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Reading Economic Disposability: The Function(s) of Waste in Literary Systems of Exchange

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READING ECONOMIC DISPOSABILITY:

THE FUNCTION(S) OF WASTE IN LITERARY SYSTEMS OF EXCHANGE

by

ANDREW LINDQUIST

B.A., SUNY Fredonia, 2010

A thesis submitted to the

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Reading Economic Disposability: The Function(s) of Waste

In Literary Systems of Exchange

has been approved for the Department of English

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The final copy of this thesis has been examined by the signatories, and we find that both the content and the form meet acceptable presentation standards of scholarly work in the above mentioned discipline.

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Despite the attention paid by economists and journalists to the abundance of material garbage in recent years, few conceptual understandings of the term “waste” as a socio-economic function are offered in economic discourse. Essentially, waste is treated as the unwanted-but-inevitable byproduct of otherwise beneficial productive processes. But as a few scholars, authors and general critics of the capitalist world economy have implied, the increasing production of waste and garbage (in both material and social senses) over the past century is not simply an inevitable and unfortunate side effect of a capitalist mode of production but in fact its primary operating logic. As a thorough examination of the development of capitalism into what Immanuel Wallerstein has termed a “world-system” demonstrates, the primacy of capital accumulation, one of the essential principles of contemporary capitalist production, is accompanied by a complementary logic of disposability. Any solutions to or methods of ameliorating the ceaseless production of waste provided by contemporary economists are thus formed upon these very principles. The purpose of this study is to evaluate the economic systems inscribed in the novels of William Gaddis, Thomas Pynchon and Eric Gansworth, and to examine the convergences and divergences between these systems and those articulated within the discourse of contemporary economics. In *J R*, *Gravity’s Rainbow* and *Smoke Dancing*, Gaddis, Pynchon and Gansworth each construct, critique and satirize capitalist economic models, particularly insofar as each author’s model is driven by such a logic of disposability. In so doing, the authors in turn confront the global system of the production and dissemination of literature, constituting a “world-system” in and of itself. The inherence of disposability within the logic of capitalism, made so clear by each of these authors, demonstrates the significance (and, indeed, the urgency) of establishing alternative frameworks of economic discourse. I argue, then, that works of literature can (and do) play fundamental roles in discussions on contemporary and historical economics.
To Molly, for everything,

and to my mother.
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Chapter 1

An Introduction to Capitalism’s Contradictory Logic of Disposability

In the summer of 2012, the World Bank issued a report that pointed to a “looming crisis” in the management of industrial and consumer garbage.¹ The report, aptly titled “What a Waste: A Global Review of Solid Waste Management,” presented, for the first time, consolidated and quantitative information on the world’s waste management industries and practices.² According to the report, the “looming crisis” is made apparent as the exponential increase in the amount of waste produced in the world’s cities—the World Bank predicts a 70% increase in waste volume by 2025—is paralleled by a simultaneous increase in the cost of waste management methods—estimated to increase from an annual $205 billion today to $375 billion in 2025.³ The authors of the report emphasize the primacy of the waste management industry in the development of prosperous cities: “The report notes that municipal solid waste management [MSW] is the most important service a city provides. . . . A city that cannot effectively manage its waste is rarely able to manage more complex services such as health, education, or transportation. Improving MSW is one of the most effective ways of strengthening overall municipal management.”⁴ The

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² Ibid.
⁴ World Bank, “‘What a Waste.’”
authors thus emphasize the importance of recycling used material and improving the efficiency of waste management industries, arguing that “the old concept of ‘throwing away’ trash no longer works”: “In solid waste management, there is no ‘away.’”

The World Bank’s report thus formalizes what, in recent years, has been referred to as a growing “global garbage crisis.” Manifestations of this seemingly ever-looming crisis are numerous: in 2008, Silvio Berlusconi “declared waste a national crisis” in Italy, pressured by protests in Naples over the abject ubiquity of garbage in residential areas; after the 2011 revolution, Egyptians were confronted with increasingly abundant trash dumps in public spaces, an issue so pervasive that former Egyptian president Mohamed Morsi “vowed to tackle [it] . . . during his first 100 days in office”; India has been dealing with the dumping of industrial waste in low-income communities for decades, culminating in widespread protests in 2012; even Long Island, New York, only last year, experienced a garbage crisis, stemming from over-filled landfill sites. Each of these in turn can be traced back to the infamous Mobro Garbage Barge and its inability to find a suitable (and willing) site to dump its load. In 1987, the barge spent two months at sea seeking a dump site only to return, after being “[r]ejected by six states and three

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5 Ibid.
7 Ibid.
countries,” to its point of origin in Brooklyn.¹¹ In each manifestation, the circumstances appear remarkably similar: the amount of garbage being produced vastly exceeds the space necessary for its storage.

Yet while it is difficult to argue that the world currently faces a “garbage crisis” of sorts, the causes attributed to the problem and its proposed solutions are deeply problematic. The narrative of the “garbage crisis” constructed by both World Bank economists and journalists seems to be that the abundance of garbage—in the streets of Bangalore, the residential areas of Naples and, increasingly, in the world’s seas and oceans¹²—is a “problem” to be “tackled,” a puzzle to be solved, largely by improved consumption and recycling methods and with the help of ever-improving technology.¹³ As such, great emphasis is placed on improving the management of waste, after the fact of its production. Indeed, Sweden’s efficient waste management industry, which reuses the majority of its waste through recycling and “waste-to-energy” incineration processes, is consistently hailed as a model for other industries worldwide.¹⁴

¹² According to GlobalTrends.com, “seas are becoming the world’s largest garbage dump.” Today, it is estimated that “[o]ver 13,000 pieces of plastic litter” sit in “every square kilometer of ocean. . . .” GlobalTrends.com, “Talking Trash.”
¹³ The editorial staff at Newsday note that the temporary solution to Long Island’s garbage crisis involved using railways to transport the “backlog” of garbage; stating that this is only an immediate solution, the staff conclude: “we need to start developing a plan to address our long-term garbage disposal problems.” Bob Lillenfield, noted garbage scholar, offers the old mantra “Reduce, Reuse, Recycle” as a basic solution and in fact elevates the importance of using thin, lightweight plastic materials. The editors at GlobalTrends.com focus on raising awareness of the problem, closing their article with: “Waste not, want not. Time to rethink your recycling, packaging and consumption footprint.” NewsDay, “Long Island’s;” Bob Lillenfield, “From Crisis to Myth: The Packaging Waste Problem,” LiveScience April 22, 2015; GlobalTrends.com, “Talking Trash.”
¹⁴ Elise Zelechowski, in an interview with Martha Bayne, described Malmo’s recycling processes as “what we need: physical infrastructure that allows us to organize these resources, and citizen
Implicit in this narrative, then, is an understanding of waste as the inevitable-yet-necessary byproduct of otherwise beneficial production processes. Surely, since we cannot hope to eradicate waste entirely, the best we can do is to manage the waste we produce. But is the concept of waste truly so simple? Can we be contented by the argument that “[n]o waste means no production, which means no consumption and no humans”?15 Is the currently mounting garbage crisis simply the inevitable outcome of human industrial development?

To these questions I respond with an emphatic “not quite.” While the excretion of waste material is indeed a necessary biological function, I argue instead that disposability—the relative ease with which things can be rendered as waste products—serves as the underlying logic of a strictly capitalist mode of production. While the elevation of waste management industries to “the most important service” may indeed stem from valid concerns about the abundance of garbage and offer pragmatic ways of ameliorating the problem, the narrative put forth by the above accounts obscures two crucial characteristics of waste and its role in the current so-called “garbage crisis.” First, as a thorough conceptual examination demonstrates, waste is not merely an inevitable byproduct of industrial production processes but in fact the central product of capitalist production. As I argue below, the failure of these accounts to distinguish between waste as a socio-economic function and the materials deemed garbage or trash lead to incomplete understandings of the current “crisis.” Even further, the dominating empirical approaches to

economic discourse, along with the apparent synonymy of “capitalism” and “economics” within economic scholarship, ensure that any methods of solving the garbage crisis after the fact remain embedded in the very logic that produced the crisis in the first place. The emphasis on investments in waste management companies, as largely private capitalist industries themselves, can thus only fail to enact significant change. Second, as demonstrated by the historical development of capitalism as a global economic system, waste has long held significant social qualities.\textsuperscript{16} Indeed, as an exploration of the development of what Immanuel Wallerstein has termed the “modern world-system” demonstrates, the unequal exchange of capital across national borders—typically from the periphery to the core, or from the colony to the “mother country”—has been mirrored by an unequal exchange of waste in the opposite direction.\textsuperscript{17} Even

\begin{flushleft}
\textsuperscript{16} While Elise Zelechowski notes the typically unequal distribution of waste, tending towards areas of low income, she also elevates the recycling methods of the Zabbaleen of Egypt, whose “entire . . . economy” is based on picking through refuse. She states: “There’s a really cool movie about them called Garbage Dreams. They have this system based on family units and they all have different zones in the city. . . . They’re able to achieve insanely high recycling rates.” While the notion of “ragpickers” is certainly nothing new, the fact that wealthy nations turn to the world’s most impoverished social groups as model recyclers is unsettling to say the least. Noah Sachs, writing of a similar waste-economy in India, appropriately takes issue: “It’s easy to admire this kind of resourcefulness, but there’s a human cost to being the rear end of a city’s chain of consumption. In the Dickensian workshops of Jolly Mohalla, I witnessed extremely dangerous conditions. Where workers were melting plastic, there was intense smoke and fumes but no ventilation fans. In fact, there was no worker-protection equipment of any sort. And dozens of children younger than 15 were toiling in the shops.” Sachs also points out that, even in the United States, sanitation employees have among the highest worker mortality rates. Bayne, “Conversation;” Noah Sachs, “Garbage Everywhere: What Refuse in India’s Streets Reveals about America’s Hidden Trash Problem,” The Atlantic June 20, 2014, http://www.theatlantic.com/features/archive/2014/06/confessions-of-a-trash-tourist-india/373118/.
\textsuperscript{17} As D.J. Frantzen notes, the notion of a capitalist “world-system” originated with Fernand Braudel’s Civilisation Matérielle, Economie et Capitalisme: XVe-SVIIIe Siècles (1967), in which Braudel defined the “économie-monde” as, according to Frantzen, a “hierarchically structured space consisting of economically integrated national states, with an international division of labour which is itself determined by the unequal geographical development of the productive forces.” For the remainder of this project, however, my use of the term “world-system” relies primarily on Immanuel Wallerstein’s The Modern World-System I: Capitalist Agriculture and
further, as capitalism transgressed national boundaries in an effort to find new markets and labor sources, the inhabitants of non-capitalist world regions, upon their incorporation into the growing world-system, became largely disposable themselves. As I hope this project makes clear, capitalist production has long relied—and continues to rely—on a “logic of disposability,” according to which the ease with which objects and peoples can be disposed of—rendered as waste—serves to facilitate the accumulation of profits and the expansion of the system’s influence.\footnote{Of course, if capitalist production indeed operates according to a logic of disposability, then the current waste crisis, as distinct from a “garbage crisis,” is fundamentally an economic problem. The central issue, as described above, is that, in the vast majority of contemporary economic discourse, the narrow conceptualizations of waste implicit in the “garbage crisis” narrative are fully embraced. Thus, at the heart of this project is the assertion that works of literature, particularly in their ability to embody contradictory worldviews and defer strictly empirical conclusions, can in fact function as powerful tools for more clearly understanding the logic of contemporary and historical economics. More specifically, the fact that literary works are able to articulate, critique and reframe this contradictory logic demands greater critical attention in terms of their continuity with economic discourses.}

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\footnote{The term “logic of disposability” is taken from Michelle Yates’ “The Human-As-Waste, the Labor Theory of Value and Disposability in Contemporary Capitalism.” Her use of the term refers specifically to the disposability of global labor sources, referring to a “permanent surplus (superfluous) population.” As I make clear below, I adopt this logic as the foundation of capitalist production in general. Michelle Yates, “The Human-As-Waste, the Labor Theory of Value and Disposability in Contemporary Capitalism,” \textit{Antipode} 43, no. 5 (2011), 1680, 1679.}
The purpose of this thesis project is to explore specific works of literature in order to better understand the economic functions of waste and disposability. The following chapters will explore William Gaddis’ *J R*, Thomas Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow* and Eric Gansworth’s *Smoke Dancing* in order to evince a theory of “reading economics,” by which I mean using works of literature as a means of engaging with the themes and discourses of economic scholarship. In particular, I argue that by examining the literary systems of exchange inscribed in these novels, we, as readers and scholars of literature, can both uncover critiques of capitalism and its reliance on disposability and, simultaneously, imagine potentially viable alternative modes of economic exchange. While *J R* wonderfully articulates the logic of accumulation via disposability in the context of American corporate capitalism, *Gravity’s Rainbow* traces this logic to the expansion of the modern world-system, locating the focal point of disposability in the act of colonization. *Smoke Dancing*, then, positions Indigenous reservations in the United States as contemporary reiterations of the relationship between colonizer and colonized. In so doing, however, Gansworth makes the crucial point of subversion in his articulation and deployment of a system of exchange founded upon localized Haudenosaunee epistemic forms. Importantly, each of these novels embody their critical projects within their unique aesthetic and narrative modes; the bodies of the novels themselves, then, act as mediators between the reader and the world-system within which she is immersed.

Surely, however, I am not the first to examine the intersections of literary analysis and economic discourse. Indeed, Dierdre McCloskey’s 1985 study, *The Rhetoric of Economics*, served as the foundation for what Willie Henderson has referred to as “literary economics.”

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19 Surely, the notion of a post-colonial form of literature is already under scrutiny in this project, as will be discussed below.

McCloskey, economic scholarship was not, as many of her predecessors had it, a hard science seeking a pure and definite form of knowledge, but simply a “conversation between economists,” in which the role of storytelling figured greatly.\(^{21}\) More recently, Catherine Labio, in an effort to move way from what she perceived as a Marxist reflex for literary approaches to economics, argued that the origins of economic discourse in eighteenth-century Europe developed parallel to its particular form of aesthetics.\(^{22}\) Frederic Jameson, perhaps most famously, offered a groundbreaking literary framework for understanding the forces of late capitalism, in which he worked against the notion of a necessary or “natural” market.\(^{23}\) My approach in this project, however, is distinct from the discourse of literary economics in that I do not apply literary analytic tools to economics texts but, conversely, propose a literary exploration of the peculiarly economic qualities of two American novels and one Haudenosaunee novel. The project thus falls more closely in line with Marc Shell’s *The Economy of Literature*, in which Shell argues that works of literature, “composed of both small and large tropic exchanges,” provide a means of understanding the exchanges of the political economy.\(^{24}\) My departure from Shell is evident in this project’s emphasis on waste and disposability. Importantly, however, the focus on disposability is not simply a narrowing of Shell’s methodology; rather, I hope to show here that disposability is the *primary operating logic* of contemporary capitalism, functioning as the other side of the coin, as it were, of ceaseless accumulation and growth. The concept of waste is not, as

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\(^{23}\) Specifically, Jameson is critical of the Left’s movement toward this understanding of an essential market: “‘The market is in human nature’ is the proposition that cannot be allowed to stand unchallenged.” Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 263.

explained below, simply the inevitable byproduct of otherwise beneficial methods of production but in fact the central product of a strictly capitalist form of production.

Of course, one could certainly take issue with the notion of literature as a means of interrogating and potentially subverting the logic of the modern world-system when the production of literature itself is inescapably part of a world literary system. As Franco Moretti argues, the global production and dissemination of literature is a system much like the global economic system detailed by Wallerstein, Samir Amin and Fernand Braudel. For Moretti, the global system of literature—dubbed, appropriately, “world literature”—is, not unlike the global economic system, “[o]ne, and unequal”: “one world literary system (of inter-related literatures); but a system which is . . . profoundly unequal.”

Critics of world literature and, varyingly, postcolonialism thus take issue with their implementation in academia. Arif Dirlik unequivocally argues that postcolonialism as an intellectual system is deeply complicit with global capitalist (and thus Euro-American) hegemony. Mariano Siskind takes a similar argumentative thread, arguing that the “discourse of globalization” is little more than the “universalization of the cultural particularity of the bourgeoisie.” For many, then, the use of literature—specifically the English novel, as a Western form—as a means of subverting the

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26 Timothy Brennan presents a more ambivalent picture of this debate, noting that the globalization of literature, “[o]n the one hand . . . holds out hope for the creation of new communities and unforeseen solidarities; on the other hand, it appears merely to euphemize corporatization and imperial expansion.” Timothy Brennan, “From Development to Globalization: Postcolonial Studies and Globalization Theory,” Cambridge Collections Online (2006), 122.
27 Specifically, Dirlik states: “The complicity of postcolonial in hegemony lies in postcolonialism’s diversion of attention from contemporary problems of social, political, and cultural domination, and in its obfuscation of its own relationship to what is but a condition of its emergence, that is, to a global capitalism.” Arif Dirlik, “The Postcolonial Aura: Third World Criticism in the Age of Global Capitalism,” Critical Inquiry 20, no. 2 (1994), 331.
world-system or of establishing localized autonomy is deeply problematic. Indeed, for Siskind, the novel form is merely the “visual reality” of the bourgeois project of globalization.\textsuperscript{29}

Considering the purpose of and the authors chosen for this thesis project, the critical thread of world literature is indeed one worth keeping in mind. If the development of the economic world-system was driven by the disposing of non-capitalist world regions, it could certainly be argued that certain works of literature are, in the system of world literature, equally disposable. If so, how is it that two American authors, embedded within the “core” of contemporary capitalism and the locus historical colonization, can effectively interrogate the very system within which they and their works are immersed? Even further, and perhaps more significantly, how is it that Eric Gansworth, a member of the Onondaga Nation, can effectively subvert the logic of the modern world-system in the form of the English novel?

Pynchon and Gaddis, as American authors, address the role of literature in the world-system in both narrative (content) and aesthetic (formal) ways. In \textit{J R}, Gaddis articulates two distinct yet inextricably linked systems of exchange: the “productive” exchange of commodities for capital and the “unproductive” exchange of works of art for more abstract reasons.\textsuperscript{30} While the corporate-capitalist economy of \textit{J R} relentlessly seeks to dispose of the novel’s artists, Gaddis refuses to accept the production of works of art as a futile endeavor in the effort to circumvent ceaseless incorporation and disposal. On the contrary, Gaddis asserts, using Edward Bast’s eventual completion of a musical composition as evidence, that works of art—among them, novels—can serve as sites of order and meaning in an increasingly disordered world; \textit{J R} thus

\begin{flushleft} 29 Siskind argues: “if philosophy conceptualized the transformation of the globe as the realization of a totality of bourgeois freedom (Kant, Hegel, and Marx), the novel provided this philosophical concept with a visual reality, a set of images and imaginaries that elevated the fiction of bourgeois ubiquity to a foundational myth of modernity.” Ibid., 337.

30 The terms “productive” and “unproductive” and their multiplicity of meanings will be addressed at length in the second chapter.\end{flushleft}
embodies the very chaos and disorder characterizing its capitalist economy in order to level its most powerful critique. Pynchon, in turn, offers deeply ambivalent conceptualizations of waste in *Gravity’s Rainbow*: the “wasteland” of the Zone proves a space within which subversive acts can occur, yet the ultimate failure of these acts of subversion—Byron’s impotence, the lost love between Roger Mexico and Jessica Swanlake, the ultimate futility of the Counterforce—leaves the reader with a more cynical impression of systemic control. Pynchon’s peculiar aesthetic approach to the Empty Ones’ subversive project, however, is emblematic of his critique of a world literary system. In particular, by *omitting* the launch and detonation of the Empty Ones’ Rocket 00001 from the text, and thus removing the act from the narrative system of the novel, Pynchon provides ample room for literary subversion.

In order to fully unpack Gansworth’s intervention into the discourse of world literature, it is certainly worth addressing the theoretical underpinnings of the growing field of Indigenous American literary criticism more generally. Indeed, Simon Ortiz, Acoma Pueblo author, poet and scholar, provides an appropriate response to the questions posed above. While Moretti notes that the adaptation of traditionally Western modes of artistic production (i.e. the novel) by non-Western communities necessarily constitutes a compromise between, on the one hand, local materials and epistemologies and, on the other, foreign artistic forms, Ortiz argues that such “compromises” in no way undermine their potential to assert localized autonomy and sovereignty. In his epilogue to *American Indian Literary Nationalism*, Ortiz points out:

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31 Moretti, after compiling an enormous body of research, concludes: “Four continents, two hundred years, over twenty independent critical studies, and they all agreed: when a culture starts moving towards the modern novel, it’s *always* as a compromise between foreign form and local materials.” But Moretti, significantly, points out that “because . . . the compromise between the foreign and the local is so ubiquitous, then those independent paths that are usually taken to be the rule of the rise of the novel (the Spanish, the French, and especially the British case)—*well,*
the indigenous peoples of the Americas have taken the languages of the
colonialists and used them for their own purposes. Some would argue that this
means that Indian people have succumbed or become educated into a different
linguistic system and have forgotten or have been forced to forsake their native
selves. This is simply not true. Along with their native languages, Indian women
and men have carried on their lives and expression through the use of the newer
languages, particularly Spanish, French, and English, and they have used these
languages on their own terms. This is the crucial item that has to be understood,
that it is entirely possible for a people to retain and maintain their lives through
the use of any language. There is not a question of authenticity here; rather, it is
the way that Indian people have creatively responded to forced colonization. And
this response has been one of resistance; there is no clearer word for it than
resistance.\[32\]

For Ortiz, and, as Chapter 4 will show, for Gansworth, survival—in both biological and
cultural senses—is key: the ability of Indigenous American nations to adapt to
encroaching pressures of colonization and expansion as well as their ability to appropriate
Euro-American forms of expression and exchange has, for centuries, provided a means of
ensuring the continuation of localized epistemic, aesthetic and political forms. Implicit in
Ortiz’s statement is the great significance of maintaining these localized forms in the
process of adaptation.\[33\] For Ortiz, then, the reframing of Western aesthetic and cultural

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\[32\] Simon Ortiz, “Towards a National Indian Literature,” in *American Indian Literary
Nationalism*, eds. Jace Weaver, Craig S. Womack and Robert Warrior (Albuquerque: University
of New Mexico Press, 2006), 257.

\[33\] Ortiz’s epilogue opens with a retelling of his Uncle Steve’s tradition of shouting the names of
Catholic saints, in Spanish, on fiesta days. The fiestas, during which community members named
after these saints give gifts to the rest of the community, are organized to honor these Catholic
saints. But Ortiz definitively asserts that such a compromise in no way undermines the strictly
localized (Acoma) nature of these celebrations: “Obviously, there is an overtone that this is a
Catholic Christian ritual celebration because of the significance of the saints’ name and days on
forms within a localized epistemic structure reasserts local autonomy and resist systemic assimilation.

Eric Gansworth, in *Smoke Dancing*, thus follows Ortiz’s model. By adhering to localized Haudenosaunee epistemic and aesthetic forms, Gansworth is able to inscribe a system of exchange based not on accumulation and disposability but on reciprocity and redistribution. Smoke Dancing’s Tuscarora reservation members adapt to the pressures of encroaching capitalism, appropriate the ethics of accumulation and entrepreneurship, and re-inscribe these ethics within a Haudenosaunee system of exchange. The general trajectory of this project, then, is as follows: William Gaddis presents and critiques capitalism’s logic of disposability in a national (American) context; Thomas Pynchon then extends this logic to a deeper social and historical scale, focusing specifically on Germany’s colonization of Southwest Africa in the late nineteenth century; Eric Gansworth, in turn, articulates and undermines this logic from within a localized.

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Surely, there is an enormous body of literature on the ethics and principles of Indigenous economics; and appropriately so, for, as Scott Cook points out, economies and trade systems in North America long predate the imposition of capitalism on the continent. Angelique EagleWoman, citizen of the Sisseton-Wahpeton Dakota Oyate, argues that reservation-based poverty can be ameliorated if economic structures are controlled entirely by tribes and rooted in tribal epistemologies. While these works certainly demand attention within the context of “reading economics,” this project focuses primarily on the strictly Haudenosaunee system of exchange articulated in Gansworth’s fiction.

(Haudenosaunee) context and with a localized (Haudenosaunee) aesthetic form. Thus, while Moretti proposes the practice of “distant reading”—“which allows you to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes tropes—or genres and systems”—as a means of navigating the complex and unequal structure of the world literary system, I propose instead the primacy of close-reading the localized epistemic and aesthetic approaches embodied in the works of these three authors.

**Defining Waste**

If we are to fully understand the perception of the waste management industry as an essential—perhaps the essential—industry of modern civil society, we should also come to a clearer understanding of “waste” as a conceptual term. Indeed, I believe that one of the central issues of contemporary economic approaches to waste is that within the enormous body of literature on the industry of waste management, very little, as Katy Bisson and John Proops point out, has been written on *conceptual* understandings of waste. In other words, the majority of economic scholarship on the issue of waste “seem[s] to assume that while dealing with ‘wastes’ is a problem, the concept of ‘Waste’ is not.” In order to fill the apparent gap in economic-based waste discourse, it seems appropriate to ask: what is “waste,” and how does an object become waste?

At first glance, waste appears to be a fairly intuitive concept. In the natural world, the excretion of waste is an essential biological function: the continuation of an organism’s life

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35 Moretti, “Conjectures,” 57.
36 Bisson and Proops note in their introduction to *Waste in Ecological Economics* that, “if one checks through the ecological economics literature over, say, the past ten years, one finds rather little on waste *qua* waste.” Bisson and Proops, *Waste in Ecological Economics*, 1.
37 Ibid.
processes relies on the consumption, metabolization and excretion of material. For French theorist Georges Bataille, this is a “basic fact” of life:

The living organism, in a situation determined by the play of energy on the surface of the globe, ordinarily receives more energy than is necessary for maintaining life; the excess energy (wealth) can be used for the growth of a system (e.g., an organism); if the system can no longer grow, or if the excess cannot be completely absorbed in its growth, it must necessarily be lost without profit; it must be spent, willingly or not, gloriously or catastrophically.\(^{38}\)

For Bataille, the need to profitlessly expend unused energy is a fundamental aspect of organic life. Indeed, waste is expelled even at the molecular level: the reactions of certain chemicals result in their synthesis, often accompanied by a release of energy in the form of heat. While this excess energy cannot be simply destroyed, it can, and indeed does, become wasted, as such energy is no longer useful for further reactions.\(^{39}\) In this context, waste is simply the inevitable result of organic consumptive processes. Certainly, then, the industry of waste management is as essential factor of developing human society as excretory organs are to an organism.

Yet, as a brief turn to the dictionary demonstrates, coming to any single, clear-cut interpretation of waste as a concept is no easy task. More importantly, revealing the conceptual implications of waste in terms of the modern global economy is a complex process. According to the Oxford English Dictionary, “waste” can mean a great number of things; it can even function

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\(^{39}\) According to Jeremy Rifkin, the notion of energy made “unusable”formulates the second law of thermodynamics (or, the entropy law), which states: “Energy can only be changed in one direction, that is, from usable to unusable, or from available or unavailable.” Jeremy Rifkin and Ted Howard, *Entropy: Into the Greenhouse World* (New York: Bantam Books, 1989), 20.
as a noun, adjective and verb. Most striking, however, is the fact that some interpretations of the noun “waste” directly contradict others. The OED takes one definition of waste as “[a] profusion, lavish abundance of something.” Waste, in this instance, is excess, an abundance of material that extends beyond the ability to use or consume it in its entirety. Within this interpretation of waste, then, fall the notions of garbage, trash and shit: waste-as-excess is the portion of an object leftover after its consumption, biologically or economically, by an organism. Yet waste denotes more than the material leftovers of consumptive processes. Turning back to the OED, we see that waste can also signify an absence. As a spatial description, waste denotes “[u]nhabited . . . and uncultivated country” and “[a] piece of land not . . . in any man’s occupation.” Waste, then, in this context, implies vacancy, an absence of human engagement. Of course, as we will see below, waste-as-absence refers to a particular form of absence: the absence of productive (in a Lockean, capitalist sense) human behavior. Yet while these definitions of waste may appear contradictory, when considered alongside the cultural and historical development of global capitalism, these disparate interpretations can be reconsidered as opposite ends of a spectrum that is at once temporal and spatial.

Waste in Economic Scholarship

In the majority of economic scholarship on the topic, waste is described in much the same way as in the “garbage crisis” narrative—as inevitable, “undesired joint-products” of industrial production. More specifically, waste functions as the antithesis of value. Indeed, it is precisely
this understanding of waste put forth by Bisson in Proops in their attempt to arrive at a conceptual understanding of the term: “[w]aste is something which is produced as an undesired joint-product; as such, it has no economic value.”44 Richard C. Porter, former professor Emeritus of economics at the University of Michigan, adopts this conceptualization of waste. Porter defines waste as, quite simply, “stuff we don’t want—and hence we are willing to pay to get rid of it.”45 Porter conceptualizes waste as the necessary, albeit unpleasant, outcome of industrial production processes.46 The assumption, for Bisson, Proops and Porter, is that waste—a term Porter believes to be synonymous with “trash, rubbish, garbage, refuse,” and thus always in the form of excess47—is an inevitable byproduct of what are otherwise beneficial methods of production. As such, the waste management industry plays the fundamental role of mitigating the inevitable production of waste. Even further, according to Porter, waste management methods should be subject to cost-benefit analysis. Porter believes we should be “estimating how much damage mining waste is doing and how much abatement of that damage is called for, balancing cleanup costs against life-saving benefits.”48 The implication here, then, is that the waste of industrial processes is always subordinate to the wasting of money.

Porter’s warning against the wasting of money indeed highlights what appear to be implicit understandings of waste-as-absence in economic discourse. More specifically, waste-as-absence is representative of inefficiencies in market mechanisms. As an example, take some of

44 Ibid., 5. My emphasis.
46 More specifically, Porter argues that the economic wealth of the United States has provided the nation with the ability to “produce[] huge amounts of goods and services for its citizenry. Alas, along with these ‘goods’ come ‘bads’—and one of the most pervasive of these is waste, things we don’t want but that can be dangerous or expensive to get rid of.” Ibid., 1.
47 Ibid., 2.
48 Ibid., 27.
the scholarship working to understand and articulate the causes of the growing international wealth gap—defined by Daron Acemoglu as “perhaps the most important challenge[] facing social science.” In an attempt to understand why—against the predictions of neoclassical growth models—the recent global income distribution has been so vastly unequal, a number of economists and economic scholars point to relative institutional quality and worker productivity. For Laura Alfaro, Sebnem Kalemli-Ozcan and Vadym Volosovych, “institutions are the rules of the game in a society.” They argue that nations with high institutional quality—consisting of strong property rights, low corruption, stable forms of government and open trade regulations—maintain higher levels of income, while countries without these high-quality institutions—countries in which corruption and instability are rampant—experience lower levels of income.

Charles Jones and Robert Hall, examining the productivity of laborers across national boundaries, also point to the role of social infrastructure. They note that workers of a given national economy “choose between production and diversion,” between contributing meaningfully to their economy through capital-producing labor or detracting from it. Accordingly, Jones and Hall

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51 Ibid., 349.
52 In conclusion, Alfaro et. al. assert: “Our results suggest that policies aimed at strengthening the protection of property rights, reducing corruption, and increasing government stability, bureaucratic quality, and law and order should be a priority for policymakers seeking to increase capital inflows to poor countries.” They offer Intel’s debate on whether to establish a headquarters in either Mexico or Costa Rica as an example. While Mexico possessed a larger supply of trained engineers and technicians, “Costa Rica’s stability and lower corruption levels tilted the balance in favor of the country.” Ibid., 365, 348.
argue, “the suppression of diversion is a central element of a favorable social infrastructure.”

Waste-as-absence, then, in economic discourse, manifests itself in the form of unproductive activity: behavior or labor that does not contribute to the production of commodities or the accumulation of profit.

We can, however, intuitively take a number of issues with the worldview embedded in the scholarship of contemporary economics. For one, the categories of waste laid out here assume a false form of absolutism: If waste is simply “stuff we don’t want,” then what are the qualities of these objects that make them unwanted? And who is “we”? If an object is unwanted by one, may it be wanted by another, and thus cease to exist as waste? Indeed, Susan Strasser undermines this form of absolute waste by claiming that “[n]othing is inherently trash.” Rather, Strasser argues that trash is made through consumer decisions, the outcomes of which, importantly, are historically contingent as well as dependent upon class structures. Thus, the qualities that render an object worthy of the trash-heap are determined not by the object’s inherent characteristics but by the characteristics of larger economic forces and the consumer’s position within them. In much the same way, the linking of waste to unproductive activities itself assumes a falsely absolute binary between waste and value, and thus between productive and unproductive forms of labor. More specifically, the non-wasteful, productive labor of capitalist production in fact produces—inevitably so, as Porter, Bisson and Proops point out—waste-as-excess, the scale of which grows proportionally with the growth of the means of production.

Hall offer farming as an example of productive labor and thievery as an example of diversion. In their article, diversion “acts like a tax on output.”

54 Ibid., 96.
56 Ibid., 9.
Beyond the explicit and implicit references to waste, we can also take issue with what appears to be a narrow, ahistorical (not to mention deeply dehumanized) perception of global economic relationships embedded in these works. Indeed, their description of the global economic structure—composed of multiple, semi-autonomous national economies, each with particular and self-established infrastructures—is points to short-sighted historical understandings and is often supported by contradictory logic. For example, Hall and Jones “recognize explicitly that social infrastructure is an endogenous variable. Economies are not exogenously endowed with the institutions and incentives that make up their economic environment.” While we can certainly offer, as recent examples, the United States’ attempted coups in Latin America and the Middle East as explicit examples to the contrary (to say nothing of the massive shift in Indigenous American and Australian economic forms over the past few centuries), the authors appear to directly contradict themselves only eight pages later, where they argue: “[c]ountries most influenced by Europeans in past centuries have social infrastructures conducive to high levels of output per worker, as measured by our variables, and, in fact, have high levels of output per worker.” Europe’s project of colonization—treated here as an “influence” as opposed to an

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57 David Moss, in *A Concise Guide to Macroeconomics*, articulates a field of global economic study in which GDP, Gross Domestic Product, functions as its primary metric. Further, he points to David Ricardo’s Theory of Competitive Advantage, as “one of the most important principles in all of economics.” Ricardo’s theory proposed that “every country . . . would benefit from specializing in what was relatively best at producing and then trading for everything else.” There are two implications here worth noting: for one, Moss’s perception seems to be that the playing field of the global economy is fairly equal for all national economies; and, second, that the modes of production across national boundaries are relatively independent of one another. As I show below, a world-system approach certainly takes issue with these implications. David Moss, *A Concise Guide to Macroeconomics: What Managers, Executives, and Students Need to Know* (Watertown: Harvard Business Press, 2007), Books24x7 e-book, chap. 1.


59 Ibid., 107-8. My emphasis. To be sure, Hall and Jones are not alone in their conclusion that those countries with the greatest extent of European “influence” have the most successful capitalist economies. Acemoglu, Johnson and Robinson have argued that the extent of successful
expropriation—thus seems to have had a direct impact on the socioeconomic structures of former colonies as well as the evaluation of the structures of those “less” colonized.

At first glance, then, economic discourse promotes the seemingly contradictory notion of the function of waste: capitalism requires the minimization of waste (in the form of unproductive “diversion”) and yet inevitably produces waste (in the form of material excess) every day. The impression given by these scholars and economists is that capitalist forms of production—treated as essential aspects of human society—inevitably produce waste in the form of industrial and consumer byproducts. Simultaneously, capitalism, when successful, engenders the minimization of waste by eliminating inefficiencies and funding improvements for the waste management industry. Yet I argue that the conceptualizations of waste put forth here obscure the contradictory and historical relationship capitalist production maintains with waste. As I demonstrate below, the failure of economic discourse to acknowledge the historical development of capitalism as a globally hegemonic system is fundamental to economic misconceptions of waste. Indeed, while these understandings of waste appear contradictory, if we consider the term within the framework of what Immanuel Wallerstein has termed the modern world-system, these apparently disparate interpretations become the opposite ends of a single spectrum. Thus, it is precisely within these two contradictions—of minimized-yet-inevitable waste and autonomous-yet-“influenced” national economies—that we can begin to unravel the central contradiction of capitalist production: its logic of ceaseless accumulation and expansion via disposability.

Surely, as the World Bank had asserted, the industry of waste management is fundamental to the development of civil society. As such, a number of scholars have traced the significant role of waste management to ancient Roman civilization. Yet if waste is simply a joint-product with “no economic value,” how are we to explain the enormously profitable industry of waste management? Indeed, as Heather Rogers points out, corporations like Waste Management and Browning-Ferris Industries have “brought the dark and fetid world of rejectamenta into the realm of billion-dollar revenues and the New York Stock Exchange.” As a number of scholars have argued, the notion of waste as undesired, valueless refuse is deeply flawed; on the contrary, the disposal (and thus disposability) of objects has long served a significant positive purpose. Gavin Lucas asserts that the disposal of household rubbish in the twentieth century was not only a reinforcement of one’s class position but also understood as a means of improving familial hygiene. Jennifer Seymour Whitaker traces the shift in the scale of garbage production to the rise of the plastics industry in the postwar era, in which plastics served

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as a cheap and convenient method of both packaging and advertising. As far back as 1960, Vance Packard had positioned disposability as a means of mitigating overproduction, which had then become the norm for American manufacturing companies. Yet Rogers, in her explicit linkage between disposability and capitalist forms of production, articulates this logic most convincingly. She cites from Stuart Ewen’s *PR! A Social History of Spin*, arguing that the ubiquity of landfills and garbage dumps is not “just an unfortunate byproduct of capitalism; they actually represent the success of capitalism.” Capitalist production thus thrives on the disposability of the objects it produces and exchanges (namely, commodities), objects which, prior to disposal, were containers of value.

As these garbage-scholars have demonstrated, the ease with which commodities can be disposed of—rendered as *excessive* waste products—has in fact nicely served the purpose of accelerating the accumulation of capital since the advent of industrial modes of production. How, then, are we to account for waste-as-absence? What sort of role does the productive/unproductive divide play in this context? In order to tease out these relationships, it will be helpful to recall that absent forms of waste, as noted by the OED excerpt above, refer largely to descriptions of space or land. It is thus unsurprising that European colonists throughout the seventeenth, eighteenth and nineteenth centuries so often labeled regions of the “new” world as wastelands. As an exploration of the development of the modern world-system shows, Europe’s project of colonization was driven largely by its need to expand and incorporate non-capitalist world

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63 Specifically, Whitaker asserts: “. . . package design and convenience were key elements in selling: The layers of paper and cardboard, foil, and plastic were one with the product.” Jennifer Seymour Whitaker, *Salvaging the Land of Plenty*, 103.
64 According to Packard, “the pressures to expand production and consumption have forced Americans to create a hyperthyroid economy that can be sustained only by constant stimulation of the people and their leaders to be more prodigal with the nation’s resources.” Vance Packard, *The Waste Makers* (1960; New York: Pocket Books, 1963), 5.
65 Rogers, *Gone Tomorrow*, 153.
regions, converting, in the process, waste into value. The contradiction, then, is that the very act of colonization ensured the disposability of the colonized. Early European capitalists thus sought to convert waste-lands and waste-populations into value-resources, only to render them as waste-products once their value had been extracted.

For Immanuel Wallerstein, the modern world-system came into being “in Europe in the sixteenth century.” The development of what Wallerstein terms the “capitalist world-economy”—a world-system governed by the need to accumulate capital—was characterized by expansion; more specifically, the world-system developed by incorporating, via colonialism and imperialism, non-capitalist world regions into the system’s structure. Importantly, the incorporation of non-capitalist regions into the world-economy “was never at the initiative of those being incorporated . . . [but] derived rather from the need of the world-economy to expand its boundaries, a need which was itself the outcome of pressures internal to the world-economy.” In other words, the accumulative nature of the capitalist economy necessitated its eventual confrontation with boundaries—both spatial (in terms of resources) and social (in terms of labor)—which it transcended by expanding into non-capitalist world regions.

Yet while Wallerstein and Samir Amin nicely articulate the accumulative tendency of the world-system, and while they certainly provide the necessary tools for constructing a theory of

67 Ibid.
disposability, they do not explicitly account for the system’s reciprocal and contradictory logic of disposability as a factor of expansion.\textsuperscript{70} Indeed, the expansion of the world-system was driven as much by waste as by potential profit. It is worth recalling again the OED’s paradoxical interpretations of waste discussed above, in which waste is defined as both the absence of productivity and its excess, in the form of byproducts. In the early stages of the world-system’s development, non-capitalist external areas of the world were perceived as wastelands in that European colonists could find no signs of what they deemed to be productive activity; yet it was the very wastefulness of these world regions that convinced colonial powers—driven by a capitalist need to convert waste into value—of the need to incorporate the regions into their growing economic structure. Indeed, Vinay Gidwani, writing of the British presence in Bengal, attributes the establishment of a permanent settlement to the perception of India’s wasted, unproductive land. Citing W. W. Hunter’s \textit{Bengal MS Records, 1782-1807}, Gidwani makes it clear that it was the “Waste Lands [of Bengal] . . . whose vast extent and difficulties of reclamation determined both Cornwallis and the Court of Directors to declare the Settlement permanent.”\textsuperscript{71} Yet the incorporation of the world’s external regions—in an effort to convert the world’s wastelands into productive colonies—simultaneously rendered the function of these

\textsuperscript{70} To be sure, Wallerstein hints at the disposability of peripheral labor sources in \textit{European Universalism}. He notes that the expansion of the world-system led core-based employers to seek cheaper sources of labor in the world’s rural areas. Wallerstein observes, “The employer could find such zones wherever there were large pools of rural workers ready to accept low-paid waged employment because the real income that resulted was higher than such newly employed waged workers had previously obtained in their rural locale. . . . The only problem . . . was that after a period of, say, twenty-five to fifty years, the workers in this new zone began to organize and demand higher renumeration.” Increasing engagement with the world-system thus rendered peripheral labor sources disposable, as core-based employers seek ever cheaper sources of labor. Immanuel Wallerstein, \textit{European Universalism: The Rhetoric of Power}. (New York: The New Press, 2006), 56. Notably, this point is startlingly reinforced by Marianne McCune’s NPR report, “‘Our Industry Follows Poverty’: Success Threatens a T-Shirt Business.”

regions as “dumping grounds” for the excessive waste of capitalist production.\textsuperscript{72} Zygmunt Bauman argues that colonies functioned largely as dump sites for Europe’s excess population, itself a result of the processes of modernization.\textsuperscript{73} Bauman thus concludes: “The disposal of human waste produced in the ‘modernized’ and still ‘modernizing’ parts of the globe was the deepest meaning of colonization and imperial conquests—both made possible, and in fact inevitable, by the power differential continuously reproduced by the stark inequality of ‘development.’”\textsuperscript{74} The contradiction is apparent: Colonization was driven by the need to convert waste-as-absence into something of value and, simultaneously, by the system’s need to excrete its waste-as-excess.

As Bauman suggests, Europe’s colonization of non-capitalist world regions is the culmination of the contradictory logic of disposability governing capitalist production. In order to understand the fundamentally contradictory nature of the world-system’s logic of disposability, it will be useful to examine the economic relationships that constitute the system. Wallerstein finds at the root of the capitalist world-economy a “central relationship or antinomy: that of capital and labor.”\textsuperscript{75} The relationship between capital and labor is indeed one of capitalism’s deepest contradiction: the accumulation of capital depends on a supply of labor to produce value-laden commodities while simultaneously engendering the disposability of these very labor sources to ensure that the rate of accumulation continually increases. According to both Wallerstein and Amin, the modern world-system, having incorporated all regions of the world

\textsuperscript{73} Bauman argues that the supposedly “vacant” world regions had “for a greater part of modern history played the crucial role of dumping grounds for the human waste turned out in ever rising volumes in the parts of the globe affected by the processes of modernization.” Ibid.
\textsuperscript{74} Ibid., 6.
\textsuperscript{75} Wallerstein, \textit{The Politics of the World-Economy}, 33.
into its structure, is comprised of core-states and peripheral regions, along with a number of semi-peripheral states in between. To be sure, these are by no means stable categories; nations and world regions defined as core or peripheral are not necessarily condemned to their respective fates. Yet what Amin makes clear is that the relationship between given core-states and peripheral regions, at a given phase in the development of global capitalism, is characterized by a few consistently present qualities. Most notably, core-states and peripheral regions are linked by what Amin refers to as the “fundamental difference” in modes of production, which in turn engenders the unequal distribution of wealth between these world regions.  

Whereas in core-states (e.g. the United States, Western Europe) production involves the manufacture of goods to be consumed internally, production in peripheral regions (e.g. Bangladesh, Southwest Africa) is “externally propelled,” focused instead on the export of materials to be consumed elsewhere. The difference between core and peripheral models of production ensures an “unequal exchange” in which, in the periphery, the “return to labour” for equally productive forms of labor is “less than what it is at the centre.” Since, Amin asserts, the production of consumer goods does not occur to nearly the same degree in peripheral regions as in core states, demand for these items is not necessary. As a result, the absence of such demand removes the need for core-based companies to balance profits with demand-driven wages.

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77 Ibid., 10, 13-15.
78 Ibid., 13.
79 Ibid., 14-15.
80 Amin notes that while “wages [are] the source of demand for mass consumption goods” in core-states, in the peripheral model of production, “wage does not emerge both as a cost and an income which creates a demand, vital to the model, but on the contrary only as a cost, demand itself originating elsewhere.” Ibid., 10, 15.
It is precisely through the unequal exchange between core-states and peripheral regions that the inhabitants of the latter, reduced to a source of national and transnational labor, become disposable. In other words, the endemic poverty of world regions often labeled the “Third World”—which is not, as Hall and Jones would have it, an endogenous factor but in fact the result of the exploitative relationship between core and periphery—is an intentional outcome of capitalist expansion and accumulation, allowing core-states to choose among peripheral regions for sources of cheap labor. To present this logic of disposability more clearly, we can turn again to Marx. According to Amin’s framework, labor within peripheral regions, as Marx had noted of European industrial labor, “is therefore not the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a means to satisfy needs external to it.” For Marx, because relations between laborers are only crystallized in the exchange of their products, “the relations connecting the labour of one individual with that of the rest appear, not as direct social relations between individuals at work, but as what they really are, material relations between persons and social relations between things.” The exchange of the products of human labor, as the sole purpose of the labor itself, leads to the fetishization of commodities and, simultaneously, to the objectification of human laborers. In much the same way, as core-periphery relations are only crystallized in the act of unequal exchange, peripheral laborers become commodities themselves. And as the exchange of

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81 To drive this point home, see Marianne McCune’s investigatory story “‘Our Industry Follows Poverty’: Success Threatens a T-Shirt Business” for National Public Radio, which details the plight of a Colombian shirt-production company who had recently lost its contract with Jockey, an American clothing company, as a result of increasing wages and standards of living in Colombia.


commodities is reliant on their ability to be consumed and disposed of, peripheral labor must also be disposable.\textsuperscript{84} It is precisely within this commodification of laborers that Michelle Yates locates contemporary capitalism’s logic of disposability, a phrase I owe to her work. According to Yates, “[u]nder capitalism, labor takes on the form of a commodity. Thus, like other commodities on the market, labor is consumed . . . and can then be disposed of when no longer needed.”\textsuperscript{85} Because labor can be “disposed of when no longer needed,” the accumulation of capital in the cores of the world-system thus demands the impoverishment—a result of, among many other things, low wages—of peripheral regions.

Yet if we recall, as Yates does, that labor is the very means by which items of value—namely, commodities—are produced, its disposability thus constitutes a powerful contradiction. Labor is a peculiar sort of commodity as it is more than a mere container of value; according to Yates, labor “is unique in its ability to produce value.”\textsuperscript{86} Yates, borrowing from the work of Robert Kurz and Neil Larsen, thus touches on the deeply contradictory nature of this logic: if the logic of capitalist production is both the ceaseless accumulation of capital and the disposability (in ever-increasing amounts) of its laborers, the system will eventually be unable to reproduce

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\textsuperscript{84} For further examples of peripheral labor disposability, see Kohndaker Abdul Mottaleb and Tetsushi Sonobe’s article “An Inquiry into the Rapid Growth of the Garment Industry in Bangladesh” in \textit{Economic Development and Cultural Change} 60, no. 1 (2011).
\textsuperscript{85} Yates, “Human-As-Waste,” 1688.
\textsuperscript{86} Ibid.
The dependency of capitalist production on ceaseless growth, as reiterated by a number of economic scholars, thus seems deeply problematic.\textsuperscript{88}

\textit{The Project at Hand}

The following three chapters of this thesis project offer explorations of particular fictional systems of exchange. Throughout these chapters I hope to accomplish three things: to elicit an understanding of waste—and its subordinate terms, garbage, trash and shit—as a conceptual and historical term with deep social implications; to situate disposability—the rendering of objects and people as waste—as the operating logic of contemporary and historical capitalism; and to demonstrate how literature can function as a means of exposing, interrogating and undermining this deeply problematic logic. My focus, then, is on the literary systems of exchange inscribed in William Gaddis’ \textit{J R}, Thomas Pynchon’s \textit{Gravity’s Rainbow} and Eric Gansworth’s \textit{Smoke Dancing}. Given the profound lack of historical and humanistic depth in contemporary economic discourse (as discussed above), I argue that a thorough examination of these literary economies are not simply beneficial but indeed essential to understanding the economic world in which we live. Importantly, while the three novels all articulate and critique the contradictory logic of disposability governing capitalist production, each novel, in both their narrative form and content, tackles a particular aspect of this logic.

The second chapter explores William Gaddis’ deeply complex novel, \textit{J R}. The plot of \textit{J R} is driven by the operations of a rapidly growing corporate empire, coordinated by the eleven-
year-old J R Vansant and operated according to J R’s business ethics, summarized by his refrain—his narrative trademark, if you will—“holy shit.”89 J R’s corporation is indeed built from “crap,” stocks and bonds deemed worthless by the novel’s Wall Street traders,90 his ability to render these value-less stocks into profitable pieces of paper thus renders him not an unusual but in fact an exemplary practitioner of capitalist ethics. Yet, in this chapter, I argue that the corporate-capitalist economy of J R, driven by a logic of ceaseless accumulation, is in fact underpinned by a contradictory logic of disposability. Notably, the incredible growth and profits of J R’s corporation helps to destroy the livelihoods of most of the novel’s artists. Accumulation via disposability occurs in J R through two primary mechanisms. First, much like Hall’s and Jones’ division of human labor into “production” and “diversion,” capitalism in J R relies on the division of human activity into productive and unproductive categories, which informs a certain understanding of value in which the behaviors and items that enable the flow of capital—things that are commodifiable—are value-filled, while those that inhibit such flow are value-less or wasteful. The novel’s capitalist thus seek to minimize wasteful or unproductive activities in order to maximize the production of value-filled items and accumulate capital. Second, the use of technological devices serves to facilitate the accumulation of capital throughout the novel precisely through its ability to minimize such unproductive—i.e. wasteful—activities. Surely, technology has long served the purpose of reducing labor time and lowering labor costs; yet in J R technology also serves the crucial function of reducing the risk of “failure,” particularly in the field of art production. Indeed, as Gaddis makes clear, the implementation of technological devices in the field of art production has served to “democratize” the production of art works,

90 Ibid., 77.
effectively “get[ting] the God damn artist out of the arts all at once.” Technology’s ability to increase the rate of profit by reducing the risk of artistic failure thus produces the excessive waste of the artist him/herself, transformed into an obsolete and unproductive laborer. Gaddis clearly demonstrates, then, that, through their attempts to minimize or eliminate waste and increase value, such accumulative practices necessarily produce enormous amounts of waste in a variety of forms.

The narrative of the novel itself—as an embodiment of the very chaos and entropy that, for many scholars, characterizes contemporary capitalism—thus functions as its strongest critique and most viable source of alternatives: it is within the body of Gaddis’ literary work that he is able to illuminate, with startling clarity, the contradictory logic of corporate capitalism. It is precisely in its embodiment of disorder and chaos that Gaddis’ work asserts its meticulous order. 

J R thus interrogates the unequal world literary system at the national level. Set largely in New York City in the 1970s, prophetically foreshadowing the advent of economic deregulation and finance capitalism that would follow, Gaddis embeds his fictional system of exchange within the very core of global capitalist production. Certainly, then, critics like Mariano Siskind would take issue with a novel set in the corporate offices of New York City. Yet as J R makes clear, Gaddis’ attempt to exhaust the limits of both the fictional system of exchange inscribed in the text and the formal structure of the novel itself serves as a powerful critique of both the economic and the literary world-systems.

Chapter 3 examines Thomas Pynchon’s monumental third novel, Gravity’s Rainbow, within which, I argue, is inscribed an economic world-system not unlike the one described by

91 Ibid., 288.
92 See Chap. 1, note 29.
Immanuel Wallerstein and Samir Amin. Pynchon’s world-system is a War-state in which death serves not as the unfortunate byproduct of war but as the necessary fuel for the War-state’s continual existence. The Zone, then, as an anarchic and seemingly extra-systemic space, serves as an external wasteland, which, according to the logic of capitalist expansion, must be re-incorporated back into the novel’s system. But *Gravity’s Rainbow* makes it clear that capitalism’s logic of disposability took shape not during the rise of American corporations nor through the attempted extermination of Jewish Europeans by Germany’s Nazi party; rather, this logic culminates in the act of colonization by European countries of non-capitalist world regions. Germany’s colonization of Southwest Africa coupled with the colonial effort to exterminate Indigenous Hereros thus serves, for Pynchon, as a significant historical precedent for Germany’s actions in World War II.

Yet, in typical Pynchonian fashion, the very “wasting” of peoples and regions by Them and Their War-state in fact provides the space and means for subversion and potentially extra-systemic autonomy. Indeed, for the Schwarzkommando, the novel’s relocated Zone-Hereros, the detritus of previously-exploded V-2 rockets provides them with the necessary materials to enact their project of racial suicide. Of course, we as readers do not bear witness to the launch of the Empty Ones’ rocket, Rocket 00001; this is precisely the point. Pynchon, by removing (or, perhaps, disposing of) the Empty Ones’ act of collective suicide from the *narrative* system of the novel, opens a space in which the Schwarzkommando have the greatest potentiality for subversion and extra-systemic autonomy. He thus confronts what Moretti has described as a single but unequal world-system of literary production.\(^93\) It is precisely in the absence of the

\(^{93}\) See Chap. 1, p. 9.
Empty Ones’ subversive act from the narrative system of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, an American novel, that Pynchon is able to circumvent the unequal (and thus disposing) system of world literature.

The fourth and final chapter looks at Eric Gansworth’s novel, *Smoke Dancing*. The novel is set on a Tuscarora reservation in western New York, impoverished by a centuries-long exploitative relationship with the capitalist forces of the United States. Beyond financial poverty, the reservation’s members also experience the impoverishment of bodily health, as the presence of industrial contaminants buried throughout the reservation are internalized into the bodies of the reservation’s members. Gansworth thus positions the contemporary relationship between State and Indigenous Nation as a reiteration of Pynchon’s colonial relationship, wherein colonies functioned as “outhouses of the European soul.”

The reservation’s population is further divided along sentiments towards the novel’s two prominent businessmen, the traditionalist Chief Jacob “Bud” Tunny and young, modernity-embracing Mason “Rollin’ in Dough” Rollins. Thus, in *Smoke Dancing*, Gansworth inscribes a tension felt by Indigenous nations across the continent, regarding the extent of the adaptation of capitalist practices as a means of ameliorating poverty and establishing national sovereignty. Yet while Gansworth remains ambivalent regarding the two sides of this debate, he unequivocally positions the community as the central actor in the development of a redistributive system of exchange. More specifically, he demonstrates that by adhering to localized (in this case, Haudenosaunee) epistemic, aesthetic and historical forms, Mason Rollins, with the help of his community members, is in fact able to appropriate the ethics of capitalist exchange and reframe them in a redistributive, reciprocal enterprise. Rollins and his community thus adopt Gerald Vizenor’s concept of “survivance,” defined by Gansworth as “the

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deliberate state of actively embracing survival as a life way.\textsuperscript{95} The cultural and biological survival of the Tuscarora Nation—as Mason, with the help of Patricia “Fiction” Tunny and Don “Big Red” Harmony, make clear—indeed relies on the elevation of Haudenosaunee systems of ethics, aesthetics and exchange to the primary modes of operation. It is precisely through the development of Mason’s enterprise according to Haudenosaunee economic principles that the reservation’s members are able to regain access to clean water and healthcare services.

The body of Gansworth’s novel, then, is evidence of this elevation. Through the numerous pieces of visual art, the meticulous structure of the novel, and his aptly-named protagonist, “Fiction” Tunny, Gansworth encodes within the novel form a strictly Haudenosaunee system of aesthetics, effectively appropriating the form as a means of autonomous expression. The novel itself thus constitutes a literary act of survivance: by transforming the Western form of the novel into a localized and strictly Haudenosaunee body of aesthetic work, Gansworth undermines the logic of disposability characterizing the modern world-system (in both economic and literary terms). Gansworth, in his inscription of a “literary localism,” accomplishes in literary terms what Mason, with a good deal of help from his community, accomplishes economically: the appropriation of Euro-American systems of expression and exchange as a means of adapting to the pressures of an unequal world-system and establishing Indigenous autonomy.

In both narrative and aesthetic forms, each of the novels addressed in this project offer powerful critiques of—and, simultaneously, alternatives to—the logic of disposability characterizing contemporary and historical capitalism. As such, they provide significant critical interventions into the field of contemporary economic discourse. The fictional systems of

exchange articulated in these works thus provide scholars and/or readers of literature (from all academic or professional disciplines) with a means of reading economics according to a literary sensibility. More specifically, fundamental role of waste—as a powerful yet contradictory socio-economic function—inscribed in these novels offers a deeply historicized conceptualization of the term that eludes contemporary economists. Analyzing these fictional systems of exchange, then, provides a crucial tool to better understanding the reality of our economic world.
Chapter 2

“Holy shit”: J R’s Logic of Disposability

William Gaddis’ second novel, J R, has been described as a particularly noisy text detailing the entropic nature of contemporary corporate capitalism.¹ The general understanding seems to be that because the novel’s economy is characterized by chaos and disorder, it is indeed an entropic system. Certainly, J R, in both form and content, is a chaotic text, and the overarching theme seems to be traced by a money-driven downward spiral for almost all of the novel’s characters: J R’s “Family of Companies” eventually tanks; Gibbs and Eigen both end up divorced and experiencing legal/financial difficulties; Norman Angel attempts suicide, an act at which Schramm succeeds; and Edward Bast, while having completed “a piece for the unaccompanied cello,” is hospitalized, his body

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quite nearly wasted by his participation in J R’s company.² These plots and subplots—in addition to a number of characters killed in car accidents, the few notable business dealings held in restrooms and the accumulating chaos that characterizes J R Corp.’s “uptown headquarters”—thus inscribe a path toward destruction, disintegration and devastation for the novel’s characters, which, for many scholars, exemplify the entropic nature of the narrative, composed almost entirely of fragmented dialogue and unattributed outbursts of speech.

Importantly, according to the OED, each of these three terms can be traced back to the concept of waste, defined as “[d]estruction or devastation cause by war, floods, conflagrations, etc.,” and a “[g]radual loss or diminution from use, wear and tear, decay or natural processes.”³ Yet the term waste cannot so easily be made synonymous with entropy. Indeed, it is the very contradictory nature of waste that makes it such an apt characterization of J R’s system of exchange. As explained in the introduction to this thesis, “waste” calls simultaneously to mind two oppositional notions: absence, “empty space or untenanted regions of the air;” and excess, “a profusion, lavish abundance of something.”⁴ In J R, waste appears in both absent, conceptual forms—as unproductive or unprofitable forms of labor—and excessive, material forms, encompassed by terms such as “trash,” “crap” and “shit.” As I make clear, the ever-increasing production of waste in J R’s primary system of exchange is not merely inevitable, as its correlation with naturally-occurring entropy would imply, but in fact intentional. Thus, while the novel’s

² William Gaddis, J R (New York: Penguin Books, 1993), 675. All future excerpts in this chapter refer to this edition and will be cited parenthetically. Unless otherwise noted, all ellipses and emphases refer to the original text.
⁴ Ibid.
chaotic corporate-capitalist economy certainly tends toward disintegration and
destruction, it does so according to a specific and paradoxical logic. Gaddis demonstrates
that the project of capital accumulation requires a reciprocal logic of disposability.
Capital accumulates by maximizing productive activity while minimizing unproductive
or wasteful activity; at the same time, the objects of value—commodities—created by
productive labor are necessarily disposable—able to be transformed into crap, trash or
shit—if capital is to effectively accumulate. In other words, the economy of J R, in its
efforts to minimize what it perceives as waste—that which cannot be converted into
exchange-value—in fact produces waste in ever increasing amounts through the very act
of commodity exchange. Indeed, as Douglas Dowd has noted of the modern global
economy, waste, in the form of products or forms of production that are “withheld from
use and/or . . . destroyed,” in fact served as the “solution” to an expanding economy after
World War II. 5 In particular, by tracing the many functions of paper as a means of
exchange, we will see how the project of capital accumulation indeed relies on its
production of waste-products. In such a process, any clear distinction between waste and
value becomes deeply complicated.

Any use of the term “entropy,” then, should be qualified with a clear description
of the term’s meaning(s). Thermodynamically speaking, entropy is the measure of energy
made unavailable after a given thermodynamic process. More specifically, the entropy of
a closed system—a system which, according to James Clerk Maxwell, is “enclosed in an
envelope which permits neither change of volume nor the passage of heat, and in which
both the temperature and the pressure are everywhere the same”—is simply “the

5 Douglas Dowd, The Waste of Nations: Dysfunction in the World Economy (Boulder:
remainder of the energy, which cannot be converted into work.” To put it another way, the Second Law of thermodynamics, referred to as the Entropy Law, “states that matter and energy can only be changed in one direction, that is, from usable to unusable, or from available to unavailable,” and that the tendency in closed systems is for entropy to increase. Entropy thus represents a certain form of absolute waste, as the quanta of energy it measures cannot be converted back into usable forms. Yet in J R, waste—taking a number of forms, among them “crap,” “trash” and “holy shit”—is never defined absolutely. On the contrary, the creation of waste—through the act of disposing—is in fact productive, as it serves as the foundational logic of the novel’s corporate-capitalist economy.

In J R and its scholarship, entropy is most closely associated with terms like disorder, noise and chaos. Gaddis himself used Norbert Wiener’s *The Human Use of Human Beings*—in which entropy is described as the measure of mis-communicated information—as a primary source for entropy in the novel. Certainly the novel seems to make corporate capitalism synonymous with chaos and disorder: as a number of scholars

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8 Arieh Ben-Naim criticizes the parallel often made between entropy and disorder. In particular, he argues that while it is fairly easy to distinguish between ordered and disordered systems, it is much more difficult to distinguish between two ordered or two disordered systems. Ben-Naim concludes that disorder is sometimes a useful description of what happens in entropic systems, however it is not always effective. Arieh Ben-Naim, *Entropy and the Second Law* (Singapore: World Scientific Publishing Co., 2012), 19-25.
have noted, the 96th Street Apartment—the site of a great number of financial transactions—is perhaps the pinnacle of entropy-as-disorder. Yet, much like thermodynamic interpretations of entropy, the notion of disorder within the novel should be qualified. After all, it is through the innumerable seemingly disordered telephone conversations that capitalists like Davidoff, Cates and J R are able to construct effectively accumulating corporate enterprises. What appears to be disordered to some characters—and indeed the reader—may in fact be, in an alternative sense, quite ordered. Indeed, as the final section of this chapter asserts, the function of the novel itself is to inscribe precisely this sort of “orderly disorder.”

The chapter, as follows, is divided into four sections. In the first section, I argue that J R inscribes a capitalist system of exchange driven by the need to accumulate capital, and that this accumulation is realized by adhering to a logic of disposability. In J R—and, indeed, in the world of contemporary economic study—the accumulation of capital occurs primarily through two mechanisms. The chapter’s second and third sections thus tackle each of these mechanisms as inscribed in the novel. First, the division of human activity—labor, more specifically—into productive and unproductive categories establishes a certain understanding of value in which the behaviors and items that enable the flow of capital—things that are commodifiable—are value-filled, while those that

9 See, for example, Thomas Sawyer, “JR: The Narrative of Entropy,” 119; Tom LeClair, The Art of Excess, 99; and Jack Gibbs himself, who observes of the apartment: “Problem Bast there’s too God damned much leakage around here, can’t compose anything with all this energy spilling you’ve got entropy going everywhere” (287).
10 Joseph Conte, Design and Debris: A Chaotics of Postmodern American Fiction (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2002), 2. It is worth noting that Design and Debris does not address J R specifically; additionally, I do not adopt with Conte’s use of “orderly disorder” as a characterizing aesthetic for postmodern fiction. As I point out in this chapter, I do believe J R goes beyond a postmodern “affinity for—rather than a[ modernist] aversion to—forms of disorder” (8).
inhibit such flow are value-less or wasteful. In rooting out what is wasteful or unproductive, the novel’s system of exchange is able to increase the production of value-filled items and thus accumulate capital. Second, the use of technological devices serves to facilitate the accumulation of capital throughout the novel. By circumventing laborious tasks and, more pertinently, reducing opportunities for human error, technology accelerates exchange while reducing the risk of “failure,” which, as we will see, is representative of wasted effort. But Gaddis clearly demonstrates that, through their attempts to minimize or eliminate waste and increase value, such accumulative practices necessarily produce enormous amounts of waste in a variety of forms. Even further, the production of this waste is by no means incidental but in fact intentional; waste, in this sense, is in fact of great value, as it facilitates the process of capital accumulation.

The final section of this chapter explores the function of the novel itself, as a means of conveying some form of narrative order. Indeed, for a novel so often hailed as a disorganized, chaotic, entropic and postmodern work, J R in fact overflows with order and meaning in its very embodiment of the logic of corporate capitalism. I argue here that Gaddis’ ability to inscribe capitalism’s contradictory logic within the narrative structure of the text is evidence of literature’s function as a mediator between contemporary and historical economic discourses and the reality of global capitalism today. Thus, while Mariano Siskind argues that the novel is merely the “visual reality” of the bourgeois project of globalization, J R’s narrative embodiment of capitalism’s contradictory logic

\textit{Accumulation: J R’s Runaway System}

\textit{J R’s} dominant system of exchange is modeled on American corporate capitalism, a system that places enormous emphasis on exchange-value. As John Johnston notes of \textit{J R}’s economy, “[w]hat above all characterizes this regime is the almost complete subordination of use-value to exchange-value.”\footnote{John Johnston, \textit{Information Multiplicity: American Fiction in the Age of Media Saturation} (Baltimore: The Johns Hopkins University Press, 1998), 125.} In other words, the utility of an object in this capitalist system is derived not from any characteristics inherent in the object itself but by its ability to be\textit{ exchanged} for capital; and such exchangeability, as Marx makes clear, is contingent upon the object’s relationship with other commodities.\footnote{“Turn and examine a single commodity, by itself, as we will, yet in so far as it remains an object of value, it seems impossible to grasp it. If, however, we bear in mind that the value of commodities has a purely social reality, and that they acquire this reality only in so far as they are expressions or embodiments of one identical social substance, viz., human labour, it follows as a matter of course, that value can only manifest itself in the social relation of commodity to commodity.” Karl Marx, \textit{Capital: A Critique of Political Economy Vol. 1}, ed. Frederick Engels, trans. Samuel Moore and Edward Aveling (New York: International Publishers, 1967), 47.} But Johnston goes even further, citing Jean Baudrillard to argue that “the operational logic of contemporary capitalism is dictated by ‘the force which rules market value: capital must circulate; gravity and any fixed point must disappear; the chain of investments and reinvestments must never stop; \textit{value must radiate endlessly and in every direction}’.”\footnote{Johnston, \textit{Information}, 126. My emphasis.} Baudrillard’s final phrase is of particular importance. Much as Marx and Engels had asserted that the capitalist market “must nestle everywhere, settle everywhere, establish
connexions everywhere,” Baudrillard is arguing that contemporary corporate capitalism must expand endlessly by converting everything into something of systemic value—namely, exchange-value—through the process of commodification.\(^{15}\)

Governor John Cates, director of Typhon International, is an exemplary model of such an exchange-centered capitalist. Upon discovering J R and Hyde in an office bathroom, Cates lectures the boys on the capitalist ethics of monetary expenditure:

—Millionaire? What would you do with a million dollars, you tell me that.
—Me? First I’d get this great big place with these electric fences and . . .
—Be a damn fool too wouldn’t you. . . . You in this class of Mrs. Joubert’s are you? Mean she’s never told you the only damn time you spend money’s to make money? (109)

For Cates, the expenditure of capital is only sensible if it produces a return. Accumulation, then, through the ceaseless return of profit, is the governing principle of the novel’s economy. In particular, the exchangeability of a given commodity is anticipated before capital is invested in its production; the likelihood of the commodity’s exchange for profit determines its very existence as a commodity. J R, an unequivocally successful capitalist and incidental disciple of Cates, attempts to describe this principle to Edward Bast:

—Would you want to do that? Mister Bast?
—Do what.
—This import export business right from your own home.
—Import and export what.
—How do I know but I mean that’s not the thing anyway, you know? He kicked a can up the highway’s unkempt shoulder kicking the weeds for

some remnant of sidewalk, —I mean the thing is just where you get to sell something. . . . (133)

For the novel’s capitalists, “the thing is just” exchange, an implicitly assumed logic that allows for capital accumulation, which, as Max Weber observed of capitalism in the early twentieth century, “is no longer subordinated to man as the means for the satisfaction of his material needs.”16 In other words, the accumulation of capital is not a means to some material end but an end in and of itself. Toward the novel’s end, J R proves himself to be an adept practitioner of this accumulative logic. When Bast tries to convince J R that the company is out of control, J R, quite succinctly, explains the golden rule of accumulation:

. . . haven’t I told you to stop? when the whole thing started? just stop and let somebody help you pull things together instead of this more! more!
The more you get the hungrier you get. . . .
—No but that’s what you do! I mean where they said if you’re playing anyway so you might as well play to win but I mean even when you win you have to keep playing! (647; my ellipses and emphasis)

Accumulation, “more! more!” is both the logical and ethical project of J R’s corporate empire; J R’s oft-repeated phrase provides all of the necessary justification: “but that’s what you do.”

Indeed, J R’s system of exchange is driven entirely by the need to accumulate profit. The novel’s economy thus constitutes what Tom LeClair refers to as a “runaway system.”17 Certainly, a system founded upon the principle of accumulation lends itself to its description as a “runaway.” Adam Smith, writing in the latter half of the eighteenth century, positions accumulation at the center of capitalist production: “In the progress of

17 LeClair, The Art of Excess, 92.
manufacture, not only the number of profits increase, but every subsequent profit is
greater than the foregoing; because the capital from which it is derived must be
greater.”

Even further, it is through this accumulative principle that commercial society
realizes its primary function, which Smith terms “universal opulence.” He explains: “It
is not the actual greatness of national wealth, _but its continual increase_, which occasions
a rise in the wages of labour.” In other words, ceaseless growth leads to higher profits
for capitalists and higher wages for laborers; everybody wins when capital accumulates.

Yet, although _J R_’s economy of finance capitalism is based on Smith’s general concept of
accumulation, the nature of _J R_’s and Cates’ accumulation, as LeClair points out, is
fundamentally different. LeClair, building from Anthony Wilden’s _System and Structure_,
describes _J R_’s runaway system in terms of “positive feedback”: “the more you have, the
more you get.” The capitalists in _J R_ spend _only_ if there can be some high probability of
an even _higher_ profit in the future. Accumulation is not naturally inevitable, as Smith
would have it, but preemptively so. Indeed, as LeClair points out, “[w]hat Cates primarily
produces, Gaddis suggests, is more production, using excess cash or borrowing money to
expand, to enlarge the Cates corporation’s power and control.” The end goal, then,
becomes not the increase in national produce, as Smith perceived, but the increase in
individual profit. Because what is accumulated (capital) is not _consumed_ but only

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19 Ibid., 18. Importantly, Smith’s assertion of the universal opulence of commercial society stems from his discussion on the importance of divided and specialized labor categories, which are _by nature_ unequal and hierarchical. It seems rather contradictory, then, that such division of labor could lead to a “universal opulence which extends itself to the lowest ranks of the people.” Ibid.
20 Ibid., 68. My emphasis.
21 LeClair, _The Art of Excess_, 92.
22 Ibid., 94.
reinvested to ensure further accumulation, the system circles back in on itself. Tyrone Slothrop, looking back on his family’s history with trees, reaches a similar conclusion: “Slothrop’s family actually made its money killing trees, amputating them from their roots, chopping them up, grinding them to pulp, bleaching that to paper and getting paid for this with more paper. ‘That’s really insane.’”

As noted above, J R’s capitalists accumulate by using two particular mechanisms: the division of labor into productive and unproductive categories and the implementation of technology as a means of facilitating exchange. As Gaddis makes clear, each of these mechanisms in fact expands the production of waste precisely through its efforts to minimize it. Even further, the object of the novel itself, as an embodiment of an entropic, “runaway” system, provides readers with the means of navigating the often contradictory categories of waste and value.

Un/Productive Labor: Value, Worth and “holy shit”

Central to the project of accumulation is the clear delineation between value and non-value. To put it another way, the accumulation of capital is made possible only by distinguishing between productive and unproductive labor, and thereby keeping unproductive labor to a minimum. For Adam Smith, productive labor is the sort “which adds to the value of the subject upon which it is bestowed,” while unproductive labor is that “which has no such effect.”

24 Smith, *Wealth of Nations*, 191. For Smith, productive labor is exemplified by manufacture and agriculture, while within the category of unproductive labor fall professions of service: “churchmen, lawyers, physicians, men of letters of all kinds . . .” even the “sovereign . . . with all the officers both of justice and war who serve under him, the whole army and navy, are unproductive labourers.” Ibid., 192.
Hall, writing in 1999, note that workers can choose to participate in either productive labor or diversion.\(^{25}\) In *J R*, the things and practices valued by its capitalists are those that enable the process of capital accumulation, aiding its participants in their realization of the system’s primary function. Commodities, as subjects “bestowed” with value, serve as the fruits of productive labor in such a system. For Marx, commodities realize their value only upon their quantifiable relationship with other commodities and are thus defined as such by their exchangeability.\(^{26}\) The function of the capitalist, then, is to commodify: to render objects or concepts as quantitative expressions of exchange-value to ensure that value “radiate[s] endlessly and in every direction.”

The world of *J R* is indeed one characterized by an almost universal form of commodification; nearly everything—from pieces of paper to human bodies and relationships—can be exchanged for capital. For example, Schepperman, one of the novel’s several struggling artists, has “been selling his blood for money to buy paint” (48); Edward Bast’s body—the counterpart to J R’s disembodied, muffled and telephonic voice—is used for profit, his physical health exchanged for the financial health of J R’s company; Amy Joubert’s relationship with her ex-husband Lucien and, later, with her son Francis become central factors of Typhon International’s business dealings; and Jack Gibbs’ relationship with his daughter is largely dependent on the money he is able to

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\(^{26}\) Marx refers to the General Form of Value, in which certain quantities of a number of commodities are made equivalent to a particular quantity of a single commodity. This “form expresses the values of the whole world of commodities in terms of a single commodity set apart for the purpose . . . and thus represents to us their values by means of their equality with [the single commodity]. . . . By this form, commodities are, for the first time, effectively brought into relation with one another as values, or made to appear as exchange-values.” Marx, *Capital*, 66.
provide for child support—not to mention the cost of payphones, his primary means of communication.

Yet, as with objects themselves, bodies and relationships are not inherently commodities; rather, they are rendered as such by their perceived exchangeability. In particular, the ability for certain characters to exchange affection for the potential of financial profit engenders the commodification of relationships throughout the novel. In this sense, the commodification of these relationships becomes productive for the novel’s capitalists. Once again, Governor Cates provides a useful model. By spreading Amy’s ex-husband’s shares in Typhon International into two tax-exempt foundations—titled the “Emily Cates Moncrieff” (Amy’s alias) and “Francis Cates Joubert” foundations—Governor Cates and Monty Moncrieff (Amy’s father) were able to circumvent taxation and prevent the ex-husband from exercising a company takeover. Indeed, for Cates, the status of these foundations is more important than the health and well-being of Amy herself. After Amy faints in her father’s office, the company lawyer’s response is put into perspective by Cates:

—I, I think she’s all right sir she . . .
—You do do you Beaton? Had a little scare though didn’t you suppose she wasn’t, keeled over lying dead at your damn feet right now where would we be, damn Frenchman she married march in take over as the boy’s trustee guardian every other damn thing rob us all blind. . . .” (101-2; latter ellipsis mine)

Governor Cates and his company Typhon International are more effectively able to accumulate capital by ensuring a particular sort of relationship exists between Amy and her son, Francis.
Stella Bast, Edward’s cousin/sister, is perhaps the most exemplary commodifier of human relationships in the novel. While her characterization early on is somewhat ambiguous, it becomes clear, as the novel progresses, that her primary motivation is to hold the majority share of her recently deceased father’s company, General Roll. Stella’s husband is Norman Angel, manager of General Roll. While Edward and Stella’s aunts, Anne and Julia, are discussing what could have brought Stella and Norman together, Julia makes a remarkably cogent observation:

—I think it’s perfectly obvious Anne, if there was any doubt it’s quite clear now the reason he married her plain and simple was to gain this foothold in the company. Once he got those twenty-three shares out of Thomas [Stella’s father] he was in a position to step right in about the time Thomas became less active. Now with Thomas gone and no one to look after things we and James [Stella’s uncle, and possibly Edward’s father] have only twenty-seven among us, and if Stella’s to have all twenty-five or so from the estate they can bring this gang of strangers in and run it all however they please. Why else would she and that husband of hers have come out here turning things upside down, hounding Edward to kingdom come. He’s just afraid that if Edward claims half they’ll end up with something like thirty-five shares, we’d have almost forty with Edward’s half and keep things in the family as Thomas intended. (233)

Certainly the convoluted process of distributing Thomas’ estate here necessitates the entanglement of familial relationships within General Roll’s flow of capital. Julia has indeed struck the proverbial nail on the head, with one minor confusion: it is Stella, not Norman, who perceives relationships as productive commodities. Indeed, Norman in fact pushes against the idea of letting the company go public—selling it to a public company for a large profit. As the company lawyer, Coen, pressures him to consider the public
option, Norman responds: “Can’t you see you go public and all these people owning you want is dividends and running their stock up, you don’t give them that and they sell you out . . . if they’d just understand I’m not just trying to grab this whole show for myself but to keep it doing something that’s, that’s worth doing” (359). Jack Gibbs, who happens to have had, at one point, five important shares of General Roll—five shares which would have given Stella and Norman a clear majority—discovers the intentions behind Stella’s casual inquiries into the status of these shares:

—I mean you’ve been saying twenty-three I think and didn’t Father give you some shares and you know God damned well it was five, you know twenty-five plus five is thirty which is more than twenty-three and more than twenty-seven . . .
—Jack you . . .
—But Norman’s twenty-three plus five would be twenty-eight which is more than your aunts’ twenty-seven and more than your twenty-five well you didn’t have to bother Stella, I haven’t got the God damned five shares. (351)

Stella’s quasi-incestuous relationship with her brother/cousin Edward thus takes on new meaning. While Edward admits his affection for Stella—his opera was inspired by their relationship—Stella in fact seduces Edward in order to gain access to his birth certificate, which would determine whether or not he would be eligible to receive half of Thomas’ shares in General Roll. Importantly, in this process, Edward’s and Stella’s relationship—or, Edward’s perception of their relationship—is effectively “destroyed,” as Edward loudly reminds his cousin:

. . . you broke in Stella you broke in and destroyed every, up there I can still see you those flashes of lightning I can still see you on the bed up there I can still see your throat your voice I can still hear it don’t, you
don’t have to seduce me I can still feel your hand when you . . . (716; my ellipsis)

To which Stella responds:

Destroyed of course I did! You didn’t think I, that I wanted you did you? You don’t think I, that day up on the mountain that I didn’t know you were watching me. . . ? that, that barn out there where these ideas these fantasies these, these obsessions could hide untouched unfinished till you opened the door on them again, on this fear you haven’t inherited James’ talent so you’ll settle for money that’s where it belongs all of it, with your music in the trashbasket all of it! (716).

Of course, as we learn from Stella’s final conversation with Mister Coen, Stella does in fact succeed in taking majority control of General Roll by the end of the novel.

J R Vansant, as studious a reader of Wall Street “literture” as any in the novel, opts instead to replace his rather unproductive relationships with the productive, accumulative principles of corporate capitalism. More specifically, it is J R’s lack of emotional relationships that leads him to capitalist practices of growth. We first meet the eleven-year old at a rehearsal for the school’s adaptation of Wagner’s Der Ring Des Nibelungen, conducted by the composer Edward Bast. J R, one of the few students “who seemed indeed to know his part,” held the role of Alberich the Nibelung, a dwarf who, after being denied by the Rhinemaidens, renounces love and steals the Rhinegold, from which he later forges the Ring of power (36). J R, presenting a wonderful parallel to Alberich, shouts his line, “—Hark floods! Love I renounce forever!” and does indeed make off with the Rhinegold (36). Not unlike Alberich, J R appears to be rather

lonesome. We learn in the first half of the novel that J R’s parents play a relatively small role in his life. Indeed, the boy’s name, as a “sort of abbreviation for Junior,” is telling of such an absence: certainly, the addition of Junior to a name implies an association with a fatherly first name; substituting this first name with “J R,” essentially the “junior” to no one in particular, calls attention to a familial absence. Amy Joubert, his teacher, observes that “he always looks as though he lives in a home without, I don’t know. Without grownups I suppose, like he simply lives in those clothes of his” (246). On their walk home from the train station, Bast asks J R:

—doesn’t your mother expect you to . . .
—Her . . . ? the sidewalk ended abruptly — no she comes in at all different ow! holy, boy I almost lost my . . . (134)

J R here inadvertently stubs his toe, but the sudden presence of pain and loss upon discussing his mother is worth noting. It is thus unsurprising that J R dubs his capitalist project “The J R Family of Companies,” effectively replacing his own renounced love, like Alberich, with financial power: just as Alberich forges the Ring of power from the stolen Rhinegold, so J R uses his “Rhinegold”—a bag containing the twenty four dollars and sixty three cents raised by J R and his classmates—to purchase a share of Diamond Cable and lay the foundations of his corporate empire.

If value consists of those items that serve to facilitate the accumulation of capital—namely, commodities—then what is wasteful, in contrast, are those things and practices that are unproductive or inhibitive to this end. The ethical response, then, is to minimize such waste. Adam Smith articulates this logic quite nicely. While Smith admits

that forms of unproductive labor do in fact have value, he clearly describes these forms of labor as inherently wasteful to the project of accumulation.\(^{29}\) He argues:

Both productive and unproductive labourers, and those who do not labour at all, are all equally maintained by the annual produce of the land and labour of a country. . . . According, therefore, as a smaller or greater proportion of it is in any one year employed in maintaining unproductive hands, the more in the one case and the less in the other will remain for the productive, and the next year’s produce will be greater or smaller accordingly.\(^{30}\)

Because the amount of produce necessary to sustain a given country of people is finite, any amount of this produce that will not be returned—via the sustenance of productive labor—is inherently wasteful. Indeed, for Hall and Jones, diversion—the antithesis of productive labor—acts like “acts like a tax on output.”\(^{31}\) Unproductive laborers are thus those who consume the fruits of capitalist production but do not contribute to its reproduction; they take without giving back. Governor Cates adopts a Smithian perception of waste as he admonishes Davidoff for considering the disposal of leftover food, instructing him that “[w]aste shows an undisciplined strain of mind” (111). Such feelings toward waste serve to explain why he saves a paperclip tossed (by Davidoff) into a wastebasket.

In \textit{J R}’s productive/unproductive framework, the production of art—in the form of music, paintings and literature—takes on a rather peculiar role. Certainly, the

\(^{29}\) Smith qualifies his categorization of unproductive labor forms by noting: “The labour of the meanest of these [unproductive professions] has a certain value, regulated by the same principles which regulate . . . every other sort of labour.” Smith, \textit{Wealth of Nations}, 192.

\(^{30}\) Ibid., 192-193.

\(^{31}\) Hall and Jones, “Output Per Worker,” 95.
enveloping forces of capitalism attempt to commodify works of art in order to extract value from them. J R’s school is almost successful in this direction, staging a performance of Wagner’s *Der Ring Des Nibelungen*. Principal Whiteback—who also happens to be president of a local bank—conceives of the performance as part of a “cultural drive” and hopes to “see[] it pay off in mass consumers, mass distribution . . . [l]ike automobiles and bathing suits” (28; my ellipsis). Miss Flesch, director of the performance, seems to take possession of the opera: “my Ring, you take my Ring . . .” (27). Wagner’s opera, here, appears less as a piece of performance art than as a commodity object, an actual “ring” with which Miss Flesch decorates a finger. Even the artists themselves are pulled into this commodifying eddy. Whiteback asks Flesch: “—If your Ring isn’t ready, your Wagner, what is there?” to which she responds, “—My Mozart” (29). Importantly, the purpose behind this cultural drive is to make it “pay off,” which, as Major Hyde recapitulates, is “what America’s all about” (27). Indeed, toward the end of the novel, Wagner reappears as the name of Mister Brisboy’s successful funeral company, making enormous profits through the deaths of others. The irony, of course, should not be lost: the school plans to raise money—ascribing to a capitalist logic of accumulation—by commodifying an opera focused entirely on the dangers of greed and the endless accumulation of power.32

32 Thomas Hanlon, in his doctoral dissertation titled, aptly, “The Ring Cycle of William Gaddis’ *JR*,” exposes Richard Wagner’s own apprehension toward a money-centered capitalist system: “Though much that is ingenious and admirable has been thought, said, and written about the invention of money, and of its value as an all-powerful cultural force, nevertheless the curse to which it has been subject in song and story should be weighted against its praises. There gold appears as the demonic throttle of mankind’s innocence; so too, our greatest poet [Goethe] has the invention of paper money take place as a devil’s trick. The chilling picture of [paper money as] the spectral ruler of the world might well be completed by the fateful Ring of the Nibelung as a stock portfolio.”
Yet the near-impoverishment of most of the novel’s artists, along with their consistent inability to find work “worth doing,” seem to suggest the resistance of art production to commodification, to conversion into exchange-value (491). There appears, then, to be a distinction between the value of commodities and the worth of a work of art. Mister Crawley, Diamond Cable’s stock trader, advises the composer Edward Bast, meeting on behalf of his partner J R, to “[s]tay in music and advise your, your associate here to stay in whatever the name of God he’s in, where neither of you will ever have to know the value of anything” (201). Literature, too, seems to be considered value-less. Mister Beamish, a lawyer with Triangle Products, notes that the evaluation of recently deceased Schramm’s estate—which includes his unfinished novel—should be a brief process, as “there doesn’t seem to be anything here of ah, of any great value . . .” (389). Indeed, the production of artistic work in the novel seems to operate according to a specific mode of valuation. While capitalist production—driven by accumulation—emphasizes expenditures that lead to larger returns, artistic production and exchange are driven by what Georges Bataille would refer to as profitless expenditure. Schepperman, J R’s struggling painter, is motivated not by the promise of any material return but purely by the exposure his work receives. His painting—a “staggering thing of his must be ten by twenty feet, all shattering blacks and whites” (409)—has worth only insofar as it is placed in a public space where it can be viewed. When Typhon International opts to take down the painting, the painter goes berserk. Jack Gibbs explains: it was “about making a statement. . . . One God damn statement after another where nobody could see it and he


33 See Chap. 1, p. 15.
didn’t give a damn for the money, just his statements shut up where nobody could see them only God damn reason he’d painted them” (409; my emphasis). In a similar vein, Bast notes of his musical composition that “till the music’s actually performed it doesn’t really exist at all,” that, on paper, Bast’s music is just “a lot of chickentracks” (288, 725). In order for the worth of art to be realized in this system, then, only its exposure to an audience is required; the promise of a *return* is superfluous.

Surely, then, artistic exchange in the novel seems to operate according to a set of ethics completely counter to the ethics of capitalist exchange. If artistic exchange demands the profitless expenditure Schepperman desires, Zona’s patronage of his work—which, importantly, provides Schepperman with the financial sustenance necessary to complete the work in the first place—instead requires accumulating profits. Indeed, as her conversation with Mister Beaton demonstrates, Zona can potentially earn more through the sales of his artwork by keeping the paintings stored in her private residence:

— I’ll tell you where he is right now, he’s breaking into my Saybrook house and stealing every painting of his he can lay his hands on. . . . The agreement Beaton drew up for me with this painter has seven years to run and if you think I broke my ass for a corner in his work so he could go out and peddle it on the side while he’s living on my money Beaton how much did the company pay for that atrocity.
— Twelve thousand dollars ma’am the actual purchase was . . .
— If he thinks he can get prices like that on his own he can kiss mine, isn’t that right here in the agreement Beaton?
— Yes ma’am not ah, yes not precisely in those words of course but . . .

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—Both cheeks, if he tries it again while this agreement’s in effect I’ll dump his work at prices that wouldn’t open a pay toilet and he’ll stand outside trying to sell one till his back teeth float. Where’s that twelve thousand now Beaton, if it’s anybody’s it’s mine. . . . (420-21; my former and latter ellipses)

The artists, those who seek “work worth doing,” are thus also those who take without giving back; they are the novel’s unproductive laborers, participating in diversionary, non-capitalist forms of activity. Governor Cates lambasts such unproductive laborers, labeling them “damn fools” who would “bite the damn hand that feeds them. . . . Only damn reason they think something’s worth doing’s they get paid to do it” (710). It would appear, then, that the accumulative force of capitalist exchange, effectively rooting out what it deems unproductive, causes the collapse of the system of artistic expenditure in the novel. Indeed, as Edward Bast is pulled deeper into J R’s Family of Companies, both his work and his body atrophy: as the composer’s health diminishes, his composition, which began as an opera, moves to an oratorio, downshifts to a “suite for a small orchestra” and ends, in a hospital bed, as “a piece for the unaccompanied cello” (567, 675). Nearly all of the novel’s artists are unable to complete their work, occupied as they are with the ceaseless search for money. Jack Gibbs, despite a renewed sense of vigor, is interrupted and eventually prevented from finishing his novel in the 96th Street apartment—J R’s “uptown headquarters”—by an endlessly ringing phone; he is essentially pulled into J R Corp.’s expanding network of exchange. J R’s ever-expanding corporation thus expels the system of artistic production; in other words, the system of artistic production and exchange is not wasteful in and of itself but is rendered as waste—disposed of—by its incorporation into a capitalist system of exchange, within which it contains no value.
Despite their fundamental differences, however, the principles of these two systems of exchange—of art and capital—tend to bleed into one another. In particular, the novel’s paper objects seem to problematize the distinction between productive and unproductive, value and waste. Scheperman’s paintings are in fact of much greater value to his patron, Zona, than to the artist himself. Beaton, Typhon International’s lawyer, explains to Zona: “as a collector of course you may deduct the full market value of the paintings . . . if Mister Schepperman were to donate his own paintings to the museum for instance, he would be allowed only the actual cost of the materials he used in producing them just as an author is allowed paper costs, erasers typewriter rib . . .” (706; my former ellipsis). Zona’s patronage, which facilitated the painting’s exposure—importantly, in the offices of Typhon International—in fact allowed Schepperman to realize, temporarily, the worth of his work. At a basic level, the novel’s artists require money in order to fund the production of their works. Paper money, then, has some level of worth in that, in sufficient quantities, it allows for the completion of a given work.³⁵ At the same time, paper money is consistently described as lifeless, worthless and empty. Indeed, the novel opens with just such a discussion, between Edward Bast’s talkative aunts, Julia and Anne:

—Money . . . ? in a voice that rustled.
—Paper, yes.
—And we’d never seen it. Paper money.
—It looked so strange the first time we saw it. Lifeless.
—You couldn’t believe it was worth a thing. (3; ellipsis in original)

³⁵ Thielemans notes that the “basic irony of [Edward Bast’s] seemingly desperate search for money is that he could get all the money he needs through a simple legal action, claiming part of the estate of Thomas Bast, his legal father, who has just died when the novel begins. One piece of paper—a birth certificate—is all he needs.” Thielemans, “Art as Redemption,” 139.
The “value” of money—as the very metric by which exchange-value is measured—then seems to be undermined by its paper existence, its apparent lifelessness and the ease with which it can be thrown away.

The unstable categorization of waste as value’s opposite points to the central contradiction of the novel’s capitalist ethics of exchange and, further, exposes the dependency of such exchange on disposability. If what is truly wasteful to this system is that which inhibits capital accumulation, then, recalling that the project of capitalism is to convert anything and everything into a commodity, the act of disposal, of perceiving an object as trash or garbage, and thus no longer suitable for exchange, is a wasteful act in and of itself. This perhaps sheds light on the seemingly paradoxical descriptions of J R’s early financial interests. Bast learns from Mister Crawley that J R’s Eagle Mills bond is better suited as “wallpaper,” and J R himself refers to his mail-in business investments as “crap,” albeit “better crap” than his friend Hyde’s (200, 79). J R’s “paper empire,” which two-thirds of the way through the novel is “running up toward four hundred million in sales,” is thus built from “crap,” paper that only appears to be worthless for the accumulation of capital (529). But upon a closer analysis of this “crap,” it becomes apparent that certain objects, once relegated to the status of “trash”—items of no use for consumers—are in fact quite valuable to the system of capitalist production as a whole. For Stanley in The Recognitions, this was the nature of “[e]xpendability” which so thoroughly characterized America: “Everything wore out. What was more, he lived in a land where everything was calculated to wear out, made from design to substance with only its wearing out and replacement in view, and that replacement to be replaced.”

logic according to which capital flows is thus what Michelle Yates calls a “logic of disposability:” the ease with which commodities can be disposed of serves to accelerate the accumulative flow of capital; once a commodity becomes trash and is thrown out, it will be replaced by another and the cycle begins anew.\(^\text{37}\) Trash is, in this sense, not waste at all but in fact productive, in that it facilitates the accumulation of capital.

As a number of waste-scholars have pointed out, waste is not merely the valueless byproduct of production. This of course works against the predominant perceptions of waste in economic discourses explored in this project’s introduction.\(^\text{38}\) Yet Heather Rogers, who traces the abundance of garbage disposed by US households to the industrial revolution, notes that the advent of sanitation engineering after World War II helped to bring about an industry of waste management that profited handsomely from increasing amounts of trash. The high profits of this industry ensured the abundance of trash; the more objects disposed, the more profits brought in. Rogers argues that the “technocrats” within the waste management industry “were far from neutral. The engineering profession, of which sanitation is but one subset, emerged to fulfill the demands of capital and evolved with business and industry as its most influential forces” (71). Rogers quotes from Stuart Ewen’s \textit{PR! A Social History of Spin}, who concludes that landfills are not “just an unfortunate byproduct of capitalism; they actually represent the success of capitalism.”\(^\text{39}\)


\(^{39}\) Rogers, \textit{Gone Tomorrow}, 153.
The paradoxical productivity of disposal and value of waste thus reinforces J R’s oft-repeated phrase, “holy shit.” J R’s ability to convert crap into profit, making shit holy, renders the eleven-year-old not an unusual or exceptional but an exemplary model of the capitalist mindset. Indeed, as Michel Serres as asserted, the proliferation of trash in the modern world is little more than the capitalist’s claim to property. Serres traces the production of trash to a long biological history of the use of excrement by organisms to establish territorial boundaries. For Serres, pollution—in the form of either material waste or advertisements—stems from the animalistic “intention to appropriate.”

It is thus unsurprising that the 96th Street apartment—J R’s “uptown headquarters”—is filled with material trash, brand names and corporate logos, and, a topic that will be discussed in the following section, entropy. The novel’s characters are consistently having to navigate among the ever-increasing piles of mail, emptied cans of food and assorted items and packages strewn about the apartment: “[Jack Gibbs] was past the fleet of cartons and over the film cans, up 24-One Pint Mazola New Improved across bales of the Morning Telegraph toppling a peak of lampshades to mount Appleton’s Cyclopaedia of American Biography . . .” (279). The “stuff” in J R’s uptown headquarters is indeed so ubiquitous that Jack Gibbs is nearly “buried” by its bulk (569). The accumulating profits of J R’s Family of Companies are thus mirrored by the accumulating waste within the 96th Street apartment.

J R’s categorization of productive and unproductive objects and behavior, in its very successes in accumulating capital, thus operates according to a two-fold logic of disposability: it effectively roots out what is unproductive, disposing of the novel’s artists;

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simultaneously, the very distinction between productive and unproductive constitutes a contradictory logic according to which the ease with which items of value—commodities—can be disposed accelerates the accumulation of capital. Gaddis personifies this contradiction in the character of Stella Bast. Stella, who uses personal relationships for financial gain, is certainly a productive capitalist; and yet, like Smith’s unproductive laborers, she is described with “eyes taking all, giving nothing” (66).

*Technology, Mechanization and Entropy*

For Michel Serres, technology and machines are little more than mechanical extensions of organic processes. Having laid out his theoretical argument detailing the use of excrement as a means of appropriation, Serres poses the following question: How did we, as organisms, move from “vital excrement into chemical waste”? His response is that, as a result of the externalization of human bodies into machines and manufactured objects, the waste produced (according to the same principles of appropriation) is of a different composition. Certainly, Marshall McLuhan would agree to some extent. In *The Gutenberg Galaxy*, McLuhan cites the anthropologist Edward T. Hall, arguing that, “[i]n fact, all man-made material things can be treated as extensions of what man once did with his body or some specialized part of his body.” Transposing McLuhan’s framework onto Serres’ theory, the aspects of machines that produce waste—in the form of industrial byproducts, on one hand, and advertising campaigns on the other—thus have a specific biological counterpart in the human excretory system. Beyond this, however, Serres and

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41 Ibid., 37.
McLuhan establish a clear theoretical link to the rise of technology in the twentieth century and the production of waste therein.

Other scholars, however, have opted for a more materialist approach. As both Heather Rogers and Susan Strasser have made clear, the dramatic shift in the scale of trash production in the United States can be traced to technological changes in the means of production. For Strasser, the advent of mass production in the early twentieth century disrupted what has been a nearly closed—albeit deeply problematic—system of industrial production and class-oriented scavenging practices. As commodities were being produced more quickly and at lower costs, “trash and trashmaking became integral to the economy in a wholly new way: the growth of markets for new products came to depend in part on the continuous disposal of old things.” Jennifer Seymour Whitaker takes the relationship between technology and garbage even further, arguing that the explosion of technology during the Second World War—notably, plastics and petrochemicals—played a fundamental role in the rise of disposable packaging for consumer goods in the postwar era. It is thus somewhat paradoxical that technology was employed to solve the very problems it helped to create. As Rogers has convincingly argued, the abundance of garbage in early twentieth century cities was, more than anything, a “technical problem”

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44 Strasser argues that “ragpickers” repurposed many industrial byproducts and provided early factories with second-generation raw materials: “Grease and gelatine could be extracted from bones; otherwise bones were made into knife handles, ground for fertilizer, or burned into charcoal for use in sugar refining.” Yet Strasser is also careful to point out that this “closed” system produced enormous amounts of air and water pollution. Susan Strasser, Waste and Want: A Social History of Trash (New York: Metropolitan Books, 1999), 13.
46 Whitaker, writing in 1994, claims that, “[m]ore than any other single factor, the consumption boom of the last fifty years can be ascribed to the postwar miracle of petrochemicals.” Jennifer Seymour Whitaker, Salvaging the Land of Plenty: Garbage and the American Dream (New York: William Morrow and Company, Inc., 1994), 101.
solvable with appropriate technology and the “profession of sanitation engineering.”

Importantly, as touched on above, the management of industrial waste was motivated primarily by economic factors: ensuring that city streets were clear of trash was “a prerequisite for a burgeoning economy.” Despite its ability to produce waste, then, technology, as we will see, is deployed to accumulate capital precisely as a means of waste-minimization—in both conceptual (unproductive) and material (byproduct) forms.

To be sure, a vast number of economic scholars have noted the primacy of technology to economic growth. Phillipe Aghion and Peter Howitt position technology as economy’s other half, noting that “economic growth involves a two-way interaction between technology and economic life.” Technology—essentially any device to reduce the labor necessary to complete a given task—is indeed essential for the growth of and participation in the modern global marketplace. Unsurprisingly, this concept is not lost on J R, as he recalls the words of his teacher Mister Glancy to his friend Hyde: “modern banking would be impossible without the wonders of the computer see all these electric numbers down here?” (168). The primary sites of capitalist exchange in J R are littered

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47 Rogers, *Gone Tomorrow*, 61.
48 Specifically, Rogers argues that a “freer flow of commodities and bodies” led to greater industrial output, “which relied heavily on transportation” for exchange. Ibid., 60.
51 Robert Barro, macroeconomist and Professor of Economics at Harvard University, defines technology as a “given state of knowledge.” I’ve opted to use the term more intuitively, comprising the specific tools or objects developed from these given states of knowledge. Robert Barro, *Determinants of Economic Growth: A Cross-Country Empirical Study* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1997), 4.
with the fruits of scientific and technological progress. Crawley conducts his business using a “Quotron,” which he can, “[j]ust by pressing a button or two . . . ask [] for the latest information on any stock, number of shares traded, latest bid and asked prices . . .” (85; my ellipses); the conversations in the offices of Typhon International are consistently punctuated by ringing telephones; and Eigen’s and Gibbs’ 96th Street apartment, J R Corp.’s “uptown headquarters,” is encumbered with an often-active video phone.

For J R in particular, the use of communication technology provides the means by which his enterprise grows. More specifically, it is technology’s ability to mask the nature of his humanity—registering him as numbers on a screen—that allows the eleven-year old boy to conduct business across the globe. As J R points out, monetary exchanges that take place through technological devices transform the human being into “just different electric numbers on these checks and all which this computer reads them it doesn’t give a shit if you’re three years old just if the money’s there” (173). J R’s numerous pay phone exchanges, through which he is able to mask his voice with a handkerchief, do in fact provide the young capitalist with the means of enormous economic growth.

Yet as Norbert Wiener—one of Gaddis’ primary sources for J R—had asserted nearly half a century ago, communication through technological devices is riddled with entropy. Wiener, in *The Human Use of Human Beings*, positions “information,” the content of a given message, as entropy’s true opposite: “[j]ust as entropy tends to increase spontaneously in a closed system, so information tends to decrease; just as
entropy is a measure of disorder, so information is a measure of order.”\textsuperscript{52} Wiener’s text sheds some light on J R’s use of Edward Bast as the company’s primary spokesman: J R’s “human use” of a human being indeed leads to the disintegration of Edward’s general health. In Wiener’s terms, the entropy of a given system of communication consists of the portion of the message which is mis-communicated, lost to “background noise.”\textsuperscript{53} Importantly, as adopted from the Second Law of thermodynamics, entropy within a closed system will never decrease. Even further, the greater the complexity of a message, the higher its entropy; or as Gibbs explains, the “more complicated the message more God damned chance for error” (403).\textsuperscript{54} It is thus unsurprising that the use of technological devices for communication lead to exponentially increasing instances of miscommunication throughout the novel.

Despite their entropic nature, however, technological devices are applied throughout the novel as tools for capitalist accumulation through the elimination of wasteful practices. This is the primary function of Vogel’s company, Frigicom. As the name suggests, Frigicom intends to “solve the noise pollution problem” by freezing “noise shards” and disposing of them “in remote areas or at sea . . . where no one will be disturbed by their impact upon thawing” (527). Yet in his very attempts to be productive—by reducing wasteful “noise pollution”—Vogel in fact creates other forms of waste—specifically, destructive forms. After successfully freezing into shards Beethoven’s Fifth Symphony, Vogel and three technicians were physically injured by the

\textsuperscript{53} Ibid., 55.
evidently explosive process of noise-thawing. In a similar vein, as Jack Gibbs often laments, technology is used to eradicate the possibility of human error. Gibbs, attempting to finish his book—which Gaddis himself eventually does, as the novella Agapē Agape—notes that “democracy claimed technology’s promise to banish failure to inherent vice, where in painting it survives today” (571). Indeed, the notion of failure, as the result of unproductive labor, constitutes its own form of waste: a failed attempt is wasted time, wasted effort, wasted talent. Stella, meeting a disheveled, impoverished and recently divorced Jack Gibbs, recalls how he had “cared so, so strongly so bitterly;” seeing him presently, she can only lament: “What a waste . . .” (74). Yet as Gibbs also observes, the eradication of failure through the mechanization of the production of art leads to the democratization of the arts; the mass production of art works, allowing access to anyone, renders the artist him/herself obsolete, a mere waste-product. The player piano—the business of Edward Bast’s own uncle—is one such mechanizing device, making music “[u]niversal, because there is no one in all the world, having the use of hands and feet, who could not learn to use it with but little effort” (609). The effect, then, of the mechanization of the production of art is to “get the God damned artist out of the arts all at once” (288).

Although the mechanization of the arts figures high on Gaddis’ priority list, J R extends this mechanizing force beyond human behavior to actual human bodies. Again,

55 The immorality of wasted time is also addressed in The Recognitions in a sermon delivered by Wyatt’s father, who, according to his Protestant ethics, believes that “[a]nything pleasurable could be counted upon to be, if not categorically evil, then worse, a waste of time.” Gaddis, The Recognitions, 13.

56 Gaddis directly addresses the mechanization of the arts in his early essays on the player piano, collected in The Rush for Second Place. See also his final novella, Agapē Agape, also the title of Jack Gibbs’ work in J R.
we can turn to Norbert Wiener. For Wiener, organisms are sites of temporarily increasing organization, or anti-entropy: “certain organisms, such as man, tend for a time to maintain and often increase the level of their organization, as a local enclave in the general stream of increasing entropy.” Wiener argues that by adopting the un-entropic systemic characteristics of the human body, machines may be able to, in fact, decrease entropy. This is indeed the project of cybernetic study: by overlooking the more intangible aspects of human existence, cyberneticists may be able to construct machines that resemble the human bodily system. Wiener explains:

> It is in my opinion, therefore, best to avoid all question-begging epithets such as “life,” “soul,” “vitalism,” and the like, and say merely in connection with machines that there is no reason why they may not resemble human beings in representing pockets of decreasing entropy in a framework in which the large entropy tends to increase.

By adapting technology to the human bodily system, making machines more human-like, Wiener hopes to *decrease* the entropy of technological devices.

Yet what occurs in *J R* is in fact an inversion of Wiener’s cybernetic proposal; it is not the machine that is made to be human-like, but the human that is made to be machine-like. The staff at J R’s school exemplify this confusion:

> . . . we key the human being to, how did you put it once Dan? Key the . . .
> —The individual yes, key the technology to the individ . . .
> —Dan knows what I’m talking about, key the individual to the technology. . . . (224)

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58 Ibid., 46-7.
The syntax here is significant: rather than construct machines that are humanized, perceptions of human bodies in the novel are *mechanized*. Vogel indeed exemplifies this inverted logic. Vogel, in his conversation with Dan DiCephalis, describes the (female) human body in machinistic terms:

—Look at that rise and fall, just look at that! they came up on the corridor,
—look at the reciprocating beam motion and you can see what got Newcomen started on the steam engine can’t you.
—Well I, I hadn’t thought of . . .
—Never pictured him with Mrs Newcomen out together dancing cheek to cheek?
—No, I guess I . . .
—Frightening thing how machinery can give you ideas like that about a simple schoolgirl. Start off with that steady reciprocating movement and the next thing you know you’ve got a bottom, round and droops a little but still good, nothing wrong with that at all. It’s when you add that so-called parallel motion James Watt introduced that you’ve got ass, push pull, push pull, quite an improvement, always sorry I never got a look at Mrs Watt.

(318)

Vogel here begins with the machine and arrives at a hypersexualized female body; the mechanics come first, and the human being is manipulated to fit the mechanical system. In doing so, the totality of human behavior is reduced to the workings of a machine, workings which are necessarily predictable and mathematically quantifiable.

The similarities between mechanization and commodification are thus readily apparent. By reducing human behaviors and bodies to quantifiable processes and pieces

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59 To be sure, there is much to be argued regarding the mechanization and sexualization of *female* bodies, let alone the role of female characters in general, throughout the novel. Such arguments, however, will be left for further research.
of “equipment,” the novel’s capitalists can more easily fit humans into their mathematized, formulaic economic system. Indeed, this is the essence of neoclassical economics, the success of which is attributed to the “‘scientificization’ or ‘mathematization’ of economics in the twentieth century.” Unsurprisingly, J R is finely attuned to the logic of commodification through mechanization. As J R explains his intentions to sell off a recently purchased company “on this here leaseback deal,” Bast attempts to remind him that the employees of the company are “real people” (295, 296). J R responds:

—No but look hey I mean holy, I mean this isn’t any popularity contest hey. Besides what could they do?
—Well they could, they could quit they could . . .
—Okay well then see we wouldn’t have to fire anybody because that’s mostly what costs so much anyway is all these here people, you know? See because if we could get them out of there and get this here new machinery I read this thing where you get this new machinery which then you divide how long it will take to wear out into how much did it cost you which then you get to take that off taxes too see? Only the neat thing is see they let you pretend like it’s going to wear out two or three times as fast so you’re getting this big bunch of tax credits right off, they call it depreciated acceleration or something only the thing is you can’t do it with people see so. . . .” (296)

J R’s insights are significant for a number of reasons. For one, his understanding of accelerated depreciation illuminates the larger logic of disposability governing the lives of commodities. By shortening the life-span of a commodity—ensuring its eventual

disposability—the capitalist is able to collect “this big bunch of tax credits.” Mechanizing the human body, then, engenders the commodification—and thus the disposability—of human beings. Even further, the advent of the very technology which engendered the disposability of commodities in turn rendered the human being disposable in a different sense. Despite Vogel’s efforts, J R insists that complete mechanization is something “you can’t do . . . with people.” Because the logic of accumulation favors disposable commodities, human laborers appear only as costs; disposing of laborers by excluding them from the system entirely then seems to be the only logical thing to do. The human body in J R, then, is reframed as both waste-as-absence, as an instrument capable of failure and thus less productive than a machine, and as waste-as-excess, as on obsolete tool of production.

Technology in the novel, in its (usually successful) efforts to minimize human error, thus seems to replace Adam Smith’s “invisible hand” as a controlling mechanism for market activities. Much as it removes the artist from the arts and redefines laborers purely as costs, technology, increasingly, takes on the responsibility of control from the likes of capitalists like J R and Governor Cates. Indeed, Cates, whose body aging body parts have been replaced by a patchwork of transplants, in fact resembles a machine, devoid of any human existence. Hospitalized at the end of the novel, Cates is described by Zona as

nobody, he’s a lot of old parts stuck together he doesn’t even exist . . . started an appendectomy punctured the spleen took it out then came the gall bladder that made it look like appendicitis in the first place now look at him, he’s listening through somebody else’s inner ears those corneal
transplants God knows whose eyes he’s looking through, windup toy with a tin heart. . . . (708; my ellipses)

J R, too, mainly exists through technological devices; he appears to the majority of the novel’s characters as a muffled voice over the telephone. Perhaps this is the true nature of a “runaway system,” a system governed entirely by technological apparatus and, as such, beyond the reach of human control. Control, then, as with Gravity’s Rainbow’s system, has been internalized:

A market needed no longer be run by the Invisible Hand, but now could create itself—its own logic, momentum, style, from inside. Putting the control inside was ratifying what de facto had happened—that you had dispensed with God. But you had taken on a greater, and more harmful illusion. The illusion of control. That A could do B. But that was false. Completely. No one can do. Things only happen, A and B are unreal, are names for parts that ought to be inseparable. . . .

The Novel Itself

As the novel reaches its climax and close, Governor Cates, shortly before bearing witness to the collapse of his own financial behemoth, addresses the risks of investing in the business of the printed word:

. . . take the wallpaper any day something you can draw up a budget on, don’t matter how ugly it is houses like a string of motel rooms you know how many damn rolls you can sell, these damn books you need a fortune teller in there doing your budget publish ten hold your breath waiting for one of them to bail out the other nine that any way to run a business? . . . Get into these mass paperbacks print an edition of five hundred thousand might as well ship three straight to the shredder one thing I hate it’s waste,

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61 Pynchon, Gravity’s Rainbow, 31.
can’t figure costs to sales too many unknowns too damn much waste. . . .
(692; my former ellipsis)
For Cates, wallpaper is of greater value than a work of literature; even further, the industry of literary publication, whose profits are largely unpredictable, is a particularly wasteful enterprise. How, then, are we to approach the novel itself, a bound collection of paper with its own endowments of value and worth? Certainly, it is difficult to overlook the novel’s own existence as a commodity—the “value” of my own 1993 Penguin edition is $25.00, or £8.99. The paper object of the novel is thus subject to the flows and processes endemic to the system of capitalist production; and yet, it must be commodified and exchanged in order to reach its audience. Is Gaddis, then, writing with a cynical form of self-awareness? Does he, like his novel’s artists, “wage a losing battle” with the forces of capitalism in an “ineluctable context of inescapable deterioration”?62

At a first and relatively uncritical glance, it would certainly appear so. Within the content of the novel, the corporate logic of accumulation—as Bast puts it, “[t]he more you get the hungrier you get” (647)—is reciprocated by a logic of disposability: the production of waste—like J R’s “crap,” the artist’s consistently deferred works and the chaos of the 96th Street apartment—is in fact productive, in that it facilitates the accumulation of capital. J R, as a novel composed of ever-accumulating voices and frequently interrupted and unattributed dialogue, imposes this reciprocal logic onto its readers. Such a narrative structure—more accurately, a lack of narrative structure—essentially bombards the reader with details, information. For Jean Baudrillard, an overabundance of information in fact detracts from the possibility of deriving meaning. He argues that abundance of information that characterizes the postmodern world—sent

62 Thielemans, “Art as Redemption,” 137.
through communication channels like television and radio, those incessantly interrupting devices popping up throughout J R—does not produce an “excess of meaning” but in fact erodes meaning.\(^\text{63}\) At first glance, then, Gaddis seems to be admitting the futility of his work in the contemporary world. As Davidoff reads an article on the Frigicom company over the telephone, the reader learns that

Vogel envisions concerts comma entire operas comma and books read aloud and preserved by the Frigicom process comma stressing its importance to longer works of fiction now dismissed as classics and remaining largely unread due to the effort involved in reading and turning any more than two hundred pages period. . . . (527; my ellipsis)

If this is indeed the case, the production of a 726-page novel, ridden with miscommunication and fragmentation, appears to contribute to its own unreadability.

Yet recalling that waste, in certain senses, can in fact be productive, we can perceive J R as not only meticulously organized but also spilling forth with meaning. By embodying the very chaos and waste that characterizes contemporary capitalism, the novel is able to simultaneously articulate and critique capitalism’s contradictory logic of disposability. It is worth recalling that media, for Marshall McLuhan, as the means of communication, is an extension of the human sensorium.\(^\text{64}\) From this assertion, McLuhan famously claimed that, in the electric age of the post-World War II world, “the medium is the message”: “The personal and social consequences of any medium—that is, of any extension of ourselves—result from the new scale that is introduced into our affairs by


each extension of ourselves, or by any new technology.” Thus, for McLuhan, it is not within the message itself but within the devices that mediate the message that information about society is stored. The narrative of J R thus embodies precisely such a medium, for the reader interprets not the messages of its characters but their persistent mediation by technological devices and economic forces. Gaddis focuses not on communication but on miscommunication, exemplified in Miss Flesch’s own misinterpretation of McLuhan’s work: “You have public relations whether you want them or not and I told him PRwise it can’t hurt the company imagewise the medium and the message and all that bla bla bla” (418).

J R thus exemplifies the concept of “orderly disorder” which, as Joseph Conte posits, characterizes the majority of postmodern fiction. Much as the rise of quantum mechanics and chaos theory had undermined the once-stable principles of classical Newtonian physics, postmodern fiction destabilized its modern predecessors precisely “in the conception of the relation between order and disorder.” Certainly the electric world of which McLuhan writes bears some striking similarity to the postmodern world Conte describes. As the editors of Essential McLuhan argue, “McLuhan showed that paradox, like metaphor, establishes ratios of a truth, for truth cannot be one thing, nor can reality, under electric conditions.” Yet I argue that, in the chaos and disorder that characterizes

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65 Ibid., 23.
66 Ibid. 
67 Conte, Design and Debris, 2. Conte notes that the term “orderly disorder” is borrowed from “scientific theories of chaos and complexity since the 1970s,” pointing specifically to the work of Benoit Mandelbrot, Ilya Prigogine and James Gleick. Ibid.
68 Ibid., 7.
69 McLuhan, Essential McLuhan, 7.
the narrative of *J R*, Gaddis is doing far more than “enact[ing] the interrelation of order
and disorder.”70 In particular, Gaddis’ novel makes three important strides: it
demonstrates the insufficiency of binary terms such as waste/value, order/disorder,
despite the persistence and significance of these categories; it locates the contradiction of
valuable disposability specifically in the logic of contemporary corporate capitalism; and
it establishes the medium of literature as an effective means of critically engaging with
this very system. The narrative thus serves as both critique and alternative. Indeed, as
David Buehrer has argued, “Gaddis suggests through *JR* that recognizing and even
exhausting the limits of the system may be the means toward correcting it, or at least
restoring it to a proper human scale.”71 It is thus fitting that Gaddis attempts to “exhaust
the limits” of the medium of the novel in *J R*. The seemingly incoherent and entropic
flood of information and dialogue—which, according to Baudrillard, serves to erode
meaning—is thus the exact opposite; by inscribing what appears to be an entropic
narrative, Gaddis is able to imbue the pages of *J R* with a recognizable meaning. Of
course, assuming the novel has taught us anything at all, it is clear that the adjectives
“incoherent,” “entropic,” and “meaningful,” “ordered,” were never so oppositional to
begin with.

*J R* is thus a novel that embraces the very principles of corporate capitalism it
seeks to critique. More specifically, the novel’s very embodiment of these principles is its
critique. As I have shown above, the economy of *J R* operates according to a
contradictory logic of accumulation/disposability. Tension is thus created between the

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70 Conte, *Design and Debris*, 2.
71 David Buehrer, “Personal Entropy and the Satiric ‘Incorporation’ of Characters in
economy’s need to accumulate—by producing commodities or commodifying objects—and its need to dispose of the very objects that contain value. These tensions, however, are synthesized within the form and body of the text itself. In *J R*, Gaddis is able to construct a seemingly entropic narrative *as a means of creating meaning*. The paper body of the text, as an expendable commodity, thus reconstitutes the opposing attributions of value inherent within these systems into the overarching system of the novel itself. Even further, the text as a piece of literature imagines the very world in which it is, for all intents and purposes, disposable in order to establish its autonomy. Gaddis himself has lambasted readings that describe *J R* as an embittered lament of the inevitable failure of the artist in a world governed by corporate capitalism:

> Frequently enough, careless or predisposed readers, John Gardner for instance, see these books as chronicles of the dedicated artist crushed by commerce, which is, of course, to miss, or misread, or simply disregard all the evidence of *their own* appetite for destruction, their frequently eager embrace of the forces to be blamed for their failure to pursue the difficult task for which their talents have equipped them, failure to pursue their destiny if you like, taking art at the center, as you say, as redemption in, and of and from, a world of material values, overwhelmed by the material demands it imposes. . . . Bast starts with great confidence, the sort I mentioned earlier, that confidence of youth. He’s going to write grand opera. And gradually, if you noticed—because of pressures of reality on him and money and so forth—his ambitions shrink. The grand opera becomes a cantata where we have the orchestra and the voices. Then it becomes a piece for orchestra, then a piece for small orchestra, and finally at the end he’s writing a piece for unaccompanied cello, his own that is to say, one small voice trying to rescue it all and say, Yes, there is hope. Again, like Wyatt, living it through, and in his adventure with JR having
lived through all the nonsense, he will rescue this one small, hard, gem-like flame, if you like. Because it is that real note of hope in JR that is very important. It’s the kind of thing that someone like John Gardner totally missed.\footnote{Gaddis, “Art of Fiction.” Gaddis is referring to John Gardner’s review of JR in The New York Review of Books, in which he argues the novel is “false” because its “self-righteous, emotionally uncontrolled last movement poisons what went before it, casting suspicion on what seemed at first basically generous and fairminded, genially satiric or justly sardonic.” John Gardner, “Big Deals (review of William Gaddis’ J R),” The New York Review of Books, June 10, 1976.}

Notably, as Edward Bast learns at the novel’s end, the failure to find work “worth doing” is the failure to complete the given work and have it recognized as such. He addresses Thomas Eigen, writer and friend of Jack Gibbs, in the chaos of the 96th Street apartment:

“I mean until a performer hears what I hear and can make other people hear what he hears it’s just trash isn’t it Mister Eigen, it’s just trash like everything in this place everything you and Mister Gibbs and Mister Schramm all of you saw here it’s just trash!” (725). But Bast’s efforts to salvage his finished composition from the hospital wastebasket have already transformed the piece from trash to potentially worthwhile work. Indeed, as Duncan, his hospitalized bedmate, had reminded him earlier, “[y]ou don’t even know what failure is at your age how can you call yourself one when you’ve never done anything” (672); Bast himself reiterates Duncan’s words near the novel’s end: “he told me nothing’s worth doing till you’ve done it and then it was worth doing even if it wasn’t” (715). Bast’s exclamations here are telling of Gaddis’ own intentions with the novel. In encoding capitalism’s contradictory and chaotic logic within the narrative itself, Gaddis puts the onus on the reader to sort through the complex web of dialogue and establish some form of order. Much like Bast’s audience members, the reader of JR, as Stephen Schryer has argued, acts “like Maxwell’s demon, eventually . . . learn[ing] to
sort characters’ voices out of the chaotic flow of conversation.” What Gaddis has made so clear, then, is that the reading of *J R*, in every instance, serves to realize both its worth and its order.

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Chapter 3

“the outhouses of the European soul”: Colonization and Disposability in Pynchon’s World-system

As I have shown in the first chapter, William Gaddis’ J R demonstrates how contemporary capitalism’s logic of accumulation is underscored by a reciprocal—and contradictory—logic of disposability. The distinctions between waste and value, and between productive and unproductive, become deeply complicated in the novel. What is clear, however, is that the ease with which commodities—objects, relationships and even people themselves—can be disposed of helps to accelerate the accumulation of capital. In this sense, what is labeled “waste” can in fact be quite valuable, a notion reiterated in J R’s refrain, “holy shit.” The ability to “make shit holy,” as it were—not through recycling but precisely through disposing—is central to the project of capital accumulation. Despite the global implications touched on in the novel—written, notably, in 1975, on the coattails of numerous global decolonization movements—J R’s corporate capitalist economy remains limited to a national scale. Of course, as Immanuel Wallerstein has noted at great length—and, indeed, Marx long before him—one of the
fundamental characteristics of capitalist production is its need, eventually, to transcend national boundaries and develop into a wholly global system.¹

Thomas Pynchon’s third novel, *Gravity’s Rainbow*, confronts such a global system. Though the novel is set in Europe at the close of the Second World War, its implications—and indeed its history—extend far beyond the pseudo-continent in the twentieth century. The system(s) of exchange established in *Gravity’s Rainbow* transcend national boundaries, and yet, in some sense, as is argued below, they rely on the existence of such boundaries. Governed by the unseen, unheard but certainly not unfelt Them and Their Firm—“They,” as Slothrop is quick to surmise, “embracing possibilities far far beyond Nazi Germany”²—Pynchon’s global system of exchange, known in the novel as the “War-state,” constitutes what Immanuel Wallerstein and Samir Amin, among others, have described as a capitalist world-system (78). Just as Gaddis’ depiction of corporate capitalism operated according to a logic of accumulation via disposability, so too does Pynchon’s War-state grow by disposing. Yet what distinguishes global system of *Gravity’s Rainbow* from Gaddis’ national economy is the specific disposability of not merely human beings but of human beings as *value-producing labor sources*. The world-system stratifies the globe into particular modes of production; accordingly, as with income and wealth, the disposability of the inhabitants and spaces of certain world regions are unequal. Thus, for Pynchon—and, by extension, Wallerstein and Amin—the

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¹ For more on Wallerstein’s explication on the relations between capitalist expansion and disposability, see Chap. 1, pp. 24-25.
² Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity’s Rainbow* (New York: Penguin Books, 2006), 25. All future excerpts in this chapter refer to this edition and will be cited parenthetically. Unless otherwise noted, all ellipses and emphases are from the original text.
act of colonization, as the early stage of an expanding global capitalist economy, represents the culmination of a contradictory logic of disposability.

To be sure, there is no shortage of scholarship on Pynchon’s monumental third novel. Indeed, a cursory search of the novel’s title on the MLA International Bibliography returns over six hundred results. A good portion of this scholarship—working largely in response to Edward Mendelson’s categorization of the novel as an encyclopedic narrative—\(^3\) is devoted to highlighting, exploring and unpacking Pynchon’s very refusal of the notion of a totalizing, all-encompassing structure or system.\(^4\) As a result, much attention is paid in recent scholarship on the elevation of liminality and the multiple converging, diverging and overlapping systems in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, particularly insofar as these offer the characters the means of escaping or refuting Their systemic project.\(^5\) Waste, then, for many scholars, is extra-systemic; as such, as Dana

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\(^3\) See Edward Mendelson’s “Encyclopedic Narrative: From Dante to Pynchon,” in *Comparative Literature* 91, no. 6 (1976): 1267-1275.

\(^4\) See, for example: Molly Hite’s *Ideas of Order in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon* (Columbus: University of Ohio Press, 1983); Luc Herman’s and Petrus van Ewijk’s “Gravity’s Encyclopedia Revisited: The Illusion of a Totalizing System in Gravity’s Rainbow,” in *English Studies: A Journal of English Language and Literature*, 90.2 (2009); and, more recently, Luc Herman and Steven Weisenburger’s *Gravity’s Rainbow, Domination and Freedom*, in which the authors argue that “the narrator’s mistrust of totalizing interpretation” is demonstrated by the novel’s outright refusal to provide unified endings, preferring instead the abrupt em-dash. Luc Herman and Steven Weisenburger, *Gravity’s Rainbow, Domination and Freedom* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2013), 11-12.

\(^5\) Marcel Cornis-Pope, for example, asserts that Pynchon’s narrative, in its focus on marginalized and liminal voices, creates a dynamic, pluralist perspective that subverts hegemonic systems of order. Cornis-Pope places *Gravity’s Rainbow* (as well as *V.* and *The Crying of Lot 49*) in the framework of polysystems theory, in which cores and peripheries are in constant tension, their relationships constantly being redefined. The novel thus “seeks meaning in the interstices between systems,” particularly through the recurring motif of the interface. Marcel Cornis-Pope, “Rethinking Postmodern Liminality: Marginocentric Characters and Projects in Thomas Pynchon’s Polysystemic Fiction,” *symplóke* 5, no. ½ (1997), 35.
Medoro has argued, *Gravity’s Rainbow* orients the “wastes of the World” as sites of salvation from the rigidly defined relationships between Elect and Preterite, core and periphery. My aim in this chapter is not to discredit these arguments *per se*; indeed, as I will show, the liminality of both the Zone and the Schwarzkommando present them with certain opportunities of systemic subversion. Rather, I argue that by reading *Gravity’s Rainbow* within the framework of the historical development of the modern world-system (singular), and specifically in terms of the logic of disposability that defines the system’s evolution, the notions of waste, liminality and subversion become deeply complicated. Within this framework, the non-capitalist wasteland of the Zone is thus distinguished from the non-capitalist wasteland of pre-contact Southwest Africa, in that the Zone is representative of waste created *by the world-system itself*, well after all of the world’s regions had been incorporated into the capitalist world-system. Waste, then, in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, is never entirely extra-systemic; it is both the means of subversion and, simultaneously, the means by which the novel’s world-system continues to incorporate, expand, accumulate and dispose.

While the emergence of capitalism’s contradictory logic of disposability as demonstrated through an exploration of the development of the modern world-system was made clear in the introduction to this project, it will be helpful to consider the role of the State in this development. For Immanuel Wallerstein, a world-system is a system that is “integrated . . . composed of interrelated parts [and is] therefore in some sense

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7 For more on capitalism’s logic of disposability in terms of the development of the modern world system, see Chap. 1, pp. 22-30.
systematic with comprehensible patterns.” According to Wallerstein, the modern world-system in which we find ourselves today has organized itself through the creation of “all major institutions of the modern world: classes, ethnic/national groups, households—and the ‘states.’” I emphasize “states” because it is of particular interest here. Certainly, the Second World War—the temporal and contextual setting of Gravity’s Rainbow—was a war between well-defined nation-states as much as a war between opposing ideological/economical systems. Indeed, Pynchon’s War-state paradoxically requires the existence of well-defined states while demanding their continuing disintegration through the violence of war. Yet, as Pynchon himself points out, the violence is all theater, a “diversion from the real movements of the War” (107)—movements which are, of course, defined by capital exchange. While the violence of war presupposes the establishment of well-defined boundaries, capital consistently transgresses these very boundaries. The profits made by Pynchon’s war-time capitalists—Katje, the double agent, and IG Farben, dealing with a number of American companies—indeed find historical parallels in the development of the world-system: Wallerstein points to European entrepreneurs in the sixteenth century who traded with the “enemy” during wartime. And yet, while these entrepreneurs often held dual or multiple citizenships, they “needed to utilize state machineries to strengthen their position in the market vis-à-vis competitors and to protect them vis-à-vis the working classes.” The nation-state, then, has a paradoxically primary yet subordinate role in the world-system, a role fully understood by Pynchon’s enigmatic and transnationalist Firm.

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9 Ibid. My emphasis.
10 Ibid., 34. My emphasis.
For Wallerstein, then, states are “created institutions reflecting the needs of class forces operating in the world economy.”\textsuperscript{11} The function of the state, to a greater or lesser degree, is to provide the necessary legal justification and military protection for the world’s capitalists. In the contemporary world, the nation-state is, essentially, the only regionally-defined institution endowed with this sort of power. Yet, as Giorgio Agamben points out, the development of the nation-state as a means of ordering the growing world-system necessarily excluded, and thus rendered disposable, those regions not defined by nation-states.\textsuperscript{12} For Agamben,

the idea of a people today is nothing other than the empty support of state identity and is recognized as such. . . . [O]n the one hand, the world powers take up arms to defend a state without a people (Kuwait), and, on the other hand, the people without a state (Kurds, Armenians, Palestinians, Basques, Jews of the Diaspora) can be oppressed and exterminated with impunity, so as to make clear that the destiny of a people can only be a state identity and that the concept of people makes sense only if recodified within the concept of citizenship.\textsuperscript{13}

The existence of the nation-state thus exemplifies the dependency of the logic of capital accumulation—which occurs only among well-developed nation-states—on a reciprocal logic of disposability. It is certainly worth recalling here Dominique Laporte’s assertion that “the State is the Sewer,” the means by which capital and humanity are purified

\textsuperscript{11} Ibid., 33. To be sure, Wallerstein’s explication of the function and development of states as institutions of the world-system is greatly detailed and thoroughly arguedl See Part I, Chapter 3, “The States in the institutional vortex of the capitalist world-economy,” in \textit{The Politics of the World-Economy}.

\textsuperscript{12} For more on the notion of waste as a function of ordering and knowledge production, see John Scanlan’s excellent second chapter, “Garbage and Knowledge,” in \textit{On Garbage}.

through the disposal of non-states.\textsuperscript{14} Zygmunt Bauman offers another conceptualization: “sifting out, segregating and disposing of the waste of order-building combined into the main preoccupation and metafunction of the state, as well as providing the foundation for its claims to authority.”\textsuperscript{15} The state, having become the sole means of economic and political participation in the world-system, is the system’s primary disposer, an institution that determines what is waste and what is valuable.

The disposal function of the State, however, is necessarily contradictory. As I had noted in Chapter 1, the disposability of labor, as the means by which value-laden commodities are produced, constitutes a powerful contradiction.\textsuperscript{16} As Gravity’s Rainbow makes clear, capitalism’s contradictory logic of disposability is exemplified by the actions of IG Farben in World War II—a transnational cartel that, during the war years, was essentially a State institution. Yet German colonials in Southwest Africa, some forty years prior to the war, indeed adopted this very logic in their colonial project. What Pynchon seems to be doing, then, is articulating the fundamentally contradictory and self-defeating logic of disposability that undergirds the modern world-system in two particular stages of its historical development: the stage of expansion via colonialism and imperialism, and the stage following the close of the Second World War, during which numerous regions were de-colonized and reconstituted as nation-states themselves. It is certainly worth pointing out that, despite the novel’s temporal setting, Gravity’s Rainbow


\textsuperscript{15} Bauman, \textit{Wasted Lives}, 33.

\textsuperscript{16} See Chap. 1, pp. 29-30,
was written and published during the “long sixties,” an aspect that demands (and has received) critical attention.\textsuperscript{17}

The chapter is divided into three sections. In the first section, I will articulate the structure embedded within \textit{Gravity’s Rainbow} that closely parallels a world-system, and as such operates according to a contradictory logic of disposability. This system, which Pynchon terms the War-state, sustains itself through the deaths of its citizens—military members and civilians alike. Death in the War-state is thus not the unfortunate byproduct of war but the necessary fuel for the War-state’s continual existence. In particular, in his explicit focus on waste, shit and disposability, Pynchon in fact illuminates an underlying logic of accumulation governing the War-state’s processes. The War-state’s need to accumulate thus informs the presence of Allied powers in the demilitarized Zone of Germany. The Zone, then, in Pynchon’s War-state, is indeed a wasteland: it is by definition demilitarized and denationalized, and as such is of little value the War’s system, which requires governments capable of effectively mobilizing its armed forces into war. But it is precisely these unproductive qualities—the absence of an effective nationalized military and government—that brings about the scramble of Allied forces occupying demilitarized Germany in their attempts to recover German V-2 rocket hardware and personnel. Even further, the Zone was in fact created by the War-state’s internal processes; like Wallerstein’s and Amin’s world-system, the War-state, operating according to a \textit{contradictory} logic of disposability, engenders its own moments of crisis, thus opening the doors for just “a little while” to potential subversion (566). The War-

\textsuperscript{17} Herman and Weisenburger in particular, addressing questions of “‘the chances for freedom’ in the age of late capitalism,” believe that “those questions need to be better situated against the variably defined ‘Long Sixties’.” Herman and Weisenburger, \textit{Domination and Freedom}, 3, 3-4.
state’s logic is perhaps best exemplified by the historical role of IG Farben as the primary provider of materials for the Third Reich’s military endeavors. In its very efforts to aid the Reich in its project of racial purification—both providing the Wermacht with synthetic fuel and developing a number of chemicals used to murder prisoners of the Nazi Party—IG Farben helped to decimate the labor force necessary to continue Germany’s enormous war effort. As a result, the Reich turned to the population it had already disposed of, forcibly putting to work the millions interned in concentration camps—exemplifying the central contradiction of capital accumulation.

The second section of this chapter demonstrates how Pynchon traces his War-state’s operational logic to the specific historical conditions of colonial Southwest Africa. Pynchon situates the act of colonization—specifically, of Southwest Africa by Germany—as the culmination of a logic of disposability. While both Amin and Wallerstein (and, indeed, Marx) articulate the endlessly expanding nature of the capitalist world-system—incorporating non-capitalist regions in order to derive profits from the extraction of raw materials and exploitation of newly available labor sources—Pynchon unequivocally argues that this expansion was driven by “much, much more” than mere access to “Cheap Labor and Overseas Markets” (322). Colonies, according to Pynchon, functioned as “outhouses of the European soul” (322)—spaces in which the wastes accumulated through the development of Europe’s capital economy could be stored without affecting the purified centers of capital exchange. The function of colonies as waste-storage sites indeed highlights the perception of the indigenous inhabitants of colonized regions—and, later, of peripheral world regions—as disposable bodies. Pynchon thus articulates an unstable binary between blackness and whiteness, in which
the color white, exemplified by Captain Blicero, is representative of those who do the consuming and excreting, while black represents those who are consumed and excreted. Germany’s official colonization of Southwest Africa at the end of the nineteenth century—an act driven by the need to secure German assets already in the region—led to not only the exploitation of the region’s resources but also the expropriation of its peoples. The indigenous Herero and Nama, reduced to a form of social waste, were the receivers of deplorable acts of physical and sexual violence. In the years between 1904 and 1911, the entire Herero population was nearly wiped out; as a result, in order to keep the colony profitable, those who survived von Trotha’s ruthless campaign of extermination were relentlessly sought out, to be enlisted as forced laborers. The historical reality of colonial Southwest Africa thus sheds some light on the project of “racial suicide” pursued by the Empty Ones, a branch of the relocated Zone-Hereros known as the Schwarzkommando. Much in line with Tiina Käkelä-Puumala’s recent work, this section demonstrates that the Schwarzkommando’s appropriation of German rocket technology as a means of committing collective suicide is neither “submission to death-promoting European culture” nor, as Deborah Madsen has suggested, an extreme reiteration of the “colonial project of abjection;” rather, the suicide of the Empty Ones, as a purely unproductive—in the capitalist sense—form of death, indeed constitutes an act of subversion.

The chapter’s final section addresses the function of the Rocket(s) in Gravity’s Rainbow. In particular, I argue that Blicero’s Rocket, Rocket 00000, serves as a representative of the world-system itself. The novel closes with what is assumed to be

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Blicero’s Rocket 00000 reaching its “last delta-t” over the theatre in which the reader imagines herself to be seated (775). The Rocket’s parabolic path (also known as “gravity’s rainbow”), launched from Germany in 1945 and landing in Los Angeles in the early 1970s, inscribes the trajectory of not only the novel’s narrative system but also the modern world-economy. Indeed, from the moment of its liftoff, the Rocket is always already acted upon by Gravity; its flight is necessarily atrophic, in that it can have no other destination other than complete destruction. The world-system, as a wholly self-consuming system, develops along just such a parabolic trajectory. Of course, Blicero’s Rocket is not the only rocket of concern here. The Empty Ones indeed succeed in constructing their own V-2 rocket, Rocket 00001; however, we as readers never witness its launch, flight or landing. Yet it is precisely through Pynchon’s refusal to make explicit the path of the second Rocket that it is imbued with the potentiality for survival, continuation beyond the system’s inevitable collapse. The narrative omission of the Schwarzkommando’s Rocket provides it with its imaginative power. If the system of global literary production is, as Moretti has argued, a system that is both “[o]ne, and unequal,” then Pynchon’s aesthetic approach—his refusal to narrate the Empty Ones’ subversive act—serves as his circumvention of such a world-system.  

We can thus read Gravity’s Rainbow much as Ben Ware and Michael LeMahieu read Wittgenstein’s Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus. In a letter to Ludwig von Ficker, Wittgenstein explains that his “work consists of two parts: of the one which is here, and of everything which I have not written. And precisely this second part is the important one.”

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explicitly unwritten launch of Rocket 00001 provides the Empty Ones with extra-systemic space in which they can move beyond both the economic and the narrative systems of Gravity’s Rainbow. Pynchon thus describes an alternative system of exchange based on Herero worldviews precisely by refusing to inscribe it.

**The War-State World-system**

*The “real business of the War”*

The economy of Gravity’s Rainbow is driven by its own world-system, one that Pynchon labels the War-state. The War-state is organized much like an empire, with outposts and subdivisions geographically scattered to act in its interest. Brigadier Pudding, lamenting his assignment to the Political Warfare division, ponders the numerous acronymed departments of the Allied war effort, the “other named areas of the War, colonies of that Mother City mapped wherever the enterprise is systematic death” (78). It’s worth pointing out that the “War,” that “Mother City,” to which Pynchon refers is not strictly the Second World War, nor is it any war that can be bracketed by temporal beginnings and endings. The War-state is representative of the “real War,” which, as Mister Information informs young Skippy, “is always there. The dying tapers off now and then, but the War is still killing lots and lots of people” (658). Death, then, the literal wasting of humanity, is the logic of disposability that drives Pynchon’s War-state; importantly, this logic arises not by virtue of the apparent inevitability of death in wartime but through the War’s *intentional* employment of death as fuel for its reproduction. Indeed, as the “devil’s advocate” Father Rapier observes, “[d]eath has

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also Ben Ware’s “Ethics and the Literary in Wittgenstein’s Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus” in *Journal of the History of Ideas* 72, no. 4 (2011).
always been the source of Their power” (548). The War ensures that “the right people are dying”: “[t]he ones who stand up, in Basic, in the middle of the machine-gun pattern. The ones who do not have faith in their Sergeants. The ones who slip and show a moment’s weakness to the Enemy. These are the ones the War cannot use, and so they die” (658).

*Gravity’s Rainbow*’s War-state establishes a logic of disposability through ceaseless commodification and quantification. Just as the world’s labor forces are commodified in contemporary global capitalism, so too are the War-states laborers—extending beyond the military to include everyday civilians, “whatever ‘civilian’ means nowadays” (22)—reduced to quantifiable packets of information, items to be exchanged. Certainly, as *Gravity’s Rainbow* makes clear, the War-state is, at its foundation, economic in nature: while the “enterprise [of] systematic death,” driven by disposability, is essential to the success of the system, Pynchon’s narrator reminds us that “the real business of the War is buying and selling” (78, 107). In other words, not unlike contemporary capitalism, *exchange* is the central function of the War. Roger Mexico, lambasting Pirate Prentice’s description of Mexico’s emotional state as “[c]heap nihilism,” connects the primacy of exchange to the damned Calvinist insanity. . . . Payment. Why must they always put it in terms of exchange? What’s Prentice want, another kind of Beveridge Proposal or something? Assign everyone a Bitterness Quotient! lovely—up before the Evaluation Board, so many points earned for being Jewish, in a concentration camp, missing limbs or vital organs, losing a wife, a lover, a close friend—. (58-9)²¹

²¹ It’s worth noting that, according to Steven Weisenburger, the “Beveridge Proposal” was indeed a real form of post-war policy: “The 1944 report ‘Social Insurgence and Allied Services,’ by Lord William H. Beveridge . . . became a foundation piece in
Mexico’s remark, made to his lover Jessica Swanlake, is meant to be hyperbolic (for the most part); yet the quantification (and thus commodification) of human experience for purposes of evaluation/exchange is indeed an essential aspect of the War-state’s system. Indeed, for Pynchon’s narrator, “[t]he true war is a celebration of markets” (107). Yet while large-scale companies like IG Farben and Standard Oil saw great monetary profit in the unfolding of World War II, on the smaller scale, “among the people, the truer currencies come into being. So, Jews are negotiable. Every bit as negotiable as cigarettes, cunt, or Hershey bars” (107). In the War-state’s system, human beings, like scarce commodities, are a medium of exchange, a currency, a form of wealth. Katje Borgesius, a double agent, is one of a number of war-time capitalists. She realizes that

the others have invested time and lives—three Jewish families sent east—though wait now, she’s more than balanced it, hasn’t she, in the months out at Scheveningen? They were kids, neurotic, lonely, pilots and crews they all loved to talk, and she’s fed back who knows how many reams worth of Most Secret flimsies across the North Sea, hasn’t she, squadron numbers, fueling stops, spin-recovery techniques and turning radii . . . hasn’t she? What more do they want? She asks this seriously, as if there’s a real conversion factor between information and lives. Well, strange to say, there is. Written down in the Manual, on file at the War Department. (107).

Thus, in the War-state’s system, lives and information are the primary medium of exchange; and, as with commodities, it is through the act of exchange that the War-state’s citizens become disposable. Indeed, when Sir Stephen Dodson-Truck goes missing from

English policy toward the displaced persons of war-torn Europe. Beveridge argued that the last should be first, that those who suffered most should stand first in line for Allied aid.” Steven Weisenburger, A Gravity’s Rainbow Companion (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 1988), 42.
the Casino Hermann Goering, Slothrop suspects Katje’s involvement: “What do you do, just throw people away?” (224) Katje responds: “Do you want to find out?” (224)

If Katje is a model wartime capitalist, then Brigadier Pudding is an exemplary representative of a disposable War-state citizen. Pudding, a veteran of World War I, not only demonstrates a strong affinity for excrement but also embodies the very notion of waste within his character: his name signaling material to be consumed, Pudding is one of the few elected for survival by the conditions of the War, but only insofar as he benefits the system’s self-reproduction. When we are first introduced to the Brigadier, we are told that “[h]is greatest triumph on the battlefield” occurred in the First World War, when “he conquered a bight of no man’s land some 40 yards at its deepest, with a wastage of only 70% of his unit” (78). Beyond the physical wasting of the vast majority of his comrades in the muddy trenches of the Ypres Salient, Pudding’s military motivation was the conquering of a piece of no man’s land, a tract of land by definition unpossessed, unclaimed and uninhabited. No man’s land is thus a wasteland, unproductive for the War that demands a certain degree nationalism to motivate its citizens into battle. The War-state thus seeks to render such “neutral” land as the property of either of the warring sides.

Pudding’s long experience with the wasting War system illuminates his eroticization of excrement, made explicit in his scene with Katje (disguised as Domina Nocturna, the Night Goddess). Before Pudding reaches the Katje in the final chamber he travels through six other chambers, a journey which, as Steven Weisenburger informs us, represents an inversion of the Kabbalistic ascent to divinity. Instead of climbing toward a culmination in enlightenment, “Brigadier Pudding descends into a private hell, and into
the darkness signified by the muds of the Passchendaele and symbolized in the Domina Nocturna herself.” Yet Weisenburger notes further that, according to Jacob Grimm’s *Teutonic Mythology*, one of Pynchon’s primary sources, “the dominae nocturnae were thought to hover over battlefields to take off the souls of the dead.” Katje, in this scene, symbolizes not only the seventh and final stage of Pudding’s hellish descent but also the specifically war-induced form of waste—death in battle. Pudding, then, having been excreted by the War-state, consumes the shit of the War’s representative, Katje as Domina Nocturna: “[t]he stink of shit floods his nose, gathering him, surrounding. It is the smell of Passchendaele, of the Salient. Mixed with the mud, and the putrefaction of corpses, it was the sovereign smell of their first meeting, and her emblem” (238). The Brigadier, subservient to the war goddess, is placed on a hierarchical level with her excrement.

Katje’s waste then takes on a peculiar form, for it is not, like entropic forms of waste, unavailable for consumption. Indeed, she excretes her waste purely for the purpose of its consumption by the Brigadier. Such a repurposing of matter could be perceived as an act of subversion, as would the ceaseless recycling of commodities (which would inhibit capital accumulation). Yet we learn in the pages preceding this scene that Pudding’s relationship with Domina Nocturna is a part of a plot constructed by Ned Pointsman to ensure funding for “The White Visitation.” The descent and subsequent excretory transactions are designed to ensure that “Brigadier Pudding will not go back on any of his commitments” (231). The Brigadier is, indeed, being used (consumed, as it were) by the War-state as part of its larger systemic project.

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22 Ibid., 122.
23 Ibid., 123.
The Peripheral/External Zone

If we are to follow Wallerstein’s and Amin’s world-system model, the Zone in Gravity’s Rainbow, into which readers are immersed in Part 3 of the novel, occupies a peculiar structural role. The Zone, springing into existence after Germany’s defeat in 1945, appears, at first, as a boundless “no man’s land.” As such, the Zone seems to parallel what Wallerstein has referred to as an external arena of the world-system, a region with which the global economy trades but is not dependent on for specific forms of labor. As such, the external Zone contains a semi-autonomous form of economy—specifically, a black market. Unsurprisingly, then, the Zone is “a place without political identity,” without nationality. These qualities seem to afford the novel’s Zone-inhabitants a certain level of freedom. The narrator describes the boundary-lessness of the Zone as its primary site of redemption, the space in which the preterite, the doomed and damned of the world, might find “a route back”:

maybe that anarchist [Slothrop] met in Zürich was right, maybe for a little while all the fences are down, one road as good as another, the whole space of the Zone cleared, depolarized, and somewhere inside the waste of it a single set of coordinates from which to proceed, without elect, without preterite, without even nationality to fuck it up. (566)

24 Wallerstein draws out the difference between peripheral and external regions more clearly: “The periphery of a world-economy is that geographical sector of it wherein production is primarily of lower-ranking goods (that is, goods whose labor is less well rewarded) but which is an integral part of the overall system of the division of labor. The external arena of a world-economy consists of those other world-systems with which a given world-economy has some kind of trade relationship. . . .” Immanuel Wallerstein, The Modern World-System I: Capitalist Agriculture and the Origins of the European World-Economy in the Sixteenth Century (1974; Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 301-02.

The Zone is thus an anarchic, seemingly extra-systemic space that, as Lawrence Kappel has argued, allows for “an explosion of existential possibility.” John Johnston describes it as a dynamic space “populated not so much with linked events as with movements and flows in a flux of people objects, signs, and representations.” Such characteristics point to unpredictability, a quality in direct opposition to the system’s need for order and the existence of stable categories. A number of scholars have thus argued that the Zone is a liminal space of ambiguity into which the War-state cannot effectively penetrate. As such, as Marcel Cornis-Pope has pointed out, the Zone provides its inhabitants with opportunities for subversion. Indeed, the Zone is the space in which a number of subversive events take place: the collection and construction of the Schwarzkommando’s rocket; Slothrop’s evasion of “The White Visitation;” the seemingly boundless network of black market activities led by Gerhardt von Göll; and the anarchist movements of Francisco Squalidozzi and Graciela Imago Portales. The Zone, then, appears to allow a certain amount of freedom or escape from the War-state’s system. As Kappel notes, even “the final and most cruel manipulation of Slothrop, sending him into the Zone as a secret weapon in an intelligence war, allows him to escape reality’s control.” Slothrop, the novel’s most sought-after character, conditioned from birth by the very system that

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26 Ibid., 230.
28 Cornis-Pope argues that subversive actions can take place in the Zone precisely because of its characterization as a liminal space, defined as “the contradictory space between a transcendental world-view which assumes a stable, predetermined order in history, and a performative view of history which emphasizes its unexhausted potentiality.” As such, the Zone’s inhabitants are able to “acquire some subversive power by virtue of their position at the interface of different planes.” Cornis-Pope, “Postmodern Liminality,” 31, 36-7.
29 Kappel, “Psychic Geography,” 250.
attempts (and succeeds, at various points) to manipulate him for its own purposes, seems to find solace in the Zone.

Of course the Zone, as a space characterized by the absence of productive (in the capitalist sense) activity, is also wasted space. Christopher Leise likens this sort of unproductive activity to the Puritan sin of Sloth. According to Leise, “for America, Pynchon says, the sin of sloth is different in kind: it is a sin against economy, a sin against productivity.”

Indeed, it is the peculiarly liminal quality of Sloth—characterizing those “that halt between two opinions”—that, for Leise, allows Slothrop to find a sort of postwar salvation. Yet it is the political character (or lack thereof) of the Zone that is particularly interesting. Recalling both Agamben’s and Gidwani’s work mentioned in the opening of this chapter, the absence of state structures enclosing a region is indicative of its wastefulness, its unproductivity. The Zone, as an unnationalized space, thus provides its inhabitants with potentially extra-systemic refuge.

Yet, for all its potentially salvific qualities, the Zone, opened after the collapse of the German Reich, is relentlessly being enclosed as the novel progresses. Even further, it is precisely its wastefulness that drives the Allied nations—particularly the US and USSR—into the Zone, in order to retrieve leftover technology and personnel salvaged from Germany’s rocket sites. This is indeed the purpose of America’s Project Hermes, with which Major Marvy is tangentially involved. As Steven Weisenburger has noted, “[u]nder the code name Hermes, GE [General Electric] and U.S. Army Ordnance worked

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31 From Thomas Hooker’s “Spirituall Love and Joy,” quoted in Leise, “‘Presto Change-o!’”, 136.
to sneak one hundred dismantled A4 rockets out of Germany to White Sands, New Mexico, for extensive testing.”32 The Zone, then, laden with resources and raw material, is not unlike the pre-colonial Americas and Africa. Indeed, the narrator likens Slothrop’s experiences in the Zone to “going to that Darkest Africa to study the natives there, and finding their quaint superstitions taking you over” (286). Like Africa in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries, the Zone’s apparent inaccessibility to European institutions, along with the abundance of natural resources, motivate European nations to colonize and incorporate it. The Zone, in all its anarchy, is thus representative of what early imperialists conceived of as the world’s “wastelands,” devoid of productive (capitalist) forms of labor. Schnorp, accompanying Slothrop in a hot-air-balloon, explains the Zone’s economy to the novel’s protagonist. Slothrop, feeling guilty that the “ballooning enthusiast” Schnorp had thrown away “half of his inventory” of pies in an attempt to escape Major Marvy’s hunting party, is told not to worry (337, 341). The Zone, Schnorp explains, “is like the very earliest days of the mercantile system. We’re back to that again” (341). It is precisely this non-accumulative economic model that encouraged colonial settlements across the globe. Indeed, just as Brigadier Pudding was driven by the need to convert no man’s land into occupied territory, so too are the Allied nations driven to occupy the demilitarized Zone.

But the Zone is, for all intents and purposes, the result of the very processes of the War-state; it was created by the War itself. As such, the wasteland of the Zone is wholly distinct from the wastelands of pre-contact, non-capitalist world regions. The underlying logic, however, in both cases remains the same. After Germany’s apparent defeat, the

32 Weisenburger, Companion, 152-3.
space that once was Germany was no longer controlled by a national power. Indeed, as Pynchon makes clear, the black market economy of the Zone is one embraced by the War itself: “The true war is a celebration of markets. Organic markets, carefully styled ‘black’ by the professionals, spring up everywhere” (107). The Zone is thus both waste-as-absence—un-nationalized, unproductive space—and waste-as-excess—space excreted, essentially, by the War-state itself. In characterizing the Zone, then, it may be helpful to consider the economic forces at work. For the majority of Marxist theorists—Amin and Wallerstein among them—capitalist production is driven by growth and expansion, an which the first chapter of this project has made clear. Yet as David Harvey and Simon Clarke have argued, the necessity of endless growth, coupled with finite sources of labor, means of consumption and raw materials, inevitably brings about moments of crisis. As it expands and accumulates, capitalism, in a moment of crisis, encroaches upon its limits, which it then transcends. In much the same way, the War-state of Gravity’s Rainbow, through its own dynamic processes, necessitates the de-nationalization, through military defeat, of one of its warring parties—Germany, in World War II. The War-state’s growth brings about a violent rupture, which it then must fill again. The Zone is thus

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33 For Clarke, building from Marx’s Grundrisse, “the central dynamic of capitalist accumulation [is] in the tendency, imposed on every individual capitalist by the pressure of competition, to develop the forces of production without limit. This tendency comes into conflict with the limited social basis of the capitalist mode of production, which confines the development of the forces of production within the limits of profitability.” For Harvey, because capital is “committed to a compounding rate of growth,” “[a]ny slow-down or blockage in capital flow will produce a crisis.” Simon Clarke, Marx’s Theory of Crisis (New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 1994), 118; David Harvey, “The Enigma of Capital and the Crisis This Time,” MRZine, a Project of the Monthly Review (September 27, 2010), 1, 2, http://mrzine.monthlyreview.org/2010/harvey270910.html

34 Slavoj Žižek has noted that “one should never underestimate the infinite plasticity of capitalism,” its ability to circumvent the limits it imposes upon itself. Marije Meerman, “Living in the End Times According to Slavoj Žižek” vpro international (2010), 15:10, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Gw8LPn4irao.
representative of the world-system’s logic of disposability at a specific moment in its historical development. Though the novel is set in 1944-45, *Gravity’s Rainbow* was composed throughout the “long sixties,” during which a number of decolonization movements, sparked in large part by the Suez Crisis in 1956, took place. By this time, no truly “external” area existed in the world. To borrow the words of Zygmunt Bauman, “[t]he planet [was] full;” capitalist production, then, having reached a spatial limit to expansion and growth, initiates ruptures in order to open new waste-spaces that can be re-incorporated into the world-system. The Zone is indeed such a waste-space, created by the War-state’s needs for expansion and accumulation.

It is thus unsurprising that the Zone offers alternative economies; indeed, for Marxists, such crises are necessary for total class revolution, a notion not lost on Slothrop’s Argentine Zone-contact. It is worth recalling the conversation between Slothrop and the Argentine anarchist, Francisco Squalidozzi:

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35 Luc Herman and Steven Weisenburger argue that questions regarding the notions of freedom and domination in the novel “need to be better situated against the variably defined ‘Long Sixties,’” which “opened in the mid-fifties with the U.S. Supreme Court’s school desegregation ruling (1954), the 1956 Suez crisis, the bloody repression of anti-Soviet resistance in Hungary” and “closed in the mid-seventies with the release of *Gravity’s Rainbow* (1973), President Richard Nixon’s impeachment and resignation (1973-74), the collapse of U.S. military-backed regimes in Southeast Asia (1975), and the unraveling of American antiwar and rights movements, sidelining dissident and antiauthoritarian voices and presaging the Reagan eighties.” Herman and Weisenburger, *Domination and Freedom*, 4-5.


37 Clarke notes: “It is the Marxist theory of the necessity of crisis, of crisis as a necessary expression of the inherently contradictory form of capitalist production, which marks the dividing line between ‘reform’ and ‘revolution’, between social democracy, which seeks institutional reforms within a capitalist framework, and socialism, which seeks to create a fundamentally different kind of society. If crises are purely contingent, or if they merely mark the transition from one phase, ‘regime’ or ‘social structure’, of accumulation to another (Aglietta, 1979; Bowles, Gordon and Weisskopf, 1984), then socialism has no
“In ordinary times,” he wants to explain, “the center always wins. Its power grows with time, and that can’t be reversed, not by ordinary means. Decentralizing, back toward anarchism, needs extraordinary times . . . this War—this incredible War—just for the moment has wiped out the proliferation of little states that’s prevailed in Germany for thousands of years. Wiped it clean. Opened it.”

“Sure. For how long?”

“It won’t last. Of Course not. But for a few months. . . .”

“Yeah but—what’re you gonna do, take over land and try to hold it? They’ll run you right off, ponder.”

“No. Taking land is building more fences. We want to leave it open. We want it to grow, to change. In the openness of the German Zone, our hope is limitless.” (268)

Here, Pynchon’s ambivalence toward the viability of subversion in the Zone is made apparent. Though the openness and anarchy of the Zone is indeed in direct contradiction to the operational mode of closed, nationalized capitalism, opportunities for subversion simply “won’t last,” for it is the Zone’s very openness that demand its re-incorporation into the War-state world-system.

“Hell’s Cartel”

For William Gaddis, as this project’s first chapter has shown, capitalism’s logic of disposability manifests itself in the practices of American corporations. For Thomas Pynchon, this logic is exemplified in numerous, unsettling ways by Germany’s infamous chemical cartel, IG Farben. Importantly, the origins of the cartel, according to Diarmuid Jeffreys’ aptly titled Hell’s Cartel, can be traced to William Perkin’s derivation of purple objective necessity and the socialist movement has no social foundation.” Clarke, Theory of Crisis, 7.
dye from coal-tar, “a noxious black gunk that was a by-product of gaslight.”[38] In much the same way that J R made shit holy, the immensely lucrative synthetic dye business was birthed near the turn of the century from coal-tar, or “Earth’s excrement,” as the spirit of Walter Rathenau describes it (169).[39] Yet as Pynchon is quick to remind us, the extraction of value by German chemical companies from what may be perceived as waste is not simply reuse or recycling. Describing the derivation of synthetic dyes from coal-tar, Rathenau’s spirit observes: “this is all the impersonation of life. The real movement is not from death to any rebirth. It is from death to death-transfigured” (169).

Indeed, just as J R’s Family of Companies embraced endless accumulation—the mantra of which can be framed by Bast’s outburst, “more! more!”[40]—so too was the rise of IG Farben driven by clever, ruthlessly accumulating capitalists. For Jeffreys, one of the most significant characters in the consolidation of the IG chemical cartel—known to some as “the world’s greatest industrialist”[41]—was Friedrich Carl Duisberg. While working for Bayer and Company, Duisberg was able to bring his firm enormous profits once he realized that “to succeed in the cutthroat world of the German synthetic dye industry a chemist needed more than just scientific acumen, a capacity for hard work, and promising connections.”[42] Yet the growth of German chemical companies like Bayer,

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[39] Walter Rathenau’s connection to cartel-like operations is worth noting. Weisenburger points out that Rathenau’s father, Emil, had “purchased European patent rights to Edison’s inventions, then amassed a fortune in the electrical power industry. Emil Rathenau founded the AEG (Allgemeine Elektrizitäts-Gesellschaft), and his son Walter inherited it.” Weisenburger, *Companion*, 94.
[42] Cutthroat indeed. In Duisberg’s time, the rising dye industry in Germany—which had only been unified into a nation a decade before Duisberg’s appointment at Bayer—was
BASF, Hoechst and Agfa (all of whom joined the IG in 1924), born from the “preterite dung” of coal-tar, was itself a negated growth. The spirit of Walter Rathenau, responding to Smaragd, Pynchon’s fictional Generaldirektor for the IG, advises:

You think you’d rather hear about what you call ‘life’: the growing, organic Kartell. But it’s only another illusion. A very clever robot. The more dynamic it seems to you, the more deep and dead, in reality, it grows. Look at the smokestacks, how they proliferate, fanning the wastes of original waste over greater and greater masses of city. Structurally, they are strongest in compression. A smokestack can survive any explosion—even the shock wave from one of the new cosmic bombs . . . as you all must know. The persistence, then, of structures favoring death. Death converted into more death. Perfecting its reign, just as the buried coal grows denser, and overlaid with more strata—epoch on top of epoch, city on top of ruined city. This is the sign of Death the impersonator. (169-70; my ellipsis)

For Rathenau, the foundation of the IG—the derivation of dyes from coal-tar for enormous profit—is nothing more than the impersonation of Death. The financial growth of IG Farben throughout the second quarter of the twentieth century was, as Rathenau points out, mirrored by the growth in the production of waste.

plagued by ambiguous and labyrinthine patent laws. For all of Duisberg’s chemical knowledge, his and his firm’s rise to power stemmed largely from his ability to find loopholes in German patent regulations. Jeffreys notes that “[o]ne of the many peculiarities in German patent law was that a company was allowed to copy a rival’s product if it could come up with a different way of making it. Inventors knew this, of course, and would do everything in their power to preempt future imitators by patenting as many different permutations of their process as they could think of. But occasionally they would miss something and competitors would pounce. As might be imagined, the courts would usually then be asked to resolve the matter and so ideally any potential imitators would try to find a manufacturing method that was as demonstrably unlike the original as possible. If they managed to do so and were able to convince the authorities of the novelty of their process, the rewards could be enormous. If not, the penalties and legal costs could be crippling.” Ibid., 26, 27.
IG Farben’s contradictory logic of accumulation via disposability comes full circle in its incorporation into the Third Reich. The financial relationship between the IG and the Reich was cemented in 1932, when Adolf Hitler agreed to fully support the IG’s search for synthetic fuel sources. Given the poor economic state of Germany in the twenties, IG Farben held fast to the Reich’s support in order to ensure a market for their products. Yet the onset of war, along with Germany’s imprisonment of non-Aryans, led to a problematic shortage in labor for the IG. As a solution, the IG, led by Otto Ambros—a central figure in the much-needed development of buna rubber—arranged, with the help of Heinrich Himmler, to have a buna production center established at the Auschwitz labor camp. Jeffreys argues unequivocally: “The availability of slave labor had been a crucial factor in the concern’s [IG’s] decision to build a plant next to a concentration camp. . . .” Indeed, it was the very disposability of Auschwitz’s prisoners—most of which were either captured Red Army soldiers or incarcerated Jewish civilians—that

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43 Synthetic fuel, which could be produced domestically, was an incredibly significant resource, as the increasingly visible actions of the Nazi party in the early thirties made Germany an unpopular business partner internationally. Jeffreys notes that, by 1933, “reports about the anti-Semitic violence of the storm troopers and the systematic arrest and torture of the Führer’s political enemies had generated such widespread public outrage abroad that many were now calling on their governments to place an embargo on German exports.” Ibid., 174.

44 And with great success. The agreement reached between the Reich and IG Farben ensured that the IG would produce sufficient quantities of synthetic fuel; in return, the Reich would buy any additional fuel above the necessary amount, essentially guaranteeing a market for the IG’s product. Even further, as Jeffreys notes, when Germany decided to “expand” its boundaries, IG Farben was close to follow, taking over Polish and French chemical companies and equipment, essentially giving them a monopoly power in occupied regions. Ibid., 143, 251-60.

45 Jeffreys points out that buna rubber was “the product the Nazis had identified as a key element in strategic autarky.” Auschwitz’s somewhat strategic location, situated at “the confluence of three rivers” and nearby a number of coal mines, were also of some significance to the IG’s presence. Ibid., 279, 281.

46 Ibid., 291. My ellipsis.
made them such a lucrative option for the cartel. Yet considering that the IG’s motivation was primarily the availability of labor, it seems disturbingly paradoxical that the directors of the cartel so readily embraced the Nazi’s brutal treatment of prisoners. Jeffreys notes at length the brutal treatment dealt to the prisoners of the IG’s Monowitz camp.\footnote{Jeffreys cites an IG progress report written in August of 1941, noting that “in the last few weeks the inmates are being severely flogged on the construction site by the kapos in increasing measure, and this always applies to the weakest inmates, who really cannot work harder. The exceedingly unpleasant scenes that occur on the construction site are beginning to have a demoralizing effect on the free workers, as well as on the Germans. . . . We have therefore asked that they should refrain from carrying out this flogging on the construction site and transfer it . . . to the concentration camp.” Ibid., 293. My former ellipsis.}

Overworked and underfed, inefficient laborers were often sent to the neighboring Birkenau complex, where they would be gassed with a pesticide known as Zyklon B, developed by the IG itself.\footnote{As Jeffrey notes, the “most ‘promising’ of [SS euthanasia] trials involved the use of Zyklon B, a hydrocyanic, or prussic, acid that had been introduced into the camp in July 1940 for use as a pesticide to fumigate lice-infested buildings and prisoner clothing. Deadly to humans in even small quantities . . . [i]t was manufactured by an IG Farben subsidiary, the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Schädlingsbekämpfung (Degesch), or German Pest Control Company. . . .” Jeffreys, \textit{Hell’s Cartel}, 306. My ellipsis.} IG Farben’s business practices in the war thus embody precisely what Michelle Yates has termed the contradictory logic of disposability of contemporary capitalism. According to Yates, “[t]he contradiction here is that waste in human form conflicts with capital’s internal drive for ever increasing value, which can only be produced by and extracted from human labor.”\footnote{Michelle Yates, “The Human-As-Waste, the Labor Theory of Value and Disposability in Contemporary Capitalism,” \textit{Antipode} 43, no. 5 (2011), 1688.} The IG’s contradictory logic of disposability is thus made manifest: in the process of capital accumulation, the laborers “employed” by the cartel were rendered disposable; however, in the very act of disposal, the cartel diminished the availability of its labor, which is required for the further accumulation of capital.
“Out and down in the colonies”

Europe’s Outhouses

The Third Reich’s Final Solution, in which IG Farben played an integral role, was doubtlessly an apex of evil in the twentieth century. Indeed, for Horkheimer and Adorno, Nazi fascism was the absolute culmination of a capitalist system of exchange rooted in Enlightenment ideology. Yet, unsettlingly, the Reich’s attempted extermination of Jewish Europeans is not entirely without historical precedent. For Pynchon, it would seem that the process of colonization, both within and without the novel, is the culmination of a strictly capitalist logic of disposability. Samir Amin certainly notes the connection between the world-system’s expansion and the events of World War II, describing fascism as the “virulent offspring” of imperialism. Indeed, the capitalist world-system, through its long history of imperialism, has converted what it perceives as the world’s wastelands into profitable colonial outposts, taking advantage of both untapped resources and low—even, in its earlier stages, nonexistent—labor costs.

50 For Horkheimer and Adorno, Jewish Europeans were the scapegoats of an inherently unequal bourgeois-capitalist economy: “The productive work of the capitalist, whether he justified his profit as the reward of enterprise, as under liberalism, or as the director’s salary, as today, was the ideology which concealed the nature of the labor contract and the rapacity of the economic system in general. . . . That is why people shout: ‘Stop thief!’—and point at the Jew. He is indeed the scapegoat, not only for individual maneuvers and machinations but in the wider sense that the economic injustice of the whole class is attributed to him.” Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 142.

51 Amin specifically points to the shortcomings of postmodern critiques of contemporary global capitalism: “. . . when Lyotard says Auschwitz and Stalin meant the failure of the modernist dream, his laconic formula leaves out an adjective: capitalist. For imperialism and its virulent offspring, fascism, along with world wars and colonial massacres, are all precisely a product of sharpening contradictions within the capitalist system, a measure of the conflict between the promises of freedom it holds out and its inability to deliver commensurate improvements.” Samir Amin, Capitalism in the Age of Globalization: The Management of Contemporary Society (London: Zed Books, 1997), 137.
Pynchon taps into this line of historical thinking in his development of the Schwarzkommando, a relocated band of Herero militants occupying the demilitarized Zone of postwar Germany. Situated between the Kalahari and Namib deserts, the Herero call home the “waste country” of Southwest Africa, which was brought under German colonial rule near the end of the nineteenth century (328). The process of colonization, ascribing to a purely capitalist system of ethics, is driven by the need to convert waste—what is unproductive—into value.

Yet the project of imperialism in *Gravity’s Rainbow* extends far beyond the need to squeeze profit from wastelands. In what may well be the novel’s most striking passage, the narrator observes:

[W]ait, wait a minute there, yes it’s Karl Marx, that sly old racist skipping away with his teeth together and his eyebrows up trying to make believe it’s nothing but Cheap Labor and Overseas Markets. . . . Oh, no. Colonies are much, much more. Colonies are the outhouses of the European soul, where a fellow can let his pants down and relax, enjoy the smell of his own shit. (321-22)

Here, Pynchon exposes a specific aspect of colonizer/colonized relationship: the budding capitalist nations of Western Europe perceived potential colonies not only as sources of “Cheap Labor and Overseas Markets” but also as sites of release, places to unleash forms of waste repressed in the system’s accumulative centers. Colonial conceptualizations of waste thus involve two distinct aspects: the social and spatial geography of pre-colonial external regions, characterized by unproductivity, embody waste-as-absence; and both the colonial space and the colonized society embody waste-as-excess. Indeed, as Frantz Fanon has noted, “[t]he colonist’s sector is . . . a sector of lights and paved roads, where the trash cans constantly overflow with strange and wonderful garbage, undreamed-of
leftovers.” Colonies thus function as what Zygmunt Bauman refers to as “dumping grounds” for an expanding world-economy—a notion that will be explored in greater detail in the third chapter. Indeed, as he argues further, “[t]he disposal of human waste produced in the ‘modernized’ and still ‘modernizing’ parts of the globe was the deepest meaning of colonization and imperial conquests—both made possible by the power differential continuously reproduced by the stark inequality of ‘development.’” Colonies are indeed “outhouses,” storage sites for the waste produced by the world-economy itself.

The nature of colonial waste is not only material and social but also psychological. Colonies are spaces of indulgence for the value-centered European soul: “Christian Europe was always death, Karl, death and repression. Out and down in the colonies, life can be indulged, life and sensuality in all its forms. . . . No word ever gets back. The silences down here are vast enough to absorb all behavior, no matter how dirty, how animal it gets. . . .” (322). Indeed, as Horst Drechsler points out, the physical and sexual violence by German colonists against the Herero and Nama of Southwest Africa were often attributed to—and, as such, justified by—the inexplicable ailment known as

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53 Bauman here refers to the disposal of “human waste,” that is, the human beings necessarily cast out of the growing capitalist economy (a notable example is the founding of Australia by European outcasts and criminals). For Bauman, the supposedly vacant and unproductive world regions had “for a greater part of modern history played the crucial role of dumping grounds for the human waste turned out in ever rising volumes in the parts of the globe affected by the process of modernization.” Bauman, *Wasted Lives*, 5.
54 Ibid., 6.
“‘tropical frenzy’, a term specifically invented for this purpose.”

Thus, while in Europe waste must be kept separate, “with no harm done to the Metropolis, nothing to soil those cathedrals, white marble statues, noble thoughts,” colonies allow for the liberation of the imperialists’ repressed waste in both literal and figurative forms (322). In the core-state of Europe, waste, though an inherent aspect of the European soul, is seen as unfit to exist within European borders; as a result, waste in all its forms is sent to the colonies.

The Schwarzkommando present a clear example of colonial forms of wasting in the novel. Indeed, the group is characterized by their associations with waste. They are the novel’s outcasts, in both Herero and European terms. The Schwarzkommando give themselves the nickname Erdschweinhöle, or Ovatjimba, translating to “people of the aardvark.”

According to Pynchon’s narrator, the Ovatjimba are the “poorest of the Hereros, with no cattle or villages of their own. . . . Considered outcasts, they lived on the veld, in the open” (320; my ellipsis).

At the same time, as they seek to reconstruct a V-2 rocket, the Zone-Hereros are the outcasts in the Allied rush to appropriate German rocket technology. Andreas Orukambe, attending to a Schwarzkommando radio transmitter, sits patiently as

[t]here springs into being an antenna pattern, thousands of square kilometers full of enemies out in their own night encampments in the Zone, faceless, monitoring.

56 Steven Weisenburger, citing Hendrik Luttig’s The Religious System and Social Organization of the Herero, offers this translation: “Ova- is the Herero prefix signifying “people,” while –tjimba signifies the “ant-bear”—the aardvark, or Erdschwein.” Steven Weisenburger, Companion, 161.
57 As Weisenburger shows, Luttig, Pynchon’s main source on the Herero, reinforces this point: “The Ovatjimba may at present be considered as a group of outcasts, as they do not possess the requisite number of cattle necessary for social significance. This explains the fact that they do not live in villages as do the rest of the tribe. They live a scattered existence in the veld.” Ibid., 161.
Though they are in contact with one another . . . though there can be no illusion about their plans for the Schwarzkommando, still they are holding off, waiting for the optimum time to move in and destroy without a trace. . . . (331; my emphasis).

As the “nation-less” Schwarzkommando seek the same technological and military information as the nationalized Allied forces, and as, we will see, they plan to use such technology unproductively, they must be rooted out. The Schwarzkommando thus define themselves as outcasts while being defined as such externally.

Pynchon’s description of the Schwarzkommando as systemic waste-products in fact traces the historical reality of the descendants of colonial German and indigenous African relationships. In Germany’s Southwest Africa colony, the indigenous Herero and Nama were perceived as little more than social waste, byproducts of deterministically unfurling world economy. As such, the atrocious acts of sexual and physical violence committed by Germans against the region’s inhabitants were typically justified along these lines. Drechsler points out that

the files of the Imperial Colonial Office contain long lists of Germans who committed acts of violence against Africans in the period from 1901 to 1904. In all the cases recorded there was a glaring discrepancy between the punishment awarded and the severity of the crime. The excessive leniency shown by the courts even prompted [Governor Theodor] Leutwein to observe that ‘the reason why so many cases were dismissed is that all the witnesses were natives and the courts did not necessarily lend much credence to their testimony.’

The German perception of the Herero and Nama as a form of social waste precluded any severe punishments for violent acts by German colonists. Thus, even more disturbingly, the abundant rape of Herero women that carried through Germany’s colonial presence in

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58 Drechsler, Die Fighting, 135-6.
Southwest Africa brought into being a generation of highly stigmatized African-Germans. As Krista Molly O’Donnell points out, German colonial offices made the marriages between colonists and Africans illegal, thus rendering the children of such couples illegitimate. She explains that the children of invalid relationships—often the result of forced sexual activity—were strictly segregated from German children: after a complaint from a student’s father, the Swakopmund district court ruled that “[i]t cannot be expected of the citizens of Swakopmund, that they allow their children to go to the same school with non-purely white offspring of a mixed marriage. The danger for the moral well-being of the children is too great.” The children of African and German parents were “stateless,” “legally left… without nationality.” The resulting generation, of which the Schwarzkommando is a part, was one brought into being by Germany’s incorporation of Southwest Africa into the world-system; the moment of incorporation marked their instant of marginalization, and so ensured their eventual excretion.

Indeed, Germany’s colonization of Southwest Africa near the end of the nineteenth century quite nearly brought about the eradication of the Herero. It should be noted that Germany’s increasing colonial presence between 1880 and 1915 was motivated largely by economic factors. For years, the relationship between Hereros and

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59 According to O’Donnell, in 1905, the governor of German Southwest Africa “decreed that marriages between colonists and persons with any African heritage would henceforth be illegal and, in 1907, the administration ruled that existing unions also were invalid.” Krista Molly O’Donnell, “The First Besatzungskinder,” in Not so Plain as Black and White: Afro-German Culture and History, 1890-2000, eds. Patricia Mazón and Reinhold Steingröver (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005), 64.

60 O’Donnell, “Besatzungskinder,” 70.

61 Fatima El-Tayeb, “Dangerous Liaisons,” in Not So Plain as Black and White, 47.

62 According to Helmuth Stoecker, the decision to annex the region came only after persistent urging from the German Association for Colonization and Export and a memorandum prepared by Adolf Woermann, whose firm was among the most successful
Germans was characterized by exploitative treaty agreements—led, interestingly enough, by German Imperial Chancellor Heinrich Goering, father to Hermann Goering, whose name grace the Casino to which Slothrop is sent in the novel’s second part—in which Germans received land in exchange for their “protection” of the Herero against their local enemies, the Nama. Importantly, according to these treaties, the Germans were to provide “‘protection’ to the chief and his tribe, while recognizing and supporting the Chief’s jurisdiction over his own people.” Yet as the Hereros came to discover, this “protection” turned quickly into active violence and expropriation. The circumstances for Indigenous Southwest Africans was indeed so dire that the Herero and Nama, after decades of intermittent warfare, agreed to work in tandem against further German


Drechsler points to a treaty prepared by Adolf Lüderitz in August of 1883: “The contract said that the Bethanie people had sold the above-mentioned coastal strip [from the Orange River to a point 26° south]—’20 geographical miles wide’. It is an established fact, however, that the Africans were unfamiliar with the term ‘geographical’ or ‘German’ mile (the equivalent of 7.4 kilometres). They assumed that what was meant was the English mile (equivalent to 1.5 kilometres), a fact exploited by Lüderitz and his agent, Vogelsang, for their fraudulent manoeuvre.” Drechsler, Die Fighting, 23. It is worth noting that the use of treaties as both a colonial means of exploitation and an Indigenous means of survival is addressed in Chapter 4.

“The growing numbers of Germans flocking to South West Africa soon provoked feelings of anger and contempt among the Africans. It started with drinking bouts and invectives against the Africans and ended with the Germans taking liberties with the Herero women. . . . Amongst other things, they [the Germans] built their homes in the immediate vicinity of traditional burial places of the Herero, which deeply offended the feelings of the Africans.” Ibid., 38.
penetration. The Herero Uprisings of 1904-1907, however, failed to rid the region of Germany’s presence; General Lothar von Trotha, referred to by Drechsler as a “veritable butcher in uniform,” led German colonials on a campaign of extermination. German colonials took to extermination and very nearly laid waste, in a literal sense, to the entire Herero population. Von Trotha and his German forces pushed the Herero population eastward, forcing the few survivors into the “sandy waste of the Omaheke Desert. Drechsler cites a study of the German General Staff, which “noted laconically: ‘The arid Omaheke was to complete what the German Army had begun: the extermination of the Herero nation.’”

Indeed, by 1911, “there were a mere 15,130 Herero left out of an original 80,000.” Yet Germany’s deplorable efforts to exterminate the Herero population again recall Michelle Yates’ contradictory logic of disposability. Just as IG Farben had brutally maltreated its primary source of labor, leading many to death, so too had Germany’s colonial institutions nearly wiped out the means by which value was to be extracted from the colonized space. Theodor Leutwein, Germany’s colonial administrator for Southwest Africa until 1904, expressed his concerns about von Trotha’s brutal tactics—though, to be sure, his issue was not morally or ethically centered. Leutwein did

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66 “Finally, in November 1892, the Nama and the Herero, who had been at war throughout the 19th century, concluded peace in order to cope better with the new situation that had arisen with the German penetration of South West Africa.” Ibid., 55.
67 Drechsler cites von Trotha’s own policy on quelling the uprising: “I know enough tribes in Africa. They all have the same mentality insofar as they yield only to force. It was and remains my policy to apply this force by unmitigated terrorism and even cruelty. I shall destroy the rebellious tribes by shedding rivers of blood and money.” Ibid., 147, 154.
68 Ibid., 155.
69 Ibid., 155-6.
70 Stoecker, German Imperialism, 62.
not concur with those fanatics who want to see the Herero destroyed altogether. Apart from the fact that a people of 60,000 or 70,000 is not so easy to annihilate, I would consider such a move a grave mistake from an economic point of view. We need the Herero as cattle breeders, though on a small scale, and especially as labourers. It would be quite sufficient if they are politically dead. 

Leutwein’s concern highlights the contradictory nature of Germany’s colonial presence in Southwest Africa. Yet before we commend Leutwein’s humanistic alternative to outright extermination, it is worth noting that his intentions are purely economic. He argues, essentially, that if the Germans render the Herero only politically dead—made so by dismantling Indigenous systems of exchange and expropriating Hereros of their cattle and land, restructuring them as laborers in an exploitative colonial system—German colonial industries will still profit handsomely.

Leutwein’s and von Trotha’s perspectives, when taken together, thus constitute a two-fold approach to disposability parallel to that taken by Katje’s Dutch ancestor, Franz Van der Groov. Van der Groov spent his brief stint on the island of Mauritius exterminating the native population of dodos, compelled, at first, by “reasons he could not explain” (110). To the Dutchman, the dodos were profoundly ugly, almost “to the point of Satanic intervention, so ugly as to embody an argument against a Godly creation” (112). Clearly, to Van der Groov—certainly as clearly as the Hereros to von Trotha—God had selected this species for preterition. Indeed, their extinction seemed predestined. Even as Van der Groov felt the hints of guilt for his murderous actions, he laments, “[b]ut what now can mitigate this slaughter? It is too late. . . . Perhaps a more comely beak, fuller feathering, a capacity for flight, however brief . . . details of Design” (112). The

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71 Drechsler, Die Fighting, 148.
fate of the dodoes is thus, for Van der Groov, dependent on their apparent lack of divine utility. Their extermination was necessary: because they lacked any evidence of God’s Design, they appeared to be useless to Him. Yet Van der Groov also imagines an alternative situation in which the dodoes, endowed with the “Gift of Speech,” were in fact converted to Christianity: “Sanctified now they will feed us, sanctified their remains and droppings fertilize our crops” (112, 113). The dodoes, in this case, having been brought into Van der Groov’s theological system, are immediately excreted as waste-products, albeit useful ones—politically dead, as Leutwein would have it. Thus while as a theological waste-as-absence the dodoes were killed and “left . . . to rot,” as a theological waste-as-excess, their deaths are, in a certain sense, productive (111; my ellipsis).

Notably, “[i]n both [cases], eventually, the dodoes die” (113). In much the same way, as Frantz Fanon has noted, the “political death” of a colonized people is indeed their death as a people. Fanon, in his fourth chapter of Black Skin, White Masks, notes that the recent works of Octave Mannoni “deliberately ignor[ed] the fact that since Gallieni [the French Admiral who evicted Madagascar’s monarch in the nineteenth century] the Malagasy has ceased to exist.”72 The political death of the Herero, then, as will be addressed below, is the death of the Herero as such.

Blackness and Whiteness

72 Fanon’s chapter is largely a rebuttal to Mannoni’s The Psychology of Colonization, in which the author argued, among other things, that colonized subjects suffered from a paradoxically imposed yet inherent inferiority complex, and as such came to be dependent on their colonial overseers. Specifically, Mannoni argues: “Wherever Europeans have founded colonies of the type we are considering, it can safely be said that their coming was unconsciously expected—even desired—by the future subject peoples. Everywhere there existed legends foretelling the arrival of strangers from the sea, bearing wondrous gifts with them.” Frantz Fanon, Black Skin, White Masks, trans. Richard Philcox (New York: Grove Press, 2008), 74, 79.
Germany’s near-eradication of the Herero is telling of an even larger relationship between colonizer and colonized made explicit in the novel. *Gravity’s Rainbow* establishes an unstable binary between whiteness and blackness. The “Freudian Edwin Treacle,” pursuing the melanin-altering Gavin Trefoil with an ax, reminds his European colleagues at PISCES that “their feelings about blackness were tied to feelings about shit, and feelings about shit to feelings about putrefaction and death” (280). The connections drawn here are paramount: the Schwarzkommando (translating to “Black Command”) are always already perceived through their relations with waste by virtue of the automatic association in white European (and American) minds between blackness, on the one hand, and “shit,” “putrefaction and death” on the other. European understandings of blackness thus shed a great deal of light on colonial social relationships. In particular, the colonial space of German Southwest Africa functioned as an interface between black indigenous Hereros and white German settlers. As Fanon has argued at length, the body of the black man, through the eyes of white men, functions as the embodiment of all of the vices repressed by white civilization. He notes, “[t]he civilized white man retains an irrational nostalgia for the extraordinary times of sexual licentiousness, orgies, unpunished rapes, and unpressed incest. . . . Projecting his desires onto the black man, the white man behaves as if the black man actually had [these fantasies].”73 The “tropical frenzy” described by Drechsler is, according to Fanon, a manifestation of repressed sexual and violent urges set loose in the colonial waste-space.

The connection between blackness and waste sheds a good deal of light on a number of instances in the novel: Katje, dressed as Domina Nocturna in her excretory

73 Ibid., 143.
transaction with Brigadier Pudding, wears a black wig and has even had her “pubic hair . . . dyed black for the occasion” (238); Slothrop and his father, with all their hereditary connections to preterition, are labeled in Lazlo Jamf’s codebook as “Schwarzknabe” (“Black-child”) and “Schwarzvater” (“Black-father”) respectively (290); and the Schwarzgerät, or “black device,” is needed to guide Rocket 00000, the projectile whose atrophy is outlined by the novel itself. The Schwarzkommando, and indeed all things black, “the color white people are afraid of,” must be marginalized, separated in much the same way that waste is thrown into garbage bags or flushed down toilets (701). Indeed, the act of separation is “what that white toilet’s for” (701).

Yet the color white, exemplified by Captain Blicero, also embodies waste, in that it represents death itself. However, Der Bleicher / Blicero represents a specific kind of death. Just as the toilet’s “white porcelain [is] the very emblem of Odorless and Official Death,” the Bleacher’s whiteness, as Blicero himself describes, represents “that special death the West had invented”—more specifically, death (political and biological) as a result of colonization (701, 736). The distinction is important: shit, blackness and death represent the excreted, those who have been consumed; bleaching, whiteness and Death represent the excretors, those who do the consuming. Blicero, wasting away on his deathbed, explains to Gottfried Europe’s need to produce this specific form of waste, the need to “establish . . . its order of Analysis and Death” in the peripheral regions of “Africa, Asia, Amerindia, [and] Oceania” (737). Death (with a capital “D”) thus inevitably recalls the act of colonization, as the process by which the regions of “Africa, Asia, Amerindia, [and] Oceania” were incorporated into the world-system.
The overt presence of excrement and toilets in the novel thus takes on new meaning. In particular, recalling that the organization of the world-system into competing nation-states necessitates its own form of waste, the white toilet, as such an organizer (separating black waste from the pure space of the household), is thus emblematic of the state’s function in the world-system. Just as the Rücksichtslos—a Toiletship, which is “to the Kriegsmarine as the bathroom is to the house” (456)—is a “triumph of the German mania for subdividing,” the toilet in general serves to keep shit, that unproductive, excess material, separate from the sanctioned realm of productivity (455). Pynchon’s paranoia of toilet-control is thus worth noting, as toward the end of the novel, the narrator observes:

The basic idea is that They will come and shut off the water first. . . . Shutting the water off interdicts the toilet: with only one tankful left, you really can’t get rid of much of anything any more, dope, shit, documents, They ‘ve stopped the inflow/outflow and here you are trapped inside Their frame with your wastes piling up, ass hanging out all over Their Movieola viewer, waiting for Their editorial blade. Reminded, too late, of how dependent you are on Them, for neglect if not good will: Their neglect is your freedom. (708)

Indeed, if the flushing of shit down toilets is, for Pynchon, one of Their functions, then the toilet is, for Dominque Laporte, a function of the State. For Laporte, the State’s control over the collection of waste is the source of its power. Indeed, he claims unequivocally that the “State is the Sewer.” He argues that, in order to maintain its

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74 Fanon also makes this connection, observing that, in Europe, “the black man—or, if you prefer, the color black—symbolizes evil, sin wretchedness, death, war and famine,” while whiteness recalls “the bright look of innocence, the white dove of peace, magical heavenly light.” Ibid., 168, 167.

75 Dominque Laporte, *History of Shit*, 56.
power over its subjects, the State need not scrutinize the composition of its subjects’
wastes; “[t]he patrolling and controlling of orifices are sufficient strategies.”

The pure, clean, civilized “white marble statues [and] noble thoughts” of Europe to which Pynchon
refers are thus emblematic of Laporte’s purifying tyrant: “[h]is purity seizes my soul with
its master of waste. . . . He who seizes my soul literally lifts me out of the shit. To him I
swear my eternal love.”

Much like the modern world-system, Pynchon’s War-state—
governed by the ambiguous and supranational Them—expands and accumulates
precisely through the act of disposal, as a means of organizing shit from purity, waste
from value, colony from nation.

Racial Suicide

Certainly one of the more overt characteristics of the Schwarzkommando is their
desire to, in effect, enact their own self-wasting. More specifically, the branch of Zone-
Hereros known as the Empty Ones plan to commit a “racial suicide,” carving a path to
“the Final Zero” (321, 323). Within the novel itself, these relocated Hereros hold close
connections with death. In Part Three, the Schwarzkommando have occupied the
mountains near two notable German locations: Nordhausen, or “North-houses” (for the
Herero, “North is death’s region” [327]) and Bleicheröde, which “takes its name from . . .
Der Bleicher (‘Bleacher,’ a nickname for Death) and öde (a wasteland, or desert).”

Their aim here is to construct a V-2 rocket of their own and use it in an act of collective
self-wasting. The Schwarzkommando, who have been (along with their historical Herero
counterparts) disposed of by the world-system at large, seek to remove themselves

76 Ibid., 63.
77 Ibid., 64.
78 Weisenburger, Companion, 150, 124.
entirely from the system, finding escape only in their death. It seems only appropriate, then, that the rocket assembled to carry out this collective suicide is one made from the refuse of previous rockets, “scavenged all summer piece by piece clear across the Zone from Poland to the Low Countries” (686).

The primary motivation of the Empty Ones is certainly worth noting. Their suicide is not simply a means of reaching the realm of Death, Pynchon’s Other Side, but specifically a means of “finish[ing] the extermination the Germans began in 1904” (321). How, then, are we to approach Josef Ombindi’s project of collective suicide? It is acquiescence, a lamentable giving in to a system in which they are already disposable?

For Theodore Kharpertian, the Empty Ones’ suicide is a “paradoxical affirmation” of the very form of death presented them by Germany’s colonial presence; the Zone-Hereros wish to “effect[] through suicide a hopeless, violent repudiation of European manners and morals.”79 In a similar vein, Jeffrey Nealon has argued that the death-drive of the Empty Ones is merely an appropriated European form.80 Indeed, it is worth recalling here that the means by which the Empty Ones are to commit suicide is the construction and launch of a German V-2 rocket. These Schwarzkommando thus appropriate German technology and a specifically German ideology (racial extermination) to bring about their own deaths.

The rocket itself—Rocket 00001, built from the detritus of other rockets—is transformed

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80 According to Nealon, in the Herero experience, a “technological order of analysis and death was inflicted upon them and coerced them into believing that there was a determinate ‘truth’ to the moon and to death, a deadly truth that enslaved them to the project of the rocket.” Jeffrey Nealon, _Double Reading: Postmodernism after Deconstruction_ (Ithica: Cornell University Press, 1993), 123.
in its construction into, as the narrator notes, “the first African rocket to be fully assembled” (331).

Yet looking deeper into the intertextual overlaps between Pynchon’s Hereros and the actually-existing Hereros of the German Southwest Africa colony, it becomes clear that the suicide of the Empty Ones operates according to a specifically localized logic. The Empty Ones believe themselves to be already dead, inanimate. Thus, “[t]hey call themselves Otukungurua. Yes, old Africa hands, it ought to be ‘Omakungurua,’ but they are always careful . . . to point out that oma- applies only to the living and human. Otu- is for the inanimate and the rising, and this is how they imagine themselves” (321). Much like the Fanon’s articulation of the Malagasy’s experience with European imperialism, Germany’s colonization of Southwest Africa marked the end of the Hereros’ existence as such. This helps to explain why they “each carry one knotless strip of leather” (321). Pynchon touches on the missionary history of Southwest Africa, during which the Rhenish Missionary Society had worked tirelessly to convert indigenous Africans.81

In each village, as noon flared the shadows in tightly to their owners, in that moment of terror and refuge, the omuhona took from his sacred bag, soul after converted soul, the leather cord kept there since the individual’s birth, and untied the birth-knot. Untied, it was another soul dead to the tribe. (321)

Death, then, for the Empty Ones, had occurred long ago; their suicide is thus simply a way of closing the contradiction of disposability into which they were pulled. Samuel Maherero, leader of the 1904 Great Herero Uprising, adopted a similar logic. In a letter to

81 Importantly, Drechsler, citing Heinrich Loth, asserts the significance of a missionary presence to any colonial efforts: “South West Africa is a classic example of how the activities conducted by a Christian missionary society over several decades make it possible to paralyse a country’s natural powers of defence and to pave the way for colonial subjugation.” Drechsler, Die Fighting, 18.
the Rehoboth Kaptein Hermanus van Wyk, Maherero stated, “[l]et them [the Germans—H. D.] kill us all, let them all come here. There is no other way.”

Drechsler cites further a statement made by the son of Chief Zacharias of Otjimbingwe, a subgroup of Hereros, who noted that “[t]he cruelty and injustice of the Germans had driven us to despair, and our leaders and the people felt that death had lost much of its horror in the light of the conditions under which we were living.”

In this context, the Empty Ones’ suicide, certainly an unproductive act from a capitalist perspective—death not for the sake of profit, but for the sake of death alone—is in fact productive from the point of view of the Hereros taking part. Pynchon’s narrator clarifies further: “It was a simple choice for the Hereros, between two kinds of death: tribal death, or Christian death. Tribal death made sense. Christian death made none at all” (322).

The suicide of the Zone-Hereros is thus neither submission to Their system nor merely an escape route from it. Rather, the Empty Ones hope to establish a positive alternative reality through their specific form of death—a form under their control. The narrator informs us of Enzian’s intentions:

What Enzian wants to create will have no history. It will never need a design change. Time, as time is known to other nations, will wither away

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82 Ibid., 143. Drechsler’s edit.
83 Ibid.
84 Tiina Käkelä-Puumala presents a wonderful supporting argument to this reading of the Hereros’ collective suicide. In particular, she reads the Schwarzkommando through a Baudrillardian lens. Baudrillard, in *L'échange symbolique et la mort*, distinguished between modern perceptions of death—death as negative, non-value—and pre-modern perceptions—death as positive, part of a cycle of reciprocity. Käkelä-Puumala uses this framework to understand the Empty Ones’ death project, arguing that their “primitive” form of death is in fact a “symbolic offering” and, as such, a subversive form to European forms of death They endorse. This is a powerful reading, however I take issue with her generalizing distinction between modern and “primitive” as well as her failure to root the Hereros’ death project in a local context, as Pynchon goes to great lengths to do. Käkelä-Puumala, “A Weird Death,” 196-97.
inside this new one. The Ercsheinhöhle will not be bound, like the Rocket, to time. The people will find the Center again, the Center without time, the journey without hysteresis, where every departure is a return to the same place, the only place. . . . (323)

As Tiina Käkelä-Puumala has noted, the Empty Ones seek to transcend linear, historical time, which embodies the very sort of social determinism—primitive, pre-modern, modern, postmodern—that had informed and legitimated the colonization of world regions by European nations. By replacing a linear, unidirectional temporality with one that is boundless and eternally returning—recalling the mandala-like physical structure of traditional Herero villages—these Hereros seek not a return to some preexisting historically reality but to establish an alternative system rooted in local, accessible epistemology. The Rocket, then, is truly appropriated, put to work for entirely unproductive—in the capitalist sense of the word—activity.

Gravity and Atrophy

It would be remiss to offer an analysis of the system(s) of Gravity’s Rainbow without offering a thorough treatment of the Rocket, perhaps one of the novel’s most ubiquitous characters. Pragmatically speaking, there are two rockets of fundamental importance to the novel: Rocket 00000, housing Gottfried in his “Imipolex shroud,” launched by Blicero from the Lüneberg Heath and falling on the Orpheus Theatre at the novel’s close (766); and Rocket 00001, Enzian’s rocket, housing the Schwarzkommando

85 Specifically, Käkelä-Puumala works through Guy Debord’s distinction between modern, segmented, linear time and pre-modern, cyclical and returning time to conclude: “The Zone-Hereros seem to stand on a threshold between two notions of time and death. As Hereros they have inherited a cyclical notion of time in which the distinction between here and hereafter is not decisive, but, being partly Europeanized, they have also internalized a linear notion of time and an idea of death as the End—terrifying, perhaps, but glamorous in its absoluteness.” Käkelä-Puumala, “A Weird Death,” 211.
and fulfilling their project of collective suicide. The differences between the two rockets are certainly worth pursuing.

It is noteworthy that Pynchon so clearly connects Blicero’s rocket project with Adam Smith’s discourse on political economy. During a séance, Carroll Eventyr, the medium, narrates the experiences of a recently deceased Roland Feldspath. Now that Feldspath had been “transected into the realm of Dominus Blicero,” the Lord of Death, finding that “all signs had turned against him,” he observes (30):

It’s control. All these things arise from one difficulty: control. For the first time it was inside, do you see. The control is put inside. No more need to suffer passively under ‘outside forces’—to veer into any wind. As if . . . A market needed no longer be run by the Invisible Hand, but now could create itself—its own logic, momentum, style, from inside. Putting the control inside was ratifying what de facto had happened—that you had dispensed with God. But you had taken on a greater, and more harmful, illusion. The illusion of control. That A could do B. But that was false. Completely. No one can do. Things only happen, A and B are unreal, are names for parts that ought to be inseparable. (31)

There are a number of significant factors within this passage. For one, the internalization of control that Feldspath observes in Blicero’s death-region seems to be an apt description for the shift from production-based capitalism to contemporary finance capitalism. Though Gravity’s Rainbow was published two years before J R, Pynchon is quite attuned to the logic of exchange articulated in Gaddis’ second novel. In the world of corporate finance, investment is always preemptive: in order for a commodity to be produced (which requires labor and capital costs), the return to profit must be reasonably assured. The global flows of capital are indeed primarily controlled by the needs of those institutions most deeply entrenched in capitalism: namely, transnational corporations.
Yet Feldspath also points to another incredibly important characteristic of the modern global economy. The notion of control, he claims, is mere “illusion.” It is worth recalling here that the literary object to which Feldspath refers, the “control” that is internalized, is the Schwarzgerät—Gottfried himself, wrapped in the “black polymer,” Imipolex G (496)—the guidance device for Bliceró’s Rocket. The Rocket, then, which governs the novel’s system of exchange, is Pynchon’s representative for the world-system. In a very practical sense, the Rocket is always already in a state of atrophy. Though it successfully resists the pull of Gravity throughout the first half of its flight, it is never capable of escaping Gravity’s invisible power. The Rocket belongs to neither core nor periphery—it is neither Preterite nor Elect. Rather, it traces the parabolic trajectory of the system as a whole. The Rocket’s journey from launch to landing is the outline of a world-system governed by its endlessly increasing production of waste. Adam Smith’s metric for economic growth—determined not by “the actual greatness of national wealth, but its continual increase”86—and its adoption by modern economists in the form of a constant domestic growth rate seems fundamentally indicative of eventual systemic collapse. Indeed, recalling the finite amount of material resources the planet offers, the world-system, by its exponential output of waste, will eventually be left with only unavailable energy. As Michelle Yates has made clear, a system governed by a contradictory logic of accumulation/disposability is wholly unsustainable.87

87 Building from the work of Neil Larsen, Yates argues: “Within the context of current levels of intensified productivity, capital cannot continue to perpetuate itself if it is simultaneously excreting human labor, the producer of its dominant form of social wealth, value. While capital may still be extracting and producing value that is profitable, the
manifests this unsustainability by recalling the dream of Friedrich August Kekulé von Stradonitz, a dream that “revolutionized chemistry and made the IG possible”:

Kekulé dreams the Great Serpent holding its own tail in its mouth, the dreaming Serpent which surrounds the World. But the meanness, the cynicism with which this dream is to be used. The Serpent that announces, ‘The World is a closed thing, cyclical, resonant, eternally returning,’ is to be delivered into a system whose only aim is to violate the Cycle. Taking and not giving back, demanding that ‘productivity’ and ‘earnings’ keep on increasing with time, the System removing from the rest of the World these vast quantities of energy to keep its own tiny desperate fraction showing a profit: and not only most of humanity—most of the World, animal vegetable and mineral, is laid waste in the process. The System may or may not understand that it’s only buying time. And that time is an artificial resource to begin with, of no value to anyone or anything but the System, which sooner or later must crash to its death, when its addiction to energy has become more than the rest of the World can supply, dragging with it innocent souls all along the chain of life. (419)

Much like Kekulé’s Great Serpent, the Ourobouros, global capitalism is a self-consuming system. The parabolic path of Blicero’s Rocket thus inscribes the very trajectory of the world-system itself. From its moment of liftoff, the Rocket, under the force of Gravity, is always already moving toward its Final Zero, its silent explosion. The world-system, in its turn, having internalized its mechanisms of control, acts only according to its own accumulative/disposing gravity.

Gravity, however, occupies a peculiar role in Pynchon’s novel; it is both the means of religious fulfillment—the movement toward the “Eternal Center” that accumulation process does not occur in the perpetually increasing fashion that capital desires to reproduce itself.” Yates, “Human-As-Waste,” 1690.
characterizes the narrative trajectory of the Zone-Hereros (323)—and the means by which the V-2 rockets are brought down without sound or warning on Slothrop’s lovers and the movie theatre that we, as readers, are meant to picture ourselves in at the novel’s close. Gravity is thus both salvation and damnation, Election and Preterition; the Rocket’s atrophy, driven by Gravity, outlines the trajectory of a system driven by a logic of disposability. Indeed, while it is the V-2’s free-fall under the force of Gravity that makes it so terrifying to the likes of Slothrop, Gravity also serves as the force by which the Schwarzkommando’s Empty Ones will (?) enact their project of racial suicide. Rocket 00001 appears, as Kälekä-Puumala has noted, as the “double” of Blicero’s Rocket 00000, “a matter of ironic reversion and death.” 88 It is the rocket of the Black-Command, made from recycled rockets; a stark contrast to Blicero’s/Der Bleicher’s specially-designed V-2.

Yet while we as readers bear witness to the launch and near-explosion of Rocket 00000, the same cannot be said of the launch of the Empty Ones’ rocket. The fate of Rocket 00001 is left unnarrated. The Schwarzkommando’s racial suicide is thus one of the novel’s many examples of what Louis Mackey has referred to as “preteritions,” events defined by their very omission. 89 Mackey traces the etymological roots of Pynchon’s favorite adjective, “preterite”: “Restored to its native Latin, praeteritio identifies a figure of rhetoric. The Greek paraleipsis, the figure of conspicuous omission. Omission by mention, or mention by omission.” 90 While within the Calvinist theological doctrine the Preterite refers to those selected for damnation, Mackey exposes the term’s

90 Ibid., 20.
more literal meaning as that which is “passed over.”

Indeed, as Enzian relates to Slothrop, the few survivors of von Trotha’s brutal campaign “have a word that we whisper, a mantra for times that threaten to be bad. . . . Mba-kayere. It means ‘I am passed over’” (368; my ellipsis). Thus, as Mackey notes, “[p]reterition can mean survival.”

More specifically, by omitting the Empty Ones’ Rocket project from the narrative system of the novel, Pynchon thus describes the event—precisely by not inscribing it—as potentially extra-systemic: beyond the reach of the novel, the narrator and its readers, the Schwarzkommando’s death project may well take shape. With this in mind, we can (and certainly should) revisit Luc Herman’s and Steven Weisenburger’s approach to Pynchon’s consistent narrative evasions. For Herman and Weisenburger, Pynchon’s refusal to narrate significant events in the novel—opting instead for “the white space following the em dash” is evidence of the hesitation in Gravity’s Rainbow between substantial, anti-systemic revolution and futile, empty struggle. The authors recall the close of the novel’s “Story of Byron the Bulb”: Byron hangs above a colonel, who is receiving a haircut from a trembling Eddie Pensiero, with “his head tilted back now in what may truly be surrender” (655). The seemingly immortal bulb is being fed electricity not by the Grid or by Phoebus, the massive light-bulb cartel, but by a generator powered by Paddy McGonigle, who “wants the colonel out of the way as much as anyone” (655):

Eddie Pensiero, with the blues flooding his shaking muscles, the down, mortal blues, is holding his scissors in a way barbers aren’t supposed to. The points, shuddering in the electric cone, are aiming downward. Eddie

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91 Ibid.
92 Ibid., 21.
93 Herman and Weisenburger, Domination and Freedom, 11.
Pensiero’s fist tightens around the steel loops his fingers have slid out of. The colonel, with a last tilt of his head, exposes his jugular, clearly impatient with the—(668-69)

As we will see in the following chapter, authorial ambivalence between cynical acquiescence and steadfast refusal of hegemonic powers may in fact be a novel’s most redeeming quality. While for Herman and Weisenburger the episode’s closing em dash is representative of narrative hesitation and uncertainty, perhaps it in fact represents the greatest opportunity for extra-systemic freedom. Indeed, as Franco Moretti suggests, the adoption of the novel form—an inherently Western form—by authors concerned with these issues necessarily leads to a formal compromise within a world literary system that is, like the economic world-system, always “[o]ne, and unequal.”

Pynchon’s refusal to include these acts of outright subversion within the narrative system of the novel thus may serve as literary evidence of their potential success. Perhaps, then, we as readers should seek out the Empty Ones, Byron the Bulb and the Argentine anarchists not within the text but without, in the empty space following the em dash: “Now everybody—” (776).

Chapter 4

“rising out of a pile of trash”: Wampum Aesthetics and Reservation “Survivance” in
_Smoke Dancing_

The first two chapters of this project each tackled particular aspects of the logic of disposability that drives capitalist production, as inscribed in two momentous American novels. William Gaddis’ _J R_ wonderfully articulates the driving forces of contemporary finance capitalism, an institutional world so naïve that the childish logic of eleven-year-old J R Vansant—which can be summarily reduced the mantras of “holy shit” and “more! more!”—is by no means exceptional or unusual but in fact exemplary of the economic understandings of the novel’s successful capitalists. _J R_ thus inscribes a logic of accumulation that _requires_ a reciprocal logic of disposability: in order for capital to accumulate, capitalists must produce disposable commodities, re-commodifying what was disposed and re-disposing of those commodities in a ceaseless, exponentially increasing cycle of trash-making. _Gravity’s Rainbow_, then, applies this logic in a social context to a globalized economy, positioning the act of colonization—specifically, of Southwest Africa by Germany—as the culmination of the expanding world-system’s reliance on disposal. Yet by highlighting capitalist disposability, Pynchon makes explicit the inherently contradictory nature of its logic—manifesting in Kekule’s dream of the self-consuming Ouroboros—while simultaneously inscribing potential opportunities for subversion via the very waste-channels the system itself had created.
Yet despite (or, perhaps, because of) the incredible scope of both *J R* and *Gravity’s Rainbow*, we receive little in terms of rigorously localized methods of navigating an increasingly expanding and disposing world-system. Surely, Pynchon constructs the potential for systemic subversion through the localized and historically situated lens of the Schwarzkommando, tapping into the specific relationship between colonizing Germans and colonized Hereros; however, as I’ve argued in the second chapter, the narrative power of the Empty Ones’ rocket project stems largely from its active *omission* from the novel’s narrative system.¹ Gaddis, in turn, interrogates capitalism’s logic of disposability from within Western forms of art production, adopting the abstract notions of entropy and *un*productivity as narrative tools. If this project is concerned with the necessarily increasing production of material and social waste in contemporary capitalism, then certainly it must include the voices of those effectively wasted by this system. Indeed, as Pynchon implies, it is precisely within the realm of the wasted that alternative systems of exchange may persist.

The final chapter of this project will thus focus on familiar instances of disposability within the capitalist world-economy and the localized responses they engender. Here, I examine the ways in which, within the United States, Indigenous reservations occupy the functional role of colonies as disposable spaces of waste-storage. In particular, Eric Gansworth’s novel, *Smoke Dancing*, embodies a critique of the historical and contemporary relations between the Haudenosaunee Confederacy of Nations—comprising the Seneca, Oneida, Onondaga, Tuscarora, Cayuga and Mohawk nations—and the capitalist institutions of the United States. Most significantly,

Gansworth, an Onondaga novelist, poet and artist, roots both his critique of capitalist exchange and his formation of a potentially viable alternative system of exchange in localized aesthetic and epistemic forms. The novel thus serves as both a reclamation of Haudenosaunee lifeways as well as a means of survival, a way to circumvent the economic system that has, for centuries, worked to dispose of Indigenous communities.

Importantly, the economy of Smoke Dancing, based on localized systems of exchange, presents the reader with an alternative to both universal capitalism and universal socialism. Certainly, then, the generally Marxist thrust of this project should be addressed. As David Bedford has noted, “[h]istorically, Aboriginal peoples have not seen much of value in Marxist thought.”

Indeed, one of the central tenets of Marxist theory is the understanding of Indigenous “pre”-capitalist economies as necessary teleological steps toward global socialism. The majority of Marxist critics share in Marx’s elevation of socialism as the most effective (and, for some, inevitable) alternative to capitalism. Thus, while Indigenous peoples may “share with Marxists a loathing for capitalism, they do so for different motives and with different expectations.”

As Samir Amin, a Marxist himself, points out, the majority of socialist movements have in fact deepened the universalizing ethics of capitalist production. He argues:

> Trusting in the progress and overestimating the capacities of capitalism, socialists have tended to believe that its expansion would gradually erase national boundaries, and that the resulting worldwide homogenization of society would lay the basis for class struggle and socialism at a world level. . . . Hence they have been inclined to prefer assimilation, by

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3 Ibid., 103.
democratic means, over the defence of specificities and differences, which they have often seen as vestiges of a dying past.\(^4\)

Wallerstein, too, works against the “universal” nature of capitalism, arguing that universalism today is merely an extension of European bourgeois thought.\(^5\) Both Wallerstein and Amin, however, propose not an erasure but a “perfection” of universalism.\(^6\) Wallerstein, in particular, calls for a

universal universalism, which refuses essentialist characterizations of social reality, historicizes both the universal and the particular, reunifies the so-called scientific and humanistic into a single epistemology, and permits us to look with a highly clinical and quite skeptical eye at all justifications for ‘intervention’ by the powerful against the weak.\(^7\)

Certainly, then, while there is room for discussion between Marxist and Indigenous critics, there appears to be a fundamental disagreement regarding the role of localized socio-economic forms.

In a similar vein, a great deal of attention (and criticism) has been paid recently to the growing fields of globalization theory, postcolonialism and world literature. Arif Dirlik overtly takes issue with the notion of a “post-colonial” field of study, arguing that “[t]he goal . . . is no less than to abolish all distinctions between center and periphery as well as all other ‘binarisms’ that are allegedly a legacy of colonial(ist) ways of thinking


\(^5\) Wallerstein argues that the appeals to universalism made by leaders of Britain, the United States and the UN are based on “very old themes, which have constituted the basic rhetoric of the powerful throughout the history of the modern world-system, since at least the sixteenth century.” Immanuel Wallerstein, *European Universalism: The Rhetoric of Power* (New York: The New Press, 2006), xiv.


\(^7\) Wallerstein, *European Universalism*, 79.
and to reveal societies globally in their complex heterogeneity and contingency.”

Dirlik thus argues that postcolonialism, as a discourse, is in fact complicit with the concerns of global capitalism in its “diversion of attention from contemporary problems of social, political, and cultural domination, and in its obfuscation of its own relationship to what is but a condition of its emergence, that is, to a global capitalism.” The discourse of world literature, as described by Franco Moretti and the Warwick Research Collective, takes a broader approach, defining the current system of literary production and dissemination as a single yet unequal system; in other words, world literature is “the literature of the world-system—of the modern capitalist world-system, that is.” Thus, as noted in this project’s introduction, Moretti observes that any literary production using Western structures—i.e. the novel—requires a compromise between local materials and foreign forms.

Yet the discourses of postcolonialism and world literature rarely seem to include the literary works of Indigenous American authors and artists. Indeed, Indigenous

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9 Ibid., 331.
10 Moretti defines the world literary system as “one literature (*Weltliteratur*, singular, as in Goethe and Marx), or perhaps, better, one world literary system (of inter-related literatures); but a system which is different from what Goethe and Marx had hoped for, because it’s profoundly unequal.” Franco Moretti, “Conjectures on World Literature,” *New Left Review* 1 (2000), 56. Emphasis in original.
12 See Chapter 1, note 31.
13 As Penelope Kelsey notes, “[p]ostcolonialists have had a tendency to overlook Native Americans, as Louis Owens and countless others have lamented.” Penelope Kelsey,
nations and groups in Canada, the United States and Australia have, for centuries, resisted and continue to resist the assimilative forces of Euro-American capitalism. In turn, the works of Indigenous authors are often assimilated into Western forms of literary criticism. Even further, as Jace Weaver has argued, the critical reception of authors and critics educated in Western institutions had, in the recent past, often discredited formal compromises—between the Euro-American novel form and local materials and characters—as somehow less “authentically” Indigenous.\textsuperscript{14} Weaver thus proposes, as a critical mode for Indigenous American literary criticism, a form of “pluralist separatism,” which focuses on strictly Indigenous American epistemic and aesthetic forms while accounting for the varying local experiences of different Indigenous nations and groups.\textsuperscript{15}

Indeed, given the unique contemporary experience of Indigenous American nations—existing within the geographical space of the center of global capitalism—the production and criticism of Indigenous literary works seem to demand a certain level of local specificity. Thus, I argue in this chapter that the adoption of the novel form by Indigenous authors does not by default undermine an authorial project of aesthetic and epistemic reclamation; on the contrary, as Eric Gansworth demonstrates, the appropriation of Euro-American literary (and, indeed, economic) forms and their

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\textit{Tribal Theory in Native American Literature: Dakota and Haudenosaunee Writing and Indigenous Worldviews} (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 2008), 6.

\textsuperscript{14} Weaver is working against Elvira Pulitano’s \textit{Toward a Native American Critical Theory}, in which she remains skeptical of “separatist” authors like Robert Warrior and Craig Womack, yet calls into question the authenticity of Indigenous writers educated in Western institutions. Jace Weaver, “Splitting the Earth: First Utterances and Pluralist Separatism,” in \textit{American Indian Literary Nationalism}, 18-21.

\textsuperscript{15} More specifically: “American Indian Literary Nationalism espouses a kind of separatism, but it is a pluralist separatism. In this it mirrors the pluralistic aspects of the broader Native community. Though it is popular to refer to Native America, it is perhaps more correct to refer to Native Americas, in the plural.” Weaver, “Splitting the Earth,” 46. Emphasis in original.
subsequent transformation within localized Indigenous worldviews can in fact constitute an act of resistance and subversion. As Simon Ortiz, in his epilogue to *American Indian Literary Nationalism*, points out, the appropriation of “the languages of the colonialists” by Indigenous authors and writers as a means of localized expression is indeed a form of “resistance; there is no[] clearer word for it than resistance.”

In Eric Gansworth’s novel, *Smoke Dancing*, capitalism’s logic of disposability is both articulated and critiqued from within a specific, localized epistemology. Gansworth, a member of the Onondaga Nation, uses Haudenosaunee systems of knowledge, ethics and exchange in order to shed light on the deeply unequal economic relationship between New York State and the Tuscarora reservation in which the novel is set. In so doing, Gansworth both imagines and employs an alternative mode of economic production in order to “provide[] glimpses of a non-capitalistic economy based on exchange. . . .”

More specifically, Gansworth inscribes an economy that appropriates capital and puts it to work according to Haudenosaunee methods of exchange—a form of work that is, from a capitalist perspective, overtly unproductive. By developing a fictional economic model based on localized ethics of exchange—namely, reciprocity and the redistribution of resources—Gansworth is able to articulate a system of exchange that refuses capitalism’s contradictory logic of disposability. *Smoke Dancing* thus constitutes a form of literary localism that interrogates the unequal economic and literary world-systems from within a specific cultural and historical context.

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Importantly, as a result of centuries of engagement with an increasingly aggressive capitalist market, Haudenosaunee society and geography has felt the effects of this troubling logic. As I argue below, the novel’s Tuscarora reservation—and, indeed, innumerable other reservations enclosed by the United States’ and Canada’s borders—functions in much the same way as colonies for Pynchon’s narrator. Deemed as unproductive lands, Indigenous reservations are, from a capitalist State’s point of view, wastelands, and thus suitable spaces for the storage of the State’s waste. It is thus unsurprising that a number of Native scholars take issue with the notion of “tribal capitalism.”

Oren Lyons, a Faithkeeper of the Onondaga Nation, is avowedly anti-capitalist, opposing the casinos established by the Oneida Nation’s business leader, Ray Halbritter. For Lyons, the establishment of a capitalist enterprise as a means to improve the conditions of reservation life is a “short vision.” Lyons is particularly opposed to the establishment of casinos on reservation lands because such enterprises require legal agreements with American or Canadian companies, in which a certain amount of jurisdiction is usually compromised. “In order to open up a casino,” he observes, “you have to give up your sovereignty.” In particular, Lyons conceptualizes capitalist enterprises as necessarily individualistic and profit-centered. He argues, “[y]ou can’t

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20 Ibid.
21 For Lyons, tribal capitalism is inseparable from individualism, which undermines Indigenous modes of exchange: “right now what I see are Indian nations across the country giving up all kinds of things for the privilege to gain money.” Ibid., 243.
run a nation like a corporation, because it’s not a corporation.” Taiaiake Alfred, the renowned and outspoken Mohawk scholar, seems to share Lyons’ perspective. For Alfred, attempting to solve reservation poverty through economic development is a deeply problematic and wholly futile approach. Apart from the numerous instances in which Indigenous capitalist enterprises gained enormous profits while their communities remained impoverished, Alfred argues, “the economic development agenda is founded on a basic concession to white power and the willing Okwehonwe [original people] surrender of fundamental rights.” In other words, any attempts at economic reform, if based on capitalist forms of exchange, inevitably submits to the very logic of accumulation through disposability that tirelessly expropriated the lands and resources of Indigenous nations.

Yet after his own conversation with Ray Halbritter, Alfred expresses ambivalence regarding the viability of quasi-capitalist institutions as a means of Indigenous resurgence. He admits, “after speaking with him, I was more convinced than ever that economic power is the foundation of independence. But,” he continues, “I was also more keenly aware that maintaining our connection to our cultural roots is the only thing that ensures we remain Onkwehonwe.” Indeed, as Frantz Fanon had argued, the political death of a people is certainly the end of that people. Mason Rollins, Smoke Dancing’s Tuscaroran entrepreneur, makes a similar observation after Chief Jacob “Bud” Tunny had signed away the Nation’s jurisdiction of its reservation: “This place stopped existing as

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22 Ibid., 242.
23 Alfred, Wasáse, 42. Alfred also observes that “[t]he most common form of corruption in indigenous communities is plain and basic material greed.” Ibid., 122.
24 Ibid., 222.
Tuscarora Nation the second Bud signed his name to that jurisdiction statement.”

The issue, then, is adaptation: how are First Nations like the Haudenosaunee Confederacy nations to exist as First Nations within an ever-expanding, ever-penetrating economic structure that survives on the both disposal of peripheral spaces and peoples and the creation of waste-spaces to store the accumulation of excess waste?

It is precisely within the complex and controversial discourse of Indigenous economics that Gansworth inscribes his Haudenosaunee economy. In particular, Gansworth’s portrayal of economic entrepreneurs on the Tuscarora reservation remains deeply ambivalent, making it impossible to come to any clear-cut conclusions about the viability of capitalist enterprises as a means of alleviating poverty and establishing autonomy. In Smoke Dancing, Mason Rollins runs a successful gasoline-and-cigarettes business, taking advantage of the tax-exempt status granted to Haudenosaunee businesses in the 1794 Treaty of Canandaigua. Yet while Mason’s business ethics are by no means free from criticism, he is, ultimately, and with the help of his community, able to develop an enterprise driven not by capitalist principles of accumulation and disposability but by Haudenosaunee principles of reciprocity and redistribution. Gansworth, then, by embracing this very form of “unproductivity” that characterizes Haudenosaunee

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25 Eric Gansworth, Smoke Dancing (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2004), 196. All future excerpts refer to this edition and will be cited parenthetically. Unless otherwise noted, all ellipses and emphases are from the original text.

26 Mason’s use of long-established treaty agreements as a means of bettering his community is certainly worth noting. Naomi Klein, in her recent work on capitalism’s destructive impact on the climate and environment, notes that “Indigenous land and treaty rights have proved a major barrier for the extractive industries. . . .” Of course, herein lies one of the strongest criticisms of Mason’s enterprise: extraction-based production methods—i.e. oil and gas—are inherently linear and non-reciprocal, taking without giving back. Naomi Klein, This Changes Everything: Capitalism vs. The Climate (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2014), 370.
exchanges, inscribes a localized economic model that offers not simply survival—a
means of evading disposal—but survivance, to borrow Gerald Vizenor’s term.

For Vizenor, “survivance” is the “active presence of Native people in public
discourse and the practice of actively resisting dominant representations.” More
specifically, survivance demands the appropriation of Western representations of the
“Indian” and their subsequent reconstitution within Indigenous forms of knowledge. I
argue, then, that Gansworth’s novel constitutes a form of survivance on two levels: in its
content, Smoke Dancing appropriates Western diplomatic history and economic
structures in order to articulate an adaptive Haudenosaunee system of exchange that
serves to improve the livelihoods of the inhabitants of the Tuscarora reservation; in its
form, the novel appropriates Western literary structures as an act of literary reclamation.

This chapter is divided into three sections. The first section builds off of
Pynchon’s description of colonies as the “outhouses of the European soul.” Much like
colonies, Native reservations in contemporary America also function as outhouses of
sorts. Waste, however, in the relationship between State and reservation is not only
biological and psychological—repressed forms of sexual and physical violence, and,
notably, what Blicero refers to as “that special Death the West had invented”—but also
material: the detritus of industrial capitalist processes. Tapping into the real-world

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27 John D. Miles, “The Postindian Rhetoric of Gerald Vizenor,” College Composition and
28 Notably, for Vizenor, the term “Indian” is an empty signifier, in that it is only “a
simulation, the absence of natives . . . [and] has no referent.” Gerald Vizenor, Fugitive
Poses: Native American Indian Sciences of Absence and Presence (Lincoln: University of
30 Ibid., 736.
experiences of Indigenous reservations across North America, Eric Gansworth’s *Smoke Dancing* inscribes a Tuscarora reservation in western New York State that houses the wastes of the state’s Niagara Power Project. Importantly, however, the storage of waste on reservation lands—as is often, but certainly not always, the case—was part of an agreement reached between tribal chiefs and capitalist market interests. Gansworth is unequivocal on this point: agreements to allow the reservation to act as an outhouse, though tenuously done with the Nation’s interest in mind, serve only to diminish the Nation’s autonomy and degrade the health and bodies of its members. Yet in its very capacity as an outhouse, *Smoke Dancing*’s Tuscarora reservation is laden with the potential for alternative forms of economy; more specifically, by embracing Haudenosaunee forms of exchange, adaptation and survival, the novel’s characters—namely, Big Red Harmony, Fiction Tunny and Mason Rollins—are able to envision and enact a viable, non-capitalist economy geared toward communal redistribution, as opposed to accumulation and disposability.

The chapter’s second section thus interrogates the primary economic forces articulated in the novel. *Smoke Dancing*’s Tuscarora reservation is divided between supporters of the two reservation entrepreneurs: Chief Jacob “Bud” Tunny and Mason “Rollin’ in Dough” Rollins. Bud Tunny claims throughout the novel to uphold strictly Haudenosaunee traditions, presenting Mason’s modernity-embracing enterprise—particularly his wish to tap into New York State’s water supply—as a direct threat to the Nation’s sovereignty. Yet Gansworth’s characterizations of both Bud and Mason leave the reader with ambivalent feelings toward the viability of capitalist enterprise as a means of reducing reservation poverty and asserting national sovereignty. And this, I argue, is
precisely the point. Gansworth’s Tuscarora reservation makes significant strides toward
the embodiment of survivance only with great help from the community; it is with the
assistance of his peers that Mason is able to construct an entrepreneurial enterprise based
wholly on Haudenosaunee ethics of exchange.

The third and final section of this chapter addresses the aesthetic and narrative
functions of Gansworth’s novel. I argue here that, much as Mason appropriates capitalist
forms to construct a localized, non-capitalist system of exchange, Gansworth appropriates
the Euro-American form of the fictional novel to create a system of literary exchange
based on Haudenosaunee aesthetic principles. While the George Washington wampum
belt functioned as a significant economic tool for Mason Rollins, wampum aesthetics
also deeply informs the novel’s visual art and prose. Wampum aesthetics—“Indigenous
Binary Code,” as Gansworth describes it—31—is, importantly, indicative of Haudenosaunee
political, social and ethical worldviews. Indeed, the exchange of wampum is the primary
means of intra- and inter-national diplomacy among Haudenosaunee nations.
Gansworth’s depiction of the George Washington belt thus recalls historical means of
adaptation and survival as well as reframes the novel within Haudenosaunee aesthetic
forms. It is thus appropriate that Gansworth names his protagonist and exemplar of
survivance “Fiction” Tunny. Fiction’s character and actions are emblematic of
Gansworth’s reframing of fiction as a medium and the novel as a form within strictly
localized methods of expression. Gansworth’s Smoke Dancing thus embodies a form of
literary localism, which serves as both critique of and response to the economic and the
literary world-systems.

31 Eric Gansworth, A Half-Life of Cardio-Pulmonary Function (Syracuse: Syracuse
University Press, 2008), xvii.
Reservation Disposal: the “outhouses” of the American Economy

For Thomas Pynchon, colonies were the “outhouses of the European soul,” spaces of both indulgence and waste-storage for repressed European subjects.\(^{32}\) *Gravity’s Rainbow* manifests this spatial relationship between colonizer and colonized in Germany’s colonial appropriation of Southwest Africa, setting a significant historical and logical precedent for the Third Reich’s attempted extermination of Jewish Europeans in the mid-twentieth century. Yet the logic undergirding Germany’s colonization of Southwest Africa finds deep and troubling parallels with Europe’s colonial project in what is now the United States. Surely, Indigenous North Americans were met with a number of removal and extermination attempts by colonists. For the Haudenosaunee in particular, however, engagements with colonists were largely economic in nature.\(^{33}\) The nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy thus felt the pressures of increasingly aggressive expropriation and what Theodor Leutwein had referred to in the previous chapter as “political death.”\(^{34}\) For the Haudenosaunee of the present-day northeastern

\(^{33}\) As some of the easternmost nations in North America, the Haudenosaunee encountered colonists and missionaries very early on. As such, colonial groups and interests were, for quite some time, heavily reliant on the economic and diplomatic cooperation of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, which wielded a great deal of political power in the region. See Mark Shell, *Wampum and the Origins of American Money* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 2013), 81.
\(^{34}\) See Chapter 3, page 116. Additionally, it should be noted that the violent formation of the United States as a nation had enormous effects on the lives of Haudenosaunees: “the [Revolutionary W]ar was against not only the British but also any form of Native resistance to American domination. The greatest casualties suffered in the Revolutionary War were by Native peoples, and the largest single assault in the war was the 1779 expedition against the Haudenosaunees.” Lee Irwin, *Coming Down From Above: Prophecy, Resistance, Renewal in Native American Religions* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 2008), 152.
United States, the consistent loss of land to colonial settlements—through both legitimate and illegitimate means\(^{35}\)—diminished both cultural and political autonomy.\(^{36}\)

Yet the colonial history of North America—primarily of the United States and Canada—is unique from the numerous other histories worldwide in that the struggle for decolonization unfolded under very different circumstances. While the “liberated” nations of India, Egypt and numerous African nations fought throughout the latter half of the twentieth century to establish national autonomy in the globalized capitalist marketplace, the Indigenous nations of the Americas sought to do so within the geographical space of already-established capitalist nations. The peculiar spatiality of the colonizer/colonized relationship in the United States—in that there are little to no geographical barriers separating, as Pynchon would have it, the dark colonial regions from pure, white spaces of European America—deeply informs the relationship between capitalist production and consumption and the storage of wastes produced in this process. Importantly, then, as Eric Gansworth makes so powerfully clear, capitalism’s logic of disposability—which, as I argued in Chapter 2, culminated in the act of colonization—can indeed be traced forward to the contemporary socio-economic relationship between

\(^{35}\) As Gail MacLeitch points out, the Mohawks, keepers of the Eastern Door, as the easternmost nation of the Haudenosaunee, experienced the greatest intensity of colonial pressures for land acquisition. While many land cessions involved mutually agreed upon treaties and covenants (often signed by Mohawks to prevent further land grabs), a vast number of settlers set up camp either without permission or wielding “fraudulent deeds claiming ownership of Mohawk cornfields and hunting grounds.” Gail MacLeitch, *Imperial Entanglements: Iroquois Change and Persistence on the Frontiers of Empire* (Philadelphia: University of Pennsylvania Press, 2011), 48.

\(^{36}\) MacLeitch notes that “[l]and provided the bedrock of indigenous economic and cultural autonomy and underpinned the Iroquois’ status as a sovereign people. Yet the defining theme of the eighteenth century was the steady erosion of the Iroquois land base and the growing absorption of their labor and resources into a market economy.” Ibid., 3-4.
capitalist North American nations and the Indigenous reservations that exist within their boundaries. Waste, in this relationship, is largely material: the “joint-products” of industrial production processes—\(37\)—from nuclear and chemical waste to the household refuse of upper-class American families—consistently transgress, in only one direction, the boundaries separating Native nations from the United States. Indeed, if colonies were the “outhouses of the European soul,” then reservations are the outhouses of the American economy.

The Tuscarora reservation in which Gansworth’s novel *Smoke Dancing* is set is emblematic this relationship. We learn from the novel’s first chapter that powerful contaminants have seeped into the reservation’s water supply, stemming from poorly installed drinking-water well systems. Patricia “Fiction” Tunny, the novel’s protagonist, has first-hand experience: “My mother, Deanna Johns, faithful member of the Tuscarora Nation Protestant Church, died young of intestinal problems, developed over years of her raw sewage seeping into her drinking-water well” (10). Of course, Fiction’s mother’s experience was in no way unique: while most of the reservation members had “gotten off lucky” with “just a skaht-yeh full of cavities,” both Big Red Harmony’s former wife, Bev, and Ruby Pem, the reservation’s Clan Mother, also passed away from ingesting contaminated well water (10). Toward the end of the novel, the Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC) offers indisputable evidence of the long-suspected but rarely confronted water contamination. In their analysis of the reservation’s underground water system, the DEC found

a high level of bacteria normally thriving in the lower guts of humans, but which at these levels was a deadly poison. They’d speculated to the Chiefs’ Council, in a statement now nearly a month old, that a possible reason for these levels was that the drought conditions had somehow altered the configuration of the underground water paths. Now, a bunch of badly installed sewage beds were seeping into fresh-water sources. (206-7)

The majority of the reservation’s population thus suffer from limited access to clean water; even further, their impoverishment limits the availability of alternatives. Big Red points out that although he and his wife “suspected our water was bad . . . we kept drinking it anyway, avoiding the price of bottled spring water” (74). And yet, in an evidently vicious cycle, the poverty of reservation members in fact led to the installation of poorly-designed water wells in the first place. Several years prior to the novel’s setting, Ezekiel Tunny, a former Chief and father to current Chief Jacob “Bud” Tunny, had reached a deal with New York State’s Niagara Power Project that secured, among other things, a safely drilled well for himself and his immediate family. While the majority of the reservation suffers from poorly constructed and contaminated water wells, Big Red is quick to point out that “[t]he state dug Bud’s well and leach bed; he didn’t. You can be sure they’re as pure as can be. I just couldn’t afford to do a better job on ours, and that was when I was working” (142; my former emphasis).

Unsurprisingly, the general poverty of the reservation deeply informs the living conditions of its citizens. Big Red Harmony, who had in previous years operated a snow-plowing service, is particularly attuned to his own and his neighbors’ lack of wealth. Big Red realizes rather quickly that he was “dead wrong about the money I’d make plowing. More often than not, I refused the crumpled-up bills that bundled folks held out to me
from their porches. They blocked off most of their rooms with blankets—living in one room in an effort to keep the kerosene bills down low . . .” (72-3; my ellipsis). Yet as a number of scholars have pointed out, the rampant poverty of Smoke Dancing’s Tuscarora reservation is directly linked to the encroaching pressures of an ever-expanding capitalist market.\(^3\) It is worth recalling here Ezekiel Tunny’s deal with New York State’s Niagara Power Project, in which “a fifth of the [Tuscarora] Nation’s land” was ceded to the State of New York (90). According to the terms of the agreement, the State of New York gave Ezekiel and his immediate family—including his son, current Chief Bud Tunny—new, large homes equipped with updated amenities and access to clean, contaminant free water; in exchange, New York State was allowed to construct a massive water reservoir on the reservation’s northern end—displacing a number of Tuscarora homes in the process—and, significantly, to bury “chemical barrels . . . deep in certain places within the Nation” (90).

Smoke Dancing’s Tuscarora reservation thus constitutes what Naomi Klein has termed a “sacrifice zone,” a region deemed unproductive for capital interests and thus suitable for waste disposal.\(^3\) Importantly, for both Gansworth and Klein, zones deemed necessary for spatial sacrifice are—and long have been—determined largely by economic forces:

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\(^3\) Penelope Kelsey notes that, in Smoke Dancing, the “origins and intended effects [of reservation poverty] are sketched in concise detail, allowing no misattribution of the causes of these Indigenous struggles and suffering to Tuscarora actors. . . .” As such, as Kelsey points out, the novel heeds Sean Teuton’s advice in Red Land, Red Power by refusing to reinforce “Western assumptions that dysfunction in Native communities occurs ‘naturally’ rather than as a result of colonial relations,” a criticism leveled against Sherman Alexie’s Reservation Blues. Kelsey, Reading the Wampum, 49; Sean Teuton, Red Land, Red Power (Durham: Duke University Press, 2008), 207.

\(^3\) Klein defines sacrifice zones as “whole subsets of humanity considered less than fully human, which made their poisoning in the name of progress somehow acceptable.” Klein, This Changes Everything, 310. Winona LaDuke has used the term “National Sacrifice Areas” in the past. See Winona LaDuke and Ward Churchill, “Native America: The Political Economy of Radioactive Colonialism,” in The Journal of Ethnic Studies 13, no. 3 (1985): 123-126.
impoverished regions, “where residents lack[] political power,” are typically sacrificed for the benefit of capitalism.\(^{40}\) Again a cycle of poverty manifests itself on the reservation: the exploitative relationship with the capitalist State engendered the reservation’s poverty by limiting their land base and political power and expropriating their resources; this in turn gave the reservation the qualifications necessary for sacrifice as American capitalism’s outhouse.

Gansworth’s description of a Tuscarora reservation laden with industrial contaminants taps into a much larger discourse on the exploitation and degradation of natural resources in sovereign Native territories. Perhaps the most notable example of such industrial waste on a national scale is the storage of the enormous amount of nuclear waste accumulated over the past half-century.\(^{41}\) Winona LaDuke points to the Atomic Energy Commission’s (AEC) use of the Nevada Test Site, located with Western Shoshone territory, in the postwar era. Between 1951 and 1992, the United States and Great Britain detonated more than one thousand nuclear devices;\(^{42}\) while the United States government originally concluded that the radiation levels were “equivalent to that of a single chest x-ray,” recent tests (in 1997) by the National Cancer Institute had shown that the radiation levels in parts of Western Shoshone territory were two- to three-

\(^{40}\) Klein notes further that, in recent years, with the “extreme energy frenzy and the commodity boom,” sacrifice zones have expanded even into wealthy world regions; “[n]o place, it seems, is off limits.” Yet, she is careful to point out that, although “we are all in the sacrifice zone now,” the poor and marginalized remain at “far greater risk of living downstream from a mine.” Klein, *This Changes Everything*, 311, 312, 314.

\(^{41}\) Winona LaDuke notes that, as of today, “30,000 metric tons of nuclear waste have been generated by the US nuclear industry.” Winona LaDuke, *All Our Relations: Native Struggles for Land and Life* (Cambridge: South End Press, 1999), 97.

\(^{42}\) Ibid., 98.
thousand times greater than those amounts. After a discussion with Virginia Sanchez, a Western Shoshone woman who had grown up near the test site, LaDuke notes that AEC “would deliberately wait for the clouds to blow north and east before conducting above-ground tests, so that the fallout would avoid any heavily populated areas such as Las Vegas and Los Angeles. This meant that the Shoshones would get a higher dosage.”

The language of sacrifice is again appropriate: because Shoshone territory and people were deemed less productive than the cities of Las Vegas and Los Angeles, their region was selected for the dispersion of radioactive fallout.

Well into the twentieth century, then, Native territory was, from a capitalist’s perspective, unproductive waste-space and thus suited for waste disposal—which, importantly, informs the disposability of Indigenous populations. Pynchon’s conceptualization of colonies in the nineteenth century as sites of waste-storage finds its historical reiteration in Gansworth’s articulation of twentieth and twenty-first century reservations. Not unlike the current garbage crisis addressed in this project’s introduction, Winona LaDuke writes of a “space crisis” for nuclear waste storage that has developed over recent decades. The solution to this crisis, then, is to find the least productive land on which to dispose of this waste: “The growing environmental justice movement, coupled with the sovereign status of Indian lands and their frequent lack of infrastructure, mean that the nuclear industry has increasingly targeted Native lands for dumps.”

LaDuke notes further that nuclear industries often use the general impoverishment of reservation citizens—which, as Gansworth makes so clear, is itself the result of

43 Ibid.
44 Ibid., 99.
45 Ibid., 100.
inherently unequal and exploitative agreements made between tribal governments and capitalist interests—as a crucial bargaining tool, offering handsome financial compensation for permission to store toxic wastes.\(^4^6\) To reiterate: American industries often exploited and extracted natural resources (i.e. uranium) located on Indigenous lands, which helped to engender the poverty of reservations; this poverty, in turn, informed the rising disposability of Indigenous lands and populations by leaving struggling Indigenous communities with little choice but to take financial compensation for the allowance of waste material within their territories. LaDuke points specifically to the Anishinaabeg community in Grassy Narrows, Ontario, riddled with unemployment, poverty and alcoholism that stemmed from the collapse of their fishing industry.\(^4^7\) Through aggressive acts of legislation in the 1960s, Canadian paper industries were given permission to establish plants along the Wabigoon River, which became increasingly contaminated by the enormous amounts of mercury dumped by the factories.\(^4^8\) More recently, in the 1990s, the Canadian government had announced plans to establish a nuclear waste dump in the Grassy Narrows reservation. Judy De Silva, an Ojibwe woman living on the reservation, explains the logic of these Federal-First Nation agreements: “There are so many

\(^{4^6}\) According to LaDuke, “During the early and mid-1990s, the federal government and the nuclear industry offered seemingly lucrative deals to Native communities willing to accept nuclear waste dumps on their land.” More specifically, large Indigenous agencies, like the Council on Energy Resource Tribes and the National Congress of American Indians, received large monetary donations in exchange for helping to “promote the waste industry in Indian country.” Ibid.

\(^{4^7}\) Writing in 1999, LaDuke observes that roughly ninety-five percent of the Grassy Narrows community depends on welfare programs, a massive increase from the fifty percent rate in the 1970s. Additionally, about half of the community’s population battles alcoholism. According to Grassy Narrows Chief Steve Frobisher, the community members “are still tested today for mercury [poisoning]. That is a program that’s going to be here forever.” Ibid., 102, 103.

\(^{4^8}\) LaDuke states that, “[i]n March 1962, Reed Paper opened a plant that released an estimated 20 pounds of mercury into the river every day.” Ibid., 101.
environmental things that have happened here that we never yelled about, because we just settled for compensation. Because we’re poor, we just settled for money. That’s probably what the government is counting on.”

It must be reinforced here that the impoverishment of the members of the Grassy Narrows reservation, which applied increasing pressure to accept monetary compensation, is inextricably a part of capitalist expansion: by removing the reservation’s members from their traditional form of economy, capitalism is able to incorporate the region impose its own economic logic (disposability) on the reservation.

Certainly, then, Ezekiel Tunny’s decision to relinquish a portion of the reservation’s land and to allow the dumping of hazardous chemicals within the boundaries of the reservation was not pure and simple self-interest. Although the Tunny family indeed received great benefits from the deal, Ezekiel, as Bud points out, had few other options available. Bud holds serious doubts that the Tuscarora Nation “could actually be effective against the United States Supreme Court” (171); his father’s justification for the deal, that “the state was going to take the land whether we sold it or not; so I figured we should at least get something for it,” could thus be perceived as an example not of submission but of making the most of a difficult situation (97). Yet, surely, the “we” to which Ezekiel refers is not the reservation as a whole but the Tunny family in particular. Ezekiel thus leans closer toward the individualistic framework of

49 Ibid., 103.
50 Shamoon Zamir also discusses the literary elements of works detailing such “sacrifice zones.” Writing of Leslie Marmon Silko’s Ceremony, Zamir notes that Silko’s narrative politics develop according to “a paradoxical mixture of a newly emergent regionalist resistance and an internalization of global forms that simultaneously erases this resistance.” Shamoon Zamir, “Literature in a ‘National Sacrifice Area’: Leslie Silko’s Ceremony,” in New Voices in Native American Literary Criticism, ed. Arnold Krupat (Washington: Smithsonian Institution Press, 1993), 397.
capitalism than the communal and reciprocal structure of Haudenosaunee economics. Even further, as suggested above, agreements allowing the disposal of industrial waste on reservation land have powerful social and biological impacts on the members of the community. Ezekiel Tunny’s agreement, then, contributed directly to the degradation of the community’s health.

To be sure, Haudenosaunee nations have also experienced their share of reservation-based contamination. LaDuke cites the efforts of Katsi Cook, a Mohawk midwife and activist, in exposing what she refers to as the “bioaccumulation of polychlorinated biphenyls” (PCBs)\textsuperscript{51}—chemicals used throughout the twentieth century in the electric industry and whose toxicity has been thoroughly noted.\textsuperscript{52} Specifically, the Akwesasne Mohawk reservation in northern New York and southern Quebec is the site of some of the highest contamination levels of PCBs on the North American continent.\textsuperscript{53} The industrial contamination of the reservation—which, as LaDuke notes, has been occurring throughout the twentieth century—stems in large part from its geographical location. The Akwesasne reservation straddles the St. Lawrence River, which plays a crucial role in the livelihoods of reservation members.\textsuperscript{54} Yet the very river that had served as a source of sustenance—for both fishing and farming practices—for centuries has, through the aggressive industrialization of the region over the last century, become the

\textsuperscript{51} LaDuke, \textit{All Our Relations}, 11.
\textsuperscript{53} LaDuke, \textit{All Our Relations}, 15.
\textsuperscript{54} LaDuke refers to the St. Lawrence River as “the well spring for much of Mohawk life.” Ibid., 14.
primary source of the reservation’s contamination. LaDuke notes the primacy of the St. Lawrence River to the disposal of industrial waste:

Today, an estimated 25 percent of all North American industry is located on or near the Great Lakes, all of which are drained by the St. Lawrence River. That puts the Akwesasne reservation downstream from some of the most lethal and extensive pollution on the continent.  

Indeed, it should be underscored here that the pollution of resources leads directly to the contamination of human bodies. Katsi Cook’s notion of “bioaccumulation” refers to the contamination of bodies through the ingestion of contaminated food and water sources. The disposable space of reservations thus takes on important social implications, for the demands of capitalist production have rendered not only the reservation’s geography but also its people disposable.

Yet recalling that the production of waste in Gravity’s Rainbow, while an essential aspect of systemic reproduction, in fact provides the Schwarzkommando and Byron the Bulb with ways to circumvent the system, it is unsurprising that Smoke Dancing’s Tuscarora reservation is the site of a number of subversive, anti-capitalist activities. It is certainly worth exploring Big Red Harmony’s practice of “junking,” “scour[ing] others’ throwaways . . . for salvageable items” (74). For Red, after having been laid off from his factory job, “[j]unking became a means of survival” (74). By repurposing and reselling scrap metal, Red was able to maintain some form of financial

55 Ibid., 15.
56 Cook’s own work deals specifically with the ways in which this contamination is transmitted through breast milk. As a Mohawk midwife, Cook’s work largely involves educating reservation mothers, testing breast milk for PCB contamination, and encouraging reservation members to stop eating contaminated fish. Cook refers to mothers as “the first environment;” pollution of the natural world inevitably leads to the pollution of human bodies. Ibid., 18.
stability for himself and his young son. But of particular importance here are the objects that he did not sell. Apart from scrap metal and the occasional sewing table, Red also, on occasion, picked up used “couches, chairs, and other furniture,” mending whatever prevented the item from fulfilling its function (74). Rather than reselling these items for profit, Red gave them away to those members of the reservation in need: “[a]nd there’s never a shortage of these folks. Someone’s always got a son or a daughter moving home from the city, needing a couch to sit or sleep on, or another table to feed everyone who has a chair and a mouth” (74-5). Big Red thus seeks to alleviate the effects of poverty on his community by sorting through the detritus of an overwhelmingly capitalist mode of production.

Surely, then, Red’s process of reconstitution and redistribution is, by all capitalist standards, inherently unproductive. Yet his efforts are not merely reactionary; he does not work purely in response to the pressures of capitalism and poverty. Rather, Red’s junking techniques are embedded specifically in Haudenosaunee social and economic structures, emblematized in his creation of the “Curbside Phoenix”—a broken and discarded oak coat rack with a mirror found on a curb in the “snotty French” DeVeaux neighborhood (75). Having transformed the discarded coat rack into a fully functional piece with original wood carvings, Big Red produced an object that, according to a Buffalo-based appraiser, “could have sold for four thousand dollars” (76). But instead of selling the Curbside Phoenix, Red put the piece to work in the office of the Tuscarora entrepreneur, Mason Rollins. Big Red describes the piece in its new environment:

Flanking the mirror in three directions curl carved, interlinked figures of the seven clans thriving on Tuscarora—Bear, Wolf, Deer, Turtle, Snipe,
Eel, and Beaver—each staring out with inlaid camera-lens eyes at whoever is vain enough to use the mirror. Above the mirror, an eagle soars above the white pine, the Tree of Peace, its roots surrounding the glass.

(183)

Certainly, recalling Governor Cates’ profit-ensuring exchange, Big Red’s refusal to exchange the Curbside Phoenix in order to facilitate the flow of capital certainly constitutes an act of unproductive labor. Yet, within a Haudenosaunee system of exchange, the piece’s performative function in Mason’s office is in fact deeply productive. Embodied in Big Red’s Curbside Phoenix is a Haudenosaunee worldview, in which survival—physical and cultural—requires an understanding of interdependence and reciprocity, represented by the “interlinked” clan figures. Red’s inclusion of the figure of the White Tree of Peace—the very tree planted by the PeaceMaker as a metaphor for the Confederacy’s health and strength—thus serves to ground Mason’s enterprise firmly in a Haudenosaunee worldview. It is only appropriate, then, that the figure is employed in Mason’s office to “keep Mason grounded . . . reminding him of the people he’s responsible for, keeping him mindful that inside the thousand-dollar suit, he’s still one of us and not above us” (184). Big Red’s Curbside Phoenix is thus representative of a localized, Haudenosaunee form of adaptation as a means of survival and prosperity.

57 The first section of the Haudenosaunee Constitution reads: “I am [PeaceMaker] and with the Five Nations’ Confederate Lords I plant the Tree of Great Peace. . . . I name this tree the Tree of the Great Long Leaves. Under the shade of this Tree of the Great Peace we spread the soft white feathery down of the globe thistle as seats for you, Adodarhoh [Onondaga Chief], and your cousin Lords. “ Section 2 follows with: “Roots have spread out from the Tree of the Great Peace, one to the north, one to the east, one to the south and one to the west. The name of these roots is The Great White Roots and their nature is Peace and Strength.” The Constitution of the Iroquois Nations: The Great Binding Law, section 1, paragraph 1-2; section 2, paragraph 1.
in a disposal-driven economic structure. Red thus takes his own advice when he claims, “[w]e all need to rise from our own shit.” (85).

Money and Epistemology: Smoke Dancing’s Ethics of Exchange

The increasingly aggressive presence in North America of French and British colonists—and, toward the end of the eighteenth century, newly-made Americans—forced Indigenous nations to confront a rapidly expanding market economy. Indeed, as the realms of politics and economics become increasingly entangled, the same can be said of the contemporary relationship between First Nations and the United States government. It is thus unsurprising that readers of Gansworth’s novel—as well as his other works—have little choice but to confront the overwhelming presence of economy. In Smoke Dancing, two distinct yet deeply intertwined economic structures are inscribed: one led by the modernity-embracing Mason Rollins and his gasoline/cigarette enterprise, Smoke Rings; the other represented by Chief and self-acclaimed traditionalist Bud Tunny and his profitable apple orchard. Importantly, both enterprises take advantage of their unique protections under the 1794 Treaty of Canandaigua, made between the Six Nations

As one example, take the County of Oneida v. Oneida Indian Nation case of 1985. At issue in this case was an agreement reached in 1795 in which 100,000 acres were given to the State of New York. The Oneida respondents claimed that, as this agreement violated the 1793 Trade and Intercourse Act, the transaction was void and that the land in fact rightfully belonged to the Oneida Nation. While the court agreed that the 1795 agreement was indeed invalid, it was widely assumed among the court justices that the Oneida could not simply have their land back. At the time of the case, nearly two hundred years after the original agreement, “[t]he 872 acres of land involved . . . include[d] the principal transportation arteries in the region, and other vital public facilities owned by the Counties of Oneida and Madison.” The only legal recourse available to the Oneidas in this case was through financial means; they were only able to seek “damages representing the fair rental value of that part of the land. . . .” David H. Getches, Charles F. Wilkinson, Robert A. Williams, Jr., and Matthew L.M. Fletcher, eds., “Chapter Five: The Federal-Tribal Relationship. Section A. Tribal Property Interests,” Cases and Materials on Federal Indian Law (West, 2011). My emphasis.
of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy and a young United States government, which, among other things, exempts Indigenous businesses operating on reservation lands from state and federal taxation. It is worth noting here that the treaty itself has two significant forms: the paper treaty, drafted by Timothy Pickering; and the George Washington wampum belt, commissioned by Washington. Indeed, as I will show, the logical underpinnings of Bud’s and Mason’s treaty use are, appropriately, drastically different. Yet while the differences between the two characters and their economic approaches are glaring, Gansworth’s nuanced articulations of the novel’s two economic frameworks make any clear-cut characterization of either quite difficult. Indeed, Gansworth’s apparent ambivalence here may in fact be the point. As Neal Keating has observed, “the creative use of tradition to adapt to the world is never fully without contradiction.”

Instead of making any claims toward the supremacy of either traditionalism or modernization, Gansworth emphasizes communal relationships—most notably through Fiction Tunny and, to a lesser extent, Big Red Harmony—to mediate Mason’s and Bud’s oppositional approaches.

_Haudenosaunee Economics: Exchanging Wampum and Wampum Belts_

Certainly, any exploration of Haudenosaunee systems of exchange will benefit from a discussion of the functions of wampum—small quahog clam shells, typically purple or white in color, often strung together in belts of varying width and design—as a medium of exchange, which itself demands a review of Haudenosaunee political, diplomatic and economic structures. Despite the perceptions of early settlers and recent

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scholars, who were quick to reduce wampum to a commodity currency, the exchange of wampum and wampum belts served crucial political, social and economic functions.\(^{60}\) Indeed, according to Haudenosaunee epistemic narratives, wampum served an essential function in the creation of a stable Haudenosaunee Confederacy, centuries before the arrival of European settlers. As Penelope Kelsey recounts, wampum came to Hiawatha (Ha:yëwënta’) as he was mourning the loss of his three daughters and wife. While he was laying in his grief beside Tully Lake,

a large body of birds that had been floating on the waters of the lake arose in flight, and the tremendous force of so many wings drove the water from the lake, revealing the wampum shells on the floor of the lake. Ha:yëwënta’ picked up the shells and strung them onto a cord, repeating to himself ‘This I would do if I found anyone burdened with grief even as I am. I would take these shell strings in my hand and console them. The strings would become words and lift away the darkness with which they are covered. . . .’ Ha:yëwënta’ was able to clear his troubled mind and recover from the tremendous loss of his family, thereby allowing him to function as a speaker for the Peacemaker and to bring the message of peace and power to the Hodinöhsö:ni’ peoples.\(^{61}\)

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\(^{60}\) In *A History of the Dollar*, Arthur Nussbaum notes that “[s]trings or belts of wampum developed into a kind of substitute for coins.” Adriaen Cornelissen van der Donck, writing in 1655, had observed that wampum “is the only article of moneyed medium among the natives, with which any traffic can be driven.” For a thoroughly researched numismatic exploration of the historical relationship between wampum and American currency (and, indeed, the central role wampum exchange and Haudenosaunee diplomacy played in the construction of the United States), see Marc Shell’s *Wampum and the Origins of American Money*. Arthur Nussbaum, *A History of the Dollar* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1957), 6; George Snyderman, “The Functions of Wampum,” *Proceedings of the American Philosophical Society* 98, no. 6 (Dec. 23, 1954), 471

\(^{61}\) Kelsey, *Reading the Wampum*, xiv. My emphasis and ellipsis. Lee Irwin offers a slightly different account, however the function of wampum as a medium of communication and peacemaking remains intact. According to Irwin, the Peacemaker, founder of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, taught Ha:yëwënta’ “how to make
Wampum and wampum belts thus possess a significant communicative quality: they can “become words,” literal representations of messages of consolation. The exchange of wampum thus serves as a means of bringing others into the Good Mind (Ga’nigö:yoh), a state of mind characterized by “caring, co-existence, fairness, integrity, respect, and reasoning.”62 Through the exchange of wampum, Hiawatha was able to communicate the Peacemaker’s message of unity to other Indigenous nations, forming the Five Nations of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy.63

The ability for wampum to “become words” thus illuminates its use as a means of international diplomacy with European settlers in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries. Indeed, as Kelsey has noted, wampum belts “have an intrinsically politically-charged content. . . .”64 Robert A. Williams, Jr. points out that wampum belts “functioned as the primary symbolic means in Iroquois culture and diplomacy for establishing and maintaining the channel of communication between groups.”65 More specifically, wampum belts served as linguistic and aesthetic records of political agreements.66

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62 From an unpublished manuscript by Nicholle Dragone, quoted in Kelsey, Reading the Wampum, 37.
63 According to Lee Irwin’s chronology, the Five Nations—Seneca, Cayuga, Onondaga, Oneida and Mohawk—were formed toward the end of the fourteenth century. In 1722, having been displaced from their southern territories by aggressive settlements, the Tuscarora nation was brought into the Confederacy forming the Six Nations that exists today. Irwin, Coming Down, 170.
64 Kelsey, Reading the Wampum, xiii. My ellipsis.
66 Kelsey notes that “wampum belts were the method that Hodinöhsö:ni’ chiefs and clanmothers used to record international diplomacy and treaty agreements initially with tribal nations and thereafter with settler governments.” Kelsey, Reading the Wampum, xiii.
exchange of a wampum belt bound the two (or more) groups in a Covenant Chain, a metaphorical representation of the enduring connective bond established in the exchange. Thus, it was understood that agreements reached through wampum exchange were never to be breached.  

The concept of the Covenant Chain is deeply informed by the imagery of human figures “linking arms together.” According to the Kaianerekowa, the Great Law of Peace—a set of principles handed down from the Peacemaker that form the constitution of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy—relations among Haudenosaunee chiefs and those with whom they exchange are to “be firm so that if a tree falls on your joined arms it shall not separate or weaken your hold.” The imagery of linked arms—establishing principles of interdependence and reciprocity—is indeed embodied in the George Washington wampum belt, used by both of Smoke Dancing’s entrepreneurs. The belt, whose production was commissioned by George Washington, displays thirteen larger figures, representative of the newly-established thirteen states, along with two smaller figures, representing the Seneca (to the West of the centered Longhouse) and the Mohawk (to the East) nations (see Fig. 1).

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67 George Snyderman cites a seventeenth-century Mohawk speaker, describing the wampum’s chain as “an iron chain larger than the trees that grow in our forests. . . . The thunder & lightning shall never break the chain.” Snyderman, “The Functions of Wampum,” 476.

68 Williams, Jr., “Linking Arms,” 994.

69 *The Great Binding Law*, section 58, paragraph 3.

70 The differences in the sizes of the figures is worth noting, as Kelsey explains: “given that Washington commissioned the belt, it is noteworthy that the belt maker surrounded the central smaller Native figures and the longhouse with thirteen larger non-Native figures, reflecting a less-than-subtle message about how Washington hoped to define future relationships.” Kelsey, *Reading the Wampum*, 30.
The larger figures are shown with arms linked to one another, to the smaller figures, and to the Longhouse—the site of Councils in which Haudenosaunee political discussions are held. Thus, with the exchange of the George Washington Belt, the United States and the Six Nations formed a Covenant Chain centered by the Longhouse; inherent in this agreement is the mutual responsibility of each party to the other, and so to the Longhouse that serves as the foundation of Haudenosaunee social structure.

The George Washington Treaty belt thus expresses the enormous importance of reciprocity—as the mutually affirmed responsibility of each party towards the other—in Haudenosaunee diplomacy: with the establishment and renewal the Covenant Chain (thus the linking together of arms) comes the responsibility of each link in the Chain to hold firmly to the arms of the other links. The protection and peace offered by the Covenant Chain only succeeds through mutually reaffirming obligations. Indeed, as Lee Irwin notes
of Huron society, the importance placed on the concepts of reciprocity and responsibility greatly influenced the “continual redistribution of wealth among people [which] most likely contributed to the stability and prosperity of the community as a whole.” The Haudenosaunee political and economic system is thus quite distinct from contemporary and historical capitalism: while the exchange of capital is driven by a logic of private accumulation and inequality, the exchange of wampum is predicated on communal responsibility and reciprocity.

*Chief Jacob “Bud” Tunny*

As Chief of the novel’s Tuscarora Nation, Bud Tunny’s obligations to his community are solidified in the Great Law of Peace. Selected by his Deer Clan Mother, Ruby Pem, as one of the nation’s Chiefs, Bud Tunny is obligated to keep the “welfare of the people” in his mind at all times. It is his duty to serve as a “mentor[] of the people for all time.” It is precisely this tradition that Bud charges himself with the duty of upholding. Bud wishes to maintain the “Haudenosaunee Confederacy system [which] has worked for hundreds of years,” a political and economic system based on reciprocity, wampum-centered exchange and, as Winona LaDuke has pointed out, reaching the “widest possible consensus” (41).

Yet Bud’s actions consistently cast doubts on his apparent concern with upholding Haudenosaunee ethics and principles. Most glaringly, Bud’s tendency toward

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71 Irwin, *Coming Down*, 139. While the Huron nation is not a member of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, their geographical proximity to the Haudenosaunee and deeply similar social structures serve to make Irwin’s point applicable here. Indeed, according to Irwin, the Peacemaker may well have been a Huron.
72 *The Great Binding Law*, section 19, paragraph 1.
73 Ibid., section 24, paragraph 1.
violence is certainly unbecoming of his status as Tuscarora Chief. At the close of Bud’s first narrative treatment in the novel, we as readers bear witness to his assault of his own illegitimately conceived daughter, Fiction Tunny. Having been provoked by Fiction’s blunt honesty, Bud explodes:

“Who the fuck do you think you are!” The end table extends an invitation, and an object with the satisfying weight of ceramic is delivered into my hand. The small table lamp shatters with sweet release, the bulb moaning a low popping sound, slamming into the wall next to her. We are in the dark, and there are freedoms there, where one doesn’t have to see one’s actions.

(44)

Bud then goes on to physically assault Fiction, covering her body with the bruises that will return to undermine his authority as a Chief later on in the novel. Certainly, Bud’s adulterous affair with Fiction’s mother, Deanna Johns, and his steadfast denial of his biological relationship with his illegitimate daughter renders him a poor mentor of his people. Yet the ease with which Bud turns to violence—culminating in his setting fire to Fiction’s trailer at the end of the novel—is an overt abdication of the responsibilities of a Haudenosaunee Chief. Indeed, for chiefs to be effective,

[t]he thickness of their skin shall be seven spans—which is to say that they shall be proof against anger, offensive actions and criticism. Their hearts shall be full of peace and good will and their minds filled with a yearning for the welfare of the people of the Confederacy.\textsuperscript{75}

Bud’s tendency toward violence, along with his two primary preoccupations—denying Fiction Tunny’s existence and avoiding the mistakes of his father—thus highlight his contradictory embodiment of Haudenosaunee traditions.

\textsuperscript{75} The Great Binding Law, section 24, paragraph 1.
A careful examination of Bud Tunny’s economic endeavors will illuminate his somewhat contradictory behavior as Chief. As noted above, the majority of the reservation’s residents live in differing degrees of poverty. As a result, “[t]he novel as a whole develops a leitmotif of ‘survival money.’”76 In other words, for most of the reservation, money functions not as a means to beget more money, as it does for J R Vansant, but merely as a means to prolong one’s life. Of course, as Kelsey points out further, the Tunny family is “[t]he only party to benefit beyond ‘survival money’. . . [and] enjoy a large, well-furnished house.”77 Despite his consistent assertions that his actions are taken in the Nation’s best interest, Bud’s economic practices are driven by individual profit. Just as his father’s arrangement with the Niagara Power Project ensured personal, not communal, benefit, Bud’s apple orchard begets personal, not communal, profit. Bud thus uses the agreements reached in the Treaty of Canandaigua for individual benefit: “My family has always used the Nation’s foggy tax definition for extra income from our orchards, legally not having to declare whatever we sell—period. . . Whatever the orchards bring in is mine, free and clear” (164). Indeed, as Bud admits, the profits of the Tunny apple orchard help him to consistently maintain a luxurious lifestyle: “the state loses over twenty-five hundred in sales tax every two years from my new-model Lincoln Continentals” (164). The fact that the majority of the reservation’s members drive old, dilapidated vehicles (like Mason’s “old Indian car,” a dated Chevette) or, like Fiction, cannot afford a vehicle in the first place, reinforces Bud’s preference of individual rather than communal prosperity.

76 Kelsey, *Reading the Wampum*, 49.
77 Ibid., 50.
Bud’s economic approach thus seems to place him nearer to capitalist principles of individual profit and self-interest than a Haudenosaunee ethics of reciprocity and consensus. His individualism is indeed highlighted by the labor conditions of his apple orchard. As Mason Rollins recounts, Bud had hired children, some “easily around eight years old, maybe seven,” to work twelve-hour shifts at the orchard, paying out an hourly rate of one dollar (23). Even his adult workers earn under minimum wage. In his efforts to cut costs while maximizing individual profit, Bud thus adopts practices similar to those employed by the corporations driving William Gaddis’ novel, J R. Indeed, much like J R himself, Bud perceives his employees primarily as costs, necessary factors that detract from individual profit. His economic approach thus sheds light on his extramarital affair with Deanna Johns and his subsequent relationship with his daughter, Fiction. Bud himself recalls the “reasons I slept among the apples with Deanna Johns: quite simply, because I could” (167). Even further, Deanna’s status as a non-Tuscarora ensured that their affair did not technically undermine Bud’s position as chief. Bud thus operates not out of benevolence for his community but according to a drive for the accumulation of power—both economic and political. Indeed, it is immediately after Bud discovers his apple orchard—the source of his economic wealth—has been poisoned that he betrays the sovereignty of the Nation he represents. By signing the statement that grants New York State Troopers “jurisdiction to operate within the Nation’s borders,” Bud manifests his hypocritical, contradictory qualities and behaviors (174): only pages earlier he had observed that “[i]f I sign that paper, betraying everything it is my responsibility to uphold, all sovereignty issues will be lost” (169). While Bud’s actions—relinquishing the

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78 See Chapter 2, pp. 71-72.
Nation’s jurisdiction, not to mention his setting fire to Fiction’s home—certainly illuminate his poor qualifications as a Haudenosaunee Chief, they also shape a worldview focused entirely on self-interest and individual power.

It could certainly be argued, then, that Bud’s decisions to marginalize non-Tuscaroras on the reservation, along with his explosive violence toward his daughter, are carried out not “in the Nation’s best interest,” as he claims, but out of his personal vendetta against Fiction Tunny. Indeed, it is Fiction who wields the threatening power of exposure, as physical evidence of Bud’s infidelity. After Fiction had exposed the truth of her lineage and the source of the bruises covering her body, Johnnyboy Martin, another Council chief, remarks to Bud: “I can’t think of any way what you did to her serves the people, and they can’t either” (170). Bud thus overtly adopts the individualistic, profit-centered ethics of capitalist systems of exchange.

Mason “Rollin’ in Dough” Rollins

The other notably economic figure in the novel is Mason “Rollin’ in Dough” Rollins. In his characterization of Mason, Gansworth renders the young Tuscarora entrepreneur as traditionalist Bud’s polar opposite. Indeed, Mason expresses his feelings toward modernization early on. For Mason, the effects of modernization—intricate sewer systems, apartment complexes, etc.—are inevitable: “These things will come. They will come ripping up fully formed through the earth, giant glaciers of modern life, the water lines massive snakes burrowing beneath the reservation, pulling it moaning into the twentieth century as the rest of the country welcomes the twenty-first” (31). At

79 To be sure, much has been written on the use of the term “tradition” as a description of cultural practices. In future writings, I will situate my use of the term within this wider discourse.
first glance, then, Mason appears to be an avowed anti-traditionalist. His understanding seems to be that the reservation’s adherence to tradition—namely, in the form of now dysfunctional Council sessions—is in fact inhibiting their ability to prosper as a community. He recalls to himself: “[f]or years, I tried to go strictly by tradition; but what good is tradition if it just keeps you poor?” (142). Mason’s powerful question here suggests the need for adaptation; modernization, for Mason, is the reservation’s surest way of reducing its poverty.

It is almost ironic, then, that Mason’s quasi-capitalist enterprise, a gasoline and cigarette company called “Smoke Rings,” uses tobacco—a “gift” created, according to Bud, “as a way for people to thank the Lord, the Creator” (93)—as a means of accumulating profit. Indeed, it is worth recalling here that, as noted above, tradition is a troubled term throughout the novel. But the apparent irony of Mason’s economic approach disappears when we consider the notion of what Gerald Vizenor had referred to as “survivance”—defined by Gansworth as “the deliberate state of actively embracing survival as a life way”80—as an Indigenous tradition in and of itself. Indeed, as Gail MacLeitch makes clear, Haudenosaunee nations have a long tradition of adapting to and surviving the pressures of an aggressively expanding market economy. She states unequivocally: “Iroquois were not unwitting victims of a new economic order, nor were they absolute agents of their own destiny. Rather, they were ordinary and resilient human beings who made the best of trying situations.”81 For Mason, his gasoline and cigarette enterprise, which brings in enormous profits, is not a means of individual profit through

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81 MacLeitch, Imperial Entanglements, 4.
the accumulation of capital but a means of communal survival through the redistribution of its wealth. Mason’s economic approach thus embraces the notion of survivance as its underlying logic. When Bud warns of the accumulative tendency of capitalist enterprises, concerned that there will be “[n]othing left for the seventh generation,” Mason responds: “Oo(t)-gweh-rheh! I’m ensuring there’ll be a seventh generation” (94).

It is thus unsurprising that Mason’s enterprise operates within a Haudenosaunee economic framework. Gansworth overtly aligns Mason’s enterprise with strictly Haudenosaunee ethics of exchange, as the shack he uses to sell cigarettes is painted “a bright purple, with bold white letters on the trailer’s side, just like the colors of the treaty wampum belts” (26). Surely, Mason applies the very same tax-exempt status granted by the Treaty of Canandaigua to his enterprise as Bud has. The central difference is that, whereas Bud opts to lower labor costs in order to increase personal profit, Mason continually redistributes his company’s wealth to the reservation’s citizens. Apart from offering cheap, much-needed health insurance to reservation citizens (regardless of tribal affiliation), providing clean drinking water and equipping his employees with high quality snowsuits, Rollins chooses to invest the company profits in the construction of communal institutions. Kelsey elaborates: “while readers may sympathize with Tunny’s espousal of ‘traditional’ ideals, Rollins remakes values of consensus, kinship, and the common pot in his seemingly opportunistic business venture.”

These two disparate enterprises, founded on opposing principles, are brought together in the novel, and indeed share as a source the same legal document.

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82 Kelsey, Reading the Wampum, 50-51.
Yet, although Mason’s economic model may in fact be a viable means of survivance, he is by no means exempt from criticism. Indeed, many of Bud Tunny’s points of contention with Mason, though stemming from a deep hypocrisy, have merit. Bud reflects on the dangers of power established through financial means:

“Sometimes . . . the power that comes with . . . money doesn’t create a smooth environment. When you can grant your own wishes in a matter of minutes, you have no time to consider the implications for your later life, or for those who come after you” (92; my ellipses). Given the long historical relationship of Haudenosaunee nations with the forces of capitalism, along with his own father’s specific engagement with the Niagara Power Project, Bud’s apprehension toward money and finance is indeed warranted. Even further, Mason’s enterprise does indeed appear, at least early in the novel, to follow a typically capitalist logic. Gansworth begins charting Mason’s understanding of economics early on. Mason’s financial “training,” as we learn, involved eavesdropping on the conversations of wealthy (presumably white) yacht-owners, through which he was able to learn “the language of wealth” (28). Appropriately, then, Mason “learned along the way of the portable sanitary toilet, where they simply carried out their waste in a handy little chemical-filled suitcase from below the commode. They dumped it, never having to see or smell the end products of their own bodily functions” (28). The yacht owners Mason observes thus perceive waste in a manner reminiscent of the sailors aboard the Rücksichtslos, Pynchon’s German Toiletship. Mason in fact adopts the perception of the function of European toilets—discussed at length in chapter 3—for his own enterprise. He notes: “With the earliest profits, I picked up a microwave, and went down to a

83 See Chapter 3, p. 120.
boating-supply shop and bought one of those portable sanitary toilets, the sort that are basic equipment on the yachts moored in the lower Niagara River in Youngstown” (27). Mason’s economic understandings, and indeed his perceptions of waste and value, were developed largely by the very forces that had rendered his own reservation as disposable, as waste-space.

It is certainly no accident that Gansworth characterizes Mason as one who learned of the inner workings of finance from wealthy, waste-wary capitalists. Indeed, his behavior throughout the novel—particularly toward Fiction Tunny—is inextricably linked to his underlying economic worldview. Observing Mason’s profits climb, Bud warns the young entrepreneur: “You see, there can be no relationship where you stand above the rest of the Nation” (173). While the irony of Bud’s statement should not be lost, Gansworth’s characterization of Mason indeed gives Bud’s words weight. Mason is by no means a likeable, selfless character. His persistent and unwarranted sexual advances toward Fiction Tunny culminate in an alcohol-driven attempt to “collect” what he perceives to be a sexual debt. Fiction narrates: “He presses me against the wall with the weight of his chest and reaches behind me. ‘It’s collection time, he says, stretching his neck back far enough to look me in the eyes” (160). Mason thus perceives financial power in a manner not so divorced from Bud: as a means of obtaining individual satisfaction, regardless of the impact on others. Even further, in Mason’s view, everything—sex, information, tradition—is commodifiable. He declares to Fiction his confidence in the power of money: “Everyone’s got a price, Fiction. And sooner or later, I’m gonna find yours” (148). Mason’s economic worldview is indeed reminiscent of what
Roger Mexico termed “that damned Calvinist insanity. . . . Payment.” In his strong belief in the quantifying and commodifying power of money—it’s ability, in large enough amounts, to “buy” anything, be it sex, authority, etc.—Mason is presented as an exemplary capitalist.

The novel thus presents us with a deeply complicated view of reservation economics, mirroring the real world experiences of Indigenous nations. What Gansworth makes clear, however, is that the choice is not simply between “tradition” and “modernization,” between a return to pre-contact socio-economic structures and an uncompromised acceptance of contemporary capitalism. There are alternatives, and the most viable of these seem to be survivance and adaptation. Yet if Mason Rollins’ “Smoke Rings” enterprise is Gansworth’s economic model, given his problematic characterization of Mason, how are we to approach the novel’s economic principles? How are we to reconcile the self-interested portrayal of Mason, forcing himself onto Fiction Tunny, with the Mason who realizes, eventually, “[w]ithout my people, I’ll fall”?

Community and Reciprocity

*Smoke Dancing*’s apparent ambivalence toward the novel’s businessmen is indicative of the deeply contradictory feelings expressed in Indigenous economic discourse. Indeed, not unlike Taiaiake Alfred, Eric Gansworth is wary of offering an outright endorsement capitalism and its associated term, “economic development,” as means of reasserting Indigenous sovereignty. The Haudenosaunee Confederacy’s long history with an exploitative capitalist regime, coupled with the tendency for capitalists to prefer personal profit over communal prosperity—as demonstrated through Bud Tunny

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and, at points, Mason Rollins—certainly legitimates such skepticism. Mason’s enterprise, Smoke Rings, is particularly susceptible to criticism. Surely there is a jarring quality to the image he had designed as the Smoke Rings logo, gracing the novel’s cover sheet (see Fig. 2).

Fig. 2. Eric Gansworth, “Smoke Dancing,” from Smoke Rings. Image © Eric Gansworth. Used with permission.

Against a background of the George Washington wampum belt, the image depicts Great Turtle Island—“the giant turtle Haudenosaunee legend says this continent is created on
the back of” (112-13)—bearing on its back the Great Tree of Peace. Here, however, the Great Tree has been transformed into a lit cigarette, supported by oil derricks and boasting branches of concentric smoke rings. Kelsey addresses one of the several issues raised by the image: “in light of the prophecy that foretells a day when the chiefs who form the branches of the Tree of Peace will hold it up as it falls, one wonders what will be left to support it.”

Even further, the lookout eagle, typically seated atop the Great Tree and, as Big Red has it, “looking to the horizon, watching for enemies,” has been replaced by crossed gasoline hoses (113). Mason’s decision to operate a gasoline industry certainly calls to mind capitalism’s particularly extractive, linear model of production. As Duane Champagne points out, those within a capitalist system of ethics perceive the world “as a natural resource wherein exploitation of raw materials through labor transforms raw materials into useful objects for further economic production or consumption and the creation of additional wealth.” It certainly appears, then, that Mason is not so much reclaiming and adapting Haudenosaunee traditional principles as commodifying them according to a strictly capitalist logic. Indeed, Bud Tunny admonishes Mason’s sale of cigarettes, claiming “tobacco was a gift, not a commodity with which to gain profit” (93).

Yet the reality of the reservation’s deep poverty demands some form of economic action. Despite his controversial aspects, Mason is surely, as Big Red observes “offering

85 Kelsey, Reading the Wampum, 55.
86 Both Winona LaDuke and Naomi Klein point to the ways in which extraction-based industries like oil and gas production have unequally affected Indigenous Nations and communities; at the same time, Native Nations have also been the fundamental source of resistance to these activities. See LaDuke, All Our Relations, chapters 4 and 6, along with Naomi Klein, This Changes Everything, chapter 11.
87 Champagne, “Tribal Capitalism,” 312.
[the reservation] survival” (82). Gansworth mitigates Mason’s capitalist tendencies by, quite simply, elevating the role of the surrounding community. Notably, the start-up money for Smoke Rings was lent to Mason by ten members of the community, who were then made shareholders in the company. The success of Mason’s enterprise thus largely depends on the community’s involvement. Big Red Harmony, Mason’s primary business partner, consistently guides Mason’s business practices in ways that are beneficial to the community. Indeed, as Red himself points out, Mason “chose me as manager because he thinks I know what’s going on, that I seem to know the reservation—not who’s taking land from whom, but the serious, real issues: who’s working, who isn’t; who needs a job, and who needs, maybe, just a loan to get out from under the bills . . .” (104; my ellipsis). Big Red thus keeps the capitalist aspects of Mason’s enterprise in check, ensuring that its profits and success are redistributed among the community. Importantly, then, with the help of Red and the reservation’s community, the economic logic of Mason’s enterprise is consistently transformed from an individualistic, accumulative, capitalist model to a communal, redistributive, non-capitalist model.

Appropriately, however, it is the women of the novel that most clearly ensure that Mason’s enterprise remains grounded in Haudenosaunee principles of reciprocity and communal responsibility. While Haudenosaunee social structure is indeed based on matrilineally-determined clan identity, Kelsey highlights further the “great significance of women in righting historical wrongs that have occurred.”88 It is certainly worth noting here that the money loaned out by the community only reached Mason by means of Bertha Monterney, whose death opens the novel. Bertha had long worked to establish a

88 Kelsey, Reading the Wampum, 58.
reservation dance troupe in order to ensure the survival of both Haudenosaunee traditions and the reservation’s impoverished youth. As Mason explains to his community, “you didn’t lend [the start-up money] to me. You lent it to Bertha Monterney—the only person on this reservation who could see past my ‘drunk’ label” (145). Ruby Pem, the reservation’s Deer Clan Mother, also played a significant role in the development of Mason’s enterprise. In particular, her passing at the end of the novel—in Mason’s arms, no less—changes Mason: Ruby “made him realize some people can see beyond their own interest and immediate pleasures very well. He claimed to finally be able to see something of the seventh generation on the horizon, claimed he was gaining Haudenosaunee eyes, shedding his white ones” (220). Ruby’s passing gives Mason “Haudenosaunee eyes,” fundamentally altering (and extending, seven generations into the past and future) his entrepreneurial vision.

Fiction Tunny, however, appears to have the most significant influence on Mason’s personal transformation. Despite Mason’s deplorable behavior, Fiction, as she tells Mason, “believes in” Smoke Rings as a potentially beneficial enterprise. Notably, as Mason reminisces of his earlier attempts to woo Fiction with the numbers on his paychecks, we learn that it was Fiction, looking closer at her father’s apple orchard operation, who gave Mason the idea of a tax-exempt business in the first place:

“Think of it. All that money, tax-free. And that’s on top of what he makes at the plant. He’s gotta make—”

“What do you mean, tax free?” (140)

Of course, while Mason hears only the notion of a tax-exempt enterprise, Fiction continues to spread communal, anti-capitalist forms of social relations. When Fiction’s windows are shot out (by none other than Bud Tunny), Mason agrees to pay for their
replacement on the condition that she bartend for the grand opening of the Tuscarora Recreation Building. As Mason offers to pay her anyway, an offer that Fiction refuses, Red observes: “She’s already taught him that valuable lesson. Folks don’t like to be given things. Their loyalty is better gained by some kind of cooperation” (110). Fiction consistently attempts to remind Mason that his reservation community cannot be bought off; rather, their favors are better won through cooperation and reciprocation.

**Inscribing Haudenosaunee Aesthetics: Gansworth’s Literary Economy**

Just as Pynchon and Gaddis have masterfully done, Eric Gansworth embeds his critique of and response to capitalist disposability within the literary object of the novel itself. Specifically, *Smoke Dancing* reveals and articulates Haudenosaunee aesthetic forms, within which are housed Haudenosaunee social, political and economic principles. As the Mohawk curator Ryan Rice has noted, “[b]oth traditional and contemporary Iroquoian creative processes are deeply rooted in a cultural system of values and aesthetic qualities that permeate the political, spiritual and economic infrastructure of our society.”

Haudenosaunee aesthetics and symbolism are indeed so pervasive that an entire section of the Great Binding Law is devoted to “Official Symbolism.” In conversation with his other creative work, the multi-dimensionality of Gansworth’s novel—involving both narrative prose and visual art—encodes Haudenosaunee worldviews through the aesthetics of wampum and his aptly named protagonist, Fiction Tunny. Importantly, as Craig Womack has argued, Indigenous literary and aesthetic forms must be political, in that they should embody and assert the significance of

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90 *The Great Binding Law*, sections 55 through 65.
Indigenous autonomy and sovereignty against assimilative cultural and economic forces. Smoke Dancing is indeed exemplary of such politicized aesthetic forms. In both the novel’s content (including his visual art) and form, then, Gansworth reclaims Haudenosaunee creative traditions as a means of adapting to and critiquing contemporary socio-economic conditions.

**Wampum Aesthetics: “Indigenous binary code”**

Dividing the novel’s three parts are visual images in which wampum belts—specifically the George Washington belt—play a significant aesthetic role. While George Washington belt is indeed apparent in the novel’s prose, its presence in the visual works of the novel are difficult to overlook. Indeed, we need look no further than the novel’s cover to become immersed in Haudenosaunee aesthetics (see Fig. 3). The image depicts the Three Sisters, representative of squash, beans and corn, who sprung from the grave of Skywoman, the Haudenosaunee figure who had fallen to Great Turtle Island—the continent of North America—and gave to it human life. Importantly, wrapped around the three sisters are the George Washington belt and, seemingly connected to it, a gasoline hose. Surely, the belt’s connection to the hose is indicative of Mason’s use of the rights granted in the Treaty of Canandaigua in order to establish his gasoline and cigarette enterprise.

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91 Specifically, Womack argues: “Native literary aesthetics must be politicized and . . . autonomy, self-determination, and sovereignty serve as useful literary concepts. Further, I wish to suggest that literature has something to add to the arena of Native political struggle.” Craig Womack, Red on Red: Native American Literary Separatism (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 11.
Yet the impact of the intertwining belt and hose on the three sisters is difficult to parse out.
It could certainly be argued that the belt and hose are in fact strangling the Three Sisters. But as Kelsey notes,

[w]hile the confusing mass of vines, stalk, gasoline hoses, and treaty belt in this piece might imply the choking out of the Three Sisters, the title’s mention of an “embrace” and Fiction’s own observations about the powerful nature of these entwinements suggest that the belts and hoses’ braiding is mutually constitutive and supportive of the Three Sisters and the sustenance they communicate in Hodinöhsö:ní’ visual code.

The ambivalence of the image recalls the controversial role of capitalist enterprises in the establishment of Indigenous economic sovereignty addressed in this chapter’s introduction. Yet Kelsey’s reading of the image—that the hose and belt are in fact supporting the sisters—indeed sheds light on Gansworth’s deployment of the belt. Much as Mason Rollins had used the rights established in the Treaty of Canandaigua to build an enterprise driven by reciprocity and communal redistribution, Gansworth depicts the belt along with the gasoline hose to demonstrate how adaptation, through the appropriation of foreign forms, can in fact constitute an act of survivance.

Wampum belts, as visual representations of material agreements, offer exemplary models of the applications of Haudenosaunee aesthetic values. The aesthetics of wampum—contrasting beads of purple and white woven into specific designs—indeed figures highly in Gansworth’s work. As he notes in the introduction to *A Half-Life of Cardio-Pulmonary Function*, a mixed work of poetry and visual art, Gansworth describes

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92 Kelsey addresses this ambivalence by noting: “The complicated nature of the image and of Gansworth’s print narrative refuse any pat conclusions about the relative good of any one definition of tradition.” Kelsey, *Reading the Wampum*, 53.

93 Ibid.
this aesthetic form as “Indigenous Binary Code.” The metaphor is indeed appropriate. Taiaiake Alfred notes that, “[i]n the Rotionohshonni tradition, the natural order accepts and celebrates the coexistence of opposites.” The contrasting purple and white wampum shells strung together on a single belt embody this notion: white shells represent, among other things, death, transcendence and femininity, while dark (purple) shells represent life, mourning and masculinity. Alfred’s use of the term “coexistence” must be emphasized here. Haudenosaunee epistemology requires neither the dialectical transcendence nor the deconstruction of the opposing concepts embodied in wampum shells. On the contrary, the opposing forces exist in mutual opposition; furthermore, their oppositional existences are necessary in order to ensure balance.

Yet the use of wampum aesthetics in Smoke Dancing serves a specific literary function as well. As Ryan Rice notes, the use of beadwork as a mode of aesthetic expression has long served as a means of adapting to new economic pressures:

By combining Victorian patterns [in the nineteenth century] with traditional elements and techniques—such as beadwork, quill work, moose-hair tufting, and basketry—Iroquois artists were able to generate a hybrid aesthetic that negotiated and positioned itself as genuine, authentic and Iroquoian. 

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96 For Kelsey, white wampum beads may signify “death and transcendence of the physical plane” while “purple=life and mourning.” According to the Constitution of the Haudenosaunee Confederacy, “[t]he white portion of the shell strings represent the women and the black [purple] portion the men.” Kelsey, *Reading the Wampum*, 39; *The Great Binding Law*, section 59, paragraph 2.
97 Rice, “Oh So Iroquois,” 60.
The use of foreign (Euro-American) forms were thus incorporated into the body of Haudenosaunee aesthetics—a process that Gansworth reenacts in his creative work. Indeed, for Gansworth, the mixing of aesthetic forms and images is precisely the driving force of *A Half-Life of Cardio-Pulmonary Function*, in which both the text and the paintings use the opposing purple and white of wampum. He explains:

I wanted to take the idea further by including images borrowed from popular culture, medical texts . . . traditional imagery, formal western representation . . . all in communication with one another, creating hybrid new narratives by illuminating old ones with different light sources. The cross-pollination finally become the informing idea, growing inextricably entwined with the ideas of the other manuscript.98

Gansworth thus appropriates foreign forms and images and encodes them into a Haudenosaunee aesthetic system, embodied in the purple text and images of *A Half-Life*. In *Smoke Dancing*, then, his deployment of wampum imagery serves as a means of appropriating the *novel form* in just such a manner. Much as Mason Rollins had appropriated the ethics and structures of capitalist enterprise to develop a Haudenosaunee system of exchange, so too is Gansworth “cross-pollinating” the form of the novel with Haudenosaunee aesthetics.

*The Power of Fiction*

Fiction Tunny is undoubtedly *Smoke Dancing*’s most influential character. As noted above, her influence on Mason Rollins is indeed strong enough to alter the

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economic methodology of his enterprise. Yet what is most striking about Fiction’s character is her strict adherence to Vizenor’s concept of survivance and her ability to spread this concept to her community. We see this demonstrated quite clearly through her practice of beadwork. For Fiction, practicing beadwork is, in a literal sense, a means of survival. The inter-national powwow at Grand River provides a number of the reservation’s members with the opportunity to sell their work. Fiction is unequivocal about the importance of her beadwork: “No beadwork, no bucks, no Grand River, no future” (155). Indeed, beadwork is a central source of “survival cash” (56). In contrast to Bud Tunny’s apple orchard, then, Fiction actively embraces Haudenosaunee aesthetics in order to provide the means of survival.

The function of Fiction’s beadwork, however, extends far beyond her own individual survival. After being physically assaulted by her father, Bud Tunny, Fiction prepares a dress, which would become her “most serious piece of beading” (126). She beads into the dress an intricate arrangement of roses to match the bruises left on her body by her father. In so doing, she transforms her augmented body into “the background for a bed of rich, purple roses” (127). By presenting this dress at the New Year’s Day Feast to her community, however, she is able to convince the members of the reservation of the dangers of leaving Bud Tunny with the authority of a Chief: “Every rose on my dress has bloomed in a place where he punched or kicked me. He wanted me to wear them on the inside, in secret, like he wants me to wear my identity, like the way you run your meetings. But I can’t do that” (132). Fiction thus uses her dress to highlight the problematic form of government running the reservation—a form of government in which Council meetings are closed to the public and which deemed it illegal for non-
Tuscarora reservation members to own property. In so doing, she calls attention to the complex historical relationship between the Tuscarora Nation—admitted into the Hauenosaunee Confederacy in the eighteenth century, centuries after its formation—99—and the other five nations of the Confederacy. Fiction, herself the last Onondaga member living on the reservation, addresses this to her community: “What if the Senecas thought this way, two hundred years ago? Did you all forget that someone gave you land to start off with here?” (133) Fiction thus uses beadwork, along with the physical harm inflicted upon her, as an instrument to reunite the reservation’s growing divide and to bring her community back within the structural principles of the Confederacy.

Given the significance of Fiction Tunny to Mason’s—and, indeed, the reservation’s—economic institutions, it is certainly worth examining her peculiar use of monetary currency. Permeating a number of Gansworth’s creative works is the image of the Indian-Head Nickel, the author’s “symbol of the literal commodification of American Indians.”100 Indeed, the symbolism of the Indian-Head Nickel—“virtually the only coin in United States history,” according to Gansworth, “that is consistently referred to by its ‘tails’ side”101—is significant. As Marc Shell points out, “the free-ranging buffalo,” as the literal other-side-of-the-coin to the figure of the Native, was “that other creature . . . whose supposedly inevitable vanishing had been exacerbated by European Americans’

99 Irwin places the admission of the Tuscaroras into the confederacy in 1722. Irwin, *Coming Down from Above*, 170.
101 Eric Gansworth, *Nickel Eclipse iroquois moon* (East Lansing: Michigan State University Press, 2000), xiii. At the author’s request, I refer to the coin by its “heads” side to avoid contributing further to the invisibilization of Indigenous Americans.
avarice, short-sightedness, and even needless cruelty.” The Indian-Head Nickel thus
made manifest the early twentieth-century rhetoric of the noble-yet-nearly-extinct Indian,
and metaphysically so considering capital was the primary motivator for the conquest of
the American continent. For Fiction, however, the Indian-Head Nickel functions not as a
means of accessing greater amounts of wealth but as an instrument for mediating the
opposing forces of tradition and modernization on the reservation. The Nickel, given to
her by Bertha Monterney, is a form of “personal medicine,” her preferred tool for making
difficult decisions (48): “If my coin came up heads, I went the traditional way, and if it
came up tails—the bullshit side—I went the white way” (49). Certainly, Fiction’s refusal
to use the nickel as a means of begetting more monetary wealth is emblematic of
unproductive activity. But the object of the nickel itself, according to Fiction, represents a
melding of modern (Euro-American) and traditional (Haudenosaunee) ways of knowing
and being. It is precisely this melding, then, that allows Fiction to use the Nickel as a
means of adaptation and survivance. For Fiction, the traditional Haudenosaunee response,
represented by the Indian-Head is “fabrication,” while the “Outside Ways,” indicated by
the “bullshit” Buffalo side, signify “Truth.” (56). Yet, as she points out, “[t]radition can’t
work without truth” (58). In a world seeking relentlessly to eradicate tradition, Fiction
elevates adaptation as the primary means of survivance.

Of course, it would be remiss to neglect Gansworth’s decision to name his
protagonist “Fiction.” As noted above, the “heads” side of the Indian-Head Nickel
signified, for Fiction, “fabrication”—or, in another word, fiction. Thus, Fiction’s
consistent use of fiction—of storytelling and exaggerating—is an enactment of what

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102 Marc Shell, *Wampum and the Origins of American Money* (Urbana: University of
Gansworth himself had referred to as cross-pollination. Surely, as Franco Moretti has pointed out, the use of the novel form—as a Western literary form—by non-Western authors is “always a compromise.” Even further, the vast majority of the world’s literature is published primarily by Euro-American publishing institutions. Yet as Gansworth makes clear, the cross-pollination of foreign forms with local materials and epistemology brings forth an aesthetic form all its own. The character of Fiction, as the novel’s representative of survivance, thus indicates Gansworth’s own intentions with the composition of *Smoke Dancing* as a fiction novel. By adopting (perhaps, appropriating) the novel form and encoding within it strictly localized aesthetic and epistemic systems, Gansworth is able to articulate an alternative literary system of exchange, resisting both the economic and the literary world-systems’ contradictory logic of disposability.

Gansworth’s text serves as the literary equivalent to Mason’s Haudenosaunee enterprise, which adopted the typically capitalist notions of entrepreneurship and profit accumulation and, using the rights agreed upon and cemented within the George Washington treaty belt, developed into the site of a localized, redistributive form of economic exchange. *Smoke Dancing*, within which is inscribed a form of literary localism, thus constitutes a literary form of survivance, fundamentally resisting the pressures of disposability.

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103 Moretti, “Conjectures,” 60.
This project was composed with three primary goals in mind: to come to a more nuanced understanding of the term “waste”—and its subordinate terms, garbage, trash and shit—as a conceptual and historical term with deep social implications; to situate disposability—the process by which objects and people are rendered as waste—as the operating logic of contemporary and historical capitalism; and to demonstrate the ways in which literary systems of exchange can serve as a means of exposing, interrogating and undermining this deeply problematic logic. Comprising these goals was the intention of putting forth a theory of “reading economics”—of critically analyzing and exploring literary systems of exchange in order to better understand the contemporary global economic structure. Within each of the novels chosen for this project is indeed inscribed a particular system of exchange, and each of these literary systems articulate and interrogate what I have termed capitalism’s contradictory logic of disposability. In JR, William Gaddis depicts the drive for ceaseless accumulation that characterizes contemporary corporate finance, but underscores this accumulation with a reciprocal logic of disposability. Gravity’s Rainbow, in turn, deeply historicizes this logic, positioning the act of colonization by European nations of non-capitalist world regions as the culmination of this contradictory logic, which finds important historical parallels to the behaviors of IG Farben in the Second World War. Eric Gansworth’s Smoke Dancing
then positions the contemporary relationship between North American Indigenous nations and capitalist nation-states (primarily the US and Canada) as a reiteration of historical colonization, detailing the novel’s Tuscarora reservation as a space laden with the waste of industrial production. Yet Gansworth’s novel, rooted firmly in localized aesthetic and economic forms, thus provides a crucial turning point in this project: by inscribing in his characters and the body of the text itself a system of exchange based on Haudenosaunee ethics and aesthetics, the novel makes manifest the potential for a localized form of subversion and alternative exchange systems.

The general thrust of this thesis project, then, was to open a space for dialogue between the seemingly disparate discourses of literary studies and economics. More specifically, the intention of this project was to demonstrate the ways in which authors and scholars of literature possess useful tools for examining economic forces, both historically and currently. As I’ve noted in the introductory chapter, this project is but one of several such attempts.¹ In particular, I have argued that literature—specifically, the novel form—can, in its ability to embody the often contradictory logic of capitalism, serve as powerful critiques of historical and contemporary economic forces, and thus contribute meaningfully to the discourse of economics in general. Even further, and perhaps more importantly, the literary works of the authors discussed in this project create an aesthetic space within which alternative systems of exchange can exist. Indeed, as Steven Weisenburger had noted of Gaddis’ *J R*, the authors discussed above are working to “crack the closed system” of corporate capitalism, European colonialism and

¹ See Chapter 1, pp. 7-9.
contemporary State-Indigenous Nation relationships\(^2\)—all of which are circumscribed by the development of capitalism as a global economic system. The function of these literary works, then, is to open—or, perhaps, create fissures within—the ever-closing, ever-incorporating system of global capitalism.

One of the most important conclusions of this project, however, was the realization of the primacy of localized aesthetic and epistemic forms in the construction of alternative, literary systems of exchange. The fourth chapter of this project focused explicitly on Haudenosaunee aesthetic and epistemic forms, positioning the economy of Eric Gansworth’s *Smoke Dancing* as a model for localized systems of exchange; in so doing, I hope to open a discursive space within which localized and Indigenous literary and economic forms can play a fundamental role. More specifically, literary analyses will benefit greatly if canonical, global texts such as *J R* and *Gravity’s Rainbow* are discussed *in tandem* with the localized and re-appropriated work of authors like Eric Gansworth.

Surely, highlighting the significance of such “literary localisms” may seem at odds with my largely Marxist/world-systems approach throughout the majority of this project. Indeed, both Wallerstein and Amin remain wary of “particularism” as an effective method of undoing capitalist hegemony.\(^3\) Franco Moretti also seems to be weary of literary


\(^3\) According to Amin—for whom “all concepts defining human communities” rest on “the fundamental contradiction between universalism (of the human species, of its destiny, and of projects for society) and particularism (of the communities that make up the human species)”—the right for a person to remain unique is important, “but it is no less important to defend the right to be ‘similar’.” Wallerstein goes a bit further: “we cannot retreat into some super-particularist stance, in which we invoke the equal validity of every particularist idea put forward across the globe. For super-particularism is nothing
particularisms or localisms. As a means of mitigating the single-yet-unequal world literary system, Moretti proposes the practice of “[d]istant reading: where distance . . . is a condition of knowledge: it allows you to focus on units that are much smaller or much larger than the text: devices, themes tropes—or genres and systems.” Yet while Moretti’s distant reading may indeed be a more egalitarian approach to the study of literature globally, it necessarily overlooks fundamentally localized aspects of given literatures. Further, it is precisely within these localized close readings that deep, systemic engagement can be found. Thus, I argue that any literary engagement with the global capitalist economy demands careful attention to localized systems of ethics, aesthetics and epistemology, which often provide the deepest systemic criticisms as well as viable alternatives.

To be sure, I take stock of my position as a non-Native working within the realm of Indigenous literary studies. My decision to analyze Gansworth’s novel alongside the work of two American (male) authors, Thomas Pynchon and William Gaddis, was made not under the pretense of the need for multiculturality but according to the specific and significant ways in which each of these authors detailed economic forces in general and articulated a logic of disposability specifically in their works. Thus, it is not my aim in this project to position Indigenous lifeways as appropriable solutions to the problems of but a hidden surrender to the forces of European universalism and the powerful of the present, who are seeking to sustain their inegalitarian and undemocratic world-system.” Samir Amin, Capitalism in the Age of Globalization: The Management of Contemporary Society (London: Zed Books, 1997), 80, 84; Immanuel Wallerstein, European Universalism: The Rhetoric of Power (New York: The New Press, 2006), xv.


5 To be sure, Moretti is aware of the shortcomings of this practice. He notes: “If we want to understand the system in its entirety, we must accept losing something. We always pay a price for theoretical knowledge. . . .” Ibid.
modernity, as often occurs. Instead, I argue that literary localism can serve as a means of interrogating and undermining the fundamental logic of contemporary and historical capitalism—its logic of disposability—and thus demands significant attention in literary and economic discourses.

Surely, as Georges Bataille has pointed out, waste is the inevitable after-substance of consumptive activities; it is a “basic fact” of organic life. But of utmost concern to this project has been the peculiar function(s) of waste in contemporary and historical capitalism. It is unsurprising that any system of production must necessarily dispose: much like organic systems, economic systems take in more material than can be entirely consumed in the process of production; this excess is subsequently excreted. Yet because capitalism, as a historically specific system of production, is driven by the need for ceaseless accumulation, the rate at which material is disposed must always increase.

Even further, its accumulative logic has necessitated its need for ceaseless expansion,

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6 A recent story by National Public Radio’s Michaeleen Doucleff details the work of Esther Gokhale, a California-based acupuncturist. Gokhale argues that the high probability of back problems endemic to modernized and developed world regions can be reduced by comparing their postures to those of Indigenous cultures “that live far away from modern life.” According to Gokhale, a number of un-modernized Indigenous tribes “have this regal posture,” maintaining the shape of their spines as a “J,” as opposed to the problematic “S” shape seen in American spines. Yet, as Arif Dirlik would argue, this elevation of Indigenous practices (and bodies) as solutions to modern problems does little to address the fundamental logic that, for centuries, has actively marginalized, impoverished and disposed of Indigenous languages and lifeways (see Chapter 1, note 27). Rather, the appropriation by the forces of capitalism—notably, Gokhale, often referred to as Silicon Valley’s “posture guru,” now has an extensive corporate clientele—serves only to more deeply entrench the ethics of disposability in general and specifically the disposability of Indigenous peoples that characterize modernity. Michaeleen Doucleff, “Lost Posture: Why Some Indigenous Cultures May Not Have Back Pain,” National Public Radio, June 8, 2015, http://www.npr.org/sections/goatsandsoda/2015/06/08/412314701/lost-posture-why-indigenous-cultures-dont-have-back-pain

which in turn demanded the commodification and subsequent disposability of particular world regions and their populations. The apparent complicity of contemporary economic discourse with the logic of global capitalism requires one to seek alternative ways of knowing and critiquing the economic world elsewhere; and it is literature that most deeply and most effectively fills this role.
Bibliography


