In Limbo, or, The Protracted Death of the Novel

William Gaddis's *J R* and the Precarious State of Postmodern Literature

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Samandrag

Eksperimentell postmodernistisk litteratur blir framleis møtt med skepsis og skuldingar om irrelevans, også av tonegjevande litteraturkritikarar som Fredric Jameson, som rangerer litteratur under resterande kunstarter i postmoderniteten. Denne masteroppgåva tek for seg dei særeigne kvalitetane til eksperimentell postmodernistisk litteratur med utgangspunkt i romanen *J R* (1975) av William Gaddis. Denne romanen særmerkast av å være skriven som ein samanhengande dialog, med berre sjeldne innslag av ei narrativ stemme som att på til forsømer den tradisjonelle deskriptive rolla til fordel for å berre være endå ei stemme i samtalemylderet. Dette gjenspeiler Jean-François Lyotards idear om den aukande ugyldigheita til metanarrativ. Med omsyn til dette illustrerer *J R* korleis romanen, som på det mest konservative presenterast i form av eit strukturert narrativ formidla av ein allvitande forteljar, kan fornyast til auka fleksibilitet for å holde relevans ved lag i postmoderniteten. Ved å presentere teksten så upartisk som mogleg, opnar den seg for ei rekke tolkingar slik at lesaren bidrar til kunstverkets skaparhandling. Lesehandlinga, som i dei mest tradisjonelle tilfella er ei passiv oppleving der forfattaren formidlar eit fullbyrda produkt til lesaren, skiftast her ut med ein dialektisk, aktiv prosess der lesaren og teksta inngår i eit gjensidig forhold. Vidare opnar den ekskluderande autoriteten til ei narrativ stemme for at mindre narrativ i teksten kan nærstuderast, mens større, meir eksplisitte narrativ kan sidestillast, ettersom dialogen ofte består av lange, tilsynelatande trivielle tema. Sjølve oppgåva er delt inn i fire deler. Første del giv ein oversikt over romanens kontekst, postmodernistiske preg og narratologiske særtrekk. Andre del tek for seg entropi, eit dominerande tema i romanen, samt dei ekstralitterære implikasjonane dette inneberer. Tredje del tek for seg dei filmatiske parallellane i romanen. Fjerde del tek for seg den singulære posisjonen til *J R* i litteraturhistoria; til tross for at Gaddis i aukande grad blir betrakta som ein av dei leiande postmodernistiske forfattarane, har han aldri fått merksemd hos eit større publikum utanom akademiske kretsar i motsetning til forfattarar som Don DeLillo og Thomas Pynchon. Eg vil derfor undersøke arven etter *J R*, om der er nokon, og parallellane mellom *J R* og Pynchons hovudverk, *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973). Sjølv om *J R* tilbyr eit alternativ til den dominerande romanstilen, kan det være at romanen berre er eit unntak til regelen, noko som understrekast av romanens avgrensa lesekrets og den snarare indirekte enn direkte innverknaden til Gaddis.

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Contents

Introduction

Novels labeled "postmodern" constitute a notoriously unwieldy, heterogenous collection of texts. The legacy of the experimental modernist novel in the vein of *Ulysses* influenced a lineage of increasingly difficult and esoteric fiction, alienating much of the reading public by the arrival of the postmodernist era. Furthermore, cinema has emerged as a competitor for the novel as a leading source of entertainment throughout the 20th century, contributing to the traditional novel form becoming increasingly archaic, with film adaptations often eclipsing the textual source material altogether, and postmodern fiction is at worst relegated to academia and critics alone. Nevertheless, a tentative postmodern canon has slowly accumulated with some consensus, a selection literary critic Daniel Green characterizes as a "curios collection of eccentric works, vaguely considered 'experimental' at best, frivolous or unnecessarily difficult at worst, and for many already mostly a historical phenomenon with little if any relevance to currently notable writers and their work" (Green 2003, 730). Discussions on the alienating difficulty and the questionable relevance of much postmodern fiction is not restricted to the general public alone but is also engaged by several notable scholars. Advocating a particularly damning angle, leading Marxist and postmodernist critic Fredric Jameson denounces postmodernist literature in his seminal text *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), one of the defining texts on postmodernism, labeled "most comprehensive of all" (McHale 2012, 98) by Brian McHale. Jameson contends that "the novel is the weakest of the newer cultural areas and is considerably excelled by its narrative counterparts in film and video" (Jameson 1993, 298). While this might be the case in some literature adhering to the restrictions of its formal boundaries and having its potential artistic effect stunted by it, and with which the film medium would have been better in portraying its contents, Jameson adds that his condemnation "at least" concerns "the high literary novel" (Jameson 1993, 298). This reads as an attack on the high postmodernist novel, the "high literary novel" from the 1970s until and past the writing and publication of Jameson's text. This shift of dominants from literature to cinema is not a new proposition. Walter Benjamin argued as early as 1935 in his famous essay "The Work of Art in the Age of Its Technological Reproducibility" that "art will tackle the most difficult and most important tasks wherever it is able to mobilize the masses. It does so

currently in film" (Benjamin 2002, 120). The novel, ostensibly, inhabits a precarious region on the brink of redundancy.

This thesis will investigate the prospects for the continued relevance of the postmodernist novel. As it seems, the aging novel form remains the preeminent medium for expressing, if nothing else, the infinitely rich network of connotations to any given word and the ensuing ambiguity and inconceivable reciprocity between the "signifier" and the "signified" (to borrow structuralist terminology), which is immediately applicable to the political milieu of postmodernity, in which binary oppositions are increasingly disputed. While not as well-known as contemporaries Thomas Pynchon and Don DeLillo (both of which were familiar with his work), no other English language postmodern writer I am aware of is as relevant to my thesis as William Gaddis, and particularly his novel, *J R* (1975), which is infamous due to being written almost exclusively in unattributed dialogue, resembling a film script, an imperative quality in this context. I argue that *J R* is a leading, but perhaps singular example of the persistent possibilities of the medium due to its democratizing approach, encouraging active participation from the experiencer. Furthermore, I will demonstrate that *J R* exemplifies how the novel form can be the most suitable medium for expressing the difficulties of navigating the information overload, isolation, and complexity of postmodern reality. *J R* is particularly illuminating in its focus on the difficulty of creating art in a late capitalist environment in which any endeavor is graded by its use value. This conception of the novel retains relevance by exposing this reality while foregoing an authoritative narrative in lieu of presenting the reader with "evidence" in the form of dialogue to be decoded by the individual, in this way permitting a variety of different readings. These attributes are not conceivable in a film adaptation, for instance, where the effect is dampened by directorial intervention at the expense of the impression of overwhelming incomprehensibility by the reader. I will investigate how various characteristic postmodernist qualities of the text are used and how they relate to the experienced postmodern reality, with particular focus on narratology, entropy, and the increasing transdisciplinary approach of experimental literature, here exemplified by its relation to cinema. Lastly, I will look at the tentative legacy of *J R*, with particular focus on Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), which is simultaneously a kindred text and a foil. Certain aspects are important enough to overlap, most notably entropy, which exerts a considerable influence both in relation to the cinematic aspects as well as the reader as writer.

Postmodernism

The democratization of art is a necessity brought on by the "collapse" of *metanarratives*[1]; that is, the loss of faith in narratives about narratives, in postmodernity, in which the authority of the author is called into question, as noted by Jean-François Lyotard in *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979), another influential postmodern text. Lyotard defines *postmodern* as "incredulity toward metanarratives" (Lyotard 1984, xxiv), an "incredulity" that extends towards the author itself, which has for centuries (but not always) assumed much authorial power. With the failing influence of metanarratives, the traditional authority granted to the author and narrator similarly disintegrates, and Roland Barthes's proclamation of how when "the author enters his own death, writing begins" (Barthes 2017, 519), as argued in "The Death of the Author" (1967), becomes evident. This has consequences for the relevance of the novel form, as the reader is now forced to engage with the material and participate in creating the narrative. *J R* represents the ultimate decentering, as there is no perceived subject whatsoever. By removing the narrative voice in favor of dialogue, it is the reader's task to detect clues and construct the narrative based on personal facilities and agendas. As opposed to cinema, where the spectator's role generally is passive, and in which characters and themes are rendered explicit by being given objectifying traits by the director, this text encourages subjectivity.

Gaddis and several other leading postmodernist novelists are conspicuously missing in Jameson's discussion on literature in *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. This mirrors the underappreciation of much experimental postmodernist art in general, which is the source of some controversy, especially in literary criticism. Jameson holds that all postmodernist art is intrinsically associated with the era of *late capitalism*, a term adopted from Ernest Mandel that refers to a skepticism to the inequities brought on by modern capitalism, with an implication that continued expansion of the capitalist system will be disastrous. A look at other modernist and postmodernist criticism gives an insight into

[1] *Métarécit* is variously translated as "master narrative", "grand narrative", "metanarrative", or variations thereof, even internally in Bennington and Massumi's translation; I will opt for "metanarratives" unless quoting an alternate variety, as this translation aligns more closely with my use of the term in the text. While using the untranslated *métarécit* is another option, its translations seem to be sufficiently established; additionally, while popularizing the term, Lytoard did not invent it.

what is demanded of a novel in postmodernity. According to Mikhail Bakthin, "The fundamental condition, that which makes a novel a novel, that which is responsible for its stylistic uniqueness, is the *speaking person and his discourse*" (Bakthin 2017, 212), and nowhere is this better manifested than in *J R*. As an alternative to metanarratives, Lyotard proposes "the little narrative" (*petit récit* in the original French text), which he considers "the quintessential form of imaginative invention" (Lyotard 1984, 60). These little narratives are the narratives of "local groups, particular institutions and subcultural enclaves" (McHale 2012, 98) which resist capitalist oppression. Lyotard contends that "the reason [the capitalist system] programs itself like a computer, is the optimization of the global relationship between input and output—in other words performativity" (Lyotard 1984, 11). As a consequence, "the only alternative to this kind of performance improvement is entropy, or decline" (Lyotard 1984, 12), which is a major theme in *J R*. Additionally, this calls attention to the immanent collapse of the capitalist model, as entropy is inevitable, which is clearly seen in the novel.

Jameson characterizes postmodernity as "the *decentering* of that formerly centered subject or psyche" (Jameson 1993, 15), "the disappearance of the individual subject, along with its formal consequence" (Jameson 1993, 16), all of which is evident in *J R*. Jameson, however, stresses the predominance of "postmodern hyperspace" (Jameson 1993, 44), which additionally advances from the modernist emphasis on temporality. This is an inherently complex shift to integrate in literature, which Jameson argues operates at the expanse of the relevance of the novel. Whereas the spatial element of postmodernism is intrinsically integrated in architecture, this spatial emphasis is seemingly at odds with literature. He argues that "architecture . . . remains . . . the privileged aesthetic language" (Jameson 1993, 37) of postmodernity, due to its ability to directly portray spatiality, which has supplanted temporality, a dominant among modernist themes. "The postmodern period", according to Jameson, "eschews temporality for space" (Jameson 1993, 134), although *J R* illustrates that temporality is still applicable in literature. While applicable to many facets of postmodernist criticism, Jameson's text is especially concerned with aesthetics. Special attention is paid to architecture and film, which he champions as the preeminent postmodernist art forms, both of which explicitly tackle the predominance of spatiality over temporality. Despite being a lengthy, comprehensive text written by a prominent literary critic, literature is overall neglected. This void necessitates scrutiny.

Entropy, Cybernetics, and Reader-Response Criticism

The democratization of knowledge entails increasing redundancy of binary oppositions and instability of signifiers, and the proliferation of information and knowledge in postmodernity becomes obstacles to understanding rather than means to comprehension. The constant intrusions of external impressions lead to entropy, increasing disorder, and degradation. I argue that the recurring entropy theme is a conscious attempt by Gaddis to reflect this diffusion of information and knowledge in postmodernity, which Gaddis illustrates by recurring entropic allegories, many of which will be discussed in this text. *J R* is consequently a reflection on the constant decoding of unstable knowledge necessary to navigate contemporaneity. Gaddis thereby provides an ambiguous answer to the question of the continued relevance of the novel, instead proposing a new one; where do we go from here? *J R* might be a mere exception to Jameson's rule of the novel's redundancy, as it remains a singular achievement.

Discussions on entropy figures frequently in Gaddis's essays and interviews, as exemplified by him proclaiming that "entropy rears as a central preoccupation of our time" (Gaddis 2002, 50). This concept is adopted from thermodynamics and denotes the measurement of disorder, or chaos. The second law of thermodynamics states that entropy is bound to increase over time in a closed system. This is to say that chaos is inevitable. A state of no entropy denotes order, while high entropy denotes a large degree of randomness. *J R*'s formal novelty is augmented by the integration of entropy into the very form itself. According to Joseph Tabbi, "the cybernetic themes also govern the design of the narrative" (Tabbi 2015, 145). This physics concept and its interactivity with "plagiarism, the pressures of capitalism, the threat of mass culture to artistic authenticity, and the continued viability of literature" are, as stressed by Michael Wutz, all "themes orchestrating [Gaddis's] entire oeuvre" (Wutz 2007, 187) and will all be relevant in this text.

While the entropy term originates in physics, it is an established interdisciplinary concept that is also crucial in the field of cybernetics, the science of communication between systems (e.g., between people and machines). Norbert Wiener, widely considered the originator of this field, states in his influential *The Human Use of Human Beings* (1950) that communication of information is negentropic (an antonym for entropy), but is corrupted by two entropic forces; namely, the passive resistance of nature, and the active resistance of

anything else. A novel, best exemplified by *J R* in this regard, is initially a passive text of transmitted information that is subjected to entropy in several ways, most notably by way of the readers' individual attempts to decode the information. Wiener's conception of entropy, partly influenced by the theories of physicist Josiah Willard Gibbs (Gaddis naming one of the leading characters in *J R* "Jack Gibbs" is no coincidence), as well as its relation to the postmodern novel, is summarized in this key passage from the preface of his aforementioned work:

> As entropy increases, the universe, and all closed systems in the universe, tend naturally to deteriorate and lose their distinctiveness, to move from the least to the most probable state, from a state of organization and differentiation in which distinctions and forms exist, to a state of chaos and sameness. In Gibbs' universe order is least probable, chaos most probable. But while the universe as a whole, if indeed there is a whole universe, tends to run down, there are local enclaves whose direction seems opposed to that of the universe at large and in which there is a limited and temporary tendency for organization to increase. Life finds its home in some of these enclaves. (Wiener 1954, 12)

As in "Gibbs' universe," "order is least probable, chaos most probable" in postmodern novels, but only a select few address and embrace this to the extent demonstrated in *J R*.

In addition to the explicit link between entropy and cybernetics, entropy has applications in reader-response theory. As explained by Wiener, "When I communicate with another person, I impart a message to him, and when he communicates back with me he returns a related message which contains information primarily accessible to him and not to me" (Wiener 1954, 16). Gaddis's dialogue is "primarily accessible to him," and it is the reader's job to decode it. I argue that the deciphering of this experimental conception of the novel can grant us valuable insight into the complexity of communication in postmodernity, as "society can only be understood through a study of the messages and the communication facilities which belong to it" (Wiener 1954, 16), and these "messages" and "communication facilities" are becoming increasingly complex as well as diversifying, as evinced by the many different means of communication in *J R*, all of which are competing for attention and cannot be ignored by simply not listening, as for instance in a film. Here each line achieves equal prominence by virtue of being written, all of which must be read to advance the narrative. The ostensible difficulty of approaching such a book is not willful obscurity on Gaddis's part, but rather a realistic mirror of the complexity of deciphering any text or conversation in daily life,

a complexity that, in line with the concept of entropy, is bound to increase, with the complexity of art increasing accordingly. As elaborated by Wiener, "the needs and the complexity of modern life make greater demands on this process of information than ever before" (Wiener 1954, 18). This complexity is not inherently negative, especially not for art, and Wiener notes how "the more probable the message, the less information it gives. Clichés, for example, are less illuminating than great poems" (Wiener 1954, 21). Furthermore, "the question of whether to interpret the second law of thermodynamics pessimistically or not depends on the importance we give to the universe at large, on the one hand, and to the islands of locally decreasing entropy which we find in it, on the other" (Wiener 1954, 39). This is not to say that increased complexity equals better art, far from it, but rather that with the rate of entropy increasing and society becomes more complex in tandem with the disintegration of metanarratives, it is increasingly difficult to create an artwork that resonates with a sizeable readership, and greater demands are posed to the artist, at least if the goal is create art that assumes some relevance to the experiencer. The aging novel medium, in its traditional conception, has only limited capacity to resonate with the heterogenous audiences that constitute postmodernity due to the predominant reliance on a single narratorial authority. The ability to balance this complexity with a justified artwork is of the highest necessity, and *J R*, in which Gaddis avoids long, narrative stretches of "literary" language (as in *The Recognitions*) in favor of matter-of-fact dialogue, is a testament to the prospects of this endeavor.

The entropic form of *J R* has also been noted by critic David Buehrer, who explains how "stylistically, *J R* is an entropic narrative, since it is told with practically no authorial markers to help the reader to cut through its seamless web of fragmented and discontinuous discourse" (Buehrer 2012, 367). While continuous unattributed dialogue has been experimented with before, most notably in playscripts (albeit often inadvertently and to different ends), *J R* remains an extreme example of this style in novel form. *J R* approximates transcendence of the novel medium without being ergodic literature or cybertext, resulting in a reading experience almost cinematic in nature, despite, as I will argue, literature being the only viable medium for its aesthetic intentions. By character Edward Bast's own admission, "most God damned readers rather be at the movies" and "most God damned writing's written for readers perfectly happy who they are rather be at the movies, come in empty-handed go out the same God damned way" (Gaddis 2007, 289-290). Despite excluding a passive reading by way of its unique form, "the purpose is not to put readers off but to force them to

participate in the fiction" (Moore 2015, 76). *J R* is what Barthes would label a "writerly" book that demands more from the reader than a "readerly" book by way of omitting the thoughts and motivations of the characters. *J R*'s perceived difficulty stems partly from its realistic portrayal of modern life, which does not lend itself to an easy relationship between signifier and signified and as the novelist no longer can (indeed never could) assume a position of complete authority, the reader is forced to engage with the text at hand in constructing the narrative. The novel takes cues from visual art and successfully inspires an innovative approach to the novel in postmodernism (in its most literal sense as a transcendence of modernism), in which *J R*'s ambition is a continuation of modernist ideals of virtuosity and temporality, but never in a regressive fashion. Like Wutz in his essay "Writing from between the gaps", I intend to take a "media-theoretical focus" (Wutz 2007, 188), although Wutz himself is generally concerned with Gaddis's final, posthumous novel *Agapē Agape* (2002), a novel that shares many formal aspects with *J R,* itself being written in a continuous monologue with no subdivision whatsoever. I agree with Wutz that "the virtue of media-theoretical analysis is that it emphasizes the way a discourse is embedded in the technologies that produced it" (Wutz 2007, 188), in addition to highlighting how "Gaddis himself, in *J R* no less than in *Agapē Agape,* works in effect as a *literary* media theorist" (Wutz 2007, 188). With its emphasis on the many adverse ways in which technology interferes in postmodern life, media is itself a leading theme in *J R* which should not be ignored.

This unique variety of the novel appears to be the most apt way to depict the entropic tendencies associated with the overflow of information in postmodernity. This is not to say that other postmodernist novels are "irrelevant" or lacking in quality, but rather that *J R*'s ambitions present an alternative to the dominant form of the novel more representative of contemporaneity, in which metanarratives are no longer trusted. Moreover, *J R,* with its urban setting and themes, assesses the difficulties of maneuvering through a modern city. Jameson addresses the necessity for modern art to confront this issue, but fails to notice this tendency in novels like *J R.* More precisely, Jameson argues that "a model of political culture appropriate to our own situation will necessarily have to raise spatial issues as its fundamental organizing concern" and "provisionally define the aesthetic of this new (and hypothetical) cultural form as an aesthetic of *cognitive mapping*" (Jameson 1993, 51). Furthermore, "the alienated city is above all a space in which people are unable to map (in their minds) either their own positions or the urban totality in which they find themselves" (Jameson 1993, 51). This also reflects the experience of reading *J R.* To successfully read and process the text

parallels the process of "disalienation in the traditional city" which "involves the practical reconquest of a sense of place and the construction or reconstruction of an articulated ensemble which can be retained in memory and which the individual subject can map and remap along the moments of mobile, alternative trajectories" (Jameson 1993, 51). I contend that Gaddis successfully translates this process into novel form.

Gaddis's self-consciousness about working within the constraints of the novel form recurs throughout *J R* and is often explicit, as seen by the removal of attributes in the dialogue. This stylistic choice reflects the disorientation and overwhelming informational flow of modern life in the city which stunts the ability for cognitive mapping for the individual, an era which Gibbs defines as the "first time in history so many opportunities to do so God damned many things not worth doing" (Gaddis 2016, 477). These opportunities are hinderances rather than means for liberation. Now, however, and as illustrated in this novel, an attentive listener can construct narratives by alternating focus on simultaneous dialogues in the streets or wherever several dialogues are held simultaneously. This reflection on cognitive mapping in Gaddis's oeuvre, which has been noted before, strengthens *J R*'s claim to relevance, as its flow of dialogue reflects the modern alienation of information excess, undermining Jameson's conception of abstruse experimental novels far-removed from real-life social contexts. The form of the novel presents literary communication and subjectivity in a new fashion, "not so much on other people as on *things,"* as noted by Tabbi, as "on *communicative networks,* the phone lines, junk mail, office memos, contracts, legal documents, and other media outlets through which talk and text can be exchanged without visual or even voice recognition while collective action is achieved . . . 'without intersubjective contact'" (Tabbi 2015, 126). In this novel, communication through phone, television and intercom assumes the same level of importance as direct communication between people by virtue of being integrated into the text in the same fashion, reflecting the intervening role of new media in everyday life. Whereas Gaddis's well-known interest in player pianos, radio and film is not to be ignored, as his previous stated "lifelong posthumousness" coupled with his "ongoing work on the player piano . . . made him sensitive to the shifts within the media ecology of the twentieth century" (Wutz 2007, 199). Cinema is thematized at several points in the novel, and, in one of the earliest scenes, we are presented with a scathing critique of television in which haphazard informational videos are used in teaching, as it is being argued that "the youngsters find it reassuring . . . like seeing a

commercial" (Gaddis 2007, 39). These surface references to film relate to the very form of the novel itself.

Cinema

J R's ties to cinema are often more conspicuous than those to literary contemporaries. The necessity of engaging *J R*'s interdisciplinary implications underlines the genre-transgressing nature of much postmodernist art, literature or otherwise. This is a key point, as I will investigate the possibilities of structuring the novel on extraliterary concepts, in this case entropy. Given the content's formal restriction to literature rather than film, however, the experience is more demanding for the spectator. Ignoring the risk of stating the obvious, the experienced temporality of film and music carries on inexorably without the audience's agency, and the spectator is free to disengage and assume a position of impressionistic passivity absent in the action of reading without surrendering a meaningful aesthetic experience. "The connections" in the novel "more often than not are never registered by the consciousness of the characters: these are communicated primarily between the author and the reader, who (as Gaddis remarked in a number of interviews) is brought in as a kind of collaborator in the construction of meaning within and through the novel's systems and networks" (Tabbi 2015, 126). In *J R* the reader is forced to not only instigate the temporality of the work by reading continuously, but simultaneously trace the unattributed dialogue to specific characters (as well as different media) by identifying recurring personality traits and localize the spatial locations where the action has shifted to, which changes seamlessly in a stream of consciousness fashion not dissimilar to the effect in modernist classics such as *Mrs Dalloway* (1925), but to entirely different ends. "Time in J R's world," according to Tabbi, "is a medium to be manipulated for present profitability, and his enterprise flourishes—in the logic of abstract economic 'growth'—more or less independently of any material base" (Tabbi 2015, 125). This has also been noted by Steven Moore, who underlines how "Gaddis's readers must join him in creating this fictional world" (Moore 2015, 76). The text is not concerned with the internal ruminations of the characters whatsoever—in fact, the dialogue is almost entirely direct, and we are never offered a glimpse into the minds of the characters apart from what can tentatively be deduced from the dialogue—but rather with the externality

of all the characters and their interactions, often subliminally or unbeknownst to the participants (as is the case in real life).

Whereas in film dialogue is generally underlined by tone of voice, music, facial expressions, and innumerable other variables (notwithstanding experimental, non-figurative, non-narrative films in the manner of Stan Brakhage), *J R* consists predominantly of dialogue, and it is the reader's job to decode and engage with the text. I argue that, in the face of the diminishing influence of metanarratives and the realization that any narrator is unreliable, *J R* presents a welcome reinvention of the novel in which the reader is free to bring in his own experiences and participate in creating the artwork and the process of cognitive mapping, or to underline the parallels to film, adopt the role of a director in face of a script. "Gaddis's fabled authorial disappearance" in this regard "is far from being a capitulation to or even primarily a critique of the mechanistic ideal. Instead, it is an attempt to reconfigure the relation between the author and his audiences in such a way that both are made to inhabit the systems and networks that define our present economy and culture" (Tabbi 2015, 131). This is the domain of reader-response theory and cybernetics, and these fields' associated terminology will be frequently engaged with in this text. Elsewhere, I will engage with literary criticism on postmodernism, aesthetics, poststructuralism, and Marxism.

Biography and Summaries

William Gaddis was born on December 29, 1922 in New York and raised comfortably, solely by his mother, in Massapequa, Long Island, which also serves as the primary setting for *J R*. Despite his ambition and precocious talent for writing, his debut *The Recognitions*, widely considered one of the first postmodernist novels, almost immediately fell into obscurity. 20 years elapsed before Gaddis published his belated sophomore novel, *J R*. During this span of two decades, considerable in the literary scene (particularly in the 20th century), high modernist fiction saw a loss in prominence and was gradually eclipsed by what came to be known as postmodernist literature. In the interim, Gaddis had long since forfeited his ambitions for a career as a novelist due to his limited commercial success and held a variety of corporate jobs to provide for his wife and two children. His experiences as a white-collar

worker undoubtedly informed his creative writing and laid the groundwork for the anti-capitalist and anti-corporate thread in *J R* and to a lesser extent the novels that followed. Tabbi's *Nobody Grew but the Business: On the Life and Work of William Gaddis* (2015), which remains the sole book length biography on Gaddis as of the writing of this thesis, gives insight into the parallels between the influence Gaddis's experiences in this period had on his creative writing, most evidently in how Gaddis, "like Eigen in *J R*, and like most men in America . . . had to work full-time at jobs he hated, to 'pay the bills'" (Tabbi 2015, 113). This influence underlines the coincidental nature of "postmodernist literature" as a genre, in its broadest sense an umbrella term for a heterogonous canon of texts varying widely in style and genre but with certain key similarities, as the differences between *The Recognitions* and *J R* owe their existence to Gaddis's life experiences and changing taste as much as to developments in art, or any conscious attempt to engage with literary trends.

Despite disparaging and self-deprecating comments about his years as a corporate writer, Gaddis was by all accounts an esteemed employee and colleague and excelled in his career, which provided experience that eventually influenced his creative writing. Notwithstanding his perennial misrecognition and legacy as a pioneer of the postmodernist style, *J R*'s form was not a conscious opportunistic choice to tap into the brief but intense wave of interest in postmodernist literature in the wake of Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), but rather a product influenced by many facets of Gaddis's personal life, not least his work experience. Moreover, the nucleus of *J R* can be traced to "as early as 1956" (Tabbi 2015, 118), one year after the publication of his debut novel, and Gaddis's creative work was otherwise out of fashion, much to Gaddis's consternation and to the detriment of any lucrative prospects. Despite unwillingly surrendering his creative ambitions in face of the overwhelming indifference to his debut, Gaddis continued to harvest inspiration from his environment. No matter what informed the content of Gaddis's second novel, *J R* is most notably a drastic departure from *The Recognitions* in form, and its coincidental publication in a period defined by several postmodernist classics is serendipitous. *J R*, published in 1975 after over a decade of writing, and two decades after its conception, remains unique among such contemporaries as *Gravity's Rainbow, Crash* (1973) and *Breakfast of Champions* (1973); the novel consists almost entirely of unattributed dialogue, with no division into chapters or paragraphs apart from the occasional prose poems that serves as transitions between scenes and settings. While postmodernist classics often experimented with metanarratives and nonlinearity, *J R*'s form has rarely been replicated and has few precursors;

this is probably partly due to its ambitious nature and demands for a virtuosic control of language. As noted by Moore, “Novels written primarily in dialogue have been done before . . . but never to the extreme lengths Gaddis takes it” (Moore 2015, 75). Furthermore, the dialogue does not consist of “completed, grammatical sentences helpfully larded with *she saids* and explanatory asides by the author on what the characters actually mean by what they say” (Moore 2015, 76); instead “*J R* reads like a transcript of real speech: ungrammatical, often truncated, with constant interruptions by other characters—and by telephones, televisions, and radios—with rarely an identifying (and never an interpretive) remark by the author” (Moore 2015, 76). This unique form has, despite its ambitiousness, resulted in alienating potential readers, and the novel remains largely ignored by the general public.

J R was to be the second of the four novels published in Gaddis’s lifetime, with his final complete novel *Agapē Agape* published posthumously in 2002, four years after Gaddis’s death of cancer on December 16, 1998. As noted above, the novel had a gestation period of two decades, and the completed text served to reinvent Gaddis’s literary voice as it appeared in *The Recognitions* (1955), virtually to the point of self-obliteration. This “holds true for the production of individually significant artists” (Adorno 1997, 286), as noted by Theodor Adorno in *Aesthetic Theory* (1970). Furthermore, “the continuity of their works is often fragmented. . . . They sometimes produce works that are starkly antithetical to what they have already completed, either because they consider the possibilities of one type of work to be exhausted or as a preventative to the danger of rigidification and repetition" (Adorno 1997, 286). Whereas the dialogue in *The Recognitions* is regularly supported by often detailed descriptions of the actions of the speakers (“–You haven’t explained all this to me yet, you know, Basil Valentine said, raising his eyes from the picture, which he pushed forward with his right hand, and a glitter of gold at his cuff” (Gaddis 1993, 240)), as well as extended passages of narration in which the narrator’s voice is explicit (“Three stars in his belt, Orion lay out of sight beyond tons of opaque building material now dissolved in darkness, serving only to support fixed points of light, the solid firmament of early Jews where stars were nailed lest they fall” (Gaddis 1993, 387)), the bulk of *J R* consists of direct discourse with little to no intervention whatsoever, even when some additional details would be helpful to the reader’s understanding, most pressingly regarding who is speaking (“You want to take them in yourself, go ahead. –In where. –In Brooklyn where it says. Next? –Brooklyn? –One way? –Wait a minute …” (Gaddis 2016, 188)).

Moreover, while the dialogue *The Recognitions* is tightly organized and flanked by substantial narrative passages and attributives, *J R*'s continuous stream of dialogue is presented with no chapter breaks or divisions into sections. While occasionally providing oblique and ambiguous descriptions to the character's fragmented, hyperrealistic dialogue, the prime role of this narrative voice is to bridge scenes and locations with passages resembling prose poems, at times as short as a sentence and never longer than a printed page. While dialogue predominates and is of the most interest to this thesis, these prose poems are not to be ignored, as the narrative voice rarely resembles the omniscient authority commonplace in the traditional novel, and is generally experienced as yet another voice in the ongoing conversation among the other disembodied voices. At times, the narrative voice is more diffuse than the dialogue, surrendering the trope of descriptive narration. This form is employed to present the rise and downfall of the eponymous 11-year old J R Vansant, a New York grade-school student who is precociously able to manipulate the stock market and establish a lucrative paper empire by parlaying penny stock holdings through postal money orders and payphone calls. As a result, long parts of the novel consist of telephone calls in which only J R's end is heard, with the reader having to deduce what is being said on the other line. J R (seemingly) attains the initial inspiration for his scheme on a school trip early on in the novel, and solicits the help of his frustrated music teacher Bast to hesitantly be the face of his enterprise, in this way successfully hiding the fact that the multi-million dollar firm is being led by a grade-school student. J R's business gradually gains momentum, and he eventually establishes two headquarters in the city, one of which is an apartment used initially and concurrently by writers Jack Gibbs and Thomas Eigen as well as Bast as a creative studio, creativity which is consistently stifled by an unending sequence of business phone calls, serving as one of the leading analogies to entropy in the text, with the chaos steadily increasing in the apartment which in this regard assumes the role of a closed system. J R's business eventually collapses, along with Bast's sanity and the stock market, instigating a national financial crisis; this adverse outcome too presented with humor as in the remainder of the novel, but the impression left by the book is ultimately more sinister than comical, highlighting the destructive, indifferent force of capitalism and the destructive effects of entropy.

As seen, *J R* has characteristic postmodernist traits. Although *The Recognitions* has been retroactively classified as the first postmodern novel (a distinction that has been applied to several novels, most notably *Finnegans Wake*, which preceded *The Recognitions* by 16

years, a somewhat more controversial assessment), it bears many traits of the classic modernist novel, and Gaddis's indebtedness to the leading modernist authors, most notably T.S. Eliot, is often evident. In my opinion, *The Recognitions* decidedly resembles a modernist novel in comparison to his more mature work. Nevertheless, the novel warrants some attention in this thesis as a foil to *J R,* and a short summary is due before moving on. Despite being largely ignored after its original publication and shunned by the majority of those select few who read it (many reviewers allegedly only read the opening pages or blurbs), it has steadily gained acclaim as an overlooked classic of early postmodernist fiction. The novel traces the life of Wyatt Gwyon (note the initials), the son of a widowed minister. His own theological ambitions are thwarted when he discovers a talent for painting and, after making a Faustian deal with a plotting art dealer, endeavors to create forgeries of the great Flemish painters of the renaissance. This theme of fraudulence pervades the novel, and the many American expatriate artists and writers we are exposed to throughout the novel are scathing portrayals of pretentious peripheral affiliates in Gaddis's New York scene of the 40s and 50s. Gwyon becomes increasingly disillusioned with deceit and pretension, and strives to live as authentically as possible towards the end of the novel. The sprawling novel, which exceeds 900 pages, has a large cast of characters, several of whose lives intertwine in complex fashion, and spans several decades and continents. In typical modernist fashion the text is highly allusive, and the plot regularly digresses into long subplots akin to the encyclopedic tendencies of James Joyce, whose influence on *The Recognitions* is often noted. Gaddis's prodigious talent occasionally gives the impression of being the main draw, however, and given his later work, it is evident that his voice was yet to be formed.

J R remains unique among other novels commonly associated with "high postmodernism", and there is no extant school of direct descendants or stylistic imitators, as is the case with the likes of Pynchon. Its form, however, with its stream of unattributed dialogue is an untapped source for a formal reinvention of the novel for a new era, in which the aging medium competes against younger artforms and struggles to accommodate the proliferation of new genres and the disintegration of cultural hegemony. Gaddis weaves the overflow of information together, deflating hierarchical notions of what can be said in favor of the unfiltered, fragmented and often crude language dictated by the facilities of the speakers, with which the largely absent narrator interferes as little as possible, and, when rarely present, the narrator merely funnels the attention of the reader to another block of unedited dialogue by way of short prose poems. The result is an unique experience in which the reader assumes

unprecedented amounts of authority and is welcomed to construct the narrative and engage in creating images in a way that is impossible in cinema in which the images are objectified by the director to a degree that Gaddis avoids as much as possible. Gaddis was himself skeptical of "the uncritical use of media technologies," which "runs the risk of producing a generation devoid of cultural literacy and intellectual effort and accelerates the dumbing down of America that is already in full progress" (Wutz 2007, 203), as paraphrased by Wutz. Although the above is a somewhat controversial perspective that I am hesitant to agree with, it nevertheless lends credibility to the argumentation of *J R* inviting reader participation. "Film and television" in *Agapē Agape* "reflect a cult of simulation in which the individual and unique have been rinsed out by eyewash visible in the dulled gloss of inanimate spectatorship. The communal coherence made possible by art, fissured by the advent of the mass media, has opened up to a yawning chasm and into nomadic isolation" (Wutz 2007, 204). The authority of the reader underlines the irrelevancy and futility of metanarratives in postmodernity, and the dated assumption of an ideal reader and universal readings advocated by many realist narrators in which sympathies are often assumed. This is not to say that *J R* provides a *tabula rasa* in which Gaddis surrenders all authority, but rather that Gaddis is well-aware of the entropy pervading real life, and acknowledges the complexity of a sentence in which any word can be scrutinized and debated, let alone whole paragraphs or entire novels, notably the latter since *J R* contains no formal segmentation. Gaddis's novel is a democratic project, and its notorious reception of difficulty is unfounded, based on the reader's overwhelming experience of being forced to create after decades of being desensitized by the everyday barrage of images from television and the ubiquitous commercials.

Chapter 1

Context: Postmodernist Theory, Narratology, and the Reader as Writer after the Collapse of Metanarratives

The Collapse of Metanarratives

While it is difficult enough to establish a workable definition for the postmodernist novel, postmodernism is itself a complex, far-reaching concept that needs to be addressed to provide a context for the "collapse" of metanarratives. One conception of postmodernism is of a forced cultural dominant disseminated by mass culture in a system of cultural hegemony. This entails a skepticism to the West's conception of its own progress in modernity, as exemplified by the Manifest Destiny of inexorable expansion of the United States, which is characteristic of postmodernism. The reasons for why "the grand narrative has lost its credibility" are complex, with Lyotard arguing that a leading cause of "the decline of narrative can be seen as an effect of the blossoming of techniques and technologies since the Second World War, which has shifted emphasis from the ends of action to its means" (Lyotard 1984, 37). Alternatively, another possible influence is "the redeployment of advanced liberal capitalism after its retreat under . . . Keynesianism during the period 1930-60, a renewal that has eliminated the communist alternative and valorized the individual enjoyment of goods and services" (Lyotard 1984, 37-38). This definition provides useful insight into the links between late capitalism, postmodernity, and the growing disillusion with metanarratives, but I will limit the discussion of historical basis to the above, as digressions into sociohistorical context are beyond the limits of this thesis. Context is not elaborated further by Lyotard either, who notes that "anytime we go searching for causes in this way we are bound to be disappointed. Even if we adopted one or the other of these hypotheses, we would still have to detail the correlation between the tendencies mentioned and the decline of the unifying and legitimating power of the grand narratives of speculation and emancipation" (Lyotard 1984, 38). Political leaders, referred to as "the decision makers" by Lyotard, "allocate our lives for the growth of power. In matters of social justice and of scientific truth

alike, the legitimation of that power is based on its optimizing the system's performance—efficiency" (Lyotard 1984, xxiv). This emphasis on efficiency aligns with a cybernetic approach. As noted by Wiener, "the Enlightenment . . . fostered the idea of progress" (Wiener 1954, 37) while "in physics, the idea of progress opposes that of entropy" (Wiener 1954, 38), explaining why Lyotard advocates entropy as a resistance to dominant narratives of progress. The ideals of the Enlightenment imply an overarching metanarrative, while a metanarrative implies a unified experiencer, both of which are debatable variables in postmodernity. The authority of a sole narrative authority, traditionally granted to white males, is no longer feasible.

An exchange between J R and public relations executive Dave Davidoff illustrates a comically deflated attempt to propagate a frontier narrative. Praising his superior, Davidoff begins by boasting that "when you go home tonight you can tell your families you met one of your country's outstanding Americans," to which he replies, "you mean you?" (Gaddis 2016, 91). Davidoff continues, unperturbed, with "Governor Cates is one of the men who opened the frontiers of America as we know it today, Davidoff leaned knuckled under on the expanse of walnut stretched before him, pad, pencils, ashtray, pad, pencils, asthray, –he …" until he is abruptly cut off by J R, butting in with "him? He was this frontiersman?" (Gaddis 2016, 91). Davidoff perseveres, narrating how he was "not like Daniel Boone if that's what you're thinking of, no. He opened America's industrial frontiers, her natural resources that make us the wealthiest country in the world. He's a man presidents come to for advice, and you can be proud …", before again being interrupted by J R, who asks, "is he rich?", before his final attempt to conclude the narration, resuming with "well after all, a man who has contributed so greatly to his country's wealth and power would deserve …", after which the subject is finally derailed altogether by J R, who asks, "what are all these here pads and pencils for?" (Gaddis 2016, 91). As seen, J R continually questions and interrupts this narrative, which is ultimately experienced as comical rather than convincing.

The Postmodernist Novel

Discussions on the postmodernist novel often necessitate returning to modernist literature and criticism. Hugh J. Silverman argues that "postmodernism is not as such a new style of creating artworks," but rather strives to "marginalize, delimit, disseminate, and decenter the primary (and often secondary) works of modernist and premodernist cultural inscriptions" (Silverman 1990, 1). As well as being indebted to the satirical novel in the tradition of Jonathan Swift, Gaddis's novels resemble or engage with the encyclopedic novel, a tradition that is almost as old as the novel itself, with canonical examples appearing regularly from *Don Quixote* published during the Spanish Golden Age to *Ulysses* at the height of literary modernism, via *Moby-Dick* from the American Renaissance. While Flaubert, as paraphrased by Stephen J. Burn, "believed that the roots of all great literature lay in encyclopedic knowledge" (Burn 2007, 47), Italo Calvino suggested that "the desire to write an encyclopedic book about everything is one of the characteristic impulses of the twentieth-century writer" (Burn 2007, 48). This is an ambition Gaddis pursued in his debut novel. While *The Recognition*'s legacy is often tied to its status as a precursor to the postmodernist novel, "the encyclopedic narrative is often defined as the quintessentially modernist form" (Burn 2007, 48), underlining the novel's modernist qualities. *J R*, on the other hand, subverts and plays off these notions. In the late capitalist climate, "the image of informational excess that eighteenth-century encyclopedic projects provided for *The Recognitions* is inverted, so that Enlightenment encyclopedias now seem emblematic of a less information-dense age" (Burn 2007, 57). This reflects the waning faith in the novel form. The attempts of Diderot and his Enlightenment contemporaries to reflect a totality of information in the ramifications of a book, ideals which were explored to the extreme by Modernist authors, now seem naive and futile. The encyclopedic novel subsists in *J R* as an artifact of a bygone era, and this play with old forms recurs throughout the novel by way of the struggling artists, whom I will discuss in their relation to entropy. This crisis of empiric data is in line with Lyotard's remark that "the status of knowledge is altered as societies enter what is known as the postindustrial age and cultures enter what is known as the postmodern age" (Lyotard 1984, 3). The uncertainty of what constitutes objective knowledge further necessitates the removal of the authoritative narrator, as exemplified in *J R*. While *The Recognitions* is dominated by the voice of an omniscient narrator, where even the dialogue assumes a more stilted, formal, and less lifelike style, a shift to skepticism in the authority of language is implied in Gaddis's transformation

to postmodernist style, where in *J R* the words are reduced to "free-floating signifiers", to borrow deconstructionist terminology, reflecting a new style of writing for a new era.

This new way of writing entails a new way of reading. Gerald L. Bruns opines that "the history of reading came to an end with *Finnegans Wake*", and that "since 1939 readers of the world have been congregating in front of the text as before a Chinese wall that blocks every access to the future" (Bruns 1990, 121). Adorno, on the other hand, is not this pessimistic. In a discussion on atonal music in *Aesthetic Theory*, he notes the sea change in music brought on by Arnold Schoenberg, the influential atonal composer: "The sounds liberated by [Schoenberg] . . . could no longer be dreamed away and henceforward bore consequences that would ultimately displace the traditional language of composition altogether" (Adorno 1997, 28-29). Schoenberg's radical music serves as a fitting allegory to the influence of James Joyce and the leading modernist writers. Bruns explains how "*Finnegans Wake* turns us against interpretation and onto the path of structuralist analysis, where the end of reading is no longer to determine the meaning of anything but rather to lay open to view the deep structure or mode of production that makes meaning, or whatever, possible" (Bruns 1990, 122). While Schoenberg is a fitting musical parallel to the literary innovations of the modernist writers, composers like John Cage or Morton Feldman, who often limited their instructions to the performer virtually to the point of imperceptibility, inviting their individual interpretations, are more fitting comparisons to Gaddis. *J R* exposes the entropy inherent in conversations, something which is evident in its lifelike dialogue. In the mind of the individual speaker, his or her sentences might be imagined as being produced fully formed and unambiguous, but in actual dialogue the result is generally different; fragmented, stuttering, and often incomprehensible out of context. This is explicated by Bruns, who notes how "on paper words are just terms; as soon as one speaks, however, words break their logical boundaries and begin speaking in tongues. We always think of what we say as if it were on paper, that is, simply and silently in terms of what we mean; but we are never ourselves alone" (Bruns 1990, 131). "Never ourselves alone" refers to the communal nature of conversation; it cannot exist in a vacuum. *J R* approaches this in novel form, realizing an authentic variety of a Bakthinian heteroglossia. Discussing Bakthin, Bruns holds that "one's discourse floats in a . . . sea of usage. But Bakthin's idea is that one's voice is always intersected by other voices, laced with other intentions, other worlds, as if one were always caught up in an urban noise of marketplace and fishmarket, street corner and train station, pub and union hall where everyone is talking at once and nobody is anyone who does not sound

like someone else" (Bruns 1990, 131). *J R*'s urban setting is no coincidence, as the multicultural urban sprawl surrounding New York epitomizes modern "noise". This new way of reading involves decoding this noise, something which elevates the role of the reader.

The disorienting effect of a plurality of voices and narratives is exemplified by a long conversation between employees at Typhon International, none of which are major characters. Moreover, the conversation only briefly involves the leading plotlines in the novel. The characters' agendas are also stifled as they constantly interrupt each other, with the result being a series of fragmented thoughts and sentences:

> –Miss Bulcke here's this news release you just …
>
> –Yes thank you Carol, good morning Governor we didn't expect the pleasure of seeing you out of the hospital today, is …
>
> –Mrs Selk is right here in Mister Beaton's office sir and …
>
> –Blaufinger here yet?
>
> –No sir … she got ahead of him for the door, –General Blaufinger called to say he … (Gaddis 2016, 419)

Here each speaker interrupts each other when they have gathered the information they need; inessential information is discarded immediately. Miss Bulcke's "is …" is enough for Carol to infer that she asks about "Mrs Selk", and the dialogue is reduced to a series of lucid speech acts. The tone shifts when Zona starts imposing her needs: "Just hold your water John, he can clear them up when he's cleared this up, I want … –Zona don't give a damn what you want, Beaton's not your black girl he's secretary and general counsel of this company and he can't drop everything just to … –Yes Beaton what about her, I can't be expected to get along without her this way and I want …" (Gaddis 2016, 420). The conversation turns into a power play, in which Zona's needs, including her narrative, is suppressed and denied by her superiors.

The Death of the Author

This aspect of *J R* relates to Barthes' proclamation of the "death of the author", an influential poststructuralist thesis. According to Barthes, who outlines a particularly effacing view on the authority of the author, "All writing it itself [a] special voice, consisting of several indiscernible voices, and . . . literature is precisely the invention of this voice, to which we cannot assign a specific origin: literature is that . . . oblique into which every subject escapes, the trap where all identity is lost, beginning with the very identity of the body that writes" (Barthes 2017, 518). Compellingly, Barthes also notes how "in primitive societies, narrative is never undertaken by a person, but by a mediator, shaman or speaker, whose 'performance' may be admired (that is, his mastery of the narrative code), but not his 'genius'" (Barthes 2017, 519. Perhaps novels in the vein of *J R* are not so much progressive examples of a new novel form as a return to the oral (in this context not only oral but also communal in the sense that the reader has an equally important role) tradition of literature prior to it being written, the norm in literary tradition before and including the *Odyssey* and the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, both of whom where communicated orally prior to being written down. This will not be explicated further in this thesis, but it serves to shed some light on the implications of the shift in the perception of the narrator from the role of a mere medium in antiquity by way of the ascendancy of the Romantic genius to the present transformation of the role. Barthes argues that "with regard to literature it should be positivism, resume and the result of capitalist ideology, which has accorded the greatest importance to the author's 'person'" (Barthes 2017, 519). Barthes characterizes "the author" as "a modern figure, produced no doubt by our society insofar as, at the end of the middle ages, with English empiricism, French rationalism and the personal faith of the Reformation, it discovered the prestige of the individual, or, to put it more nobly, of the 'human person'" (Barthes 2017, 519). With the shifts brought on by modernity and completed in postmodernity, this changes. "Linguistically," Barthes continues, "the author is never anything more than the man who writes" (Barthes 2017, 520). As follows, "to write can no longer designate an operation of recording, of observing, of representing" (Barthes 2017, 520). The text is, and has always been, "a tissue of citations, resulting from the thousand sources of culture" (Barthes 2017, 520) and a "tissue of signs, a lost, infinitely remote imitation" (Barthes 2017, 521). As

> a text consists of multiple writings, issuing from several cultures and entering into dialogue with each other . . . there is one place where this multiplicity is collected, united, and this place is not the author, as we have hitherto said it was, but the reader: the reader is the very space in which are inscribed, without any being lost, all the citations a writing consists of; the unity of a text is not in its origin, it is in its destination; but this destination can no longer be personal: the reader is a man without history, without biography, without psychology; he is only that someone who holds gathered into a single field all the paths of which the text is constituted. (Barthes 2017, 521)

Furthermore, Barthes notes, by quoting Balzac, how "no one (that is, no 'person') utters [the text]: its source, its voice is not to be located; and yet it is perfectly read; this is because the true locus of writing is reading" (Barthes 2017, 521). This absence of narrative voice relates directly to *J R*, "which is woven with words that have double meanings," has "each character understanding them unilaterally," but "there is someone who understands each word in its duplicity, and understands further, one might say, the very deafness of the characters speaking in front of him: this someone is precisely the reader (or here the spectator)" (Barthes 2017, 521). Gaddis offers the reader the dialogue as "evidence," and the reader, no matter his or her background, is free to approach the text in any manner of reading that is reasonable for the text given.

Mapping the Plot

The way in which the ensemble cast in *J R* understands words "unilaterally" is immediately evident. With no preamble, the reader is introduced to the Bast aunts in the first "scene" in the novel, characters which will only intermittently reappear. Here "one reaches the things themselves not by way of *names* but by way of pointing, or *deixis*," but deixis itself fails due to the "irreducible generality" (Jameson 1993, 138) of the words in the texts, which the reader has no facilities to understand due to being denied any backstory. The Bast aunts' discussion with the lawyer, Coen, is ridden in confusion and misunderstanding, and the plot only reveals itself gradually. It is the reader's job to "map" the plot. The discussion in the Bast house concerns one of the leading plotlines in the novel; namely, the disputed inheritance of recently deceased family patriarch Thomas Bast's fortune, in which Edward Bast and his

cousin Stella Angel are embroiled. The full extent of this dispute is increasingly revealed to be complex, as "no cross-purchase plan providing life insurance on each of the principals or an entity plan that would have allowed the company itself to buy up his interest, in the absence of any such arrangements as these, the money which will be required to pay the very substantial death taxes …", at which point Anne interrupts "Julia, I'm sure Mister Cohen only is complicating things unnecessarily …" (Gaddis 2016, 6). This is not the full extent of the complications, however, with Coen continuing that "crowned by the complications inherent in any situation in which the decedent dies intestate" and "further complicated by certain unresolved and somewhat delicate aspects of the family situation which I have come out here today to discuss with …", to which Julia curtly replies "Mister Cohen, please! Do sit down and come to the point" (Gaddis 2016, 6), at the same time spatially placing Coen as standing, underlining his stressful demeanor, in this way aiding the readers, who do not necessarily take interest in minutiae. Anne's denunciation of "complicating things unnecessarily" serves as a humorous reflection on many first-time reader's demanding introduction to the form of the novel. Nevertheless, these matters of inheritance are by no means irrelevant to the remainder of the novel, as money and the chaos brought on by both the possession (J R) and lack of it (Bast and the artists who has to take on unwanted jobs to support their respective artistic ambitions) is a leading theme in the novel, and is at several times referred to as "what America is all about" (Gaddis 2016, 19), a phrase uttered so often by several characters that it is reduced to a humorous banality, at one point morphing into "what the arts are all about" (Gaddis 2016, 288), reflecting art's reduction into a commodity in this universe.

As we have seen, *J R* is consistently dense in information, but in my experience, given that the reader actively "maps" the text, virtually no new elements introduced are arbitrary; their significance can be deduced from evidence elsewhere in the text. In *The Human Use of Human Beings,* Wiener frequently alludes to a (possibly apocryphal) quote attributed to Einstein, which Wiener paraphrases as "the Lord is subtle, but he isn't simply mean" (Wiener 1954, 35). Wiener applies this allegory to science when arguing that "nature offers resistance to decoding, but it does not show ingenuity in finding new and undecipherable methods for jamming our communication with the outer world" (Wiener 1954, 35-36). The allegory immediately applies to Gaddis's laissez-faire approach; Gaddis establishes a literary universe in *J R*, but it is the reader's task to deduct meaning, and if the reader is intent on establishing a narrative, the evidence is there for perusal, given the work put in, no matter which reading is

intended. An instance of the rewarding activity of close-reading Gaddis is the discovery of a multitude of little narratives hidden in the digressions.

One such instance is the life and death of an "idiot-genius" (Gaddis 2016, 23) child. In an expository scene early on in the novel, Amy Joubert, holding the bag of money used as a prop in the school's staging of Richard Wagner's *Das Rheingold* (1869) (helmed by the ambitious Bast, this is a dubious and humorous endeavor as Wagner's operas are notoriously long and arduous even for seasoned performers) is conversing with Principal Whiteback, Coach Vogel, and Bast when it is obliquely implied that a mentally disabled child frightens her, leading her to drop the bag:

> –Teaching our boys and girls what America is all about …
>
> –Stick 'em up!
>
> Bast's elbow caught Mrs Joubert a reeling blow in the breast, she dropped the sack of coins and he stood for an instant poised with raised hand posed in pursuit of that injury before the flush that spread from her face to his sent him stooping to recover the sack by the top, spilling the coins from its burst bottom into the unmown strip of grass, and left him kneeling down where the wind moved her skirt.
>
> –Poor child, why they let him run around loose … (Gaddis 2016, 19)

Note the poetic quality of the narrative voice with its liberal use of punctuation, which, despite describing action, remains cryptic and omits introducing the new participant in the conversation, the boy, who is merely granted a single refrain-like motto repeated only twice in the novel ("Stick 'em up!" (Gaddis 2016, 19)), implying that he is holding a toy gun, repeated again without being divulged (Gaddis 2016, 317) when Coach Vogel passes him entering a building, this time briefly alluded to by an unknown speaker ("Poor child, why they let him run around loose …" (Gaddis 2016, 19)) before the subject is abandoned altogether. Several pages later, again as an aside, the boy is alluded to parenthetically once more by Dan DiCephalis, who was not even present in the aforementioned scene, merely reflecting on "a boy who scores out at the idiot-genius level, this music-math correlation, perfectly consistent but he's running around town sticking people up with a toy pistol. Then here's one with no future at all on the standard aptitudes" (Gaddis 2016, 23). As seen, after the subject is promptly dismissed, DiCephalis immediately moves on to discuss another boy ("Then here's one with no future at all" (Gaddis 2016, 23)). The plot is again ignored for more than four

hundred pages, until again being briefly alluded to in a discussion on school matters between DiCephalis, Whiteback, Hyde, and Vern Teakell:

> No but of course they still seem to be occupied with this ahm, the tragedy of this little retarded … –No problems at all then have we, Glancy and this Vogel story and your stag movie and everything else pushed off the front page when a narcotics agent shoots down a simple-minded boy with a cap pistol and everything's fine. –Yes well no apparently the boy caught him by surprise and of course the agent's trained reflexes were ahm, yes excuse me hello …? (Gaddis 2016, 451)

As seen, the boy is ultimately shot to death by accident. Although the excerpts quoted above constitutes the entirety of this subplot, with only a single line being directly attributed to the boy ("Stick 'em up!" Gaddis 2016, 19), a subplot of depth and tragedy is implied; a mentally disabled child is neglected and accidentally killed. Despite this subplot's brevity, much can be deduced. In a reading with a disability studies angle, significance can be attributed to the fact that a mentally disabled child remains an aside; perhaps a reflection on disabled people being perceived as undesirable by officials in the capitalist model, given their limited "use value" and lack of contribution in the work force.

The school meeting scene outlined above, in which the fate of the mentally disabled child is concluded, is a particularly revealing example of Gaddis's dispersion of clues to facilitate engagement with the text. Due to the lack of attributions, the reader must map who is speaking by detecting speech habits and mannerisms. Due to the rapid-fire dialogue in this scene, a pattern is established as every odd line opens with "yes" or "no"; this can also be gleaned from the excerpts in the paragraph above ("Yes well no" and "No but of course" (Gaddis 2016, 451)). One particularly compressed exchange reveals this refrain-like opening: "Yes well I think Vern means … –I mean the first thing I told you Whiteback . . . –Yes well I thought you ahm . . . –Whiteback had to set the little retreads up in business . . . –No well in fact" (Gaddis 2016, 453). As the passage above reveals, it can be deduced that Whiteback is the speaker. Elsewhere, when no names are mentioned ("Yes of course all those are deductible, and … –But deductible from what!" (Gaddis 2016, 448)), this only has to be assumed. "Yes", however, is such a common word and opener that it is bound to be appropriated by the other speakers ("Yes yes but . . . –Don't protest Mister Bast" (Gaddis 2016, 448)). Closer study reveals that Bast's speech can be differentiated by his defensiveness and frequent use of the evasive "but" ("Yes but I'm no you see I do need the money" (Gaddis

2016, 448), “Yes but you see I” (Gaddis 2016, 448)), telling of his diffident demeanor and lack of self-confidence, while Whiteback can be identified by his frequent use of the collocation “well” (“Yes well of course she might Dan” (Gaddis 2016, 450), “Yes well Vogel” (Gaddis 2016, 451), both establishing that it is not Dan or Vogel who is speaking, but Whiteback). Additionally, Whiteback’s confidence, which Bast lacks, is revealed by even negative sentences starting with “yes” (“Yes well no” (Gaddis 2016, 451)). The distinctions above are subtle, but present, and as seen, despite the narrator omitting descriptive attributes, much can be deduced about the characters’ personality from the dialogue. Moreover, it is the reader that is forced to conceptualize the characters to aid in navigating the plot in the absence of an authorial narrator.

Elliptical, implicit narration is also the case for the subplot concerning mentally unstable writer Schramm, a close friend of major characters Gibbs and Eigen. Despite being discussed frequently throughout the novel, Schramm, unlike the “idiot-genius” discussed above, is never attributed a single sentence. A similarly tragic narrative is nevertheless established, given that the references to him are perused. Gibbs, like the reader, first learns of Schramm’s “accident” (Gaddis 2016, 182) in passing as he arrives at work and is briefed on office news:

> –Mister Gibbs could you just look at …
>
> –Not now I’m sorry, I’m in a hurry … he came through the door, down an up stairway two at a time.
>
> –Oh Mister, yes Gibbs, you had a call, an emergency I just wrote it down somewhere, somebody …
>
> –Yes Schramm you said, what happened?
>
> –Here somewhere, he …
>
> –Put out his eye with a pencil look Gibbs, I want to know where you got your material for this lesson on …
>
> –Wait what’s, what is all this. (Gaddis 2016, 183)

As seen above, the unnamed speaker, presumably a secretary, almost forgets to inform Gibbs about the “emergency.” Although initially referred to as an “accident” (Gaddis 2016, 182), a conversation on the incident among colleagues, which is only retroactively revealed to concern Schramm, likens the episode to “that painter of his cutting off his ear” (Gaddis 2016,

182), which of course refers to Van Gogh's self-mutilation during a severe depressive episode. This analogy soon proves to be an accurate assessment. On the phone to Eigen with the news, Gibbs notes how "it was an accident that could only have happened to Schramm" (Gaddis 2016, 190), continuing that "they want to keep him there overnight for observation" (Gaddis 2016, 190), implying that this was no accident. As Schramm's narrative can only be deduced from the dialogue, his backstory is only developed in passing. Schramm is mentioned again briefly in a conversation with Ann diCephalis, where we learn of Schramm's troubled life as "one of those men who wanted to write and had a father who thought writing was for sissies, made a million dollars in timber and Schramm's spent the last twenty years just waiting for him to die" (Gaddis 2016, 246). Later, again in passing, it is revealed that Schramm "lost the eye" (Gaddis 2016, 252). After an undefined span of time, Schramm is revealed to be "out loose in that shape" (Gaddis 2016, 259), implying an unstable psyche. This is soon revealed to be the case, as Gibbs is about to learn at a visit at the Eigens. After a long, meandering conversation with Marian, Eigen's estranged wife, Gibbs inquires after Eigen, who was his intended company. Marian eventually recalls how

> –I was just going to tell you yes, David I told you to go get your Pajamas now get down, go to your room and find your pajamas, now hurry… Then she turned. –It's Schramm, she said, –something about your friend Schramm …
>
> –Well what, what about him?
>
> –I don't know, Tom was talking to him and he …
>
> –Tom's at Bellevue now? Why didn't you …
>
> –No that was, that was it, Schramm got out and came to Tom's office and Tom brought him down here and then the, I don't know, the police came, they thought he'd, maybe he'd jumped, they thought somebody'd jumped and they wanted Tom to …
>
> –But where is he! Where are they!
>
> –Tom went with them, they took him up to Ninety-sixth Street to see if …
>
> –Why didn't you tell me! he turned for the hall. (Gaddis 2016, 271)

As seen above, essential information is not accessed unsolicited, and Schramm's tragic narrative is consequently forgotten and ignored. When Gibbs arrives at Schramm's apartment, "they just cut him down" (Gaddis 2016, 273). Schramm's suicide is never stated explicitly, but the circumstantial dialogue and imagery is revealing: a "policeman turned them, stood

there wiping his mouth," while Eigen complains about how they "didn't make it" (Gaddis 273). This is the sole scene in which Schramm is explicitly in focus. Without uttering a single sentence neither directly nor indirectly, consistently being referred to in passing and forgotten, a narrative of a frustrated artist's mental degradation and death by suicide is outlined.

The eponymous J R is conveniently the easiest to identify. J R's speech is markedly informal, exemplified by his frequent interjections of the colloquial "like" ("Like across from where they're building this here new shopping center, right?", "I mean like where they're going to" (Gaddis 2016, 58), "Like all they need here is fill and they, hey wait up …" (Gaddis 2016, 59)), the euphemism "holy" ("Hey holy …" (Gaddis 2016, 635), "Sure but holy, I mean, I mean holy" (Gaddis 2016, 636), "No but wait hey wait hey wait a second holy" (Gaddis 2016, 637)), and crude, scatological language ("That's a lot of crap" (Gaddis 2016, 76), "Crap. I got almost the same thing only it's free" (Gaddis 2016, 78), "He doesn't know shit about business" (Gaddis 2016, 187)), most evidently in his conversation with "the Hyde Boy": "All you've got is crap. –You said they were crap too. –Yeah but they're better crap" (Gaddis 2016, 79). The nuance of the dialogue is glimpsed in the above quotes; J R reserves the scatological "crap" for conversations with "the Hyde Boy", replacing it with the tamer "holy" in conversations with Bast. Gaddis evidently pays great attention to keeping these instances of code-switching consistent, as J R's conversations with "the Hyde Boy", his only peer, are few and far between, elsewhere only talking to adults (mainly Bast and business clients). By way of carefully constructed albeit subtle dialogue, Gaddis retains the poetic quality of description evident in "high literature" while avoiding stagnated tropes of narrative passages relying on similes and adjective-heavy language, qualities that the reader can deduce at will.

Scrutiny of the dialogue is also instigated by the characters. In a conversation with Bast, a drunken Gibbs serendipitously connects how Bast and their mutual acquaintance, Stella, are related. In running dialogue, Gibbs makes the connections: "Bast that reminds me, family matter … the cup came up, emptied, the bottle followed, –company Stella's father had … –Stella? –Stella, Bast. Stella Bast, what is she's your cousin?" (Gaddis 2016, 383). By removing the punctuation, "Stella, Bast" becomes "Stella Bast" (Bast is her maiden name, but she is usually referred to as Stella Angel throughout the novel, her married name, which again exemplifies the flexibility and arbitrary nature of given names), a passage revealing the intrinsically textual quality of the source material. Gibbs reflects on his own words while engaging in a play on words only evident to the attentive reader. Similarly, prosody assumes

significance when transcribed, as is the case with the schoolchildren chanting "Rhine … GOLD!" (Gaddis 2016, 32) during the staging of the namesake opera, with an emphasis on the second syllable underlining the capitalist satire recurring throughout the novel, comically underscored by the prop of the bag of gold being stolen by J R, the budding capitalist ("So where's the Rhinegold?" (Gaddis 2016, 32)). Curiously, the next transcription of the chant is stylized as "RHINE gold" (Gaddis 2016, 33), indicating that the stylization is not incidental, with the attention shifting to Bast, who as a response to the chant "darted . . . down the keyboard . . . as though fleeing that" (Gaddis 2016, 33). Bast is initially one of the staunchest critics of the capitalist system before he is *interpellated*[2] by J R, and his disgust with the insidious nature of capitalism is especially evident in this scene, where capitalist imagery is pervasive; "Here the gold fringe of an epaulette quivered, there a gold tassel shook as, revived by Bast's flailing arm" (Gaddis 2016, 33). The rich subtext in this scene is strictly textual in nature, with the narrator underlining "Bast's flailing arm" to imply his disgust. In this way the novel form's intrinsic textuality is tapped to depict a wealth of implications; if the reader is inclined to such a reading, that is.

This lifelike yet connotation-heavy dialogue style abolishes the need for narrative intervention. This is constructed dialogue after all, not transcriptions of spoken conversations. Eigen, who (like Gaddis himself) supports his creative writing by writing speeches for corporate executives, serves as a reflection on the flexible nature of dialogue, with him complaining to Bast about that "little bastard Davidoff every damn speech I write we go over twenty times till he gets human betterment" (Gaddis 2016, 408). This complaint doubles as meta-commentary on both the novel and the spoken word; Gaddis himself approximates speechwriting by way of composing the dialogue in the novel, no matter how lifelike, while the realism of an imagined spoken speech (consider, for instance, a presidential speech) is questioned. This can be extended to ruminations on the dubious distinction between the narrative voice and dialogue. On the printed page, the dialogue is as much written and thoroughly composed as the narrative voice, underlined in *J R* by the approximation to free indirect discourse. Moreover, the narrative voice in *J R*, a voice which traditionally assists the reader with descriptive attributes, assumes a more poetic guise in this novel, and, as we have seen, delegates the connotative clues in the text to the dialogue itself. Such is the case in the following transitional passage, quoted in context with the preceding dialogue:

[2] As in *interpellation,* the term associated with Louis Althusser which denotes the way in which an ideology recruits a new subject, often in an insidious manner.

–It’s marked boys …

The door swung the word Principal hollow behind their backs, leaving the only voice chiding in miniature from the desk where the telephone lay, the only face, where nothing had happened framed high on the wall there all this time to change the expression unchanged by a boy's lifetime at the country's helm ‘focusing on ideas rather than phrasing’ with the plea ‘let's not forget, above all things, the need of confidence and that, of course, I think nationally, it is what do you and I think of the prospects, do we want to go buy a refrigerator or something that is going to, that we think is useful and desirable in our families, or don't we? And it is just that simple in my mind.’ (Gaddis 2016, 51)

While the passage is descriptive, it does not inform the reader with commentary on the action, instead divulging a digressional aside. Looking into these quotes reveals them to be extracted from an interview with President Eisenhower. It can thus be assumed that the narrator is referring to a picture of Eisenhower “framed high on the wall” with an “expression unchanged by a boy’s lifetime at the country’s helm” (Gaddis 2016, 51). This is a reinvention of the role of the narrator; instead of divorcing the narrative voice from the context of the other characters, the narrative voice can be said to be diegetic, existing in the same universe instead of being removed from it, adhering to the rules of this universe, and joining the conversation. This role is emphatically exploited towards the end of the transition, in which the narrative voice provides counterpoint to diCephalis: “Dead before their eyes, the clock severed another of the minutes that lacked the hour, –oh. Coming out? asked diCephalis and then, paused pulling at the lateral handle of the door under the word push, –can I ride you somewhere?” (Gaddis 2016, 51). When the narrative voice remarks how diCephalis is “pulling” under where it says “push,” it does not help the reader in the decoding process; on the contrary, this passage obfuscated meaning, furthering the pervasive entropy.

The Narrative Voice and Prose Poems in *J R*

While the predominance of dialogue is one of the most characteristic traits of the novel, the prose poems and the narrative style, in which the narrator enters the conversation and perceives the plot alongside the reader rather than assuming an authoritative position, are

not to be ignored. Gaddis, fully aware of and in command of the flow of information in the novel, guides the reader by way of the sporadic prose poems at various intervals in the continuous stream of dialogue as well as by the limitations and qualities of the nuanced characters. These poems are notable due to being so few and far between, and their main function is to transition between scenes and different dialogues. Similarities to free indirect discourse occur frequently, and the narrative voice is sometimes seemingly omniscient. This notably occurs in scenes with sexual tension. At one point, with no significant bearing on the plot or the circumstances of the episode, Mister Pecci's conversation with Miss Flesch is complemented by a suggestive narrative voice observing how "she pursued from the desk top to Mister Pecci who seemed, just then, to realize that from where he sat he might appear to be looking up her skirt" (Gaddis 2016, 27), an instance of "male gaze", a perspective that reoccurs unexpectedly throughout the novel. After Bast reluctantly agrees to help Amy Joubert coordinate a school trip, the narrative voice reflects how the sexual tension gradually increases, manifesting itself at random intervals, as when he talks about being fired after his disastrous lecture on Mozart: "No I'm not with them no, no I'm no with anybody … he came down beside her and peaked his trousers at the knee as though to rouse some memory of a crease there" (Gaddis 2016, 75). Soon after, responding to Amy's gratefulness for him helping her, he starts "I'm glad to …", but his sympathetic intentions are soon obscured by lascivious desires, with the narrator supplying "he came to slow rest against her unyielding thigh" (Gaddis 2016, 75). This interference of consciousness, and the seamless link between what is spoken and what remains silent (the complete formatting of the line reads, "I'm glad to … he came to slow rest against her unyielding thigh"), hampered by the increasingly entropic tendencies associated with sexual thoughts, is aptly expressed in novel form. Instances of male gaze continues to occur throughout the novel at seemingly random intervals, but it is not always easy to know whose perspective is being reflected, as in the line "You're going to the automat instead … she held the yellow skirt against a gust of wind, –see over in that next block?" (Gaddis 2016, 110). Likewise, it is not easy to tell whether these descriptions reflect the perspective of Amy, Bast, or the narrator, and the sexual undertones are not subtle rather than explicit. This male gaze is assumed by many of the male characters in particular, as in a later scene in which Norman Angel converses with his secretary Terry, whom he later learns has recently posed for pornographic pictures:

> –Well it wasn't reckless, he'd broke his glasses, been out in Long Island and couldn't see where he was going.
>
> –Gee, she said turning back to her typewriter, and he leaned back hands clasped behind his head, looking across to how the fullness curbed in her simulated leather skirt spilled from the sides of the orthopedic typist's chair, abruptly bringing his eyes up to the hair pushed back at each return of the carriage.
>
> –Terry? What would you think of a little redecorating in here, maybe getting some of that paneling up on the walls and covering over those pipes up there. (Gaddis 2016, 150)

Here the sexual undertones seem more relevant to the dialogue than elsewhere, as Angel's attentive eyes notes his secretary's distracting features before the tendencies are suppressed in favor of discussing "covering over those pipes," again revealing the increasing disorder associated with sexual tension as in the interactions between Bast and Amy.

Additionally, the poems doubles as reminders of the understated similarities between *J R* and *The Recognitions*, although what once was Gaddis's predominant narrative style turns subtly comical here, assuming a self-referential position in which the reader reflects on what to expect from the fictional story. Elsewhere, as in *The Recognitions,* dialogue is occasionally disruptive when interspersed between long passages of poetic narration, but here the narration itself is the distractive element, forcing the reader to abruptly adopt another perspective on the text at hand. In one humorous sequence, which ultimately results in an awkward failed attempt to engage in sex between Gibbs and Amy, his colleague and love interest, Gibbs asks Amy to "go out find a Chinese restaurant Amy bring in some …" with the discussion commencing, "There is no Chinese restaurant! Can't you, I don't care what you do, I'm … – Thought you might want something to …" (Gaddis 2016, 480). This mundane exchange abruptly transitions from "If you want a delicatessen their number's on a pad under the phone there, I don't care what you do …!" into

> He got far enough up to look over the sofa's back, down any empty hallway through an empty door. –Amy …? There was no sound but running water. Movements slowed, stalking the white telephone across white carpet, getting about the place uneven gaited with a kind of deliberate cunning as though outmaneuvering gravity, he finally answered the delivery at the door and came back with it cautiously down to hands and knees, flatting emptied bags under the sofa cushion. (Gaddis 2016, 480)

Without warning, Gaddis paints a vivid picture of the scene, and assists the reader's decoding process by way of adjectives ("white telephone"), parallel imagery (white carpet"), images of movement ("movements slowed"), and similes that hints about the characters' perceptions ("getting about the place uneven gaited with a kind of deliberate cunning as though outmaneuvering gravity"). This subtlety of narration is inconceivable in any other medium. With this information at hand, the reader is invited to go back and read the scene again and fill in the blanks in the manner of hypertext, adding to a small repository of clues which the reader can refer to at will.

Literary Style versus Realism

The quoted passage in the paragraph above immediately reveals what is traditionally conceived of as *literary style*, a self-consciously constructed style that is largely absent elsewhere in *J R*. This jarring passage is the default narrative style in *The Recognitions*, as exemplified in the following excerpt:

> In the bedroom Esther entered with her hand pressed against her belly, and turned on the hot light beside her mirror. She looked at the powder spilled on the dressing table. Then she turned, the heels of her hands buried in her eyes and sat down for a moment before she could look: the bedspread had been straightened with quick carelessness so that one corner hung to the floor, and the pillow lay half uncovered. She ran her hand through her hair, and looked up to say, –Rose? with dull loudness. (Gaddis 1993, 639)

Here, as in the passage from *J R*, rich imagery abounds, and the interior life of the characters and a degree of uncertainty and mystery is narrated. Note, for instance, the hesitant "–Amy …?" in the passage from *J R* compared to the above "–Rose?". Uncertainty is rife throughout the novel, and the hesitant language is soon reiterated: "He came out of the booth pulling his tie closed at the throat, his voice constricted in the call –Amy …?" (Gaddis 2016, 190). As in *J R*, the conversations are fraught with misunderstandings and are often similarly fragmented, with ellipses (…) being utilized in an artistic fashion to underline the fragmented language. The ellipses are at times reminiscent of Emily Dickinson's use of em dashes, lending the

dialogue a lyrical quality. Ellipsis as a means to write the unwritable or unutterable underlines the virtue of literature as the best means to express the theme of miscommunication. Literature, also by way of narrative passages, has the ability to "write" silence, as it has the power to restrict information by omitting the attributes. The passages of dialogue illustrate a form of silence in which the reader's expectations of being provided with essential information are ignored. Descriptive additions such as the above "with dull loudness" (Gaddis 1993, 639) are replete in *The Recognitions*, however, and mostly absent in *J R.* In direct opposition to the approach mentioned above, which is also present in other experimental novels such as Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (1962) or David Foster Wallace's *Infinite Jest* (1996), I suspect that these glimpses of interiority are not meant to guide the decoding process of the dialogue, but are rather integrated to underline the failure of communication. As noted by Stephen Matanle:

> Characters in *J R* find themselves separated from each other, and from themselves, in a variety of ways. The human body is fragmented, reduced to separate parts, and physical contact among characters is often hazardous. This situation is compounded by a kind of ocular chaos, a fragmentation of the visual field, for which eyeglasses are a metonomy. Most important, human communication, reduced to disembodied speech, frequently generates misunderstanding and disorder. (Matanle 2004, 57)

This "disembodied speech" is characteristic of *J R*. The novel thematizes the futility of conversation and its failure to communicate any information without it being subject to some level of entropy, degrading into a series of speech acts that rarely develop beyond the communication in non-human species. As noted above, even Gibbs, "the novel's preeminent authority on disorder" (Matanle 2004, 57) struggles. *J R* is not limited to highlighting the inevitable loss of information in conversation, however, as "chaos is inherent in virtually every aspect of human life" (Matanle 2004, 58). Over time, Bast's sanity and creative abilities dwindle, J R's enterprise collapses, and Schramm is driven to suicide by the prospects of finishing his novel, serving as a foil to the creative struggles of Gibbs and Bast.

Likewise, but to different ends, the plurality of voices allows an 11-year old boy to exploit his newfound independence and assume power in the narrative. In real life, his increasingly probing questions ("Like suppose this here company makes all these baskets which they can't sell them either?" (Gaddis 2016, 84)) seem harmless, but on paper, with the freedom to scan the dialogue non-linearly, they are open to scrutiny, not unlike legal

proceedings in which the literal, objective quality of the written word can assume unintentional connotations when divorced from the speaker's intentions. Davidoff's jocular opening line, "So these are our new owners!" (Gaddis 2016, 81), quipped as he first meets the school children, seems ominous in re-readings considering J R's imminent rise to power. Joseph McElroy, himself a critically acclaimed but publicly ignored postmodern writer, characterizes the dialogue in *J R* as "an act not taken for granted but an object of further critique" (McElroy 2007, 71), telling of the many seemingly arbitrary passages, wellsprings of intricate character studies and tragicomic portrayals of the difficulties of unifying thoughts with the spoken word. In any case, Gaddis offers a studied glimpse of the mind of a 11-year boy, conveyed almost wholly through cues and character traits found in the dialogue. Postmodernist literature of this kind resists the monoculture imposed by capitalism, as well as the metanarratives of historicism.

J R himself controls the information flow by way of payphones and mail orders. Tabbi notes how "at age eleven, J R has already grasped the essentials of a virtual economy. Even if his own buying and selling was done through the U.S. post office and the pay phone nearby his Long Island grade school" (which is J R's primary modus operandi), "he would have no trouble adjusting to the handheld devices used by brokers today, not least by the real-life preteen 'self-made millionaires' that turn up nowadays in the news" (Tabbi 2015, 123). As with the largely absent narrator, "nobody sees J R" (Tabbi 2015, 124). Additionally, "we know little about the boy's mother and nothing at all about his father (who is, like Gaddis's father, entirely absent during the boy's formative years). Neglect, mainly, and nonrecognition are the basis of the free market in an advanced economy" (Tabbi 2015, 124). These implications are only evident when engaging sufficiently with the text, as "we learn to make an inventory of these plot strings and to coordinate them—something done in two contradictory operations—by learning to tell them apart and by conjecturing their larger interrelationship" (Jameson 1993, 132). Jameson accurately describes the experience of reading novels like *J R,* albeit in a skeptical manner:

> Suffice it for the moment to underscore the historic peculiarity of reading in which we strain to identify what is happening beneath our eyes . . . while nervously anticipating the next shift without warning to an unrelated plot string, something that can happen in midsentence, although it most often occurs in the gap between them, opening that up to a more profound silence on either side of each utterance (Jameson 1993, 132)

"Nervously" implies an agitated reader and needlessly demanding texts as well as questioning the value of experimental fiction of this sort. Jameson neglects the virtues of readings of this kind; active reading encourages creativity on part of the reader.

Miscommunication

As with the flexible sense of temporality and the unpredictable lack of or attention to emphasis on certain episodes, characterizations similarly fluctuate. Despite the tendency for some prominent characters to receive disorienting small amounts of characterizations, while less important characters sometimes have more, some of the transient characters get no characterization whatsoever apart from what can be inferred from the dialogue, which is the reader's task. Such is the case with Gibbs's encounter with a ticket seller, in which he tries to turn in some tickets for a refund. The conversation complicates quickly, with Gibbs starting,

> I simply want to turn in these tickets …
> –For the refund you want, right? So you fill out this and mail them where it says.
> –But I need the money now, I'm …
> –You want to take them in yourself, go ahead.
> –In where.
> –In Brooklyn where it says. Next? (Gaddis 2016, 188)

This continues for quite some time until the ticket seller, exasperated, asks, "You buying a ticket or not. Next?", to which Gibbs replies, "Wait. Look. There isn't any next. There's nobody behind me" (Gaddis 2016, 188). Such miscommunication, even in transient conversations among minor characters, is widespread throughout the novel. While he fails to turn in the tickets, Gibbs exploits miscommunication by riding the train pretending to be an oblivious German tourist that has bought a child's ticket by mistake, something the exasperated train conductor tries to explain:

> –Look. You, man. Ticket, child ticket. Get it?
>
> –In dem Bahnhof, ja, he commenced still beaming, eyes now firmly crossed, –in dem Bahnhof habe ich die …
>
> –For Christ sake look. Where you buy ticket?
>
> –Herr Teets, verstehen Sie? In dem Bahnhof, Herr Bahnhofmeister Teets, Gott-trunkener Mensch, verstehen Sie? Mit der Dummheit kämpfen Götter selbst vergebens, he beamed, eyes abruptly straightened, –nicht?
>
> –Oh for Christ sake.
>
> –Bitte? The smile gone, his mouth hung open.
>
> –Forget it. The conductor punched the ticket emphatically and turned up the aisle. (Gaddis 2016, 189)

On paper this is fluent German, not marred by a revealing accent, as might be the case if Gibbs was audible to the reader. Nevertheless, the narration, which often assumes a quality reminiscent of free indirect discourse, remains in English, revealing that Gibbs is indeed not a German tourist. This is, however, information for the reader alone, not the duped train conductor. These and other examples of miscommunication are examples of the entropic nature of communication exposed in *J R*, which leads us to the next chapter.

Chapter 2

Entropy

Entropy is one of the most prominent themes in the novel and figures on several levels, both implicitly and explicitly; Gibbs's lecture on entropy is frequently interrupted by noisy students, conversations are stifled by the characters' inabilities to express their thoughts due to the limitations of language, time, and social inequality, leading to disorder, and even the reader's attempts to decode the text are hindered by the scarcity of attributes and descriptive information, such as that regarding who is speaking. As opposed to in film (a parallel that will be discussed more closely in the next chapter), in which individual voices, faces, and objectifying images are granted by the filmmakers, *J R* forces the reader to participate in creating these images. Some level of reader participation in this manner is, of course, necessary in every act of reading, but only rarely to the degree exemplified in *J R*. Gaddis's style underlines the impossibility of conveying information in a negentropic fashion as he might have tried to in *The Recognitions*, by way of its encyclopedic level of detail. In *J R* he surrenders an authorial voice by presenting chaotic postmodernity as unfiltered as possible; even the scarce prose poems are ambiguous. With the increasing unfeasibility of metanarratives and the ever-expanding democratization and globalization of readership and of writers alike, signifiers become redundant and, at worst, misleading. While film objectifies too much, and the traditional novel subjectifies too much, *J R* surrenders this subject-object duality in favor of a deconstructionist play of free-floating signifiers. This reflects not only the erosion of genre boundaries, but also the boundaries of art forms. Additionally, *J R* consummates the "death of the author", as announced by Barthes, and invites readers to participate in the creation of the text. Coupled with its satirical portrayal of late capitalist USA, the novel is unified by its integration of chaos and entropy, which the reader must participate in parsing by finding clues in the dialogue to help construct a narrative.

Gaddis's preoccupation with cybernetics and physics predate *J R*, however, as by his own admission in his interview with Tom LeClair, "The concept of entropy—as removed from physics and the second law of thermodynamics to communications—is present back in *The Recognitions*, a work of fragmented pieces and of a breakdown at a number of levels. I

think it is a basic concern of mine and a problem. Words empty of information" (LeClair 2007, 24-25). While this might be true, the narrative voice and dialogue in *The Recognitions* is written in a conservative style that is jarring when compared to *J R*. His sophomore novel exemplifies the liberation of the narrative voice and the blurring of the boundaries between prose and poetry. This artistic progression is also noted by Tabbi, who argues that "the verbal and thematic resonances we have observed in Gaddis's first novel are even more richly worked into the fabric of *J R*" (Tabbi 2015, 126). While the latter novel is defined by the novelty of unattributed dialogue throughout most of the text, the former is rooted in a more conventional form where explicit descriptions of the character's emotions and interests abound, as the following excerpt exemplifies:

> Otto sat impatient. Finally he said, –I may have to go to South America.
> –Really Otto? She said, charmed.
> –Bolivia and northern Peru.
> –That would be very nice, she said. (Gaddis 1993, 216)

Here the characters, their sentiments, and the conversations are more transparent than in *J R*. As opposed to *J R,* with its fragmented dialogue, here each sentence is neatly in order and supported by what is often detailed descriptions of the speaker's internal reasonings and intentions ("She said, charmed"), reminiscent of the objectivity of a film adaptation in which the impressions on the audience is manipulated by extraliterary features such as the soundtrack. This direct discourse has traditionally been and continues to be the norm rather than the exception and warrants no further explication but is nevertheless curious in this context in its stark contrast to *J R.* An exception to the norm is the modernist texts of the early 20th century (by the likes of Joyce, Mann, and Proust, but none as influential on Gaddis as T.S. Eliot), many of which were characterized by experimental dialogue and free indirect discourse as a means to reflect the stream-of-consciousness approach to temporality and a more natural flow in the narrative. This approach has more in common with *J R* than *The Recognitions,* although its dialogue is not free indirect discourse, and is in fact more direct than *The Recognitions* in that it excludes superfluous (or even essential) information about the speakers altogether. Nevertheless, the effect is reminiscent of stream-of-consciousness due to the perceived temporal compression; whereas the conventional novel formula often entails

substantial ellipses and skips in time as well as the distancing effect of the rapid interchange of narrative and character voice, *J R*'s style, as influenced by the modernist legacy, challenges this perceived temporality. These qualities highlight the difficulty of enforcing a strict delimitation between modernist and postmodernist writing, as the dialogue in postmodernist literature is often closer to the comparatively simple form in *The Recognitions,* while the approach in *J R* is closer to Joyce than to Pynchon or DeLillo. Ruminations on classification aside, the differences in dialogue style by the same author shows how *The Recognitions*, published in the 1950s climate, is steeped in a novelistic tradition, whereas *J R,* published two decades later, reflects a major change in cultural hegemony, where borders between high and low art as well as genres and artforms have been transcended, most notably in this regard the reciprocal relationship between cinema and literature in postmodernity. Given the emergence of a new "golden age" for American cinema in the late 60s and early 70s, often termed "New Hollywood", with the likes of Gaddis's kindred spirit, crypto-postmodernist Robert Altman at the forefront, as well as Gaddis's experience as a script writer for the instructional videos produced by his employers, this link is reasonable.

Cybernetics

The maturation of Gaddis's style discussed above is not only evidenced by the increasing predominance of dialogue, with the characters in *J R* evincing a similar transformation. If E.M. Forster's distinction between "flat" and "round" characters is to be accepted, *The Recognitions* approximates the former rather than the latter distinction. This has been noted by several critics, but rarely in criticism on Gaddis alone, as this seems to be a recurring criticism of much postmodern fiction. Emmett Stinson notes the proliferation of texts that "avoid detailed descriptions of psychological states" and "anticlimactic or open-ended plots that do not offer any sense of character development" (Stinson 2017, 20), while Cristopher J. Knight describe Gaddis's characters as "two-dimensional" (Knight 1997, 121). This impression is worsened by the abundance of pretentious artistic intellectuals in *The Recognitions,* with the characters readily delivering fully formed, coherent sentences, which is, of course, the norm in fiction but a rarity in real life. *J R* broadens the scope considerably. Gaddis's erudition, explicit and at worst ostentatious in *The Recognitions,* is still evident in *J*

R, but it is now indulged in a subtler fashion. Where the intellectuals and artists that constituted the majority of the characters in *The Recognitions* often exchanged fully realized thoughts, the flawed characters in *J R* illustrate the improbability of transmitting a message intact, foregoing the detrimental effects of entropy. Whatever message intended by the characters is limited by their own facilities in communication, consistently thwarted by insecurities (Bast), immaturity (J R), or irascibility (Gibbs). Similarly, artistic creation is stifled by the busy and complex lives of the characters, as seen by Bast's dwindling ambitions as a composer and Eigen's struggles with writing his novel, repeatedly hindered by his work and family duties, an obvious parallel to Gaddis's own struggles to find time for creative writing between his duties as a family man on the one hand, and as a corporate writer on the other. Entropy seeps into the artistic process itself by way of the demands of his daily life, and just the prospect of setting off time for creative work is in jeopardy. J R himself, who monomaniacally focuses on running his empire, is ultimately forced out of business as the trajectory of his endeavors gains momentum and the complexity of his scheme approaches unmanageable dimensions. All these concurrent plots are conveyed in a continuous stream of information in the form of largely uninterrupted dialogue, and it is the reader's job to participate in constructing the narrative by decoding the increasingly complex message that constitutes the text. Entropy, as evidenced here, is best portrayed by entropy itself.

J R's school is no arbitrary backdrop, as the school system provides many implications for the difficulty of transmitting knowledge and the many entropic variables involved. The Massapequa school in question is almost fully automatized; in lieu of the dynamic environment of a teacher teaching classes in person, televised lectures dominate, bypassing the possibility for feedback. A television is decidedly not a satisfactory substitute for a teacher; Tabbi notes how "Bast . . . is not really talking to the children who are purportedly his intended audience on the closed-circuit TV channel, nor to the school principal and teachers and Foundation visitors who happen to tune into the program without his knowledge: he's talking largely *through* the medium" (Tabbi 2015, 116). This example is notable, even though "many characters in the novel talk through phones and through the noise of crowded offices and fast-food service places that keep people moving and at the same time keep up the novel's action" (Tabbi 2015, 116). In said instances the communication is reciprocal (albeit effected by entropy), while here Bast is "speaking largely into a void" (Tabbi 2015, 116). As follows, entropy is imminent. Bast's ramifications in the shot resemble a closed system, and left to his own devices, as he forgets the script, he starts narrating the seedier aspects of

Mozart's personality from memory (primarily his infamous scatological sense of humor, immortalized in personal letters to his friends and family). He digresses heavily from the script, and goes off on a tangent about Mozart's "playful sense of humor," inadvertently narrating how Mozart "tells [his wife] you wouldn't be able to resist me much longer and our arses will, will um, will be the symbols of our peacemaking" (Gaddis 2016, 42), his hesitation revealing his surprise over the unconscious and inappropriate trajectory of his digression. This illustrates Bast's lack of social tact but can also imply the early stages of Bast's nervous breakdown, which the reader can only deduce from his dialogue. Tabbi notes how "the fact that over the course of the novel Bast picks up habits of speech from J R . . . indicates another, more mental degeneration—all of which is conveyed without any explicit authorial or readerly access to the character's psychology" (Tabbi 2015, 144). Due to the lack of feedback from peers (J R can hardly be considered a peer, despite his precociousness), Bast degenerates.

References to mechanics and cybernetics proliferate this scene on subtler levels as well, in a manner which is only imaginable on the textual plane. When Bast's lecture derails into chaos, the narrative voice inexplicably remarks how "the cameras heaved patiently" (Gaddis 2016, 42), as if the cameras possess human qualities in a sudden instance of anthropomorphism. In the resulting panic, "Hyde tripped over it on his way to the set where Mister Pecci stood with a control knob that had just come off in his hand" (Gaddis 2016, 42-43), an unfortunate series of events presented in a slapstick fashion that seem to suggest that inanimate objects are working against them. Entropy permeates the school, ultimately reaching the teacher's office, as reflected in the language, with a narrative voice entering with descriptions of how "the telephone rang. The door opened, closed, opened again" (Gaddis 2016, 43), illuminating the mechanics at work, foregoing the emphasis on human behavior in a conventional realist novel. In this way, the always-present non-animate dimension, which is also a part of any individual narrative, receives its due emphasis. Even the music is referred to as a "stabbing rondo" (Gaddis 2016, 43), with "stabbing" implying malevolent intentions. Anthropomorphism is unlikely in this textual universe dominated by logic and the laws of physics, however. This is merely instances of the narrator's emphasis on documenting movement with the only means possible: language. As language is constructed by humans, it is unavoidable that animals as well as inanimate objects are subjected to human narratives in which the constraints and anthropocentric qualities of languages are forced upon them.

If Bast's lecture is perused, which the reader is invited to do seeing as his lecture has the same level of prominence as the dialogue in the text, subtle critiques of dominant narratives are seen. The inappropriate, seemingly apocryphal anecdotes about Mozart are in fact authentic, as the frequent references to scatology are well-documented traits of Mozart's humor. Although the information is correct, it is neither essential nor appropriate in a lecture for a prepubescent audience. Bast is here unable to differentiate between essential and inessential information, and entropy ensues; illuminating information on Mozart's contribution to music history are substituted by inflammatory gossip, thereby diminishing the pedagogical value of his lecture, a lecture already negligible due to its presentation in an ineffectual, televised medium. Nevertheless, these remarks serve "to humanize [Mozart] because even if we can't um, if we can't rise to his level no at least we can, we can drag him down to ours …" (Gaddis 2016, 42), and calls attention to how metanarratives tend to gloss over the unsavory facets of historical figures and advocate a binary opposition between good and bad, neglecting the complexity of human nature. Bast also calls attention to how "we don't like to think about poor people" in regards to how only a "few friends [followed] [Mozart's] cheap coffin in the rain" when he died in poverty and was buried in a "pauper's grave" (Gaddis 2016, 42). Additionally, Bast's lecture foreshadows his mental decline, with references to the mental health of Romantic composer Schumann, who was infamously "[carted] off to an asylum" (Gaddis 2016, 43) after a suicide attempt, information only noticeable if the reader pays attention to and engages with the transcript of the lecture actively. In any case, the teachers do not want to hear this revisionist take on a historical figure of Mozart's stature and immediately tries to "turn it off, off …" (Gaddis 2016, 42), until eventually "an expletive broke from under the window planter as the sound cut off, leaving the screen filled with a face perspiring with silent imperative," finally being replaced by "the reassuring countenance of Smokey Bear" (Gaddis 2016, 43), used because "the youngsters find it reassuring," "like seeing a commercial" (Gaddis 2016, 38), another reference to the subliminal tactics of the televised lectures, interpellating the children into assuming capitalist values.

Capitalism

Jameson questions whether "experimental high literature . . . have any sociological value" and whether it can "tell us anything about its social context and the evolution of late capitalism or its culture" (Jameson 1993, 132) whatsoever. *J R*, due to its democratizing style, invites the subjective reader to reject or accept its subtle sociological criticism as one thinks fit. Nevertheless, capitalism is another entropic force in *J R.* Resembling the autonomy of entropy, capitalism is not concerned with or governed by the legacy of the Enlightenment and thrives independently of the school system. In fact, J R's school serves as an inadvertent proliferator of capitalist ideology in the manner of an *ideological state apparatus* (schools, family, media, as opposed to *repressive state apparatuses*; police, government, military forces, both being terms coined by Louis Althusser); by organizing a field trip for the students to Wall Street to buy a share, the school system interpellates J R and his classmates into assuming a capitalist ideology. They are introduced to a "real live stock broker," "Mister Crawley," and purchase one share of "Diamond Cable" (Gaddis 2016, 83), a ruthless company exerting its influence in the background throughout the text, exemplifying the anonymous dominance of many large companies in late capitalism. J R eagerly questions the stockbroker, gradually uncovering essential knowledge by inquiring about "what's a warrant" and "the old law of supply and decline" (Gaddis 2016, 84) (a malapropism characteristic of J R's speech). By using an analogy about "all these guys tearing up all this paper all over the floor which nobody knew what they were doing" (Gaddis 2016, 85), the initial idea about J R starting his own paper business is born. The inimical, far-reaching effects of the stock market are negated in the eyes of *J R*'s classmates, who merely focus on what may be viable for a school trip subject, but J R himself, by way of his underdeveloped empathy, realizes in a dialectical fashion that the stock market can just as well be infiltrated by him as by anyone else. The essential information contained and disseminated by the professionals is beyond their control, and as entropy increases, it spreads to the most unlikely recipients. The capitalist model is tangible for anyone, and as noted by Georg Lukács (in direct contrast to Althusser), "the bourgeois or proletarian is not a bourgeois or proletarian by birth; he becomes a member of his class in the course of his personal development—unlike in feudal society where class status is neither freely chosen nor alterable" (Lukács 2006, 112), allowing unlikely individuals, such as the likes of J R, to assume power. This failure of knowledge and reason at the expense of insidious ideology and general disorder mirrors the transition from *The*

Recognitions to *J R*, with Gaddis's formerly virtuosic and eloquent language being replaced by fragmented and at-times unintelligible and ineffective dialogue, with the encyclopedic residues subsisting due to the likes of Gibbs and the other frustrated artists, assuming a humorous quality in its incongruity.

J R's ability to seize a position of power exposes a flawed system in which a child (or an equivalently irresponsible and unfit person) is able to exert inimical influence on a grand scale, all the while hiding behind a veil of anonymity. The introduction of such unpredictable variables evokes the overarching theme of entropy. Due to J R's indifference and lack of empathy, key qualities in his capitalistic endeavors, he inadvertently harms several people in his expanding network. Whenever J R is confronted with his dubious ethical choices, a rare scenario only instigated by Bast, one of the few people aware of his double life (and the closest to an authority due to the lack of a father figure), he retorts with variations of "No but what am I supposed to do!" (Gaddis 2016, 344). This line resembles the typical rebuttals of advocates of capitalism and their "interest in depicting the process of production as the opposite of what it is: as a purely technical rather than an exploitative process" (Althusser 2014, 45). As characterized by Nicholas Brown, "part of the genius" of J R is that he "embodies the innocence of Capital. Unlike the vulgar critique of capitalism, which always ultimately requires a pathological figure at the root of any particular problem—a conspiracy or a corporate monster fully aware of his or her actions—J R's next move is always entirely innocent" (Brown 2007, 152). The immaturity and underdeveloped empathy of a child is a potently mirrors the indifference of the capitalist machinery. Interviewed about the social implications of the novel, Gaddis discusses how he was

> pursuing the many meanings of communication breakdown in a system that is not under control. There is entropy, but there is also the turning upside down of what I see as the great system of private capitalism because of abuses. I would still like to think that the problems are not inherent to the capitalist system and that they could be corrected. (LeClair 2007, 23)

Rather than condemning the capitalist system outright and without reservation, Gaddis highlights the loopholes and potential for catastrophe in any seemingly impenetrable dominating system and the dangers of adhering blindly to any one ideology. By way of using the character of J R in an allegorical fashion, coupled with the union between form and

content, Gaddis invigorates the satirical novel and strengthens the claim of the novel as a reflection of contemporary society against accusations of obsolescence.

The Artists

As seen, capitalism exerts detrimental influence on the artists in the novel in several ways. The ostensible freedom of the erosion of borders between genres as well as those between high and low art stifles instead of liberates the artists in *J R*, result in a "paradox of choice". According to Gregory Comnes, "Schramm, Eigen, and the rest of the artists in *J R* fall victim to searching for something worth doing, something that forever eludes each of them and ultimately destroys Schramm. As Gibbs tells Eigen later in the novel, Schramm's problem wasn't sexual impotence; it was spiritual impotence" (Comnes 1989, 166), referring to Schramm's sexual frustration which served as an initial reasoning for his suicide. This is supported by Moore, who notes how "Gaddis's artists face the difficulty not only of finding something worth doing, but succeeding at the task" (Moore 2015, 84). The world of *J R* is "a society where art is dismissed as a luxury, a knack, an indulgence" (Moore 2015, 84) as seen by J R's disinterest and obliviousness in face of Bast's attempts to introduce him to the sublimity of Bach, which doubles as another instance of the difficulty of communicating in the novel. Bast, desperate to express himself, forces J R to listen to Bach's 21st Cantata and elicit some heartfelt response from him. Exasperated by J R's indifference, Bast yells, "Damn it J R can't you understand what I'm trying to, to show you there's such a thing as as, as intangible assets? . . . walking back from that rehearsal that whole sense of, of sheer wonder in the Rhinegold you remember it?" (Gaddis 2016, 655). Here Bast refers to the staging of *Das Rheingold,* which proved to be a failed enterprise on Bast's part but a success on the school's part, as the only legacy left by the opera seems to be the lesson on the predominance of money and greed. Bast tries in vain to explain how "music's a, it's not just sound effects there are things only music can say, things that can't be written down or hung on a clothesline" and describes the cantata as "sort of a dialogue between the soul and [Jesus]" (Gaddis 2016, 655) before being interrupted by J R who reluctantly submits. Nevertheless, when presented with the piece, J R remains indifferent, merely asking, "Hey? Okay I heard it I mean that's the end of the …" (Gaddis 2016, 656). When reprimanded by Bast about his

indifferent response, J R replies, “What was I suppose to hear!”, initiating an agitated dispute: “You weren’t! you weren’t supposed to hear anything that’s what I’m … –Then how come you made me lis … –To make you hear! to make you, to make you feel to try to … –Okay okay! I man what I heard first there’s all this high music right? So then this lady starts singing up yours up yours so then this man starts singing up mine” (Gaddis 2016, 657-658). This passage mirrors the capitalist’s inability to see the use value of art, reducing it to empty descriptors instead of appreciating the ineffable. J R, a child, is a perfect analogy to capitalist indifference.

Furthermore, many of the capitalists in the novel view artists as a source of disruption and as “disruptive neurotics and are convinced that if society could rid itself of these elements it could get on with business” (Moore 2015, 84). Moore also notes how “recurrent infusions of energy are necessary to combat entropy and homogeneity, and art is the principal means of infusing energy and diversity into a culture’s ‘system’. This illustrates an optimistic take on art which is not compatible with capitalist ideology.” Most importantly, “socially conscious art such as Gaddis’s provides invaluable ‘feedback’” (Moore 2015, 86). Moore has confidence in the artists in *J R*, noting how they “are last seen moving in a similar direction” (Moore 2015, 98) towards the end of the novel; that is, onwards. Although “the roof may be falling in on art everywhere,” “the artist persists, down on his knees if necessary” (Moore 2015, 99). This reflects the dubious role of the artist in postmodernity; despite considerable hardship, the artists persist. Even Bast, in the midst of delirium, struggles to “finish something before he dies” (Gaddis 2016, 675), composing with whatever is at hand, in this instance a crayon. Moore likens the conclusion in *J R* to that of Wyatt in *The Recognitions*, observing that “the new beginnings for these artists are tentative, not triumphant” (Moore 2015, 99). The disputed role of art is also debated by Benjamin, who notes how “the tendencies of the development of art under the present conditions of production . . . neutralize a number of traditional concepts—such as creativity and genius, eternal value and mystery” (Benjamin 2002, 102). J R, more in sync with contemporaneity than Bast, is perhaps not able to see the “mystery” of Bach and his relevance to “present conditions of production.”

While the artist might be a positive counterforce in an entropic cultural ecosystem, the novel also topicalizes entropy in relation to its detrimental effect on the creation of art. One of the leading entropic allegories in the novel is J R Corp’s headquarters, which doubles as a studio for Bast and Gibbs. Their studio is analogous to an isolated system, while the artists are subjected to entropy in the form of unmanageable increases in stacks of papers and phone

calls, eventually resulting in chaos at the expense of Bast's sanity. The disorderly apartment is representative of the working conditions of modern artists, and Bast's expectations for a quiet place to retreat and pursue his artistic ambitions are unrealistic. Gibbs remarks how one is "always afraid the damned telephone's going to go off" (Gaddis 2016, 499), exemplifying the pervasive anxiety hindering creation. Bast's image of an artist is based on dated models; at one point he recalls reading "something about Wagner somewhere, about how he couldn't stand books in a room where he was working" (Gaddis 2016, 111), reflecting improbable working conditions after Bast is forced to work in the J R Corp headquarters after an incident in which he "came home and found [his studio] ransacked" (Gaddis 2016, 143) by teenagers (later implied to be a ruse by Stella, the assumed perpetrator. In characteristic style, this can only be deduced due to the lack of an omniscient narrator). The same is true for J R's business and its eventual collapse, as well as the very form of the novel, in which case the reader is the subject confronted with an increasingly complex literary universe.

Edward Bast

Of all the artists in the novel, Edward Bast, the reluctant face of J R Corp, particularly warrants some attention. Throughout the novel, Bast is the archetypical suffering artist who bears the burden of capitalist oppression and struggles the most with the consequences of entropy. A turning point occurs when "he loses his father's barn to local vandals and is forced to compose and live in Gibbs's messy apartment" (Schryer 2007, 78). In this "messy," chaotic environment composing becomes difficult as "he can no longer exclude the 'God damned outside world'" (Schryer 2007, 78). Here Bast's struggles represent the plight of a certain type of archaic artist who feeds on soul-searching to create that is bound to fail when surrounded by urban noise and stress. Bast nevertheless perseveres, and "the small piece that he manages to compose thus constitutes a minimal protest against everything that he has experienced, a testament to the artist's radically diminished but lingering ability to escape from his immediate milieu" (Schryer 2007, 78), in the words of Schryer. Gaddis shows, by way of Bast, the detrimental effects the entropy and information excess imposed by the modern world on the artist leads to, and how the artist tries to resist it. Bast's artistic facilities gradually diminish throughout the novel, and Gaddis ultimately "undercuts most of Bast's claims for

aesthetic autonomy, demonstrating that few works of art can avoid falling prey to the narrowly instrumental concerns of the novel's capitalists" (Schryer 2007, 78-79). Both the demands of his work and J R's ever-expanding endeavor overwhelm Bast with plights, distracting him from creative work. The detrimental influence of capitalism is not limited to the artist, as "most of the works of art in Gaddis's novel fall prey to a recontextualization" as well. This proliferates the dangerous appropriation of artworks into "subservience to particular interests," as exemplified by Bast's commission to write "Zebra music" (Gaddis 2016, 202) (i.e., incidental music for a documentary on zebras) for a capitalist firm. In this way "the artwork can become a commodity like all others" by virtue of the "effects of a market economy" (Schryer 2007, 80). This is exemplified by Bast's humiliating commission. This distinction and the devaluation of art is another key development in the progression from modernism to postmodernism, and leads to debilitating disillusionment with the autonomy of art. *J R* can be seen as a surrendering of Gaddis's futile attempts to control information and his own artistic statements in *The Recognitions,* allowing the reader, perhaps uninformed and uneducated, to participate in the creation of the artwork in a democratic fashion. According to Schryer, high-modernist art "is theatrical," while postmodernist art pieces "call attention to the fact that they are objects in the world and thus encourage a performative identity between spectator and work" (Schryer 2007, 81). The mature Gaddis's "own compositional strategy is the opposite of Bast's," as well as to his younger self, as "his work does not attempt to preserve a gemlike flame amidst the chaos but rather reproduces the very chaos that his novel deplores" (Schryer 2007, 82). Schryer labels the dialogue "cacophonic" and argues that "in contrast to Bast, Gaddis's novel lets 'the God damned outside world in'" (Schryer 2007, 82). All these implicit and explicit references to entropy throughout the novel are not coincidental. Some general awareness of key cybernetic ideas is of great help in approaching the book. Schryer advocates "to read it cybernetically, as an information system whose redundancies we learn to identify by noticing each character's linguistic idiosyncrasies" (Schryer 2007, 83). He observes that "the reader" himself "becomes a second-order observer" due to "the novel's virtual elimination of the narrative voice" (Schryer 2007, 87). This illustrates a new way to approach the novel for both reader and writer and invigorates what "is no longer a very significant form or marker" (Jameson 1993, xv).

Thomas Eigen

Thomas Eigen is yet another character partly based on Gaddis himself (as noted by Tabbi, "[Gaddis] is Eigen in *J R* (German for *one's own*)" (Tabbi 2015, 85)), like "Wyatt Gwyon, who shares his initials, or Jack Gibbs in *J R*" as well as "Otto obviously (*auto*)" (Tabbi 2015, 85). Eigen published a book prior to his appearance in *J R*, but, like *The Recognitions*, the novel was largely met with public indifference, albeit some critical acclaim. This strengthens the autobiographical ties simultaneously as it devalues the importance of them, as so many characters draw on personal experiences. As noted by Tabbi, "The decision to remove his own creative self as a personality within the fiction has cultural implications" that reveal "the emergence of a business and political culture that had essentially sidelined critique; it is a culture that not only changed, but which *needed to change*, continually, for its own perpetuation" (Tabbi 2015, 117). The few but ecstatic proponents of the book are embodied by Gall, who on meeting Eigen refers to his book as "the most important book I, one of the most important books in American literature" (Gaddis 2007, 417), mirroring the diminutive but zealous cult surrounding Gaddis himself while questioning the integrity of such a grouping.

Whatever authority these claims might have, the dubious reception to his book by the general public is quickly addressed, with Eigen quipping, "Well it's nice of you to say that . . . a million more like you and I'd be …" (Gaddis 2007, 417). The novel, similarly to Gaddis's relationship with his own debut, is a source of bitterness for Eigen, as reflected when Gall tactlessly continues, "But you must have known when you were writing it, you must have known you were writing it for a very small audience, I …", to which Eigen replies, "Small audience! his feet dropped, –do you think I would have worked on it for seven years just for, do you know what my last royalty check was Mister …" (Gaddis 2007, 417). If Eigen's novel is indeed worthy of canonization, as has been the case of *The Recognitions*, this exchange reflects the slim chances of profit as a writer and the very necessity of a canon whatsoever if it indeed consists of literature for only a select educated few ("–I get letters from college kids who have it assigned in their courses, they must be passing one copy around" (Gaddis 2007, 417), Eigen quips at one point). The very idea of a Bloomian canon itself might very well be outdated in postmodernity as it implies a metanarrative favoring Caucasian males, a common criticism. Eigen is in any case trapped in his job, limited in his ability to create, noting how "if [the publisher] let me have the rights back do you think I'd be sitting here now?" (Gaddis

2007, 417). Even Eigen's short, possibly rare discussion on writing, in which he mentions that he's "been working on a play [himself]" (Gaddis 2007, 417) is cut short by the interruptions of his secretary who chimes into the discussion with "–Mister Eigen, Miss Flesch wants to know where the …" to which Eigen replies annoyedly, "look just, never mind damn it … his feet came down, –can't get a damn thing done here …" (Gaddis 2007, 418). Like Gibbs and Bast, Eigen is hindered rather than enriched in his daily life by his artistic ambitions, and as a result "can't get a damn thing done", as seen by Gibbs ironic struggles in trying to teach a disorderly grade school class about entropy and Bast's demanding schedule involving being a grade school teacher, the face of J R Corp, as well as a composer. Gibbs is not able to finish his novel, and Bast's ambitions for "something like an operatic suite" based on "that long poem of Tennyson's Locksley Hall of Tennyson's" (Gaddis 2007, 70) early on in the novel is reduced to "a piece for the unaccompanied cello" towards the end of the text, as Bast is now institutionalized, and "all they'll give him is a crayon" (Gaddis 2007, 675). The remainder of the intended instruments are subjected to entropy, and all that remains is a lone cello.

Jack Gibbs

Dwindling ambitions is also the case for Jack Gibbs. When Jameson asks, "does [experimental high literature] have anything to tell us about the transformation of the role and status of intellectuals?" (Jameson 1993, 132), Gibbs proves to be relevant. Throughout the novel, he struggles in vain to complete what he refers to as an encyclopedic work (curiously named *Agapē Agape,* the title of Gaddis's final novel, published posthumously almost three decades later), perhaps a reflection on Gaddis's own perceived failure as a young author, hampered by modernist ideals of totality. In a scene in which Gibbs reads aloud from his draft, narrating how "all art depends upon exquisite and delicate sensibility, and such constant turmoil must ultimately be destructive of the musical faculty and thus, though the flute is not an instrument which is expressive of moral …", even his artist friend Bast fails to pay attention, answering Gibbs's probing "what's the matter" with "nothing I'm, I just have to get this envelope you're sitting on and this, these newspapers …" (Gaddis 2007, 289). Tabbi notes how the "intrapersonal communication, which in *J R* is indeed people talking mostly past one another, is by no means the only communication at work in the novel and, indeed, in

the present multimediated world in which we actually do live and take cognizance of one another" (Tabbi 2015, 125). These many means of communication reflect the entropic dispersal of actual meaning reoccurring throughout the novel, and the difficulty of conveying even the most self-evident information wears down Gibbs's confidence in his project. As he progresses with his work "earlier encyclopedias being to encumber, rather than enable, Gibbs's attempt to complete his own encyclopedic work" (Burn 2007, 57), as noted by Burn. Burn, however, fails to note that Gibbs, nominally a frustrated teacher, is the first to explicitly reference entropy in the novel, teaching the concept to a middle school class in Massapequa. This scene is part of an extensive opening sequence in which we are briefly acquainted with several of the main characters by way of acclimating to their specific way of speaking so as to better parse the dialogue when it eventually proves overwhelming and dense later on in the novel, but in this instance Gaddis shifts the focus from principal Whiteback and Amy Joubert, the novels most fully developed female character, by way of a short but effective passage reminiscent of a prose poem: "and sixty-three cents, Mrs Joubert finished, a gentle bulge rippling from her knee as she shifted her weight in departure to disappear in the swirl of her skirt as the quarter bounding from the billowing trouser cuff drew Bast in a headlong lunge after the exhaust of Whiteback's car shearing from the curb" (Gaddis 2016, 19). The passage continues in this impressionistic fashion for the length of a paragraph with no breaks or punctuation and seamlessly sets the stage for the next scene; namely, the classroom. These prose poems are reminiscent of the predominant style in *The Recognitions*, but their scarcity coupled with the literary language as opposed to the hyperrealistic, fragmented dialogue featured elsewhere attracts attention. This approach, executed with understated virtuosity, allows Gaddis to curb the flow of information and thereby the extent of entropy while at the same time maintaining the speed of the narration. The implied "shot" is never static, and the implied camera is attentive to detail, assuming the nervous and watchful eyes of Gibbs, noting the "swirl" of Mrs. Joubert's skirt, "limbs dangling in unanesthetized aerial surgery" in the streets outside, and his own "knuckles gone white where he grasped the cold radiator" while watching "the loose fullness of her approach" (Gaddis 2016, 19). This is a controlled system, and Gaddis does not allow any relevant information to slip past into chaos; that is, to be subjected to entropy.

Gibbs, however, is not as well equipped to deal with entropy as the author. He tries in vain to explain that "knowledge has to be organized so it can be taught, and it has to be reduced to information so it can be organized" and that "organization" is not "an inherent

property of the knowledge itself, and that disorder and chaos" are not "irrelevant forces that threaten it from outside" (Gaddis 2016, 20). When he tries to conclude that "order is simply a thin, perilous condition we try to impose on the basic reality of chaos," he is persistently interrupted by a student absently noting that "we didn't have any of this" (Gaddis 2016, 20) in the curriculum. Form and content are united in these ruminations on disorder. Even Gibbs's attempt to explain the concept of entropy breeds disorder, with the indifferent class "fighting off the idea of trying to think" and Gibbs in vain asking if the pupil can't "hear me in the back there" while trying to explain that "it all comes back to this question of energy doesn't it, a concept that can't be understood without a grasp of the second law" (Gaddis 2016, 21). The narration transitions away from the classroom in a fashion similar to the prose poem that served as an introduction to Gibbs. A girl joining "the surge of disorder" (Gaddis 2016, 21), referring to the noisy classroom, marks the transference of focus on Gibbs to Dan diCephalis by way of this peripheral character. Gaddis himself refers to "the school at the beginning of *J R*" as a "microcosm" of an atmosphere of "confusion, waste, words going in all directions" (LeClair 2007, 25), another entropic allegory. The diminished role of the teacher, traditionally a propagator of metanarratives, adheres to the theories of Lyotard, who argues that "the traditional teacher is replaceable by memory banks, didactics can be entrusted to machines linking traditional memory banks (libraries, etc.) and computer data banks to intelligent terminals placed at the students' disposal" (Lyotard 1984, 50). This evolution (or de-evolution?) is due to "the miniaturization and commercialization of machines" which is "changing the way in which learning is acquired, classified, made available, and exploited" (Lyotard 1984, 4). As such, Lyotard argued as early as 1979 that "data banks are the Encyclopedia of tomorrow. They transcend the capacity of each of their users. They are 'nature' for postmodern man" (Lyotard 1984, 51). The television screens replacing teachers are equally "nature" in J R's universe, and these opening scenes in the school explicitly sets the tone for the remainder of the novel. By the end of this brief introduction to entropy, the reader is left to his own devices.

Gibbs himself finds an outlet for his struggles with encroaching disorder in writing an encyclopedic novel in a futile attempt to contain and control the constant flow of information, "objectifying" real life by transcribing it to the page. The artistic process is itself stifled by entropy, a lamentable observation shared by Bast, with Gibbs admonishing Bast's working conditions by complaining that "there's too God damned much leakage around here, can't compose anything with all this energy spilling you've got entropy going everywhere" (Gaddis

2016, 287). Gibbs scans the room obsessively, noting the "radio leaking under there hot water pouring out so God damned much entropy going on think you can hold all these notes together know what it sounds like?", Gibbs again fails to control the flow of information when he realizes that Bast is "not listening" (Gaddis 2016, 287). Gibbs's meandering lecture turns increasingly dense as he starts "talking about Johannes Müller, nineteenth-century German anatomist Johannes Müller took a human larynx fitted it up with strings and weights to replace the muscles tried to get a melody by blowing through it" (Gaddis 2016, 288), another cybernetics allegory. Gibbs's admonitions about entropy are futile and fail to win an audience even among his artist friends; in this world, the biggest accomplishments are those of J R, who despite being a child utilizes his limited language and intellectual facilities to build an empire. The absurdity of this accomplishment is eased into by way of the opening scenes in the school, a conscious choice by Gaddis that ensures that "the novel begins slowly as [he] attempted to create an atmosphere with enough verisimilitude to have the reader suspend his disbelief and be prepared to accept the possibility that a not very bright kid could send away for penny stocks and defaulted bond issues and out of them build a business empire" (LeClair 2007, 25). The school atmosphere serves to illustrate the failure of officials' attempts to mitigate entropy. Gaddis himself notes how "the principal's speech shows no mind operating. Education is never discussed. This absence was a conscious effort to show that the educators were wholly concerned with administrative problems, rooms, schedules, machines" (LeClair 2007, 25). This illustrates the detrimental consequences of information overload. Although data banks and computers permit access to a wealth of information, the best way to process and disseminate it is not immediately obvious, and most eager to access this information are overwhelmed rather than enlightened by the masses of data.

Alongside the entropic allegories, explicit references to entropy proliferate the novel. Several of the characters discuss entropy explicitly and note its relevance to their own lives, as in one of Gibbs's exasperated rants where he in passing goads Eigen to "read Wiener on communication, more complicated the message more God damned chance for errors" (in reference to Wiener's aforementioned *The Human Use of Human Beings*) and a paraphrase of the second law of thermodynamics) and complains about "God damned much entropy going on" (Gaddis 2016, 403). In this context entropy is utilized in a discussion on the complexities of marriage, with Gibbs complaining that even "a few years of marriage" is "such a God damned complex of messages going both ways can't get a God damned thing across" (Gaddis 2016, 403). Stephen Schryer notes how Gibbs's very name is modeled on physicist Josiah

Willard Gibbs, “who introduced contingency into physics at an elementary level through his statistical approach to thermodynamics, thereby influencing a generation of early cybernetic thinkers” (Schryer 2007, 82). As opposed to, or perhaps as a modernization of the ideal of unity as the leading virtue of quality in a text popularized by the New Critics, the very chaos wrought by entropy is the unifying theme in this novel. This is certainly not just the case for *J R*, as entropy appears as a theme in numerous postmodern novels, deliberately or not. Whereas in film, where messages and information are translated and conveyed by the mind of a single director or at most the central core of the director’s team, best exemplified by the leading auteurs of cinema, literature exposes the reader to hundreds of pages of messages and signs that needs to be decoded by the reader alone. This demanding, overwhelming experience increases the chance for entropy considerably more than in a film. A novel is an inherently more complex message for the reader to comprehend, and chaos increases accordingly. This discussion sets the scene for the following chapter.

Chapter 3

The Literary and Cinematic Duality of *J R*

One of Jameson's most convincing arguments in his discussion on the decreasing relevance of the novel is "the competition of the media and so-called cultural studies," which "signal a transformation in the role and space of mass culture today which is greater than a mere enlargement and which may increasingly leave no space whatsoever for literary 'classics'" (Jameson 1993, 131). With montages, jump cuts and the facility with which it can portray simultaneity, film might be a more viable medium for portraying the entropy inherent in the information age, yet modern experimental literature remains an invigorating exhibition of inspiration extending beyond the medium. Integration of diagrams, pictures and other extra-literary inserts, such as the facsimile of a printed letter on page 438 in *J R*, is fairly common in postmodernist literature, but this tendency manifests itself to an explicit degree in novels such as *House of Leaves* (2000) by Mark Z. Danielewski, a notable example of what is termed ergodic literature. In this style, which is frequently compared with hypertext, certain words are color-coded, fonts are liable to change, footnotes contain footnotes themselves, and the book must at times be physically rotated to be read. The virtues of this extra-literary experimentation are open to (and subject to) debate; whether this is the type of novel necessary to be relevant in light of Jameson's pessimism is disputable. Fittingly, architecture and spatiality are major themes in *House of Leaves,* but the sustainability of Danielewski's novel experimentation as a literary trend, appropriated by imitators, remains to be seen, if traceable influence is indeed a hallmark of relevance; if we are to have a literary tradition, this influence across generations is indeed necessary. In any case, Gaddis experiments with more traditional means despite restricting vocabulary and impressionistic digression to produce surprisingly lucid dialogue, although the content's inherent subtlety would still need to be examined. The addition of attributed dialogue would have broadened the audience of the novel to the most casual reader, at the expense of the novel's raison d'être.

I argue that the themes and content in *J R* are best portrayed in novel form, and that a film adaptation would transform the work to the point of self-obliteration. Whereas Gaddis's

contemporaries attained sizeable readerships due to their work being adapted for cinema, such as the successful adaptation of J. G. Ballard's *Crash* (1973), a similar treatment is unfathomable for *J R.* This is exactly what McElroy asks us to imagine: "Imagine the film, with all that Gaddis left out of *J R* put in. Like faces, places, physical presence, gesture as language, collision, body's collusion with or clothing of the soul" (McElroy 2007, 64), enumerations that can be extended at length. The exclusion of all these variables, largely unavoidable in film adaptation, reveals another important distinction between film and literature. Literature necessitates engagement; the reader is forced to construct the images outlined in the text individually. Moreover, "faces, places" and "physical presence" are, if not irrelevant, at least not crucial to the heart of the matter in most literature. In film "the human being is placed in a position where he must operate with his whole living person" (Benjamin 2002, 112), while in *J R,* more so than in most novels, the "living person" is reduced to a disembodied voice, which remains the character's only means of agency, and as noted elsewhere, the dialogue regularly fails in conveying the speakers' intents. This contributes to making faithful adaptations of novels inconceivable without some degree of entropy, and one wonders how *J R* could be adopted "without showing, betraying, giving away, extruding, inventing what Gaddis has largely excluded or elided from a tale commonly described as being composed of dialogue" (McElroy 2007, 64). It is difficult to imagine a film "as being composed of dialogue" without "faces, places" and "physical presence" being anything but distractions. The very nature of dialogue in film and literature is obviously very different. The dialogue in film is shaped by several variables, most notably inflection, extralingual expression and gesticulations. Furthermore, "[the actor's] performance is by no means a unified whole, but is assembled from many individual performances" (Benjamin 2002, 112), as opposed to in *J R,* in which characters are established by voices alone. The many possibilities of characterization in film can only be approximated in novel form, approximations often attempted *The Recognitions,* but only rarely in *J R.*

This is not to say that Gaddis's texts are without filmic equivalents, but while films such as Andrew Bujalski's "mumblecore" classic *Funny Ha Ha* (2002) or Louis Malle's *My Dinner with Andre* (1981) are composed primarily of extended conversations and seemingly unscripted dialogue with deceptively little attention paid to cinematography, film is by nature manipulative in a manner differing from literature and physically restricted by the lens of the camera and the duration of the shot, as well as the objectivity of committing to final representations of ideas and concepts only outlined in texts. Benjamin notes how "the finished

film is the exact antithesis of a work created at a single stroke. It is assembled from a very large number of images and image sequences that offer an array of choices to the editor; these images, moreover, can be improved in any desired way in the process leading from the initial take to the final cut" (Benjamin 2002, 109). *J R*, by contrast, ingeniously approximates unedited stretches of dialogue. In the absence of the prose poems, the narrative progresses by almost imperceptibly moving between conversations, and as such frivolous discussions between peripheral characters intermittently appear, such as in the following excerpt between employees at Typhon International, none of which are crucial actors in the overarching plot: "Who the devil wrote balls in the margin here, crossed out and somebody wrote in, what is it? Round objects …? –Who do you think wrote balls in the margin, I'd like to know who crossed it out. –I, I did ma'am I substituted round ob …" (Gaddis 2016, 422). Despite these digressions, the plot continues to develop seamlessly. Whereas a conventional novel is divided into self-contained sections and chapters, *J R* cannot be similarly delineated. Even films such as Andy Warhol's *Eat* (1963), *Sleep* (1964) or *Blow Job* (1964), which strive to portray the titular acts in an objective fashion and in real time duration, are limited by the static black-and-white camera, assuming an entirely different effect than possible in literature and presenting a voyeuristic effect rather than a durative one. Literature, as exploited by Gaddis in *J R*, has the potential to portray words in a virtually objective fashion, freed from the implications, of the appearance of the speakers, their presence or their tone of voice, although never entirely free from the author's bias and limited by literature's insufficiency in portraying simultaneity. This is a valuable quality, and a democratic one in the way that it engages the reader, and the facility for subtlety is more pronounced as a result.

Additionally, many of *J R*'s virtues are virtually not possible to film. In an early scene the character Gall reads aloud the inscription above the school entrance, an inscription consisting of a series of Greek letters transcribed as "ΕΒΦΜ ΣΑΟΗ ΑΘΘΦΒΡ" (Gaddis 2016, 20), which is how the letters appear in the text, with no translation or explanation as to their significance or relevance. This is a humorous sequence only conceivable in text. If this line were to appear in film, in a play, or in an audio book, the humor would be lost, as it would, of course, be spoken in Greek. Instead, this Greek sentence achieves equal significance to the predominant English in the text and must be decoded by the reader if it is to be understood. An impatient first-time reader would be tempted to ignore these eccentricities, while a reader who knows Greek (or perhaps reads a Greek translation) would most likely fail to notice its significance, as it has little bearing on the plot (it translates to "from each accord", and is

revealed to be a partial quote by Karl Marx, only mentioned in passing by Gibbs as he complains about "Schepperman God damned statements still got one of his God damned statements carved in stone over the God damned front door, God damned school boards find it's Karl Marx" (Gaddis 2016, 409)). Nevertheless, this passage is not to be ignored as merely a testament to Gaddis's erudition, as it is yet another instance of the entropy associated with the dispersion of knowledge due to the myriad of conflicting information the individual has to decode in modern, alienating cityscapes dominated by manipulative commercials side by side with informative plaques and signs, hindering any attempt at cognitive mapping.

Television

Film is also thematized explicitly by the characters in the novel, with a notable example being the televisions used for education in the grade school in the opening scenes of the novel, as well as the explicit references to cinema appearing with some regularity. In one notable deviation from the dominating narrative style, Gaddis seamlessly juxtaposes a scene from the showing of the 1922 documentary classic *Nanook of the North* with the chaotic classroom, narrating how "Nanook's losing battle against the blizzard of scratched remnants of film finally gave over to the barrage of flying milk cartons" (Gaddis 2016, 341). This passage is revealing of the difference between the experience of watching a film versus reading a novel. Whereas a director might have executed these transitions by panning the camera from the television set screening the black-and-white film to a multicolor classroom of disinterested students, several key implications are lost in this hypothetical adaptation. This is not just a matter of changing the subject, this is a case of gradual transformation of images. A dissolve transition, another potential approach, would be a poor approximation of the effect of Gaddis's passage. What is implied is the observer's (i.e., the reader's) focus on Nanook's battle being gradually subsumed by the noisy surroundings of the classroom and the concomitant impressions. An observer in situ would have to physically move his head to scan the classroom, akin to a camera, to perceive the images in the scene. The reader, on the other hand, is in a much more privileged, objective position, in which the script, so to speak, is laid out on the page. The frustrated Gibbs experiences the situation as an annoying interruption, biased by his own feelings of annoyance over "flying milk cartons" (Gaddis 2016, 341). In the

reading experience, however, the narrative shifts are produced by the reader processing the words in succession as opposed to the parallel experience of watching the film and in frustration being steered into acknowledging the mise-en-scène, thereby constructing the images individually in the mind.

The dialogue and the intermittent prose poems are not the only media of communication in the book, however. When Bast is asked to step in for Miss Flesch in delivering a lecture on Mozart, the increasingly entropic and inappropriate speech, largely due to the notes being mixed up, forcing the inexperienced Bast to improvise, the lecture is portrayed from the perspective of the other teachers, who watch and listen as it is shown directly on television. This sequence reads as an entropic allegory, an impression which is underlined by the television lectures being presented as "a simple interference-free closed-circuit school setup" (Gaddis 2016, 26), which is ultimately comically subverted. As presented in this novel, the televised lecture only appears as fragmented sentences in slightly smaller text than the overarching dialogue intermixed with the conversation among the teachers, as illustrated in the following exchange where the teachers first notice Bast:

> –Warm bodies…
>
> –Today, boys and girls …
>
> –Who's that?
>
> –The Mozart. It's …
>
> –No. The voice … (Gaddis 2016, 40)

The only parts of Bast's lecture the reader is invited to "see" are ostensibly the parts which the teachers' pay their undivided attention to, and substantial ellipses in his speech are frequent, with his speech ultimately being reduced to fragments. When Bast's papers are mixed up, chaos quickly ensues. Initially, disorder is reflected in his hesitant language, as in "the um, constant yes she, she constantly spent what little money they had on luxuries and she, she," which attracts the attention of the teachers, who remark that "he, he seems to be departing somewhat from the ahm, the …" (Gaddis 2016, 41), notably in stuttering language similarly to Bast. Entropy is inevitable, and disorder extends to the narrative itself:

> –I'd stay away from prop shots like this one too, they're liable to pick up the book upside down.
>
> –Yes we've had ahm, had trouble with books yes …
>
> –that here's um, yes here's one he wrote to a girl cousin about the time he was writing his Paris symphony he says, he apologizes to her for not writing and he says Do you think I'm dead? Don't believe it, I implore you. For believing and shitting are two very different things …
>
> –Did you, did I … hear that? (Gaddis 2016, 42)

Bast's increasingly disorderly notes are mirrored by the narrative style, in which snippets of Bast's speech progressively interfere with the teachers' conversation, both in frequency and in its influence on the dialogue, with all the teacher's now watching the television in shock. Nevertheless, whereas a film could easily cut between shots of Bast and the shocked teachers, this scene has some additional implications that would be lost in a different medium. Bast's spoken words assume equal importance to the conversation, and is as much present in the text as the conversation, which is seemingly foregrounded, as it assumed that the reader assumes a perspective in the same room as the teachers, as opposed to in the same room as Bast. Bast's speech, albeit in a smaller typeface, and the teachers' conversation are both equally text, and equally information that must be decoded by the reader.

The Unsteady Relationship between Signifier and Signified

Another decidedly literary quality is the play with names, which merely serve as free-floating signifiers in this text. This subverts Jameson's qualms about literature in which "nouns are . . . being asked to function as names, since the proper name is evidently the only term we have for the attempt to match a specific word to a unique object" (Jameson 1993, 138). The impatience of Coen, a lawyer waiting for Bast to appear in a meeting regarding his family's estate in which only his garrulous aunts are present, is briefly underlined by a narrative passage which seamlessly transitions from direct dialogue to description: "–Cai … ro? That … that would be, Egypt? Perhaps … The tremor seemed to pass through his voice right out his arm snagged in mid-air upon his wristwatch, –when I've talked with your nephew Edward, will he be down …" (Gaddis 2016, 12). This transient mention of a

wristwatch lends his words an undertone of urgency. The aunts' casual irreverence towards Coen is underlined by their inability to "spell" his name correctly. His name, "Coen, without the h" (Gaddis 2016, 3), is announced at the earliest convenience; however, whenever the Bast aunts say his name, it is spelled "Cohen" in the text, despite these two names being homonyms. This underlines the subtle patronizing and skeptic tone of the aunts in face of Coen, in a way that is only conceivable in textual form. As the two variants are homophones, Coen himself is not aware of the mistake, and the spelling is merely a subtle token of the aunts' prejudice. The aunts frequently talk over one another, as well as over Coen, so they might very well not be aware of the mistake themselves, restricting the pun to the reader alone. Curiously, "Cohen" is a Jewish name, being Hebrew for "priest". A quick investigation reveals that Cohen might very well be "the oldest and probably the most common Jewish family name in existence" (My Jewish Story n.d.). This episode might very well be a subtle instance of antisemitism, in which stereotypes of Jewish people, particularly lawyers, being greedy proliferate. If this misspelling is intended, this spelling might instead reflect their underlying prejudices (or, more innocuously, their general ignorance). This would foreshadow the upcoming scene in which another member of the Bast family, Edward, stages rehearsals for Wagner's (who infamously penned and essay called "Judaism in Music" (1850) in which he openly expounded his antisemitic sentiments) *Das Rheingold* (in which "gold" symbolizes greediness, with the gold prop used in the production eventually being stolen by J R himself, unwittingly personifying character Alberich, which is, in fact, J R's assigned role, stealing the Rhinegold) in a Jewish temple.

"Coen" is not the only name to be misrepresented, however, as misspellings reoccur frequently. Edward Bast himself is at one point referred to as "that young music what was his name, bastard" (Gaddis 2016, 225). When Edward and Coen eventually meet towards the very end of the novel in circumstances that are themselves wrought with confusion, the roles are humorously reversed, with Bast being delirious, discovering along with Coen that his house has been physically moved (this actually happens, it is not a figment of his declining mental state). When Coen tries to establish that this individual, presently delusional due to immense stress, is indeed Edward Bast, he asks "Mister Bast" if "perhaps I, I mean you are Mister Bast aren't you? Edward Bast?", to which Edward replies "With an e Edwerd with an e, Ed" (Gaddis 2016, 666). "Edwerd" is of course pronounced identically to "Edward", and "with an e" would commonly be interpreted as referring to the first letter in the name, establishing this as yet another visual pun for the eyes of the reader alone. It is curious to note

that Edward successfully refers to Coen as "Coen", asking, "You a lawyer Mister Coen?" (Gaddis 2016, 666) despite being delusional, one of the very few people in the novel to do so. Nevertheless, Edward referring to himself as "Edwerd" might be intentional, this being a covert spelling established by J R's initial misspelling of the name when exploiting him as the outward face of *J R Corp* to conceal that the enterprise is in fact helmed by a sixth-grader. This is noted when J R's nameless friend asks, "He's your business representive, Edwerd Bast? –What's so funny about that! –I mean he doesn't know shit look he can't even spell his own name Edwerd look, e d … –I said quit laughing! How do you know so much anyway and I mean he didn't even spell it, he …" (Gaddis 2016, 186). This information is only known by J R's sole peer, a character consistently referred to as "the Hyde boy", Major Hyde's son, hence the name. This denomination is not to be ignored, as it reflects the constant denial of identity in this novel, in which even the names of the characters are frequently mispronounced, and, in this instance, a name is lacking altogether. Gaddis could easily have given him an arbitrary name; instead, this choice reflects the seemingly random circumstances in which details about plot and character establishment are revealed. This underlines the arbitrary nature of names in general. The one time Major Hyde talks about his son, it would not be fitting to mention his name, as he simply mentions that "my boy's in this thing of hers" (Gaddis 2016, 28), referring to Miss Flesch's class, and his colleagues might not be acquainted with his son. As argued by Knight, "Names here are simply that—names, signifiers lacking any essential relation to beings" (Knight 1997, 84). In regards to the above episode concerning Bast's first encounter with Coen, Coen is now the one to mispronounce (while 'Edward' is Bast's given name, it is not the name Edward assumes in this situation) Edward's name, noting how "you really are the Edward Bast" (Gaddis 2016, 666) as he expresses his relief over finally meeting him, having pursued him since the very first page of the novel. In this very instance, "Edward" does indeed identify as "Edwerd". This fleeting sense of identity would be obscured in an adaptation for film, or even in a more descriptive book, such as *The Recognitions*, in which the characters are invariably given faces and other character traits. The objectifying camera would tie the names to faces and bodies, destroying this subtlety.

Likewise, in a heated quarrel between Norman and Stella Angel, he starts, "well but Stel …", to which she replies, "Please stop calling me Stella!" (Gaddis 2016, 148). This response is supplemented by a brief but effective narrative passage which directly follows with a description on how "she pulled the sheet up as though it was the force of his stare that

had abruptly bared her breast spilled toward him there, turned on her back to reach the light" (Gaddis 2016, 148). When Norman, confused, responds that "but, but that's ...", trying to elucidate what is in fact her name, she replies, "Oh I just mean stop saying it," which is again followed by a prose passage that reads, "The light went out and the mass of her thighs rose again under the blanket as she turned away" (Gaddis 2016, 148). This passage is ambiguous and welcomes several interpretations, reflecting the novel format's ability to express ambiguity. It is interesting to note that Stella is Latin for "star", something which explains the symbolism of "turned on her back to reach the light," "force of his stare" (as in a radiant stare), as well as in how "the light went out" after she succeeds in getting him to stop tying her to the name Stella. This latter quote also reflects the character's discomfort to being named; that is, defined and catalogued, a remnant of the encyclopedic tendencies of Enlightenment legacy.

Similarly, the character referred to as "the Hyde boy" would be associated with a specific appearance in a film adaptation rather than with the implications of his dialogue, which, as seen, is more revealing of his character. Paradoxically, "the Hyde boy" is more descriptive than any other name in the novel, as this firmly establishes him as the son of Major Hyde and the fact that he is a boy, as opposed to "Cohen", for instance; this "Coen" is a lawyer, not a priest (as we established above), and is an empty signifier that reveals nothing about what is signified, instead serving as a source of confusion and misunderstanding, as does "Bast", which is garbled as "bastard". The descriptive "the Hyde boy" parallels "J R", which also denotes "a son", and, although only initially, "a boy". This has further implications as "J R" is more ambiguous, as it is commonly a generic name, not a descriptive one. "J R" being such a generic name allows him to name his business "J R Corp" with no one suspecting its dubious conception. J R's father, "junior's" correlative "senior", is almost never mentioned in the text (nor is his mother), something which underlines the lack of signification in given names. One of the few mentions of his father appears when Bast asks him if "your father know about all this sending away you're doing?", to which J R replies with an oblivious "what?" (Gaddis 2016, 133). Additionally, this "J R" is exceedingly precocious (at least in the field of business, if not in spelling), and the very title of the novel, named *J R*, is misleading, as this is a novel about a boy assuming the position traditionally granted to a grown man. The novel cannot be said to be a bildungsroman either, as J R ostensibly learns nothing from the rise and fall of his enterprise, immediately plotting his new plans for "entering public life" (Gaddis 2016, 726) once more. Instead Bast, his reluctant partner, is the

one that undergoes transformation in the novel, stating towards the end that "I've done enough other people's damage from now on I'm just going to do my own, from now on I'm going to fail at my own" (Gaddis 2016, 718). His transformation is not even necessarily for the better, as he ends up being admitted to a hospital due to delirium, with his ambitions to write an opera dwindling down to "writing a piece for the unaccompanied cello because all they'll give him is a crayon" (Gaddis 2016, 675). Even his notations are mispresented, and their dubious link to actual music is highlighted by Crawley. J R Corp is lead successfully with J R not even being seen, as he predominantly communicates through payphones, distorting his voice to disguise his prepubescent voice (Anne Bast refers to it as "the oddest voice, it sounded like someone talking under a pillow" (Gaddis 2016, 229)). Followingly, J R's successful enterprise, like the novel itself, is virtually founded on dialogue alone. This underlines the lack of necessity for identifying features, such as faces and names, to function in late capitalist postmodernism, in which key actors are often shrouded in anonymity. A filmization would put too much emphasis on the appearance of J R as a boy; in text, his actions assume an ominous quality, as it reveals how easily power can be transferred to incompetent people through manipulation and clever rhetoric. As seen, a capitalist firm can function on an advanced level without the functionaries being known or present. The "death of the author", with J R being the "author" of his enterprise, is thereby consummated.

Free Indirect Discourse

In the aftermath of the "death of the author", the narrator now subsists primarily to guide the reader. The dialogue in *J R* is occasionally narrated in a manner resembling free indirect discourse:

> –Yes. There he goes now … The car crept up the drive past trees which appeared to stagger without even provocation of a breeze, rearing their splintered amputations in all directions, an atmosphere of calamity tempered, to the south, by a brooding bank of oak, by several high locusts serenely distinct against the sky in the west. –It was naughty of James. (Gaddis 2016, 17)

In the sample quotation above, which serves as the transition from the first scene in the Bast house to the second scene outside the bank in Massapequa, it is difficult to establish where dialogue ends and narration begins. It is ambiguous whether "there he goes now" is the direct words uttered by Anne Bast as she observes Coen leave, but the following descriptive passage, "The car crept up the drive past trees which appeared to stagger without even provocation of a breeze," is uncharacteristic of her manner of speech, something the reader is expected to be attuned to when identifying who speaks in able to decode the text. The passage does, however, seem to be seen from Anne's perspective rather than Bast's. The following passage is even more ambiguous, in which

> to the squeal of brakes, the car burst out into the world trailing a festoon of privet, swerved at the immediate prospect of open acres flowered in funereal abundance to regain the pavement and lose it again in a brief threat to the candy wrappers and beer cans nestled along the hedge line up the highway, that quickly out of sight to the windows' half-shaded stare from the roof pitches frowning over the hedge to where it ended. (Gaddis 2016, 17)

While the first passage resembles the impressions of a skeptic onlooker with evocative language depicting how "the car crept" in the manner of an insect or an animal, "trees" are "rearing their splintered amputations," "an atmosphere of calamity" and "a brooding bank of oak," this second passage is more attuned to Coen's sense of freedom in escaping the tense episode in the Bast house. Here "the car [bursts] out into the world" of "open acres," and the "privet" is "a festoon" rather than "splintered amputations." Additionally, the prying eyes of the Bast aunts is acknowledged as the car drives "out of sight to the windows' half-shaded stare." These subtleties of placid subjectivity and seamless transition between what is said and what is kept private are hard to imagine in any other medium.

This narrative style also has an innate ability to portray ambiguity and subtlety. In a crucial scene which depicts the field trip to Wall Street during which J R Corp is initially conceptualized, he asks Crawley "if I could take a pamphlet or something," to which Crawley, being occupied at the moment, replies, "Take it. Take it." The following exchange, "Mister Crawley, he's taking … –stock guide, and this stock commission calculator … –Take it, take them just come along …!" is written with no explicit clue as to who observes that "he's taking

…" (Gaddis 2016, 88). The full extent of what J R takes with him, implied to include essential items, is not revealed, and only called attention to in passing later on as Amy Joubert, busy counting the students prior to remarking to J R that he should "come along you've got quite enough" (Gaddis 2016, 88). When the children are seated again, the child next to J R complains, "Mrs Joubert he's taking up the whole seat with all those papers and stuff how's anybody supposed to sit anyplace," to which Amy replies, "Let's try to act a little more like grownup shareowners in a large corporation" (Gaddis 2016, 89), an unintentionally humorous line on Amy's part considering that J R will be doing just that. In a later episode the class is even taken to "a money museum," with Amy reasoning that it is "no trouble is it . . . turn them loose in the money mu …" before being interrupted by Bast, who notes that it is situated "in a bank somewhere" (Gaddis 2016, 121). This passage, ripe for a Marxist reading, reveals the insidious nature of ideological state apparatuses interpellating young subjects to adopt the capitalist ideology. The scene also underlines the covert way in which a child, inconspicuous and seemingly innocent, is able to plot unseen as no one suspects him of doing anything inappropriate and is an example of the novel form's aptness for subtlety and evocative suggestiveness.

Realism

While *The Recognitions* is rife with intertextuality, and the eloquent characters "toss of nearly word-perfect quotations from a variety of texts", this is subverted in *J R.* Here the characters "more realistically mangle or misattribute quotations" (Moore 2015, 102). This again reveals literature's independence from cinema, and notes its reliance on adjective-heavy ekphrasis, in this case ridiculed, to depict abstract concepts such as art. Furthermore, it reflects the entropy associated with the process of creating an artwork and making it public as well as all the artist's intent which evaporates in the process, a key similarity between the process of conversing and creating art and the inability of anyone to accurately portray their feelings. As noted by Moore, "Literary allusions, like everything else in *J R*, are presented in fragmented or elliptical form, shorn from their original contexts" (Moore 2015, 102). J R's ekphrasis of the Bach cantata is comically inept:

> I mean what I heard first there's all this high music right? So then this here lady starts singing up yours up yours so then this man starts singing up mine, then there's some words so she starts singing up mine up mine so he starts singing up yours so then they go back and forth like that up mine up yours up mine up yours that's what I heard! (Gaddis 2016, 658)

While Bast plays the cantata for J R to hear, in novel form J R's ekphrasis is the reader's only experience of the music, unless, of course, the reader is familiar with the cantata (the piece in question, *Ich hatte viel Bekümmernis*, is one of Bach's most acclaimed cantatas, although the assumption that the average reader should recall the music by memory can nevertheless be dismissed as elitist or alienating). Bach is anachronistic in J R's conception of the world, and Bast's laudations of "sort of a dialogue between the soul and [Jesus]" (Gaddis 2016, 655) are ridiculed. With only ekphrasis as evidence (given that the reader has not heard the cantata), the ostensible potency of the artwork degrades. Bast and J R's stunted conversation reflects the entropy inherent in communicating ineffable, immaterial concepts such as music. This is another instance in which a filmization would deflate literary subtlety.

The Dialogue

The spoken word and its wide array of interpretations are laid bare in *J R,* with nothing between the words and their inevitable interpretation, which is subject to the entropy inherent in transmission of information. McElroy describes how "Gaddis will leave the voices . . . 'alone'; go with them; try and build with them (but build what?), and unbuild or take apart with vast economy a financial and commercial and heart-burned wasteland in a novel itself made to last" (McElroy 2007, 64). The dialogue is the building block in this novel, as opposed to narrative paragraphs in conventional novels or the "shot" in cinema. As noted in the discussion on the reversal of dominance of dialogue versus narration between *The Recognitions* (in addition to most novels) and *J R*, "The leaving-out Sartre called the key to writing" is in *J R* "the drawing of attributes away from 'characters' in order to leave often an acoustic presence, narrowed profile or drive, or half-imprisoned 'voice', paralleling a

transactional or market abstraction that reduces value to either a medium of exchange or paper" (McElroy 2007, 68). With the voice "half-imprisoned" and obscured, the words must be taken at face-value. A question arises, however, as to what these disembodied words amount to. Is dialogue possible in a vacuum, and "*is* it really dialogue," and if so, "what kind of dialogue is this" (McElroy 2007, 65). McElroy likens the experience of the reader to that of a "central system operator hearing all these people on the network" (McElroy 2007, 69). This decoding process and search for clues is ongoing, and commences already with the first lines in the novel:

> –Money …? in a voice that rustled.
> –Paper, yes.
> –And we'd never seen it. Paper money.
> –We never saw paper money till we came east.
> –It looked so strange the first time we saw it. Lifeless.
> –You couldn't believe it was worth a thing.
> –Not after Father jingling his change.
> –Those were silver dollars.
> –And silver halves, yes and quarters, Julia. (Gaddis 2016, 3)

The only clues as to who is speaking is found by serendipity in the dialogue; "in a voice that rustled," the sole descriptive narration in this passage, is of little help in establishing who is speaking, and instead sets the tone for the undertones of capitalist satire recurring throughout the novel. This line also evinces an inherent quality in literary dialogue. It is hard to imagine a portrayal of "a voice that rustled" in any other medium. Furthermore, the named characters ("Julia" and "Father") turn out to be peripheral at best, as this is a dialogue between Julia and Anne Bast, the unmarried aunts of Edward Bast, who only have limited influence on the bearing of the novel's plot, merely presenting some backstory. A film might have employed this passage to set the scene in terms of imagery with focus on fitting cinematography (if not excluding this scene altogether), which is indeed what this passage does in the novel, with its darkly sinister announcement of "money" as a leading theme in the novel. A traditional novel might have opened with evocative narration, as is the case in *The Recognitions*:

> Even Camilla had enjoyed masquerades, of the safe sort where the mask may be dropped at that critical moment it presumes itself as reality. But the procession up the foreign hill, bounded by cypress trees, impelled by the monotone chanting of the priest and retarded by hesitations at the fourteen stations of the Cross (not to speak of the funeral carriage in which she was riding, a white horse-drawn vehicle which resembled a baroque confectionery stand), might have ruffled the shy countenance of her soul, if it had been discernible. (Gaddis 1993, 3)

Here attributes appear freely, with a central character (although deceased throughout the entirety of the novel, she exerts much influence on the lives of her bereaved family), Wyatt Gwyon's mother, Camilla, named in the opening sentence. The passage is also rich in evocative imagery that sets the scene ("the procession up the foreign hill, bounded by cypress trees, impelled by the monotone chanting of the priest," "a white horse-drawn vehicle which resembled a baroque confectionery stand"). An adaptation of this is conceivable, desirable or not. In *J R*, Gaddis operates on another level, more exclusive in nature. "–Money …? in a voice that rustled" (Gaddis 2016, 3), in which narrative voice and direct speech merges, is not translatable and calls attention to its "literariness".

Temporality

Despite (or because of) the incisive, lifelike conversations in *J R*, the novel continually demands intellectual engagement, as opposed to the emotional surrender involved in watching a film. This leads to a thoroughly different experience of time, most notably in stream of consciousness-passages such as J R's phone calls, which are presented in a continuous flow of words with little to no punctuation and scarce breaks or paragraphs. As the novel has no chapter breaks, a continuous reading from bookend to bookend aptly represents a subjective temporal experience. Time speeds up and down, while the focus zooms in on and out of major and minor details in ways different from reader to reader and reading to reading, influenced by the reader's attention to and familiarity with the style and language and facilities to parse the information excess and entropy. Additionally, whereas in *Ulysses* the text is a close study of one single day in Dublin, *J R* starts mid-sentence ("–Money …? in a voice that rustled. – Paper, yes" (Gaddis 2016, 3)) and ends abruptly in the middle of one of J R's rants ("Hey?

You listening …?" (Gaddis 2016, 726)). As there is no clear beginning and end in real life itself, it is difficult and unsatisfactory to provide defined limits to a narrative text. Directly in line with the reader's role in constructing the narrative, the task is to make sense of the disorder. It is unclear whether this integration of temporality is a progression in Gaddis's contemporaneous qualities, or a residue of modernism. Nevertheless, *J R* transcends mere temporality. In Jameson's discussion of postmodernist art, "any direction and any starting point are possible and that what is here offered is only one of the varied trajectories and combinations logically possible" (Jameson 1993, 168). A horizontal, spatial dimension is thereby invoked, with parallel universes, so to speak, operating simultaneously.

Unlike the omniscience a narrative voice often possesses, the narrative voice in *J R* is strictly limited to empirical evidence and resists impressionistic interiority, thereby inviting the reader to fill in the ellipses. Since the text is almost exclusively centered on people; more precisely, speakers, as opposed to being object-oriented, and is dependent on transitions, whether by way of simultaneous conversations, telephone calls, or the prose poems depicting movement, the narrative voice often depicts mundane acts such as sleep in a circumstantial manner. Such is the case in the following passage, in which Amy Joubert goes to bed:

> She lay awake, half awake in the dark, then awake at the sound of the bedroom door opening, the rustle across the carpet, the faint figure paused between the beds and then, as she started to one elbow and caught her breath, and sank back, the strain of the springs across the gap, and the toss of covers on the bed there.
>
> When she waked it was empty. She'd sat up and looked over in the cuts of sunlight, and said –Francis? But it was only a swirl of blankets, and she got up slowly and went into the bathroom to dress. (Gaddis 2016, 193)

Here, sleep is implied to occur between the end of the first paragraph and the indentation in the second. Since the narrative voice is contingent on empirical evidence, it is not depicted. Until she loses consciousness, it is the imagery of movement and sensory experience that progresses the action, as she listens to the "the rustle across the carpet" and "started to one elbow and caught her breath." When she wakes up, she immediately tries to collect information to assess the situation at hand, calling out for "Francis," her son, trying to map her environment. Her movement as she "went into the bathroom to dress" rapidly progresses the narrative as she goes to work, and the text again returns to dialogue.

Similarly, in a scene in which Gibbs falls into a drunken stupor it is the slow movement of light that is emphasized before Gibbs is rudely awakened by Eigen:

> He fell back on the low bed, flung out there still as a man cast up by the sea when light caught the window and slowly gave it definition, finally filled it leaving the overhead a yellowed pall and the buildings wide across the way in the sunlight undulant through the cheap glass pane like a part of a submarine landscape.
>
> –Jack …! (Gaddis 2016, 414)

Here, what may very well be several hours of sleep is substantially compressed, reflecting how the text is dependent on dialogue to materialize. Underlining the momentum of the text and the narrative voice's dependence on movement, even the glacial speed of light filling a room participates in progressing the plot. This passage is mirrored at a later point when Gibbs is awakened once more:

> And whatever he whispered was gone, turned to her on his side to move his hand down where it rose to rest that night as it might have on a lectern, along the creviced margin between those white slopes opened to the lesson where congregation thronged a dream.
>
> –Jack?
>
> Up on one elbow he brushed sunlight from his face, brought hers in shadow. (Gaddis 2016, 491)

Once again, the dialogue is instigated by attempts at gathering information ("Francis?" (Gaddis 2016, 193), "Jack …!" (Gaddis 2016, 414), "Jack?" (Gaddis 2016, 491)) and movement underlines the progression to and from the state of sleep ("she started to one elbow" (Gaddis 2016, 193), "up on one elbow" (Gaddis 2016, 491)). This is again the case in Amy and Gibbs's sex scene ("one leg of hers came straight and then the other, and all the mirror held was bedhead and the lamp where her hand rose, and darkness emptied it. –Jack?" (Gaddis 2016, 501)) and the next time Gibbs falls asleep ("Light came finally separating the blind . . . he came up on one elbow –who the, who is it!" (Gaddis 2016, 580)). As seen, sleep is consistently depicted by way of the movement of light, the cessation and instigation of movement, and an immediate, confused attempt at conversation and mapping of the

surroundings. Gibbs's passages are the most intriguing in this regard; the disorientation experienced immediately after waking up is intensified by Gibbs sleeping and waking up at different locations every time, never at home, and at one point being inebriated. These passages underline the open-ended and subjective nature of the text, as the reader is merely presented with empirical evidence. There are no depictions of dreams or even the act of sleeping itself; as the experience of sleeping is abstract and its depiction inevitably entails personal impressions, it is omitted altogether, and the sleep act instead needs to be inferred from the enveloping dialogue. The momentum of the text therefore never ceases, as the narrative compresses the several hours of eventless sleep to the point of being excluded altogether.

Chapter 4

J R's Unsettled Place in Literary History, and a Tentative Legacy

Despite *J R*'s innovations, its singularity might very well prove to be nothing but an exception to Jameson's proposed norm. A survey of *J R*'s singular position by way of looking at comparable texts by kindred authors, precursors, and contemporaries alike is therefore warranted. Due to constraints in scope, and the necessity for close study as opposed to brief summaries of multiple texts, I will limit my discussion to selected texts by Jorge Luis Borges and Samuel Beckett, two of Gaddis's most influential precursors, as well as Thomas Pynchon, perhaps the most acclaimed postmodernist novelist. As opposed to Gaddis's legacy, Pynchon's influence is far-reaching and well-documented. I will investigate why this is, as well as their many similarities. The case study will focus on *Gravity's Rainbow*, his most acclaimed novel, if not the most acclaimed and well-known postmodernist novel overall. This novel is an intriguing foil to *J R*; while both novels thematize entropy and the collapse of metanarratives, *Gravity's Rainbow* is characterized by an omnipresent narrator, easing the navigability of the dialogue. This accessibility is undermined by the narrator's unreliability, a decidedly non-linear and disorienting narrative, a complex plot frequently interrupted by digressions and passages bordering on encyclopedic as well as a large cast of characters. The narrative voice, however, is contingent on the characters in focus, often approaching free indirect discourse, and, as with *J R*, the novel is characterized by a plurality of voices, albeit expressed differently.

Precursors: Beckett and Borges

Wiener addresses "the problem of the nature of genuine originality" (Wiener 1954, 118). He employs painting as an analogy, in that "as the art of perspective is one which, once mastered, rapidly loses its interest, the same thing that was great in the hands of its originators

is now at the disposal of every sentimental commercial artist who designs trade calendars" (Wiener 1954, 118-119). Gaddis's innovations have not yet been "mastered" by younger generations of writers, however, as "what has been said before may not be worth saying again; and the informative value of a painting or a piece of literature cannot be judged without knowing what it contains that is not easily available to the public in contemporary or earlier works." Furthermore, "It is only independent information which is even approximately additive. The derivative information of the second-rate copyist is far from independent of what has gone before. Thus the conventional love story" (Wiener 1954, 119). No matter the innovations, a widely disseminated text will eventually lose some potency, as "even in the great classics of literature and art, much of the obvious informative value has gone out of them, merely by the fact that the public has become acquainted with their contents" (Wiener 1954, 119). Addressing originality is as seen a tricky endeavor, and, as will be seen, *J R* has some kindred texts, although often in unexpected subgenres.

Keeping in mind that theater entails text as well, a brief discussion of Beckett, another writer straddling the vague line between modernism and postmodernism, is warranted. *J R*'s resemblance to a theater script has been noted by several critics. Tim Conley describes "engaging novels like Gaddis's" as

> a rigorous exercise in regularly shifting focus, rather like what one faces when confronted with the conflation of monologue and stage directions within the pages of Beckett's *Happy Days* and or *Krapp's Last Tape;* or, perhaps more apt an analogy, like viewing the films of Robert Altman. Unattributed stammerings, the verbal equivalent of a bumper car rally, are only occasionally spliced by deft, quickly descending flights of description. (Conley 2003, 528)

The link to Beckett's plays is not further explored by Conley despite this being a pertinent observation. This play has some striking similarities to *J R.* As opposed to most films and novels, "theater *is* about dialogue" (McElroy 2007, 65), as argued by McElroy. *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958), like *J R*, consists of one single act, as opposed to *J R*'s lack of divisions of any kind. While *J R* has a wide cast of characters, however, *Krapp's Last Tape* is comprised of only one; namely, the titular Krapp. Lastly, where *J R*'s numerous subplots sprawl throughout the New York metropolitan area, *Krapp's Last Tape* is confined to Krapp's unfurnished room. The play concerns Krapp, a decrepit old man who listens to tape recordings of himself delivering monologues in a diaristic fashion. The mise-en-scène in Beckett's play is

characteristically minimalistic, and consists of little else than a table, a chair, and a tape recorder, with Krapp alternating between sitting on the chair and walking around the stage listening to the tapes and actively interrupting the monologues with comments. Nevertheless, the effect is entirely different when the play is read rather than watched performed on stage. In this case the text resembles a dialogue between Krapp and his younger selves, while the stage directions mirror the prose poems in *J R.* This unique form of dialogue reflects the discursive power of a text as opposed to the enactment of a text while epitomizing McElroy's assessment that "theater *is* about dialogue" (McElroy 2007, 65). Texts like *J R* and *Krapp's Last Tape* have the ability to flatten the dimensions of dialogue in a positive sense in that, stripping the lines of dialogue of color, explicitly highlights the links between words and sentences which might otherwise be obscured, not heard, ignored, or misunderstood. As with the very title of *Agapē Agape* (note the diacritic), "a resonant linguistic pun that lays bare the gaps between the real and the fake" (Wutz 2007, 205), the texts highlights artistic ideas intrinsic to the text format and invisible in other media. Furthermore, "The encryption behind *Agapē Agape* itself urges an attentive reader to collaborate in the slippery processes of signification. Meaning making" (i.e., signification) "in this 'multidimensional space' does not accrue automatically, but is subsumed in an unending flow of sentences without paragraphs and few punctuation marks" (Wutz 2007, 205-206), as is the case in *J R*, with the crucial difference that *Agapē Agape* is the voice of one person as opposed to the plethora of voices in *J R.*

The notion of "voice" is more complex in a staging of *Krapp's Last Tape*, in which the voice of the Krapp present on stage might be portrayed as different from that of his younger self as it appears in the recordings by way of a lighter timbre, thereby reflecting his younger age, or by being colored by tape hiss and asperity. The most striking change, however, is the monologue's voice not being given a "face". This is all obscured when confronted with the text alone. Analogous to the interactivity of hypertext, the presentation of Beckett's script lends the reader freedom to leaf back and forth through the pages in search of evidence. By extension this interactivity applies to plays as written texts in general, but rarely as self-consciously and successfully as in *Krapp's Last Tape.* As this play's implications are due to inherent qualities of drama, I argue that *J R* adopts this style successfully to even greater effect as *J R* is solely meant to be read. Like a film adaptation, an audio book adaptation is, while at least more manageable than a film adaptation, to the detriment of the inherent qualities of *J R*'s novelty. *J R* explores the essence of communication and the resulting

entropy that inevitably ensues and the symbiotic relationship between the author, reader, and text in the creation of the finalized artwork. Tone of voice, inflections and even established tempo or pulse obscures this crucial point. With the advent of internet as well as the linear format of the novel in book form the traditional novel is redundant, and Gaddis embraces this new manner of reading, decades before digital literature, perhaps Gaddis's leading lineage, would assume prominence.

This lineage does not start with Gaddis, however, nor does it originate in the U.S. It is once again necessary to look beyond the traditional novel form for kindred texts, with the short stories of Argentinian Jorge Luis Borges being particularly relevant. "The Garden of Forking Paths" (1941), "The Library of Babel" (1941), and "The Book of Sand" (1975) are all but a few of several comparable short stories, all of which have been compared to hypertext, with the first being considered one of the main inspirations for the very concept. In it, the protagonist searches for a legendary labyrinth rumored to be built by his enigmatic ancestor Ts'ui Pen. The labyrinth is not to be found until it is revealed that Pen's ambitions to "construct a labyrinth" merged with his plans to "write a book" and "construct a labyrinth." While "everyone pictured two projects," in reality the "book and labyrinth were one and the same" (Borges 1999, 124). This analogy exemplifies the potential of postmodern novels. The popularization of film has liberated the novel from linear plots into the exploration of the creative potentials of semiotics and textuality itself, which is explored more explicitly in the following passage:

> I know that of all problems, none disturbed him, none gnawed at him like the unfathomable problem of time. How strange, then, that that problem should be the *only* one that does not figure in the pages of his *Garden*. He never even uses the word How do you explain that wilful omission?'
>
> I proposed several solutions-all unsatisfactory. We discussed them; finally, Stephen Albert said:
>
> 'In a riddle whose answer is chess, what is the only word that must not be used?'
>
> I thought for a moment. 'The word 'chess',' I replied.
>
> 'Exactly,' Albert said. (Borges 1999, 126)

This passage thematizes the perceived difficulty of the experimental postmodern novel while evoking the general absence of attributes in novels like *J R.* The narrator is "the great-

grandson of that Ts'ui Pen who was governor of Yunan province and who renounced all temporal power in order to write a novel containing more characters than the *Hung Lu Meng* and construct a labyrinth in which all men would lose their way" (Borges 1999, 122). Ts'ui Pen mirrors the artists in *J R,* particularly Schramm, "a man learned in astronomy, astrology, and the unwearying interpretation of canonical books, a chess player, a renowned poet and calligrapher-he abandoned it all in order to composed a book and a labyrinth" (Borges 1999, 124). Reminiscent of the disorderly estate of Schramm, "upon his death, his heirs found nothing but chaotic manuscripts" (Borges 1999, 124). The worth of his endeavors is called into question, like the artist's disillusionment in *J R*: "It was senseless to publish those manuscripts. The book is a contradictory jumble of irresolute drafts" (Borges 1999, 124). Mirroring Gibbs's failed attempt to complete his encyclopedic novel, the library in the garden of forking paths contains a "lost Encyclopedia compiled by the third emperor of the Luminous Dynasty but never printed" (Borges 1999, 123). Nevertheless, like "Pierre Menard, Author of the *Quixote*" or "On Exactitude in Science," the encyclopedias live on, if only by virtue of being written about.

Case Study: Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*

When discussing *J R*'s lineage, or lack thereof, discussion on Thomas Pynchon is unavoidable. Despite (or perhaps augmented by the allure of) his reclusiveness, Pynchon remains the most acclaimed and enduring postmodernist novelist. Pynchon is one of the few postmodernist writers discussed in Jameson's essay, being alluded to on the very first page. As described by the authors of *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Pynchon* (2012),

> It is impossible to conceive of postmodernism in literature without reference to Pynchon's fiction. Canonized in the 1980s as the foremost American postmodernist mainly on the strength of his two most celebrated novels - *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966) and *Gravity's Rainbow* - he has become a staple of academic reading lists dealing with the period. (Dalsgaard, Herman, and McHale 2012, 1)

For many scholars and the general reading public alike, Pynchon's oft-touted "magnum opus" *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) is the leading high postmodern novel, considered "the highpoint of Pynchon's career, by almost universal consensus" (Dalsgaard, Herman, and McHale 2012, 4). While Dalsgaard, Herman, and McHale noted Pynchon's "'cult' status" (Dalsgaard, Herman, and McHale 2012, 1), Tabbi coined the term "Pyndustry" (Tabbi 2002, 37) to refer to the increasingly vast scholarship—for a postmodernist author—on Pynchon's work. Although Pynchon's notorious seclusion prevents insight into his association with Gaddis, some similarities between the two writers are striking; Thomas Pynchon was indeed for a time rumored to be a pen name devised by Gaddis. Their respective texts at hand; namely, *J R* and *Gravity's Rainbow*, have many key differences, however, most obviously in terms of form. Despite assuming a more forgiving form than Gaddis's unrelenting dialogue, Pynchon's books are also regarded as "notoriously difficult," although "the creation of meaning is communal . . . and Pynchon seeks community with his readers" (Dalsgaard, Herman, and McHale 2012, 7). With Pynchon's "refusal to make himself publicly available," "we, his readers, can make up our own minds, free of 'authoritative' pronouncements and directives" (Dalsgaard, Herman, and McHale 2012, 8). As a result, while the narrator is omnipresent in this novel as opposed to in *J R*, Pynchon himself is, in contrast to Gaddis (who while by no means exhibitionistic granted interviews and several portraits and even a filmed interview is in circulation), totally absent as an author otherwise, something that has the effect of distancing the narrative voice. These qualities reveal a symmetry in the comparison between the two authors; while Gaddis strived in vain for public acclaim, the narrative voice, which otherwise might serve as an outlet for the author's sentiments, is largely absent. The inverse is true for Pynchon.

Foregoing the unattributed dialogue in *J R, Gravity's Rainbow* is composed of long narrative passages in which the dialogue is consistently attributed in a traditional manner. However, while *J R*'s style is generally more demanding, the overarching plot about J R Corp's rise and fall is easily established. This is not the case in *Gravity's Rainbow,* and it is hard to pen a satisfactory summary. Like *J R,* the novel is darkly humorous, but in a less subtle fashion, with explicit descriptions of taboo sexual behavior and graphic violence, both underdeveloped devices in *J R*. Several of the lengthy passages are encyclopedic in style. The plot predominantly concerns the exploits of U.S. Army lieutenant Tyrone Slothrop (note the clever quasi-acronym referring to the second law of thermodynamics, clever names being a hallmark of Pynchon's style) during World War II, who serves as a tentative protagonist.

Slothrop was subjected to a Pavlovian experiment as a child in which his penis was conditioned to erect whenever a V-2 rocket launches. As a result, he has erections a few days before the rocket falls, predicting the impact. Slothrop, being a philanderer, assumes sexual relations with several women throughout London, where he is stationed in the first part of the novel, with the outcome being that the homes of his partners end up being impact sites. A secret intelligence is aware of this and keeps him under surveillance, with him eventually realizing the implications himself. His quest for illumination regarding this dubious talent is combined with him being stationed throughout wartime Europe, and his narrative is juxtaposed with several intertwining storylines and characters that go well beyond the scope of a short summary in this limited context. The novel has elements of science fiction, with the V-2 rocket being a leading theme; the very title of the novel refers to the parabolic trajectory of the rocket. Although Pynchon is "rarely classified as a science fiction writer" (Dalsgaard 2012, 156), according to Inger H. Dalsgaard, the numerous science fiction tropes are decisive attributes for those classifying him as the archetypal postmodernist writer, as, according to David Cowart, "Much of his originality – and much of what makes him postmodern – reveals itself in his ironic appropriation of tropes endemic to formula fiction" (Cowart 2012, 85). Furthermore, "His pastiche style embraces such 'low' material as much as it does high art" (Cowart 2012, 85) This "pastiche style" furthers the distance between the reader and the text, with the reader having to constantly update expectations, if not inducing a sense of paranoia due to the density of unlikely coincidences and interconnected storylines throughout the plot.

The theme of paranoia, the leading theme in Pynchon's oeuvre, is "an instance of the 'cognitive mapping' that Jameson has described as meaningful resistance against the disorientation of the individual in late capitalism" (Dalsgaard, Herman, and McHale 2012, 6). Likewise, Amy J. Elias argues, building on Jameson, that "the central logic of postmodernist art is paranoia" (Elias 2012, 126). Paranoia and conspiracy theory are what Jameson considers "'degraded attempts' at cognitive mapping, distracting and deflecting us from recognizing our true situation" (McHale 2012, 109), ruminations that double as fitting descriptions of the map detailing London impact sites in *Gravity's Rainbow*. McHale goes on to argue that "the complex spatialities of Pynchon's texts"; namely, "their proliferation of worlds, lateral and alternative, their paradoxes and short-circuits, their doubtful, shimmering, on-again off-again realities . . . imply different, more constructive possibilities of cognitive mapping" (McHale 2012, 109). Related to the theme of paranoia is the depiction of Pavlovian reflexes by way of Edward Pointsman's investigation into the relation between Pynchon's tryst pattern and the

V-2 impact sites. Pavlov is referenced to in *J R* as well but is not thematized to the same degree as in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Pointsman's "very name (a manual operator of railway lines) suggests mechanism," but "the general importance of Pavlov in the novel is to focus the many references to measuring and controlling human behavior" (Seed 2012, 115). Like *J R*, the novel is self-consciously "writerly". In an exchange between Roger Mexico and Pirate Prentice, the former initializes a sentence with "Ah. Prentice" (Pynchon 2000, 39). When spoken, these two words are clearly differentiated by the intonation of the voice, but the collocation is not incidental in writing, suggesting the word "apprentice," which Mexico utters to put Prentice in place, enforcing his assumed superiority while inviting paranoid reading and rewarding the reader for noting the coincidences.

Paranoia and conspiracy theory are readily seen as means to alleviate the effects of entropy in face of information excess. Entropy is another leading theme throughout Pynchon's oeuvre, most explicitly in his short story "Entropy" (1960), one of his earliest published works, which he later disowned. In this instance, protagonist Meatball Mulligan's apartment serves as a "closed system," as opposed to the neighboring apartment that resembles an "open system," and his party, with its increasing number of guests, serves as an allegory for the entropic process. Mulligan assumes the role of Maxwell's demon, "who attempts to lower entropy in defiance of the second law of thermodynamics" (Dalsgaard 2012, 160). His function as a "sorting demon is the point at which the two distinct forms of entropy become connected rather than merely coincidentally alike; entropy consequently becomes a metaphor made 'objectively true' by that demon" (Dalsgaard 2012, 161). The utilization of an apartment as an allegory for entropy resembles the artists' shared studio in *J R*, outlined in the first chapter of this thesis, but in this instance the chaos depicted reflects the disorder in general communication rather than the struggle to create art. In contrast to *J R*, "Entropy" is narrated by an active narrator, who frequently intervenes with narrative passages and attributes to the dialogue. The increasing disorder of the party resembles the "closed system" of Bast's and Gibbs's office. Nevertheless, here entropy is relegated to plot only, with no experimental attempts to express the disorder by way of form. Entropy figures again in his first novel, *V* (1963), a novel with close ties to *Gravity's Rainbow*, most explicitly with the character Pig Bodine occurring in both novels. Here entropy is evoked in the communication breakdown between the characters, an obvious similarity to the fragmented dialogue in *J R*. In Pynchon's sophomore novel *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), the last text to be published before *Gravity's Rainbow*, "Maxwell's demon" is again thematized by way of protagonist Oedipa's

(another intertextual, symbolically potent name) attempts to investigate a conspiracy theory regarding two competing mail distribution companies, with Pynchon this time appropriating mystery fiction as his "low" narrative mode of choice.

Gravity's Rainbow is more subtle in its stylistic experimentation, particularly in comparison with *J R*'s immediately evident dense style. Dalsgaard notes how "the presence and function of the rocket in *Gravity's Rainbow* transcend this movement from technological object to narrative device, in part because of the central position and proliferation of references to rocketry in the novel" (Dalsgaard 2012, 161). Furthermore, "The search for the rocket certainly propels the plot of *Gravity's Rainbow*" (Dalsgaard 2012, 161). While frequently derailed by competing subplots, the search for the mysterious rocket with the serial number "00000" is the main quest of the novel. Nevertheless, the novel's form adheres more to the traditional novel form than *J R* and, despite its complex plot, is narrated in an explicitly literate style, as evinced in the opening lines: "A screaming comes across the sky. It has happened before, but there is nothing to compare it to now" (Pynchon 2000, 3), considered as "certainly the most celebrated opening sentence in twentieth-century US fiction" (Dalsgaard, Herman and McHale 2012, 1) by the authors of *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Pynchon* (2012). Whereas *J R* is relentlessly stringent in form, Pynchon's style is multifaceted in a way that resembles the individual style of the chapters in *Ulysses* more than contemporaries DeLillo or McElroy. Differing from Gaddis's, Pynchon's style "[shapeshifts] in step with an age still confused about authority, referentiality in the sign, and the distinction between story and history" (Cowart 2012, 94-95). These features reveal "the genius" of postmodernism, which "may lie in its ability to alternate . . . between the marginal and the mainstream" (Cowart 2012, 94). Pynchon's style is "by turns comic, satiric, ironic and romantic" as "he effortlessly shifts . . . between lyric and epic expression" (Cowart 2012, 88). The narrator is omniscient and dominates the novel. In contrast to Gaddis's dialogue, here the dialogue is usually supplemented with attributes, as in this sample dialogue:

> 'Pssst, Joe,' he begins, 'hey, mister.'
> 'Not me,' replies Slothrop with his mouth full.
> 'You interested in some L.S.D.?'
> 'That stands for pounds, shillings, and pence. You got the wrong café, Ace.'
> 'I think I've got the wrong country,' Schweitar a little mournful. 'I'm from Sandoz.'

‘Aha, Sandoz!’ cries Slothrop, and pulls out a chair for the fella. (Pynchon 2000, 310)

This passage reveals Pynchon’s comedic talent and his tendency of matching the narrative voice with the idiomatic style of the characters, in this sample assuming a colloquial tone (“pulls out a chair for the fella”) while addressing the countercultural themes (“You interested in some L.S.D.?”) that proliferate throughout his oeuvre. The most pertinent aspect of Pynchon’s style to this discussion is not to be found in the form, however. As noted earlier when discussing the V-2 rocket as a unifying element, science is an overarching theme in the novel. The significance of this rocket as a theme warrants closer attention. Alan J. Friedman and Manfred Puetz, in their essay on science as a metaphor, offer an illuminating take on the role of life in face of entropy: “While the general tendency of physical processes is towards increasing disorder, twentieth-century biophysics has realized that life violates this pattern. We grow from a few molecular cells, increasing in complexity and order, adding atoms from potato fields, the ocean depths, and the earth itself” (Friedman and Putz 1974, 346). The key point of this passage is the significance of life as a resistance to entropy. Furthermore, “of course, entropy will take over eventually, individuals will decay, die, and return to a disorganized scattering of atoms. . . . Yet life continues to go against the general flow, even after the individual disintegrates” (Friedman and Putz 1974, 346). These remarks relate to the rocket theme, as “the essential pattern of life, from dust to order to dust, is echoed in the title image of the novel: gravity's rainbow, the parabolic path that gravity imposes on the V2 rocket” (Friedman and Putz 1974, 346). Entropy is also present in the way “the rocket, too, starts as a disordered scattering of atoms, from iron in the mountains to alcohol latent in potatoes. Man begins to reduce the entropy of those collected atoms, assembling them in one place, arranging them to take on technological life” (Friedman and Putz 1974, 397). The rocket symbolizes man’s inherent desire to resist entropy and to create as a means to subvert its effects. Whereas the reader is invited to construct the narrative of *J R* in tandem with Gaddis, the process of creation is what is narrated in *Gravity’s Rainbow*. The parabolic trajectory of the rocket and its parallels in *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s form mirrors the trajectory of J R Corp. It is the reader’s job to “launch the rocket” by way of reading, thereby tracing J R’s rise and fall simultaneously. Dalsgaard calls attention to the fact that “as you seek out and identify elements of the fiction which illustrate the second law of thermodynamics, the very attempt to ‘sort’ is likely to make your interpretive efforts comply with the theory of entropy in the communications theory sense”, which states that “the more information you gather, that

is, the more noise is produced, and the less clear is the meaning of the text" (Dalsgaard 2012, 160). Furthermore, "A reader of Pynchon . . . often ends up enacting the very substance of the text itself, and this seems particularly true of some of the scientific ideas his writing appropriates" (Dalsgaard 2012, 160). Awareness of this network of scientific themes is in any case invaluable in approaching both *Gravity's Rainbow* and *J R*.

Foregoing "paranoid reading" for a moment and assessing the primary text's settings on a more global scale, a crucial difference comes to the fore. While *Gravity's Rainbow* presents a world in an advanced state of entropy; namely, Europe in wartime, *J R* concerns a local group at the brink of chaos. J R's young age is significant, as only a child, not yet faced with the gradual disintegration associated with aging, is naïve enough to subvert entropy. Nevertheless, *J R* responds to the collapse of his dynasty with indifference. The adult Bast, on the other hand, experiences a smaller rise and a considerably more devastating collapse. J R is able to see hope, as "the uncertainty principle means that no possibility can be ruled out, and that there is hope that nature's constant reshuffling will produce desirable new opportunities" (Friedman and Putz 1974, 353). This underlines capitalism's superlative ability for survival, and mirrors the subplot of Byron the Bulb, a sentient lightbulb, in *Gravity's Rainbow*¸ who "has been given not only life but by chance even immortality" (Friedman and Putz 1974, 353). What is evident in both *J R* and *Gravity's Rainbow* is that entropy is not inherently an evil force, and Friedman and Putz argue that

> order and chaos (and hence paranoia and antiparanoia) should not be seen as antagonists of the either/or type but as elements of one and the same universal movement. And without these elements there would be no such movement, no rainbow curve of existence, and no living universe for gravity to reign over. (Friedman and Putz 1974, 359)

Such a positive evaluation of entropy is applicable to *J R.* J R's enterprise leads to national havoc, a financial crisis, and the personal ruin of both minor and major characters in the novel. The disintegration of his empire is arguably for the best.

The dire influence of J R's actions is informed by the many voices present throughout the text. Despite lacking the radical style of *J R, Gravity's Rainbow* shares "the [assumption] that history always features a medley of voices" (Dalsgaard, Herman and McHale 2012, 6). Amy J. Elias discusses the declining influence of metanarratives in her essay on Pynchon's

relationship to history and contends that "to believe that history is a series of inevitable and indisputable facts that add up to a narrative of Western progress is, for Pynchon, both to standardize and to colonize history and to make it congenial to totalitarian, or just oppressively uniform, world views and seemingly determined ends" (Elias 2012, 123). Elias characterizes *Gravity's Rainbow* as one of his "historical novels," along with *Mason & Dixon* (1997) and *Against the Day* (2006), and identifies his "goal" as "not to produce historical realism but rather to imply a philosophy of history, or meditations on the nature of history itself" (Elias 2012, 124). Furthermore, he also contends that "history is polyvocal" (Elias 2012, 124). All this relates to the qualities of *J R*'s form, which resembles how "history makes stories out of accumulated facts and chronological listings of events." Identifying another resemblance, he notes how "the stories that history tells, like all stories, depend upon 'emplotment,' which turns facts and chronicles into historical narratives" (Elias 2012, 131). "Emplotment" accounts for the feasibility, if not the inevitability of the unreliable narrator as present in *Gravity's Rainbow*. An objective presentation of historical events is impossible, and Pynchon's narrative mode reflects this.

Such a representation necessitates an encyclopaedical style. Like Gaddis's texts, Pynchon's novels are also frequently labeled "encyclopedic," and "even relatively early in his career critics compared Pynchon to writers like Rabelais, Swift and Melville" (Cowart 2012, 83). This conception of "encyclopedic" denotes "fictions in which an author undertakes to treat her or his culture comprehensively" (Cowart 2012, 89). This style "seduces the reader with the promise of something like the big picture: read this book and you'll understand the age and its enormities" (Cowart 2012, 89). This is characteristic of the reinvention of the novel in the vein of *J R.* No uniform narrative is able to express the totality of culture, and this postmodern experimentation, by way of multiple narrative styles in *Gravity's Rainbow* and disembodied dialogue in *J R* is an approximation of this impossibility and portrays it more accurately than the objectifying nature of narrative film (excluding non-narrative film in the vein of Stan Brakhage, which, like *J R*, transcends its medium). Pynchon's novels, like *The Recognitions* and, in a more subtle way, *J R*, consists of "elaborate quest plots, predicated on recursivity," yet, importantly, "none of Pynchon's novels ends with the grail possessed" (Cowart 2012, 89). In fact, all the three primary novels end in destruction: *The Recognitions* with the collapse of the cathedral, *J R* with the collapse of J R Corp and Bast's sanity and *Gravity's Rainbow* with the ambiguous (and possibly literal) disintegration of Slothrop. This underlines the impossibility of containing any semblance of totality in a novel, no matter how

lengthy, keeping in mind that among the novels discussed above, only *The Crying of Lot 49* is shorter than 700 pages.

The novels' conclusions are not uniformly bleak, however. Wyatt Gwyon ultimately experiences a revelation, and, in a world dominated by replicas, ends up striving for authenticity. J R is seemingly unfazed by his adversities, and immediately starts plotting a new scheme. The ending of *Gravity's Rainbow* is the most ambiguous, but it is assumed that parts of Slothrop continue to exist as an albatross, looking for a way to return to America. Cowart likens the way "the quest never ends" (Cowart 2012, 89) to Jacques Derrida's free-floating signifiers. Furthermore, satirical elements flourish as in *J R*, and "like Cervantes or Sterne or Joyce . . . , Pynchon takes naturally to grand, comedic visions of the culture that has shaped his imagination and sensibility" (Cowart 2012, 83). The literary allusions in his texts "reveal a remarkably wide breadth of reading, as well as a global sensibility and literary ambition," and he "refers, too, to a number of works that do not actually exist" (Cowart 2012, 85). These "faux-texts, however outrageous or bizarre, commend themselves to at least momentary plausibility" and "resemble the imaginary works" (Cowart 2012, 85-86) of the aforementioned Borges, a resemblance that also mirrors *J R.*

Despite these similarities, differences persist between the cinematic qualities of the two novels, which is best illustrated in the closing scene in *Gravity's Rainbow*. While the majority of the novel is divided into substantial chapters up to 200 pages in length (which nevertheless is a significant departure from *J R*, which is devoid of delimitation of any kind), all of which have (cryptic) titles and epigraphs, the divisions become increasingly frequent in line with the escalating action, culminating in page-long sections towards the end, resembling a montage-like assembly of short shots. The two closing sections are label "ASCENT" and "DESCENT", constituting a microcosm of the overarching form of the novel; namely, the parabolic trajectory of a V-2 rocket. Underlining this depiction of movement and resembling the abrupt shifts between sleep and wakefulness in *J R* in which hours of sleep are depicted by way of ellipsis, the "ASCENT" section closes with "*Now* –" (Pynchon 2000, 901). Suddenly the scene shifts to an "old theatre" (Pynchon 2000, 902). Mirroring the "ASCENT" section, the novel closes abruptly and obliquely with "Now everybody –" (Pynchon 2000, 902). Like the film watched by the unidentified narrator in the final section, "the last image was too immediate for any eye to register" (Pynchon 2000, 902). These passages are rich in suggestion, as the narrator disappears into the text, with the rocket hitting the roof of the theater, cutting him off mid-sentence. These stylistic choices embody an alternate take on the

inviting nature of *J R*. These passages, and indeed most of the book, are purposely oblique, encouraging multiple readings. This theatre setting seems to suggest that the entire novel is meant to resemble a film watched by the unnamed spectators the reader is briefly introduced to in the final pages. Simultaneously, the fact that this theater itself is hit by a rocket reflects the merging of the dimensions between an obscured narrator and the narrated content, with the act of reading the impossible transcript of this being yet another dimension. In this way Pynchon, in a manner quite different from Gaddis, reflects on the impossibility of a reliable narrator or narrative. The unidentified narrator in the closing passage notes how "the screen is a dim page spread before us, white and silent. The film has broken, or a projector bulb has burned out. It was difficult even for us, old fans who've always been at the movies (haven't we?) to tell which before the darkness swept in" (Pynchon 2000, 901-902). This passage serves as a meta-reflection on the modern reader being faced with a narrative. Like the film in question, *Gravity's Rainbow* presents "dim [pages] spread before us, white and silent" onto which readings are supplied by the reader. When confronting the fragmented nature of the text, "the film" (i.e., the narrative) appears "broken," to be reconstructed by the reader. While adhering to the traditional format of a novel, with a clear distinction between the narrative voice and dialogue, Pynchon approaches the medium with detached irony while, at least in some ways, providing an easier read. This partly accounts for Pynchon's sizable lineage as compared to Gaddis's.

The closing line discussed above, "Now everybody –" (Pynchon 2000, 902), also parallels the closing line of *J R*, "Hey? You listening …?" (Gaddis 2016, 726). Here the novel's conclusion is not instigated by the narrator but by the reader, who simply stops listening to (i.e., reading) J R's incessant ranting. Due to its conversational nature, with even the narrative voice being another participant, the text is intrinsically social and open, necessitating a reader for completion. *Gravity's Rainbow*, on the other hand, necessitates the narrator; this is indeed a narrative of narratives being narrated, no matter how obliquely. Likewise, *J R* opens with another question, "Money?" (Gaddis 2016, 3), and the impetus for the text is immediately established by an intriguing, universal theme and motivation. The abrupt closure of *J R* reflects the waning interest in its themes, which are exhausted in the aftermath of the destruction wrought by J R Corp. J R, being a child, does not know when to stop. His closing monologue to the unreceptive Bast concerns a new business venture ("So I mean listen I got this neat idea" (Gaddis 2016, 726)), to which Bast, like the reader, is justifiably skeptical too in light of the preceding adversities. This lays the groundwork for a

moribund narrative that is unreasonable to entertain. The implications of J R's new endeavor can be imagined, however, while the narrative in *Gravity's Rainbow* is forcibly, indeed violently, ended. The similarities between the two novels are not so much evident in execution as in the inferred intent. Whereas the multitude of possible readings of *J R* is established by all that is omitted, the possible readings of *Gravity's Rainbow* is established by all that is included, a maximalistic text in which little is certain, as established by the (possible, indeed underlining my point) twist ending which subverts the reader's accumulated evidence; the rocket descends on the theater in which Pynchon situates the reader, so to speak, thereby destroying the fundament of the reader's by now established cognitive mapping of the text.

Conclusion

This thesis has investigated the prospects for the continued relevance of the novel with particular emphasis on *J R* by William Gaddis. Despite *J R*'s radical reinvention of the novel it has not yet and may never inspire a school of proteges, not to mention a literary revolution. If Cowart's remark about Pynchon is to be accepted, in which he argues that his "place in literary history will depend, to some degree, on the achievement of those he inspires" (Cowart 2012, 94), this applies, unfavorably, to Gaddis as well, whose "place" is more precarious. However, "it will also depend on the long-term viability of the postmodern aesthetic [Pynchon] helped to found in 1963" (Cowart 2012, 94), innovations Gaddis equally warrants credit for despite Cowart neglecting him, although perhaps not for popularizing or representing, as is the case for Pynchon and the virtually disembodied mythos surrounding him. Gaddis's oeuvre, perennially ignored by the public and academia alike, may only be an exception to Jameson's rule, which, as a reminder, states that the postmodernist novel is largely irrelevant. In line with Jameson's argumentation, *J R* fails in reaching out to the various needs and expectations of a mass audience and remains the domain of the reading academia, inadvertently propagating the dated hierarchy of high and low art, its unfamiliar style attaining an excluding difficulty rather than the inviting solidarity it actually advocates.

If invested in, however, the novel invites a multitude of interpretations and implications on the democratization of knowledge and the dangers of capitalism. Close study of *J R* reveals its relation to several facets of postmodernist criticism, whether it's reader-response theory, experimental narratology, genre transgression, or the metafictional integration of extraliterary themes; notably, entropy, into the text. While none of these qualities are exclusive to *J R*, the novel exemplifies these experiments taken to their logical conclusion. With the novel being an aging format, this is a welcome evolution, albeit not an influential one, as noted above. Nevertheless, *J R* exemplifies the novel's continued relevance and possibility for experimentation without surrendering readability, as well as the implications of intrinsically literary qualities that might be taken for granted in the conventional novel style.

The absence of a traditional narrative voice results in a text composed of "evidence," readily available to be parsed by the active reader. The plurality of voices in the text reflect

the decreasing relevance and increasing infeasibility of the authority of monophonic, introverted novels. *J R* also demonstrates the potential for audience participation in the creation of art, as opposed to in cinema, where the images are premediated by the director. In this novel, the reader is forced to engage in creating said "images," which will inevitably be colored by the individual reader's personal taste, experience, and agenda. The simultaneous study of narratology and the declining faith in metanarratives in this thesis has revealed two competing qualities of this text; while an overarching plot about the collapse of a capitalist dynasty is evident in the text, the removal of an authoritative narrator permits the reader to decode the text at will and fill in the gaps, so to speak. The reader is thereby forced to "map" the plot. By navigating through the text by way of detecting clues in the dialogue, a rich language system is revealed, as exemplified by the volatile, unhinged style of Gibbs, or J R's juvenile slang. Moreover, the integration of transcripts from television, intercoms, and phone calls mirrors the difficulty of dealing with information overload in modern day-to-day life. These different means of communication are granted the same level of importance in the text, encouraging the reader to balance essential and inessential information alike, establishing a narrative based on whatever "evidence" is found, granted that it is present. The capitalist satire is a universal constant in the narrative, but the numerous subplots and implications elsewhere in the text are subject to debate.

With the implications above in mind, the prose poems assume an interesting position. Where the traditional narrative voice generally assists the reader by way of filling in gaps as well as by descriptive passages outlining scenes and episodes, Gaddis foregoes these amenities in *J R*. Here the narrative voice rarely supplies the reader with description, instead virtually being just another voice. The narrative voice never reveals the internal impressions of the characters as is common in the traditional novel, instead assuming an object-oriented perspective that focuses on movement and empirical data to move from scene to scene, resembling a camera shifting its focus from point to point in a single unbroken shot. This is the figurative camera of a documentarian filming direct cinema (as opposed to cinéma vérité), trying to capture the scenes at hand as unbiased as possible. While the plot concerning the rise and fall of 11-year old J R Vansant's capitalist venture is outlined, its implications, whether Marxist, feminist, or poststructuralist, are contingent on observations and connections made by each individual reader.

Entropy, a theme noted by most critics independently of ideology, is successfully integrated and thematized in *J R* without being ostentatious. Besides being frequently

discussed by teacher Jack Gibbs as he observes how entropy disturbs his daily life, the leading plotline of the novel; namely, J R Corp's rise and fall is itself subject to entropy, while the subplots concerning each individual character and the fashion in which they are presented and intertwined are themselves subject to increasing disorder. Most crucially in this context, the chaotic style of the text subjects the reader to entropy as well. The increasing number of voices and plotlines breed disorder, forcing the reader to parse the information to his best abilities. The overflow of information mirrors the daily endeavor of decoding information in contemporaneity. This decoding process engaged by the experiencer is stunted in cinema, where images are premediated. Here the reader must create images and establish a narrative individually with the result being assumed to be different from reader to reader as well as from reading to reading. Due to this singular style, a transdisciplinary approach is justified. By Gaddis's own admission, key similarities to film are present throughout the novel, but this thesis has prioritized investigating the novel's decidedly non-cinematic qualities; that is, what makes this an unfilmable text that would collapse in a hypothetical film adaptation. The opposite approach justifies a separate study. While Jameson advocates film as the preeminent postmodernist artform, this thesis has tried to identify certain qualities of postmodernist literature that no other medium would be able to adopt. Most importantly, *J R* exemplifies the novel's intrinsic quality of involving the experiencer in creating the artwork. This is intensified by the removal of attributes describing the characters and scenes, attributes which are generally open to interpretation in novels written in the traditional style. This is a necessity in the contemporary climate in which traditional authorial metanarratives are redundant, resulting in an art form more democratic than cinema.

At several times throughout the novel, Gaddis enacts a Derridean "play of signifiers" contingent on a literary medium. Besides integration of foreign languages and symbols, given names are especially liable to be subverted, misspoken, and most intriguingly, misspelled despite not exerting any audible difference. This play of words is introduced already in the opening section, in which the lawyer's name, Coen, is misspelled "Cohen" by the Bast aunts despite him consistently stressing that it's spelled "Coen". These two variants are homophones, but the implications of this, as entertained in this episode's section in this thesis, are open to debate for the individual reader. Likewise, due to the absence of attributes, the implications of virtually every sentence is open to scrutiny and debate, at some points even concerning who is speaking. In a film adaptation, the speaker, intention, and at least voice, or perhaps even tone of voice and the intended speech act is readily identified. This is not self-

evident in novel form, especially not in novels of this particular style. This objectiveness of the written word serves to underline the ambiguity of the words and sentences, and how they can be manipulated and twisted to serve certain ends. The dialogue in *J R* is fraught with misunderstandings and inability of self-expression, doubly underlined by the lack of insight into the internal life of the characters and the excluding duality of characters that are either oblivious or frustrated.

Parallel to Gaddis lasting, perennial obscurity, Thomas Pynchon's stature continues to rise, despite persistent and successful attempts to maintain his privacy to the point of being (wrongly, but understandably) labeled a recluse, in direct contrast to Gaddis's willing, but unreciprocated invitations to attain public interest. It is tempting to present a flawed summarization according to which Gaddis was present in person and absent in his writing (at least in *J R*), while Pynchon is absent in person and present in his novels, but as seen in the final chapter above, this is only partly true. As we have seen, Pynchon's key work *Gravity's Rainbow* entertains many of the same themes and implications as *J R*, but by wholly different means. While by no means an easy read, the utilization of a narrator and relatively orderly dialogue with identifiable speakers facilitate the ease of reading. With that said, *J R* is not necessarily more difficult to read; rather, the unconventional style remains foreign to most readers, and an illusion of impenetrability, as propagated by the likes of Jonathan Franzen, is established. While the lack of attributes is often disorienting, the plot is fairly linear and clear-cut, and Gaddis is never intentionally obscure; who is speaking and what is said can almost always be derived from the dialogue if the reader is attuned to the hints and characteristic speech styles of the characters. In this way Gaddis avoids the trappings of the subjective interruptions of a narrative voice. Unlike Pynchon's free indirect discourse, Gaddis dialogue is presented without context and reads as a transcript of real-life speech, with frequent interjections, interruptions, overlapping, fragmented sentences, and generally ungrammatical, colloquial language which varies in time with the level of education, confidence, age, and background of the individual speaker.

Additionally, the few well-known writers who are indebted to Gaddis remain marginalized and are often reduced to idiosyncratic outliers. In lack of obvious successors among novelists, attention must be allotted elsewhere. The interdisciplinary possibilities of literature would be developed by digital artists. Electronic literature, still evolving at a rapid pace, might be the most feasible progression of Gaddis's legacy, direct or indirect. With the continued redundancy of the physical book, electronic literature will inevitably be a field for

experimentation, innovation, and the evolution of Gaddis's distinct postmodernist style. Jameson fails to acknowledge the interdisciplinary possibilities of literature, and the postmodernist novel's facility for meditations on the daily abundance of excess information, its consequences, and the miscommunication this inevitably entails. While Gaddis remains largely unread and unrecognized by the general public, his influence has disseminated to untold reaches of literature, something which is to be expected in an art milieu no longer dictated by a single dominant narrative.

In the last decade of Gaddis's life, the dense, unwieldy postmodernist novel again came to the fore, perhaps for the last time. Although David Foster Wallace rejected esoteric postmodern fiction in several interviews, his magnum opus *Infinite Jest* is obviously molded in the virtuosic tradition of the encyclopedic novel. This novel is notable for its extensive use of endnotes; almost 400 in total, the endnotes often span several pages, and some even contain footnotes themselves. While many of these endnotes are seemingly inessential, they are nevertheless intended to be a part of the reading experience. As opposed to the linearity of *J R*, the endnotes are often disruptive, forcing the reader to jump back and forth between pages. Moreover, the novel contains extensive narrative passages in which the dialogue is downplayed or absent altogether. Nevertheless, some key similarities to *J R* warrants mention. Like *J R*, the novel is maximalistic, again as a means to reflect modern information excess. While David Foster Wallace has been established as something of a literary icon of Generation X, it is his colleague and personal friend Jonathan Franzen that has proved to be the most influential writer of the two—thereby indirectly negating the lineage of Gaddis—and Wallace, like Gaddis, is at worst reduced to a mere litmus test for ambitious college graduates.

In looking for *J R*'s legacy, contemporary novelists, at least novelists in the traditional sense, might not be Gaddis's most obvious heirs. Digital literature is by now a thriving field. Jason Nelson, fittingly a specialist on Cyberstudies, is one of the more prominent artists working in the field. Developing the hypertextual quality of *Infinite Jest* in a literate sense, Nelson's interdisciplinary approach merges poetry and digital art, most curiously by way of interactive games. In *Game, Game, Game And Again Game* (2007), Nelson merges an interactive poem with primitive platformer and point-and-click mechanics presented in intentionally poor aesthetics developed by way of rudimentary programming. The poem is ostensibly about the dominant belief systems throughout Western history. As you progress through the levels, the poem gradually reveals itself, with some parts only accessible by

clicking on certain items on the screen. As in *J R*, comprehension demands consistent involvement with the work. The lines of the poem are placed seemingly randomly on the screen, and it is hard to establish a linear narrative throughout. Additionally, named, clickable buttons assume the same level of importance on the screen, and it is unclear whether this should be accepted as parts of the poem or not. The similarities to *J R* are striking in this regard and brings to mind the fashion in which Gaddis interweaves the spoken words on television and intercoms with the dialogue between the characters, granting everything the same level of attention. Occasionally, short clips of Nelson's personal childhood footage are attached, accessed by clicking on a button which opens a playable video file. Gaddis's influence on digital literature is a fertile point of discussion that calls for a thesis on its own.

As seen, the implications of *J R*'s style consistently invites additional transdisciplinary study well beyond the limitations of this thesis, particularly into the novel's similarities and differences to cinema, and what this reveals about the possibilities and limitations of the contemporaneous novel. With future studies in mind, this thesis can remain as an introductory survey on the strictly literary qualities of *J R.* Although *J R* most evidently experiments with the absence of a traditional narrator and the predominance of dialogue, experiments with different variables are feasible and are indeed experimented with in novel ways. Such is the case for *Gravity's Rainbow*. Here the narrative voice is present throughout at the expense of dialogue, but unlike the prior experiments of modernists in which the reliability of narrators were frequently called into question, Pynchon's experiments entails a metafictional element in which the possibility of narrating any event, in this case the historiography surrounding the Second World War, is contested. The fact that we are reading a fictional narrative is present throughout, and everything contained is subject to debate. This is a crucial admission necessary to facilitate "relevance" among novelists. The much debated but dubious and inadequately titled genre *virkelighetslitteratur* ("reality fiction") dominating the literary scene in Norway, which is most notably associated with writers such as Karl Ove Knausgård and Vigdis Hjorth, comes to mind, and an intriguing potential study on the merits of approaching literature with primary emphasis on biographical details presents itself. This term has implications for the contrived and faulty over-emphasis on the author, which Pynchon wisely avoids but unfortunately and ironically propagates by way of his almost mythical image. Gaddis worked at a curious intersection between the celebrated "geniuses" of Modernism, with the likes of Joyce, Woolf, and Proust, and the reserved personas of and muted public reception granted to the leading postmodernist authors. *The Recognitions* is characterized by

youthful ambition, and Gaddis's stunted aspirations for acclaim are often evident in his virtuous, sometimes ostentatious language. It is unfortunate that *The Recognitions* remains Gaddis's most well-known work. This, as well as the acclaim of Pynchon, reflects, perhaps, the reader's reliance on the traditional narrator and the stagnation of the medium as well as the subsistence of the novel as a museum piece rather than a dynamic, thriving artform. Experimental novels are shunned as "unreadable" and "difficult" (by the likes of regressive Jonathan Franzen), ironically labeled "irrelevant" (by the likes of Jameson), and at best relegated to correspondingly "irrelevant" theses such as the present one. As follows, the thesis comes full circle. The latent potential of the "relevant" novel will always be present, but literary trends cannot (and should not!) be enforced and subjected to normative rules. If evolutionary stasis is inevitable, and as long as the concept of a literary canon is propagated, texts in the vein of *J R* will always be there for new readings and re-readings, always evolving in line with an equally evolving readership. As the many schools of literary criticism illustrate, a text is never truly static, it can always be read in a different manner. As such it is the reader that has the power to reinvent the novel; not the author.

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