

RESEARCH PAPER

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TOO TIDY TO DANCE: EDITH WHARTON'S  
*TWILIGHT SLEEP* AND THE DOMESTICATION OF  
SCIENTIFIC MANAGEMENT

Received: 15 March 2023

UDK 821.111(73).09Wharton, E.

82:791:61

DOI: <https://doi.org/10.22210/ur.2023.067.1/03>

This essay looks at how scientific management, initially meant to increase efficacy in the workplace, left the factory floor and made its way into the home. Included here are readings of Frederick Taylor's scientific management, Lillian and Frank Gilbreth's concept of the therblig, as well as the Gilbreth children's reports of home life in *Cheaper by the Dozen* (1948) and *Belles on Their Toes* (1950) (and their film adaptations). Edith Wharton's 1927 novel *Twilight Sleep* challenges the spreading of scientific management into the home, seen in particular in the book's treatment of the early 1900s invention of twilight sleep, a medical procedure meant to optimize childbirth by injecting the mother with a combination of scopolamine, which induces amnesia, and morphine. Yet the thesis of the essay is that the novel actually depicts the horrors of scientific management in order to suggest a path forward, that a change in social relations is more fundamental than a change in economic ones.

**Keywords:** scientific management, Edith Wharton, twilight sleep, Frank Gilbreth, Lillian Gilbreth

THE ONE AND ONLY SCIENTIFIC MANAGEMENT

Although Edmund Wilson dismissed Edith Wharton's late novel *Twilight Sleep* (1927) as remaining a mere "comedy" in her oeuvre (Wilson 434; Beer and Horner 177), the work has been consequently read as addressing a number of essential cultural shifts in the first quarter of the twentieth century. The manner that no single narrator is infallible has been taken as a critique of the modernist project, highlighting the reader's own problematic relationship to interpreting gaps in the text (Haytock 227–228). The setting of the novel within the Jazz Age of pre-depression 1920s America highlights the function of jazz music to loosen

both the mores of society and the strict division of social classes (Griffith 2006: 74), although a scene that takes place in a jazz club is not free of racist depictions of African Americans, which was perhaps offered a corrective by a similar passage in Nella Larsen's *Passing* (Griffith 2006: 88), published two years later in 1929. In addition, the novel has been examined in the contexts of the regulation of the shape of women's bodies (Toth 2014: 721) and the limited opportunities available even to the upper class, white, American wives (McDowell 1974: 526). Yet in the context of this essay, one of the most important contributions to scholarship on the novel comes from Katelyn Durkin's 2013 piece “The (Re)Production Craze: Taylorism and Regress in Edith Wharton's *Twilight Sleep*”. Here, Wharton's novel is seen as domesticating the early twentieth-century craze for mechanized production, so that:

Wharton presents a Taylorized society in which all facets of family life are reducible to a mechanical scale: human bodies function as machines, family homes as factories, and relationships as business arrangements. For Wharton's characters, the production craze is not just a culturally imposed or self-selected value, but also an internalized, psychologically powerful, and even unconscious motivator with disastrous ramifications. (Durkin 2013: 53)

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While this essay shares much with Durkin's work on the relationship between efficiency in the factory and in the home, there is one important difference. Durkin reads efficiency mainly through the work of its main popularizer, Frederick Taylor. In this essay, while Taylor is taken as an important figure, a step back from his work is taken in the reading of two of his greatest influences on efficiency, Lillian and Frank Gilbreth. The importance of the Gilbreths' work is that they explicitly worked to model their home on the principles of production, while Taylor restricted his thinking to the workplace.<sup>1</sup> For Durkin, her reading of the novel leads to seeing the Taylorization of the home as a “death wish” (2013: 71), I argue that the novel also suggests an avenue for change, suggesting that a modification of social relations are more fundamental than a change in economic relations, reinterpreting one of the important aspects of Mario Tronti's “the social factory” (Tronti 2019: xxv).

To begin with, however, Durkin is right in that the most well-known figure of early optimization is Frederick Taylor, an American mechanical engineer active at the end of the nineteenth and the beginning of the twentieth centuries. In 1878,

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<sup>1</sup> Although Durkin mentions the Gilbreths in a footnote (2013: 71–72 n5), she does not take their work into account in her analysis.

he was employed at the Midvale Steel Company in Philadelphia, and he soon rose through the ranks to become chief engineer. At the steel works, he took on a series of experiments to improve the efficiency of the workers. The key to Taylor's improvements was to get management involved in controlling every step of the way workers work. Taylor criticized the old "initiative and incentive" approach to management, which aims to draw out the best in workers (the initiative part) by providing them with incentives such as rapid promotion or higher wages (Taylor 1998: 42). To solidify his approach, Taylor conducted a number of time and motion studies and then used his own mathematical formulas to "scientifically" determine the best way to do a job, forcing everyone to either do the job in that one and only way or find another position. As Taylor explains in his classic text from 1911, *The Principles of Scientific Management*, "under scientific management fully one-half of the problem is 'up to the management'" (1998: 17) rather than just being left to the worker to decide. The "one-half" that management is to take on their shoulders is the development of a set of "rules, laws, and formulae" (16) that will ensure that whoever is currently employed in a job position will be performing their work to maximum efficiency. Or, as Taylor puts it:

[O]wing to the fact that the workmen in all of our trades have been taught the details of their work by observation of those immediately around them, there are many different ways in common use for doing the same thing, perhaps forty, fifty, or a hundred ways of doing each act in each trade, and for the same reason there is a great variety in the implements used for each class of work. Now, among the various methods and implements used in each element of each trade there is *always one method and one implement* which is quicker and better than any of the rest. And this one best method and best implement can only be discovered or developed through a *scientific study and analysis* of all of the methods and implements in use, together *with accurate, minute, motion and time study*. This involves the gradual substitution of science for rule of thumb throughout the mechanic arts. (9, emphasis mine)

Two of the most ardent popularizers of scientific management were Frank and Lillian Gilbreth, a husband-and-wife team who were interested in the way that managers implement the principles of scientific management in order to control the minds and bodies of their workers. Yet, Frank Gilbreth was not just inspired by Taylor's work; inspiration worked the other way around as well. One of the main references in Taylor's *Principles* is actually Gilbreth, especially his early work on streamlining the way that bricklayers lay bricks (which was co-written with his wife, although she remained uncredited [Lancaster 2004: 85]).

Originally, Frank wanted to be a construction engineer. His mother, who later came to live with Frank, Lillian, and their twelve children, wanted him to go to MIT. However, Frank had other plans, and, after high school, he got a job as a bricklayer. And, as two of the Gilbreths' children, Ernestine and Frank Jr., report in their personal history of the family, *Cheaper by the Dozen*, “If Grandma thought Dad was going to be a good helper, his new foreman thought he was the worst he had encountered in forty years, man and boy, of bricklaying” (Gilbreth and Gilbreth Cary 2002: 29).

However, the reason for the foreman's anger was not Frank's lack of skill or laziness but, rather, his early attempts to apply scientific management to the job he just got: “During Dad's first week at work he made so many suggestions about how brick could be laid faster and better that the foreman threatened repeatedly to fire him” (Gilbreth and Gilbreth Cary 2002: 29). One result of the situation was Frank and Lillian's first book, *Bricklaying System*, the text which Taylor later used extensively in his own *Principles*.

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In general, Taylor praises the Gilbreths' application of the principles of scientific management to bricklaying, which reduced the bricklayer's “movements from eighteen motions per brick to five” (Taylor 1998: 35). Yet, what seems to have interested Taylor the most was the Gilbreths' emphasis on the role of the manager in enforcing efficiency: “It is only through *enforced* standardization of methods, *enforced* adoption of the best implements and working conditions, and *enforced* cooperation that this faster work can be assured. And the duty of enforcing the adoption of standards and of enforcing the cooperation rests with the *management* alone” (41).<sup>2</sup>

## BRINGING WORK HOME

The Gilbreths were instrumental in the domestication of scientific management, and the main tool for this domestication is called the therblig, which is nearly Gilbreth spelled backwards. The therblig is a strange beast. Its claim to fame is to capture every movement a worker could ever possibly make in order to segment that worker's day into units that can be optimized through time and motion

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<sup>2</sup> In Chapter Two of *Bricklaying System*, titled “Methods of Management”, the foreman-as-enforcer is made clear on the first page: “The foreman must see that all work is laid out in a systematic manner. The man should be so selected and grouped so that, the job once started, speed and efficiency will be apparent and can be fittingly recognized” (Gilbreth 1909: 11).

study.<sup>3</sup> Yet, because the therblig is intended for reducing any movement into its most elemental components (Sturtevant 2014: 162–163), I argue that the Gilbreths were able to use them to transfer practices of optimizing movements of the workplace to optimizing movements at home.

The therblig was not really formalized until the latter part of 1924 in publications that came out a few months after Frank Gilbreth's death. In two articles that appeared in the August and September 1924 issues of *Management and Administration in Manufacturing Industries*, the therblig is fleshed out to an exasperating degree. In the first article, “Classifying the Elements of Work: Methods of Analyzing Work into Seventeen Subdivisions”, the Gilbreths begin by pledging their allegiance to Taylorism with the words: “This paper presents a complete method of visualizing a classification of all the subdivisions and the true motion-study elements of The One Best Way to Do Work” (Gilbreth and Gilbreth 1924: 151). They argue that this one best way to do work is “a complete classification of all work”, which is then “applicable to all kinds of work” (151). The key here is “all kinds of work”, which will eventually mean not just work in the factory but also the work done in the home.

In this article, the Gilbreths initially define several work processes, such as financing, advertising, marketing, and so on (151). Then they argue that each process consists of “Operations, which consist of [...] Cycles of motions, which consist of [...] Subdivisions, or events, or therbligs, of a cycle of motions which consist of [...]” ending with the actual 17 therbligs which include *search*, *find*, *select*, *grasp*, etc. (152).

The point of the therbligs is to reduce any movement to its most elemental components. For example, the removal of the cap of a mechanical pencil to examine the eraser involves nine separate movements of the left hand (select, grasp, release...) and six movements for the sometimes unavoidably idle right hand (Barnes 1944: 58–65). What is most important for this essay is how subdividing work into its component parts actually abstracts these parts from any concrete work process so that they can be applied to others. This means that the Taylorist processes of work optimization, which were originally established for laying bricks or carrying pig iron, can now be applied to other contexts. In the words of the Gilbreths, therbligs are not tied to any concrete task. For example, the therblig *search* can be applied to a variety of processes, such as *financing*, *marketing*, or others. Thus, a therblig maximized at work can then become a therblig maximized

<sup>3</sup> Taylor was only interested in time management; motion management is the Gilbreths' innovation.

for the home, for “it should be noted that all processes are divided in the same way from a motion-study analyst’s standpoint, regardless of which department or in which function they are found” (Gilbreth and Gilbreth 1924: 152). If implemented, this would lead to increased power in the hands of managers, who would have more tools with which to control their employees. However, the system was so complicated that scientific management was rarely put into practice, and along with the rise of labor opposition after the First World War, Taylor’s ideas became more influential as ideas rather than actual modifications to movements in the workplace (Edwards 1979: 98).

Yet it is precisely as ideas that scientific management has become domesticized, although the Gilbreths do not explicitly set out a connection between therbligs in the workplace and the application of efficiency principles in the home. For this connection we will examine how Frank Gilbreth optimized several aspects of his own home life (which then became hyperbolized, valorized, and popularized in various books and films) and then how Wharton’s novel takes the scientific management of the home as its theme. Wharton’s book, however, does not laud the importation of scientific management into the home. In fact, it sees it as a disaster, although this disaster is described in order to offer a suggestion of a way out.

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## NEVER CHEAP ENOUGH

Two key texts for delineating the optimization of the domestic sphere are a pair of semi-autobiographical books written by two of the Gilbreth children, *Cheaper by the Dozen* (1948) and *Belles on Their Toes* (1950). These books were written more than two decades after Wharton’s novel, and thus they reflect many of the important cultural changes that took place in America at the time, especially between 1925 and 1948.<sup>4</sup> At the end of the Second World War, cultural anthropologist Margaret Mead asked “What’s the matter with the family” in an influential article in *Harper’s*, reflecting contemporary concerns of “the rising rates of divorce and the deleterious impact on juvenile delinquency of fathers’ overseas service and mothers’ wartime employment” (Weinstein 2013: 14). This was also the time of the fear of “Momism”, a term coined by Philip Wylie in his 1942 book *Generation of Vipers*, in which “frustrated women who smothered their children with overprotection and overaffection” made their sons, especially, “weak and passive”,

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<sup>4</sup> I am indebted to the anonymous peer reviewers of this essay for encouraging this line of thought.

causing the United States to become vulnerable to its enemies (May 2008: 73). Wharton's critique of Taylorism will thus be read as a kind of precursor to these fears, while the Gilbreth children's books are written in a time responding to that criticism, trying to renegotiate the terms of family and motherhood.

The Gilbreth children's first book, *Cheaper by the Dozen*, records a number of ways in which Frank introduced some of the methods of scientific management into the Gilbreths' household, including installing a record player in the bathroom in order to listen to German and French lessons while taking care of other needs and painting Morse code on the ceilings so that the time sitting on the toilet or lying in bed would not be wasted. Then in the book's sequel, *Belles on Their Toes* (the title refers to how the female children were now a bit older and thus spending a lot of their time being "on their best behavior" for possible marriage partners), the authors state that "Dad liked regimentation and liked everything to be done by a system. He even had assigned each of us a number, which he used for routing intra-family correspondence and memoranda" (Gilbreth and Gilbreth Cary 2003: 2). He was also reported as collecting a five-cent fine from the children for every item on the home processes charts they did not fulfill (11). He was the initial reason that the home was modeled on the factory: "Dad had the household organized on an efficiency basis, just as he organized a factory. He believed that what worked in a household would work in a factory, and what worked in a factory would work in a household – especially if the household happened to have eleven children" (11–12).<sup>5</sup> The Gilbreths' invention of the process chart (an early version of the flow chart) was a key element to household organization, since the charts "told each of us what we were supposed to do, and when we were supposed to do it" (12).<sup>6</sup> They were located in the bathrooms, and they listed tasks such as "washing the dishes, making the beds, combing hair, brushing teeth, weighing ourselves, listening for fifteen minutes a day to French and German language records on the phonograph, sweeping, and dusting" (12). Such a level of organization of the home would be humorous if only it were not true.

In the first film adaptation of *Cheaper by the Dozen* (1950, dir. Walter Lang), there are several representations of scientific management in the household. When Frank comes home from work, he whistles for his children and then times

<sup>5</sup> The Gilbreths' daughter Mary died at a very young age, a fact that is only admitted in a footnote in *Belles* and ignored in *Cheaper* in order to fit in the *dozen* needed for the title's "humorous" effect.

<sup>6</sup> This essay is part of a larger research project currently underway by the author in reading the history of the flowchart through its use in literature.



how long it takes them all to arrive. In order to have a family discussion, a “board meeting” is held. And when one child needs to have their tonsils out, Frank arranges for the whole family to have the same operation at the same time, whether it is needed or not (and attempts to film the surgeon during the procedures in order to apply a motion and time study analysis to the work, although the camera operator forgets to load the cameras with film).

However, the optimization of the smallest movement is most prominent in a scene in which Frank takes his children to enroll in a new school. When talking to the school administrators, he stresses the optimization strategies he employs at home in his children's education (to convince the principal to let them skip some grades). And then, just to illustrate his technique, Frank shows how he has worked out the most efficient way to take a bath. Sitting in a chair in the principal's office, Frank demonstrates the technique, first taking the pretend soap in his right hand and applying it to the left shoulder, running it down the top of his left arm, up the inside of the left arm to the left armpit, and then to the ears, and so on. What is striking about this scene is that Frank is made to look a fool, taking himself far too seriously, while the family and school staff around him roll their eyes and stare in disbelief.

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In the book version of this scene, the family has also moved to Montclair, and the children are being enrolled in a new school. And Frank also insists on the children skipping grades. However, he does not demonstrate his efficient routine for bathing, and thus, there is no moment for mocking Frank's use of scientific management in the home. Yet, this does not mean that in the book the children get away embarrassment-free. Their father makes frequent surprise visits to the children's classrooms, and his managerial behavior with their teachers shocks everyone. When one of the children asks Frank about it, he admits that his techniques might seem foolish, but they get results:

“Embarrassing?” he would ask, a little hurt. “What's embarrassing about it?” Then he'd sort of pinch you on the shoulder and say, “Well, maybe it is a little embarrassing for me, too, Old Timer. But you've got to learn not to show it, and once you've learned that, it doesn't matter any more. The important thing is that dropping in like that gets results. The teachers lap it up.

They did, too. (Gilbreth and Gilbreth Cary 2002: 57–58)

Thus, in the Gilbreths' lives, embarrassment does not indicate that anything is wrong; rather, it is a sign of things going right. Embarrassment comes with the territory of scientific management and its attendant therbligs, since the point is to control and manipulate the body to perform the most efficient movements



possible, which at times might look foolish but is worth it in the end. The body becomes the process, “the worker, after all, disappears, swallowed in a technological web” (Lindstrom 2000: 725). Looking silly is a small price to pay for being the most efficient possible. Therefore, the bathing scene at school, while it might be funny, is in no way critical. For a more critical take on scientific management, we will have to look elsewhere, namely, in a novel from a writer outside the Gilbert family.

### TOO TIDY TO DANCE: EDITH WHARTON'S *TWILIGHT SLEEP*

Bringing literature into the fight against the commodification of life is nothing new. For example, E.P. Thompson's classic essay “Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism” (1967) makes great use of literature, beginning with an epigraph from Thomas Hardy and then including citations from Geoffrey Chaucer, Laurence Sterne, Stephen Duck, and Mary Collier. Thompson uses literature to trace various references to clocks from the fourteenth century onwards, tracing the change from using the sidereal time of nature to organize one's day to the segmented time of business from *The Canterbury Tales*, Faustus' final soliloquy mentioning how “the clock will strike”, and Newton's expansion of clock-work time to the whole universe (Thompson 1967: 56–57). The point of Thompson's study is to suggest that

[i]f men are to meet both the demands of a highly-synchronized automated industry, and of greatly enlarged areas of “free-time”, they must somehow combine in a new synthesis elements of the old and of the new, finding an imagery based neither upon the seasons nor upon the market but upon human occasions. Punctuality in working hours would express respect for one's fellow workmen. And unpurposive passing of time would be behaviour which the culture approved. (96)

Much of Edith Wharton's work highlights the influence of efficiency and profit on social space. In her early novel *The House of Mirth* (1905), the economy of stock market speculation has made its way into the home. Lily Bart's fortunes are repeatedly tied to the “vast mysterious Wall Street world of ‘tips’ and ‘deals’” (Wharton 1990: 85) to the point that Lily's own emotions are seen in financial terms: “she tried to calculate the exact point at which concession must turn to resistance, and the price *he* would have to pay be made equally clear to him” (266; cf. Herman 1999: 8). The division between the natural and the economized also plays a role in the novella *Ethan Frome* (1911). Ethan is characterized as a man who “had always been more sensitive than the people around him to the appeal

of natural beauty (Wharton 2000: 29), a feeling which connects him to his love interest, his wife's cousin Mattie, who also "trembled with the same touch of wonder" (30), and which separates him from his wife Zeena, who battles her "perceived" illness with a failed reliance on technology, since "her last visit to Springfield had been commemorated by her paying twenty dollars for an electric battery of which she had never been able to learn the use" (55–56).

Wharton's later novel *Twilight Sleep* functions in a similar manner. It contrasts "patient Taylorized effort" (Wharton 1997: 81) with the unorganized activity of human social interactions. It attempts to forge a new imagery of time based not on efficiency but on a lack of purpose. Yet, the novel does not do this through a contrast between the workplace and the home but, rather, through a contrast between one home turned into a workplace and others that are not. Thus, *Twilight Sleep* does two things at once: it shows the detrimental nature of Taylorizing the home, and it offers, at least in a nascent form, the kind of alternative imagery that Thompson mentions in the quote above by contrasting one home with that of another, more human variety.

48 Taking place in the jazzy New York of the 1920s, upper-class matriarch Pauline Manford organizes her home into an efficient machine, explicitly along the lines of scientific management. The first sentence of the novel has Nona, Pauline's daughter, coming into "her mother's boudoir ('the office,' Mrs. Manford's children called it)" (Wharton 1997: 9). According to Killoran, the reason for seeing an intimate space in the family home as a place of work is that Manford is "[t]he kind of woman who should be running a major corporation, she instead keeps herself so busy chasing fads promising worry-free eternal youth that her children must make appointments to see her" (Killoran 1996: 109). By calling the boudoir the office, the novel indicates how the home is being run like a business, and it also indicates the idea of the "New Woman", "a social category that emerged around the turn of the century referring to women who challenged men's social power by legitimating women's work and exploring their roles outside the home through both paid labor and political involvement" (Durkin 2013: 51). However, this shift in the role of women is reflected in the work-like schedule of Manford's activities for the day in question, here only given in part:

7.30 Mental uplift. 7.45 Breakfast. 8. Psycho-analysis. 8.15 See cook. 8.30 Silent Meditation. 8.45 Facial massage. 9. Man with Persian miniatures. 9.15 Correspondence. 9.30 Manicure. 9.45 Eurythmic exercises. 10. Hair waved. 10.15 Sit for bust. 10.30 Receive Mothers' Day deputation. 11. Dancing lesson. 11.30 Birth Control committee at Mrs.— (Wharton 1997: 9–10)

The jam-packed schedule has multiple purposes. It indicates the incremental breaking down of the day into discrete units of time so that each unit can be used most efficiently, just like therbligs. It also represents a regulated intimacy with others: 15 minutes here, 30 minutes there. When Pauline's daughter has to make an appointment to see her, this indicates that the schedule is being put before relationships. And when Pauline says some women knew exactly how to talk to their husbands, while for her "Intimacy... meant the tireless discussion of facts" (Wharton 1997: 169), what she means is "If her husband had wanted facts – a good confidential talk about the new burglar-alarm, or a clear and careful analysis of the engine-house bills, or the heating system for the swimming pool – she could have found just the confidential and tender accent for such topics" (169). Pauline is "too tidy to dance" (74), and the conflict between intimacy and micro-management in her character is one way to represent the infiltration of the factory in the home.

Yet, there are a number of ways that representations of scientific efficiency are challenged by comparing them with images of rest, disorganization, and waste. One such arena for comparison is in Pauline's spiritual life. There are three main spiritual figures in the novel. The first is the Mahatma, who eventually falls out of favor due to a sexual scandal involving Pauline's daughter-in-law, although he will never be forgotten for two main reasons: he told Pauline she was psychic (Wharton 1997: 29) and his prescribed physical exercises reduced her hips (46). The Mahatma's replacement is Alvah Loft, although his quick-fix schedule (perhaps too much like Pauline's for comfort), which makes him seem "more like an implement in a laboratory than a human being!" (272), is explicitly condemned for his "Taylorized treatments, his rapidly rising scale of charges, and the unbroken stream of patients succeeding each other under his bony touch!" (273). All of this is contrasted with Pauline's last spiritual advisor, Sacha Gobine, "the new Russian Initiate", who "absolutely refuses to be hurried" and sometimes "sees only one patient a day" (272). Gobine is a spiritualist who "takes time – he must have it... Days, weeks, if necessary. Our crowded engagements mean nothing to him" (273), which is quite a new approach, especially since Pauline's own schedule is described as "crowded" (265) shortly before. Yet, this description also includes what is one of the most profound differences between Gobine and others, and that is that "He won't have a clock in the house" (265). It is here, in the presence and absence of clocks, of their functioning or uselessness, that one of the battles with scientific management in the novel will be waged.

Clocks are the predominant literary trope in Thompson's essay "Time, Work-Discipline, and Industrial Capitalism" because they take over the representa-

tion of time from natural cycles and events. And clocks are not just a neutral way of measuring the “objective” passage of time but are rather artificial objects which are part of the ever-growing industrialization of life. Although first invented in the early 1500s, it was only the invention of the pendulum in 1658, the popularization of the minute hand, which followed the prevalence of grandfather clocks in the 1660s, and then the improved accuracy which came with the use of the spiral balance-spring in 1674 (Thompson 1967: 64), which allowed for clocks to become accurate and wide-spread enough to have an important influence on various aspects of life. More specifically, clocks quickly became the way that life was understood, the object through which flowed concepts, arguments, and understanding as well as life, work, home, and God. One of the most powerful early examples of this, found in English cosmologist Thomas Burnet's *Sacred Theory of the Earth* (1681–89), sees God as a master clockmaker ordering the whole universe according to, as Stephen Jay Gould words it, “the invariance of natural laws in space and time” (1991: 29):

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We think him a better artist that makes a clock that strikes regularly at every hour from the springs and wheels which he puts in the work, than he that hath so made his clock that he must put his finger to it every hour to make it strike: and if one should contrive a piece of clock-work so that it should beat all the hours, and make all its motions regularly for such a time, and that time being come, upon a signal given, or a spring touched, it should of its own accord fall all to pieces; would not this be looked upon as a piece of greater art, than if the workman came at that time prefixed, and with a great hammer beat it into pieces? (Burnet qtd. in Gould 1991: 29–30)

Burnet's quote shows the way that the image of clock-time rapidly penetrated the understanding of the deepest levels of the ordering of the universe, becoming a tool in God's hands for the manifestation of his perfection.<sup>7</sup> Unsurprisingly, the American anarchist Emma Goldman sees things differently. In her essay “Anarchism: What It Really Stands For”, she uses clock imagery to describe the type of centralized control that can be seen in one of the main functions of the foreman:

Strange to say, there are people who extol this deadening method of centralized production as the proudest achievement of our age. They fail utterly to realize that if we are to continue in machine subserviency, our slavery is more complete

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<sup>7</sup> In “Missionaries and Mechanical Clocks”, Jean Comaroff describes how early nineteenth-century British missionaries brought clocks, and thus a very specific measurement of historical progress, along with them for their work in South Africa (Comaroff 1991: 1).

than was our bondage to the King. They do not want to know that centralization is not only the death-knell of liberty, but also of health and beauty, of art and science, all these being impossible in a clock-like, mechanical atmosphere. (Goldman 1917: 61)

Anarchism is not clock-like. “Anarchism cannot but repudiate such a method of production” (Goldman 1917: 61). Rather than being about centralized control about how work is performed, the goal of anarchism is “the freest possible expression of all the latent powers of the individual”, which, in the context of work, is possible when a person “is free to choose the mode of work, the conditions of work, and the freedom to work” (61).<sup>8</sup> Clocks are about control, while anarchism is about freedom. In the context of Wharton's novel *Twilight Sleep*, Pauline is obsessed with all aspects of controlling her life, from the intimate to the practical, and the imagery of clocks is often used to bolster this impression, just as their absence, or non-functioning, can indicate the opposite.

The schedule for Pauline's day is not just a tool for spending one's day in the most efficient way possible, but it is also a tool for control, both of Pauline's life and of the lives of those around her. Even dancing is optimized. “You think she dances with a Purpose?” is asked about Pauline, the answer to which is, “...like everything else she does. But as if it were something between going to church and drilling a scout brigade. Mother's too – too tidy to dance” (Wharton 1997: 74). The control of the body in dance is a reflection of both reactions against the social and cultural freedoms of the Jazz Age (Griffith 2006: 74) and the increased emphasis on slenderness, meaning control of one's diet, that has been happening since the end of the nineteenth century (Toth 2014: 711–712).

In another example of control, as stated by the narrator shortly after the appearance of her daily schedule, it is not so important what the appointments were (and the position of a group addressed at one point in the day could easily be the opposite of a position addressed to another group later on) but, rather, that they involved the manipulation and control of others:

Whatever the question dealt with, these ladies always seemed to be the same, and always advocated with equal zeal Birth Control and unlimited maternity, free love or the return to the traditions of the American home; and neither they nor Mrs.

<sup>8</sup> The use of Emma Goldman here is not accidental. She actually protested a lecture of Frank Gilbert's given in March 1913, at a meeting of the Western Economic Society in Chicago. Focusing on the controlling aspect of managers, she declared, “Shame on the Gilbreths! Look at the load the poor workingman is carrying on his shoulders. This is the reason labor is against management. Everyone is on the back of labor” (Gilbreth 1971: 176–177).

Manford seemed aware that there was anything contradictory in these doctrines. All they knew was that they were determined to force certain persons to do things that those persons preferred not to do. (Wharton 1997: 11)

Much like Taylor's efficiency manager mentioned above, Pauline believes she knows how to organize people's lives better than they do themselves, and she aims to do so. This is equally true for housework, spirituality, and health. Thus, in the words of Cheryl Miller, “Control is the driving force behind Pauline's mania for hygiene; it is her attempt to fit one more aspect of life into her ‘Taylorized’ routine (after Frederick Winslow Taylor's *Principles of Scientific Management*) and thereby render it innocuous” (Miller 2007). In other words, Pauline “wants a business, not a family. She wants products, not people” (Durkin 2013: 51).

But what does it mean to state that the point of the Taylorization of Pauline's life is to render her life innocuous? To understand this, we can conclude by taking a look at the novel's title.

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### FORGETTING PAIN

Twilight sleep is a procedure developed in Freiburg, Germany, in the early 1900s which aims to eradicate the pains of childbirth by injecting the mother with a combination of scopolamine, which induces amnesia, and morphine. The procedure became especially popular in the United States. A 1914 letter to *The American Journal of Nursing*, written by a nurse of the then-Jewish Maternity Hospital of New York City, counters those who are against the procedure by stating that around 150 procedures had been carried out by June of that year on “patients with enthusiasm concerning the experience” (Thornton 1914: 60). The effects of the procedure are described as follows: “The patients conversed with at the Jewish Hospital said that they had no recollection of the period of sleep which lasts for three or four hours after the delivery. Each had been incredulous when given her baby and nearly always felt like getting up at once” (61). A year later, Marguerite Tracy and Mary Brown Sumner Boyd released the book *Painless Childbirth: A General Survey of All Painless Methods, with Special Stress on “Twilight Sleep” and Its Extension in America*. The authors are full of praise of the procedure, which allowed for the “miracle of a painless birth” (Tracy and Sumner Boyd 1915: 15), although this was not a birth without pain, but rather the pain was forgotten. One of the women who related her experience of the procedure in the book, Mrs. Cecil Stewart, was told by Dr Gauss (one of the originators of the procedure)

that she was going to feel a great amount of pain in childbirth. The patient feels comforted by this, since it was "the first time a doctor had ever admitted that I had a bad pain when I had one" (Tracy and Sumner Boyd 1915: 188). Yet, when she woke up the next morning, bracing herself for the difficulties of the childbirth that lay ahead, she was surprised to be handed her own child along with breakfast, having no recollection of having given birth (189). However, despite support for the procedure's ability to alleviate pain (its most positive aspect) from some of the first-wave feminists of this time (Johnson and Quinlan 2014), Edith Wharton's use of the name of the procedure as the title of her work is not intended as a sign of support but, rather, of critique. A similar critique of medicated forgetfulness is found in her earlier novel *The House of Mirth*, in which the sedative and sleeping agent chloral hydrate is used by Lily Bart to help numb the pain of her social fall.<sup>9</sup>

In *Twilight Sleep*, Wharton has a very specific critique of the drug. It is Lita, Pauline's daughter-in-law, who undergoes the procedure. Lita's life is the opposite of Pauline's. It is an unorganized mess directed only at fulfilling Lita's every whim, which includes redecorating the house at great frequency, valuing dancing over taking care of her child, and carrying on an affair with Pauline's husband. One of the representations of this lifestyle is the absence of clocks in Lita's home. When Pauline comes over for a visit, Lita is not there. When she eventually arrives, she asks if she is late, to which Pauline says: "How can you ever tell if you are? I don't believe there's a clock in the house" (Wharton 1997: 192). But there is, Lita says, in the nursery. "'Well my dear, that one's stopped,' rejoined her mother-in-law, smiling" (192).<sup>10</sup>

Where Lita and Pauline agree is in the application of twilight sleep to childbirth. "We ought to refuse ourselves to pain" (275), Pauline says in one of the most-quoted passages from the novel, although here she is talking (or having a

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<sup>9</sup> "The thought of the chloral was the only spot of light in the dark prospect: she could feel its lulling influence stealing over her already. But she was troubled by the thought that it was losing its power — she dared not go back to it too soon. Of late the sleep it had brought her had been more broken and less profound; there had been nights when she was perpetually floating up through it to consciousness. What if the effect of the drug should gradually fail, as all narcotics were said to fail? She remembered the chemist's warning against increasing the dose; and she had heard before of the capricious and incalculable action of the drug. Her dread of returning to a sleepless night was so great that she lingered on, hoping that excessive weariness would reinforce the waning power of the chloral" (Wharton 1990: 328).

<sup>10</sup> Lita's parents are even worse, as Pauline learns on a visit to their home, since, instead of clocks, they use an hour-glass, "for clocks would have been an anachronism" in a home decorated with "a sixth-century Coptic vestment" and "rugs woven on handlooms in Abyssinia" (Wharton 1997: 132).



hard time talking) about the pain the mother of her servant is going through since she has cancer. Twilight sleep is such a refusal. “Of course there ought to be no Pain ... nothing but Beauty... It ought to be one of the loveliest, most poetic things in the world to have a baby” (18), Pauline says, describing how Lita did not remember the pain of birthing her son. Yet, more important is the comment made after this quote by the narrator, who ties Pauline’s attitude to scientific management: “Mrs. Manford declared, in that bright efficient voice which made loveliness and poetry sound like the attributes of an advanced industrialism, and babies something to be turned out in series like Fords” (18). The narrator knows exactly where the battle line is being drawn: taking William Taylor’s call for “the gradual substitution of science for rule of thumb” (Taylor 1998: 9) off the factory floor and bringing it into the home. Thus, as Wharton’s biographer Hermione Lee says, when Pauline’s life includes “This Ford production line or efficient ‘Taylorized’ programme of improving activities”, which “has every moment accounted for” (Lee 2008: 638), the home has been fully Taylorized. It just takes Wharton’s critique to understand to what extent.

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What interested Taylor the most in the Gilbreths’ work was their emphasis on the role of the manager in enforcing efficiency. The manager ensured the enforced adoption of working standards as well as the cooperation of workers with those standards. The scientific management of these standards allowed for the easy replacement and training of workers since, after meeting a minimum standard, no particularities of individual workers would play any part in the workflow. Another contribution that the Gilbreths made to standardization was the development of the therblig, which abstracted a worker’s behavior to such a degree that optimization was no longer merely part of the factory but made its way into the home. Italian *operaismo* (workism) theorist Mario Tronti is perhaps most well-known for coining the term “the social factory” to describe the way that social space has become an expression of production. He argues that “[a]t the highest level of capitalist development, social relations become moments of the relations of production, and the whole society becomes an articulation of production. In short, all of society lives as a function of the factory and the factory extends its exclusive domination over all of society” (qtd. in Cleaver 1992: 137 n13).<sup>11</sup> Yet it is important to note that for Tronti, the social factory does not only indicate a problem but also presents a solution. For if the problem of efficiency lies in the articulation of the social realm, then the social realm is where change can be made.

<sup>11</sup> For a more substantial extrapolation of Tronti’s thought, see Barria-Asenjo et al. 2023.

In other words, a change in the social realm is “the only way in which the working class can acquire strength for itself and indeed recognize its strength as the only living, active, productive element of society, as the hinge of social relations, as the fundamental articulation of economic development” (Tronti 2019: xxv). This is one reason why Wharton’s novel, which locates its critique in the social world of the home, functions not only as a critique of the optimization of labor but also as a potential avenue of change, depicting a change in social relations, which are more fundamental than economic ones.

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## S a ž e t a k

### PREVIŠE UREDNA ZA PLES: UDOMAĆIVANJE ZNANSTVENOG MENADŽMENTA U ROMANU *TWILIGHT SLEEP* EDITH WHARTON

Rad se bavi znanstvenim menadžmentom koji je prvotno imao za cilj povećati učinkovitost radnika u tvornicama, da bi se potom počeo primjenjivati u načinu funkcioniranja obiteljskog doma. Rasprava obaseže analizu znanstvenog menadžmenta Fredericka Taylora i koncepta *therbliga* (anagram od Gilbreth) Lillian i Franka Gilbretha, kao i analizu autobiografskih romana *Cheaper by the Dozen* (1948) i *Belles on Their Toes* (1950) čiji su autori djeca Lillian i Franka Gilbretha, te analizu njihovih filmskih adaptacija. Potom se raspravlja o romanu *Twilight Sleep* (1927) Edith Wharton koji propituje širenje znanstvenog menadžmenta u obiteljskome domu, ponajviše otkriće medicinskog postupka nazvanog „spavanje u suton“ (*twilight sleep*) s početka 19. stoljeća. Svrha je ovoga postupka bila da porod učini bezbolnim time što se majkama davala doza skopolamina koji uzrokuje amneziju i morfija. Međutim, teza ovoga rada je da iako roman opisuje užase znanstvenog menadžmenta, on istodobno nudi i rješenje koje se vidi u dubinskome mijenjanju ponajprije društvenih, a ne ekonomskih odnosa.

**Ključne riječi:** znanstveni menadžment, Edith Wharton, spavanje u suton (*twilight sleep*), Frank Gilbreth, Lillian Gilbreth