and ears of America" (Bernays 113). Another tool of manipulation is, of course, to maintain silence about a subject. Compared to the other narrative modes, the Newsreel rarely refers to drink: out of 68 Newsreels, only 17 mention alcohol. Rather than reflecting the people's thoughts and concerns, the public voice aims at controlling them.

Moreover, Dos Passos's Newsreels are highly fragmented, incoherent montages. Linguistic noise swamps meaningful communication with floods of meaningless, non-contextualized data: reports are interrupted by advertisements, pop songs by headlines, and

essential news items appear next to trivial ones. On the one hand, these snippets reflect the superficial and jumpy practice of newspaper reading. On the other hand, Dos Passos demonstrates that the value of news is not primarily defined by content—a judgment that would call for an objective perspective. Rather, value is determined by the single norm of exchange value according to instrumental rationality. The Newsreels' seemingly arbitrary, formally intoxicating coverage obstructs the individuals' view of the world and thus their control over it—the ultimate aim of manipulation. The manipulative power of the public voice, again with reference to drink, is underscored in the biography of William Randolph Hearst, the newspaper magnate: Hearst was a man who did not "drink much himself," but who made "the other boys drunk" (*USA* 1162 f.).

In contrast, the stream-of-consciousness passages of the Camera Eye suggest authenticity through unalloyed subjectivity. One sees what Barbara Foley calls the "artist-hero" (206) struggling to express his manifold experiences and alert perceptions so that the "old words" may regain their meaning, unblemished by public influence, to revive "our storybook democracy" (*USA* 1136). The Camera Eye thus tries to form a counterpoint to the loss of reliable semantic meaning exemplified by the public voice of the Newsreels.[17]

Not surprisingly, the Camera Eye connects a multitude of contexts with drink, seeing it as an integral accompaniment to life and its irrationalities, free of value judgements. The thematic arch ranges from associations with childhood memories and adventure, mourning and frustration, (French) culture and modernity, the appreciation of nature and artistic creativity, business and class conventions, manliness and warfare, (international) camaraderie and protest, prohibition and absurdity, and from happiness, dreariness and the hunger for deep emotions to freedom and democracy.

The symbolism of drink in the Camera Eye passages interlaces several aspects of drink with each other, illustrating the complexity of life and the futility of rigid either/or

distinctions. In Camera Eye 33, for instance, the wine of Southern France is associated with the good life imagined in terms of food, strength, splendor, male camaraderie and freedom:

> Nevers (Duma non de dieu) Athos Porthos and d'Artagnan had ordered a bisque at the inn we wound down slowly into red Macon that smelt of winelees and the vintage fais ce que voudras saute Bourgignon in the Rhone alley . . . at every stop we drank wine strong as beefsteaks rich as the palace of François Premier . . . boys we're going south to drink the red wine the popes loved best (*USA* 486)

It is, furthermore, informed by history and fiction ("Athos Porthos and d'Artagnan"), inspired by political awareness ("red Macon") and sensual perceptiveness ("smelt of winelees and the vintage"). Camera Eye 28, in contrast, evokes a very different mood:

> when the telegram came that she was dying (the streetcarwheels screeched round the bellglass like all the pencils on all the slates in all the schools) walking around Fresh Pond the smell of puddlewater willowbuds in the raw wind shrieking streetcarwheels rattling on loose trucks through the Boston suburbs grief isn't a uniform and go shock the Booch and drink wine for supper at the Lenox before catching the Federal (*USA* 368–69).

Drink offers consolation in mourning; yet mourning and suffering can turn into rebellion against the wrong world and potentially give life meaning ("go shock the Booch").

The various concepts, emotions and experiences linked to drink in the Camera Eye convey a wealth of immaterial, non-instrumental qualities of life, including the "blind drunk" boys who are "so so noaccount" (*USA* 227). Only the harm of dryness in Camera Eye 21 is lethal: land and people are "drained out" and do "not know . . . what to do on account of the drought" (229, 227). Under such conditions, a man who does not "have money to spend on liquor" is definitely of not "much account." A dry country can only be suffered by a "drop . . . now and then," after which one is able to "put a good face on things" again (228).

The persona of the Camera Eye is open to all these experiences. He records observations and emotions with high sensitivity. In this, he resembles Stan Emery in *MT*, which is formally underscored by the stream-of-consciousness narration. In contrast to Emery, however, the artist-hero of the Camera Eye has found a "field of activity," where he could become more "actively active" (*MT* 631). His perceptiveness about plurality and, as Foley notes, change leads him towards "acknowledge[ing] his own embeddedness" in society and thereby finding his authentic self (206). Drink is a natural part of such a life, adaptable to its manifold aspects, yet it is best recognized as Kierkegaard's "way," not as "truth." It is decentered to make room for the real issues. In the final Camera Eye, no. 51, authentic selves are called upon to recognize the suffering of the people and to resist unjust powers, even if "we have only words against" (*USA* 1155).

The World Beyond Drink

Hutchinson specifically addresses the role of drink among Dos Passos's leftists in *USA*. The noticeable variety of drinking habits among the activists may at first glance seem puzzling. On the one hand, there is good-natured Mac who often drinks socially, but gets drunk and thus passive when he is torn between his political ideals and his desires for a private family life. There is the bad drunk George H. Barrow, a selfish pseudo-socialist, who, like Savage, consciously betrays but cannot entirely suppress his ideals. Furthermore, there are the near-abstinent unionist Fred Hoff and the communist Don Stevens who want to postpone all earthly pleasures until "after the revolution" (*USA* 96). On the other hand, Eugene Debs, Big Bill Haywood, Thorstein Veblen—Dos Passos's historical working-class heroes—are curiously unaffected by the question of drink (as is the fictional Mary French).

This plurality of drinking habits may indicate that the left potentially offers more freedom than a capitalist logic of either/or; yet what is striking is that drink is not essential to

those leftists who abide honestly by their socialist ideals, nor to the characters who keep going in a human way, such as the Camera Eye persona in *USA*, or Jimmy Herf and the two French immigrants in *MT*, Emile and Congo Jake, alias Armand Duval. They all may drink from time to time and even get drunk, but they are not ruled by drink. They try to maintain control over their lives without resorting to negative strategies like total abstinence. Yet with the exception of Emile and Congo—who find a satisfactory existence through trading good quality drink and food—life is typically made "bitter" for those who are not altogether subjected to capitalism, as the title of the Veblen biography "The Bitter Drink" suggests (*USA* 845). They fight for an urgently needed greater good, a cause that perhaps is already deplorably lost. They do not allow themselves to be manipulated by an either/or reductionism of abstinence vs. intemperance and become the true heroes in *USA*.

The comparison of Dos Passos's positive leftists, who are uninterested in drink, with those who drink and those who demand abstinence, keeps underscoring the basic pattern of Dos Passos's dialectic of drink, and thus the principle underlying the conflict between notions of subjective and objective reason. Those who drink suffer. They yearn for a human, versatile and complex right life which they are unable to lead themselves for various reasons. Those who abstain subscribe to the reductive logic of dominance—be it to the dominance of objective reason by left fundamentalists who venerate a system that calls for "tin saints" (*USA* 96), or to the dominance of instrumental reason by PR moguls promoting capitalism. And those who want to break through strict dichotomies, those who decenter drink and keep working for social change and a right life for everyone, are doomed in this society. In other words, the full range of the diverse drinking patterns in Dos Passos affirms the plurality of lived lives, yet indicates that under current conditions, whatever they choose, all the characters are harmed in one way or another.

In *MT*, politics is less clearly addressed, even though Jimmy Herf at one point laments that nobody "starts any revolutions" anymore, but "all anybody ever does is get drunk and tell smutty stories" (*MT* 649). *MT* seems to evoke the Christian legacy in search for alternatives to reductive instrumental reason, while *USA* foregrounds the socio-political repercussions of a capitalist society and explores the options for a better world through political activism. Whatever the concrete form, Dos Passos seems to advocate a reconciliation between the demands of society and those of nature, including the human nature of the individual. Subjective and objective rationality should form an integral dialectic so that the subjective prevents the objective from losing sight of the individual, and the objective prevents the subjective from losing sight of the common good. Drink may be the wrong answer to the right question, yet the micrological detail drink in Dos Passos's works highlights one important aspect: it is a reminder of the plurality of life as an unalienable value in itself. Without this fundamental appreciation, there can be no hope of life being right.

Notes

1 Theodor W. Adorno, *Minima Moralia*, No. 18: "Es gibt kein richtiges Leben im Falschen," my translation.

2 USA consists of the novels *The 42nd Parallel* (1930), *Nineteen-Nineteen* (1932) and *The Big Money* (1936), which were first published as a trilogy in 1938; de Voto refers to the novel by F. Scott Fitzgerald published in 1922.

3 See Crowley; Lerner; Room; Rohrer; Rosenzweig.

4 See Davenport-Hines; Berridge; Levine.

5 See Crowley; Lerner; Rosenzweig.

6 See Kingsdale; Lerner; Rosenzweig.

7 See Lerner; McGuirr; Mennell.

8 See Buell; Clark; Pizer.

9 See Rang; Rost; Smith.

10 In the following, the terms “reason” and “rationality” will be used interchangeably as the philosophers use both terms for very similar concepts.

11 In the following, the terms “subjective” and “instrumental” will be used interchangeably as the philosophers use both terms for very similar concepts.

12 See Marx; Horkheimer and Adorno; Sewell.

13 See also Pizer 28.

14 The non-personhood of teetotalers is, of course, a common topos in American modernist fiction, as is a classification among drunks, e.g., in Hemingway’s *The Sun Also Rises* (1926): “Mike was a bad drunk. Brett was a good drunk. Bill was a good drunk. Cohn was never drunk” (119). For the general attitude of the Lost Generation towards alcohol see especially Crowley, but also Lerner, and Room.

15 Note the allusion to the age-old link between poetry and drink here; Horace, for instance, already observed: “No poetry could ever live long or delight us / That water-drinkers pen” (Epistles I, xix, 2-3).

16 Not infrequently, this linguistic freedom creates humoristic effects that chime with Solomon’s more recent notion of “Slapstick Modernism” as developed in *Slapstick Modernism*.

17 Solomon, in contrast, interprets the fragmentation of the Newsreels as a counterpoint to the

illusionary narrative linearity and apparent directness of self-expression in the Camera Eye, as it uses conventional techniques of the culture industry to produce conformity. Hence, according to Solomon, the Camera Eye approach to narration needs to be overcome by Newsreel fragmentation and freedom from syntactical and semantic conventions (see 198ff.). See also Foley; Isernhagen; Pizer.