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ARTICLE

Friction Problems: William Gaddis' Corporate Writing and the Stylistic Origins of *J R*

Ali Chetwynd
American University of Iraq, Sulaimani, IQ
ali.chetwynd@auis.edu.krd

William Gaddis' corporate writing in the years between his first two novels was as important to *J R's* (1975) formal innovations as to its business-world plot. While previous *J R* criticism has dealt in formal tropes of flatness, depth, and flow, the corporate writing preserved in Gaddis' archive offers grounds for reading the novel's plot and style through the related but under-examined concept of friction. Through various archival discoveries, I sketch the case for a friction-centric reading of *J R*. I show what Gaddis' work in the slide-show medium and assembling speeches out of contradictory source material contributed to the novel's sentence-level innovations in style, and finally offer a style-driven re-reading of the novel's overall narrative design. While Gaddis' corporate work taught him techniques for eliminating traces of ideological friction, *J R's* formal innovations first draw on those techniques to establish a world that tends toward friction-lessness, then invert them to restore friction within that world's terms.

Composed primarily of unattributed, overlapping dialogue, moving from scene to scene through passages of unblinking visual narration, the defining formal quality of William Gaddis' *J R* (1975) is a negative one: the complete absence of narrated thought. *J R*'s formal distinctions from its predecessor *The Recognitions* (1955) are so fundamental, and so widely understood as inseparable from its concern with life under corporate capitalism, that it may come as a surprise that they were not origi-nary: Gaddis' early drafts towards the novel were in conventional psycho-narration.[1] See, for example, this draft (**Figure 1**) of the first encounter between protagonist Edward Bast (here called James, his father's name in the final novel) and JR, the 11-year-old business prodigy who draws him into his dealings.[2]

Psychological activity here—that which Bast "realized now," was "already plan-ning," or "could scarcely imagine"[3]—is linearly described in a prose that we could mis-take for EM Forster on his Leonard Bast. What, then, might have prompted Gaddis' invention of a thoughtless style? While the conventional-prose drafts are undated, they must come from the period between 1957, when Gaddis briefly started work on *J R*, and 1964, when, having resumed work in 1963, he first starts referring to his protagonist as "Edward" in correspondence.[4] Between 1964 and the publication of the first thoughtless-style section of *J R* in 1970, Gaddis' career as a corporate writer consumed most of his compositional energy.[5] Working primarily at Eastman-Kodak and IBM, on issues from marketing to world economics to the corporations' internal logistics, Gaddis was primarily an uncredited speechwriter but also created

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[1] "Psycho-narration" is Dorrit Cohn's term for a syntax that represents fictional characters' psychology by the form "she thought XYZ": it introduces the content with clear narrative tags, doesn't separate the content into quotation, "maintains the third-person reference and the tense of narration," and produces prose "determined by the profusion of verbs and nouns of consciousness" (14/32).

[2] Gaddis, loose *J R* draft page headed "Pal of my cradle days."

[3] Ibid.

[4] A draft letter to his then-publisher later in the decade mentions "lack of narration" alongside "incon-sistency of character" as problems to be worked out in future drafts, suggesting that preponderance of dialogue might not initially have been an intended final form (Gaddis, draft letter to Arabel Porter).

[5] Only 300 pages of the 1000-page full draft were written before Gaddis' corporate career stopped being his primary source of income in 1970 – see Chetwynd, section on "After Ford."
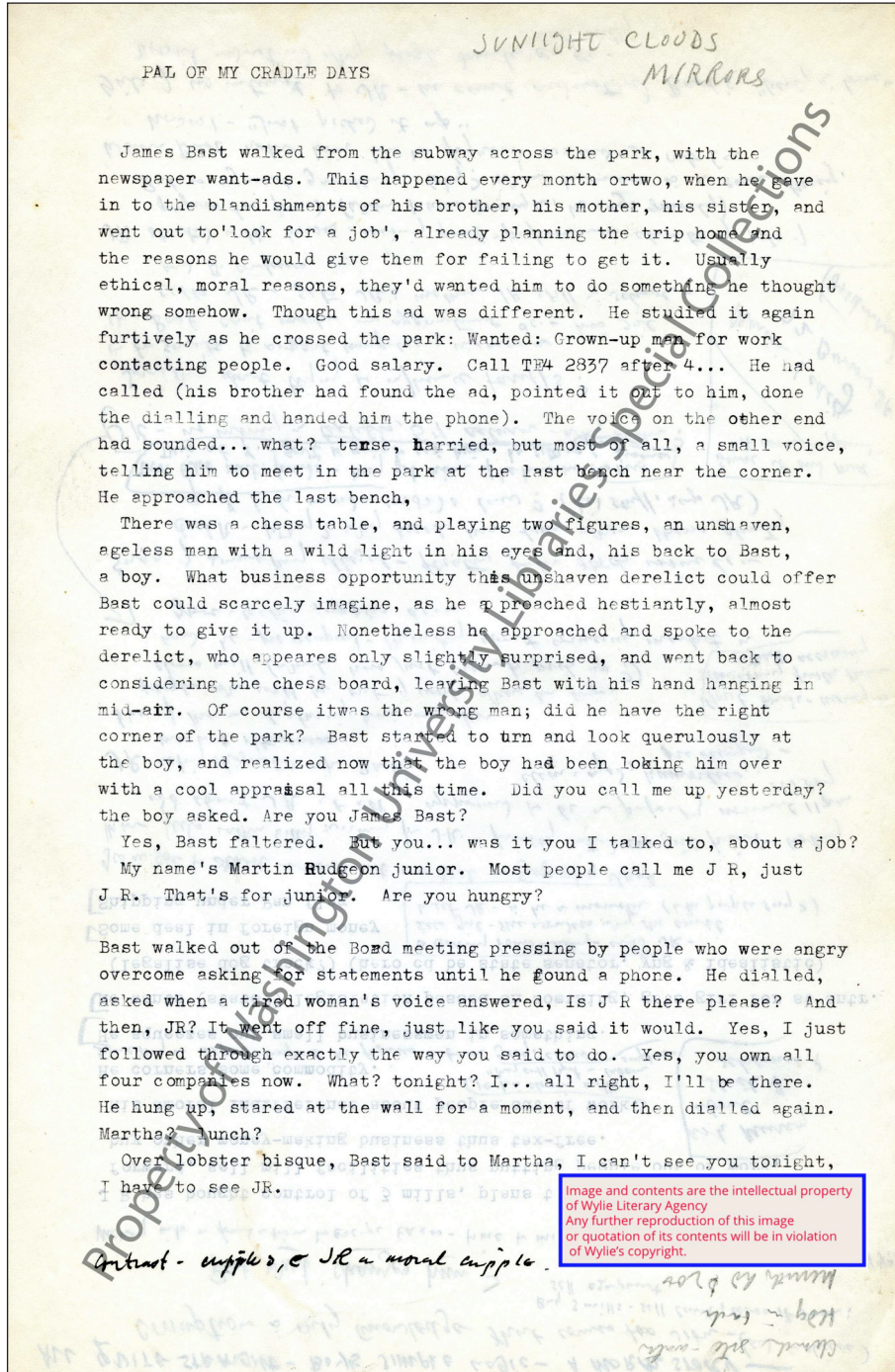
Figure 1: *J R* draft page in conventional prose.

marketing and training material in a variety of media. This work, I'll suggest, helped generate the novel's innovations.

Elsewhere in this issue of *Orbit*, I've made the archival case for reading *J R* in closer relation to Gaddis' corporate career than either he or his critics have previously encouraged.[6] Joseph Tabbi speculated as long ago as 1989 that "it is even conceivable that, rather than simply depleting his literary energies, Gaddis' corporate experience provided a technical training of sorts for JR."[7] I here pursue this line of inquiry, showing how the imperatives and procedures of Gaddis' corporate work conditioned his fictive technique. While Tabbi suggests only that anonymous speechwriting must have given Gaddis fluency with ventriloquy and jargon, I'll show that the corporate career offered both a mechanical training in various forms of non-psycho-narrative composition, and a rhetorical training in arguing about ideas central to *J R*'s world and form.

I'll focus particularly on the concept of friction, which is not only a practical question for Gaddis' corporate work, but also—as that work throws into new relief—a central theme and stylistic principle in *J R*. The novel's dual concern with the vanishing of thought and with an economy in which commodities exist in a permanent state of exchange has led critics to characterize its stylistic construction in terms of the synergic relation between "flatness" and "flow." These terms come from theories of economic transition, in particular the shift from an economics of psychology, regimentation, and efficiency to one of proliferation, liquidity, and commodification that theorists of postmodernity like David Harvey and Frederic Jameson have linked to the US economy's tribulations of 1973. *J R*'s stylistic flatness and flow, on this account, engage its culture by reflecting money's increasing departure from material embodiment, the increasingly fast and global processes of capital exchange, and the correspondingly supra-human forms of systemic and networked agency that impel such an economy. Whether from this political-economy angle that sees the novel either mimicking postmodernity or prophesying neoliberalism, or through a concern

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[6] Ibid.

[7] Tabbi, "Compositional Self," 669.

with posthuman forms of depthless subjectivity—be they poststructural or systems-theoretical—critics have usually treated *J R*'s registering of such shifts as the limits of its form and rhetoric.

What all these approaches share is reliance on a constellation of heuristics that constructs a space only "friction" could fill. When Gaddis himself was asked "If your work could have a positive social/political effect, what would you want it to be?" he replied, "Obviously quite the opposite of what the work portrays."[8] Critics seeking an optimistic rhetoric to *J R* have looked almost exclusively to flatness' opposite rather than flow's, seeking post-psychological versions of the "depth" the novel's style seems to eradicate.[9] If flatness and flow correspond horizontally as the novel's "portrayed" givens, while flatness and depth make an oppositional vertical dichotomy, then they create a conceptual rectangle missing a corner.

J R's explicit form	Flatness	Flow
"positive… effect" – "the opposite of what the work portrays"	**Depth** (addressed in criticism)	**?** (unaddressed in criticism)

What in this structure should correspond horizontally with depth, at the unportrayed "resistance" level? The answer should be flow's conceptual antipode: *friction*, which has its own relationship to resistance.

Gaddis' corporate work was constantly concerned with problems of friction and flow: it required him to frame commercial innovation in anti-frictive terms, to resolve frictions of coordination between his employers' departments, to remove signs of ideological friction from prose he assembled from disparate sources. In

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[8] Gaddis, "PW Interviews," 57.

[9] Beyond Marc Chenétier's detailed argument for the implied depth of *J R*'s narratorial passages, which I examine in detail later, see for example Johan Thielmans' claim that only the novel's artist-figures achieve any form of resistance, Frederic Karl's less optimistic reading of Bast—"Unable to resist, he begins to float toward his own kind of doom, loss of recognition of himself and of what is outside" (*American Fictions* 189)—or Christopher Leise's claim that *J R*'s emphasis on voice comes from it being "fiction that attempts to acknowledge the inevitability of the resistant voice to be co-opted into the dominant discourse(s) of American society" (41). Resistance in each of these cases is equated with the discovery, achievement, or protection of depth or physical solidity against the flattening, dematerializing liquid-imagery forces of economized flow.

what follows, I show how thematic and formal concerns in Gaddis' corporate writing warrant a redescription of *J R*'s stylistic rhetoric. My central claim will be that what Gaddis' corporate writing trained him to remove, his fictive form sought to restore: *J R*'s methods of implication reverse the polarities of his corporate composition to achieve frictions within initial terms of unidirectional stylistic and ideological flow. Furthermore, as those initial formal postulates rely on removing represented thought, so *J R*'s achievements of friction *recuperate* a place for unvocalized thought in a world that seemed to have done away with it. Since the friction-and-depth alternatives in *J R* cultivate aspects of traditional subjectivity, my Gaddis neither neutrally registers nor enthusiastically propounds a post-psychological world. I aim less to resolve existing disagreements about his prophetic supra-humanism or belated humanism,[10] though, than to offer an archivally-warranted elaboration of the many modes of sentence-level stylistic implication in a novel whose innovative form is too often discussed in monolithic terms. Precision about the form should set future discussions of the overall rhetoric on firmer ground, and in the paper's final section I show how formal shifts throughout the novel organize a constructive rhetorical arc rather than a "flat" mimesis. Whether in sentences or events, the achievement of societal friction and the recuperation of psychological depth are covalent throughout *J R*, and Gaddis' corporate work helps us understand both why and—technically, stylistically—how.

The Friction Problem

J R's most fully developed writer-character, Jack Gibbs, says at one point that "that's what any book worth reading's about, problem solving."[11] While prior critics have concurred that *J R*'s formal problems concern how to mimic or challenge those "postmodern" economic conditions of flatness and flow, the novel and its characters seem equally preoccupied by friction, particularly at its most self-reflexive moments.

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[10] The two most recent essay-collections on Gaddis' work tend toward the respective poles: for the systems-theoretical prophetic Gaddis, see Tabbi and Shavers (eds), *Paper Empire* (2007); for the Gaddis of critical humanist values, see Alberts, Leise, and Vanwesenbeeck (eds), *The Last of Something* (2009).

[11] Gaddis, *J R*, 499. I cite subsequent quotations from the novel parenthetically in-text.

Near the end of the novel, a character reads from a press release about "Frigicom" technology that can freeze sound in physical chunks: it "has attracted the interest of the recording industry due to the complete absence of friction associated with conventional transcription" (674). Since *J R*'s own formal technology rejects the novelistic convention of transcribed thought, Frigicom links friction to thought as the "absent" categories of *J R*'s world. Existing criticism treats *J R*'s nigh-exclusive transcription of instrumental dialogue as a new novelistic "technology" for the diagnosis of postmodernity's defining flatness and flow. But the Frigicom advert's insistence on friction's "absence" puts "friction" on the page, and repeated implications that Frigicom is a fraud suggest that "complete"ly eliminating friction might be harder than advertized. *J R*'s stylistic "problem," the project it suggests makes it "worth reading," is not just how to represent a world of thoughtless flow, but how to recuperate thought and friction within that world's givens. The corporate work, like *J R*, constantly frames its own practical problems in these terms of friction and thought, and it too gestures toward such recuperation.

In a speech he wrote for an Eastman Kodak executive, Gaddis implores product-designers to "seek[] the inefficiency":[12] profit relies on identifying and removing friction-problems that customers don't yet know they're hampered by. Friction-removal becomes commerce's basic product. This anti-frictive discourse and ideology was Gaddis' daily atmosphere for almost a decade of *J R*'s gestation. Yet the document that best illuminates the novel—tellingly, the only document he produced for Eastman Kodak under his own name—was one addressed inward, at solving friction-problems of the company's own operation.

The supervisor who commissioned "Some Observations on Problems Facing Eastman Kodak's Advertising Distribution Department" tells Gaddis that company executives were in "total agreement with the contents."[13] Gaddis' popular proposals were a matter of friction-reduction: the problem, he identified, was that both "customers and EK people alike" were failing "to follow the prescribed routines which

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[12] Phillips, 7.

[13] Reisem.

the system is designed to handle, thereby interrupting its smooth functioning."[14] "Smooth"'s joint implication of flatness and flow establishes both the kind of "functioning" Gaddis needed to perfect, and its incompatibility with the friction caused by human actors and their psychological categories (the document demands more constraints on "request" and "creation").[15] In the executive speech, friction-removal is a discoverable opportunity. In the internal report, it's a maintenance necessity. Gaddis' experience ventriloquizing about the one *as* Kodak trained him to address the other *for* Kodak. Yet writing about how to constrain human unpredictability to "the prescribed routines" leads him to imply that some psychological categories—the work of "decision" or "planning," the exercise of "human judgment"[16]—are inelimi-nable necessities even in the pursuit of commercial efficiency. Gaddis thus finally suggests that the corporation's own efficiency-goals would be best served by more friction and less flow: "corporate marketing" were demanding indiscriminate sending of more and more material to more and more outlets for whom it was less and less relevant: by the time Gaddis spoke to the distributing department, he found only "frank expressions of despair over the futility of trying to stop the flow of such material."[17] The tension between chaotic proliferation, total "smooth functioning," and regulative "judgment" is a tension between flow and friction, and it animates *J R*'s narrative drama.

In two set-piece conversations that bookend their business relationship, for example, Bast and JR reverse roles in relation to the word "stop." On the first occasion, JR—like corporate marketing against the distribution division—overflows Bast's pleading to "stop, just stop for a minute! This whole thing has to stop somewhere don't you understand that?" by blithely enthusing about a "neat tax loss *carryforward*" (my italics, 298). But 350 pages later, it's JR who pleads to Bast, "How am I supposed to stop everything?" (647). This switch describes the novel's main rhetorical arc. While total flatness and flow is the novel's starting point, both Bast, at the outset

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[14] Gaddis, "Some Observations...", 1.

[15] Ibid., 1, 14.

[16] Ibid., 10, 7, 10.

[17] Ibid., 5.

of JR's empire, and JR himself, when it starts to collapse, seek frictive alternatives to its seeming inevitability. It's on this axis that I'll argue the novel's central set of "problems" get framed and, eventually, tentatively, resolved.

So why haven't previous *J R* critics discussed friction, and what else has that led them to ignore? They have stressed (often exclusively) the preponderance of unattributed dialogue,[18] then characterized the overall reading experience in terms first of an unbroken "flow" of information, and of an overall "flatness" following from the absence of authorial indications about that information's relative salience. Frederick Karl established these basic terms within a few years of *J R*'s publication, suggesting that, stylistically, "the goal is seamlessness and flow" to ratify the tendency of the novel's events: "Once caught in JR's international money schemes, the characters have no lives except what the flow determines."[19] Subsequent critics have been less interested in the style's correspondence with characters' experience than in systemic mimesis, as in Tom LeClair's comparison of *J R* and *The Recognitions*: in *J R* Gaddis "presses 'flatness' to a breathtaking extremity, shows that the deadly sameness Wyatt [Gwyon, *Recognitions* protagonist] found in pedestrian writing is now the rule of life in general."[20] LeClair's "now" suggests that the stylistic difference between the two novels is a matter of both the changes in "the rule of life" in the 20-year interval between them, and of Gaddis' increasing mastery of stylistic means for imitating that world. Joseph Tabbi reconciles character and system in suggesting that flatness and flow delimit the "*transformation* of subjectivity within the terms of an emergent world-system," thereby "replacing a realism based on characters and interiority with a verbal and textual exposition based on systems."[21] Overtly non-mimetic

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[18] To take only the most recent examples, Nicky Marsh notes that *J R* is "constructed, almost in its entirety, by unattributed dialogue" (186), and Angela Allan that it "infamously consists almost entirely of conversational chaos" (234). As Marc Chénetier demonstrates, this infamous characterization erases the roughly 1/6 of the novel in narrative voice, but almost all of Allan's subsequent discussion of what "*J R*'s form… enables" (235) takes "conversational chaos" as total and discusses its implications without examining specific passages.

[19] Karl 189, 190.

[20] LeClair, 90.

[21] Tabbi, *Nobody Grew*, 132.

readers preserve the flatness/flow heuristic even more totally: for Michael Clune, *J R* abandons the distinction, necessary in our world, between thinking and sorting—"individual attention and underlying system"—to investigate a hypothetical in which, since "success depends on an incapacity to think, or even to perceive, outside the picture of the world presented by price," "[p]rice can replace intersubjectivity."[22] And Michael Levine finds *J R* a merely ludic artefact, to be read without "seeing in its… seamlessness some purpose other than an author's will to work within an outrageous self-imposed constraint."[23] However these critics disagree, they concur that *J R* represents only flatness and flow, a "world-system" without friction, depth, or their associated psychological categories.

How, then, to derive criticism, let alone a program of "resistance," from the novel's mere matching of the economy in which it circulates? Nicholas Spencer explains what Gaddis' suggestion that we locate his rhetorical implications in "the opposite of what the work portrays" has meant to most critics: "Instead of being simply mimetic, *J R* literally mirrors the attributes of postmodernity to produce a critical mimesis."[24] In LeClair's comparative terms, its success is that it "more radically documents what it hates" than comparable fictions.[25] In a recent discussion of how understandings of "Capitalist Realism"—the post-postmodern acknowledgement that capitalism circumscribes the imaginable—can be "informed by the *literary*," Alison Shonkwiler and Leigh Clare La Berge suggest that imagining beyond Capitalist-Realist terms will only become possible once the constraints of its "representational dimensions" are "measured or identified."[26] *J R*, "identifying" both an economic structure and the representational practices by which it naturalizes itself, could thus do the basic resistance-work of demystification. Yet this necessarily limits *J R*'s stylistic rhetoric to epitomizing that which it wants to resist. This rules out in advance Gaddis' actually

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[22] Clune, 22, 24.

[23] Levine, 38.

[24] Spencer, 149.

[25] LeClair, 87.

[26] Shonkwiler and La Berge, 7.

representing any alternative. It's this I want to dispute by stressing the novel's articulations of friction.

Marc Chénetier alone associates the novel's posited alternatives with a corresponding style. Rejecting the "726 pages of voices" approach on which "flatness" accounts rest,[27] Chénetier points out that almost 100 pages of the novel take the form of visually-oriented narration: "Gaddis filigrees himself" through his language in these "islets of resistance to all systems," setting authorial articulation against the flattening of language in the novel's decadent dialogue.[28] For Chénetier, the "narrative segments are the locus of literary stakes," stakes understood and valued in terms of depth: of authorial presence, of the solid narrated world underlying the ephemerality of dialogue, and, in his own econo-mimetic reading, of a defence of "life perceived as permanent flow, as unassailable by utilitarian, exploitative, discursive patterns" (even this well-supported critique of the flatness heuristic ends up propounding flow).[29] If Chénetier's revision of thirty years of criticism shows us how *J R* might actively represent depth, then might the novel represent friction too? This is *J R* criticism's own friction-problem: how frictive resistance might be *figured,* and what it has to do with the relevant depths—psychological work, authorial implication, alternative meanings. The corporate archive's record of Gaddis' routine work on problems of human friction offers some clues.

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Gaddis' clearest expression of the mindset that treats human psychology as undesirable friction comes in an ironic aside in a speech he wrote after "Some Observations…": to "make product planning and marketing a sound, respectable science… the first thing would be to get rid of those variables—especially that last one, the unpredictable human customer at the point of sale."[30] Much of *J R*'s drama stems from the protagonists' perspective on corporate systems' tendency to constrain and rationalize human unpredictability toward pre-punched models, but the ventrilo-

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[27] Moore, 63.

[28] Chénetier, 253, 258.

[29] Ibid., 258.

[30] Gaddis, "Ask the Sailors…", 3–4.

quous corporate work regarded the problem through the other end of the telescope. In "Some Observations…", arguing in his own voice, he starts to develop the ambivalent insights that *J R* subsequently foregrounds.

The ambivalence arises precisely because "Some Observations…" sets out the anti-frictive, anti-psychological worldview with such practical specificity. Human unpredictability causes the Kodak system's problems, particularly through what Gaddis considers the ill-advised offer to "tailor" products for individual clients. Noting failures "to follow the prescribed routines which the system is designed to handle," he suggests that the humans involved needed to realize that "such a system demands orders tailored to the system itself."[31] He thus recommends lesser tolerance for clients' "special and unreasonable requests," and greater, more localized "exercise of coordination and control over creation of future items."[32] That which doesn't fit the system is not only "unpredictable," as in the speeches, but "unreasonable."[33] As "reason" opposes "human," "requests," and "creation," so to be reasonable is to "follow the prescribed routines," to "tailor" oneself to the system, to give "creation" over to "control." Here Gaddis propounds the logic Shonkwiler and La Berge see as distinctive to neoliberalism: "Whenever 'realism' is defined as that which is measurable within a system of capitalist equivalence, then everything *not* measurable according to this standard becomes, by simple definition, unaffordable and unrealistic."[34] Recall Recktall Brown, *The Recognitions*' avatar of capitalist control, and his mantra that "Business is cooperation with reality."[35] Yet, as I'll argue *J R* goes beyond mere identification to represent alternatives, so "Some Observations…"—unlike the speeches—pushes its thinking far enough to undermine its own anti-frictive, anti-psychological impetus.

It particularly stresses the risks of treating systems as ends in themselves. When it comes to attributing agency in relation to supra-human systems, for example, Gaddis' language veers between two poles: if blame falls on "[t]he failure of many of those

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[31] Gaddis, "Some Observations…", 1, 10.

[32] Ibid., 1+14.

[33] Ibid., 1.

[34] Shonkwiler and La Berge, 2.

[35] Gaddis, *The Recognitions*, 243.

using [the system']s services,"[36] then the system is still the grammatical subject of its own limited capacities of accommodation: it "demands orders tailored to… itself," such that "[l]ike most systems, this one leaves little room for exceptional demands to be made upon it."[37] It demands, in other words, but can't take being demanded of. The language in which Gaddis pinpoints this problem matches *J R*'s interest in the conflict between individual and system: "[s]pecial handling means human judgment, and in Advertising Distribution this means time and expensive talent which is too often called upon simply to keep the system going."[38] The Kodak system founders on "human unpredictability," but "human judgment," the root of that unpredictability, is Kodak's only bulwark against the system exceeding their instrumental needs and becoming a talent-churning end in itself.

"Some Observations…" approaches without ever explicitly stating the crucial distinction: that between specific corporate interests, and the hermetic efficiency-drive of the systems they employ. The report thus centralizes a passing warning in the "inefficiency" speech about "systems" that "no corporate product planning can control": optimizing systemic efficiency serves no-one unless human judgment keeps the system tooled to a particular human goal. Suppressed throughout his ventriloquous speeches, eliminated from the prose of *J R*, human judgment's value here comes to the fore. For all that the language of "failure" takes a human subject or adjective wherever it recurs throughout this short report, this is one document in which Gaddis carved out a space in which thought and psychological categories could retain practical value.

Gaddis' corporate environment often conflated human judgment with human unpredictability as a single enemy, treating supra-human "efficiency" as a natural and sufficient goal. His own corporate work consistently warns against this conflation, but in *J R*'s world and form it has become the problem-generating default. The

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[36] Gaddis, "Some Observations…", 1.

[37] Ibid., 10, 1.

[38] Ibid., 10. Gaddis' corporate work is constantly preoccupied with decision-making and its conditions. This might be a case where early *J R* thinking influenced the corporate work: early notes on the novel, for example, discuss what to do with the character of author Eigen in terms that could have been excerpted from any of Gaddis' corporate projects: "is <u>he</u> the totally indecisive person? Who works for a JR company in management consultant station, 'decision-making- totally dependent on machines?" (Gaddis, loose sheet of *J R* notes headed "EIGEN").

same goes for another of the corporate work's warnings: that "management" might become an essentially machinic rather than critical discipline: not a collaboration of human beings deciding on ends and means through the medium of social human judgment, but merely a structure for the top-down promulgation of anti-human efficiency. On the latter model, management must tailor the world to fit what it can process, not only responding to customers but constructing them: "The measure of marketing's success lies in its ability to recognize, and even create, potential market situations."[39] *J R* represents a world that has taken this logic to its extreme, in which nothing can be "recognized" that hasn't first been "created" in management's, or (for Recktall Brown) "Business"' own image.

When a system becomes an end in itself, postponing its own degradation requires a degradation of human inputs. A system that "depends heavily on impartiality in handling, in order to remain intact" can only process things intelligible in impartial terms.[40] The work of keeping the system running degrades judgment by leaving its operators in "no substantial position to discriminate effectively among the demands placed on its services."[41] In this respect, the humans who ought to control and make "demands" on the system actually end up serving it by going out of their way to pre-sort, forestall, and hollow out "unreasonable" human inputs. "Some Observations…"' warnings against conflating managerial work with efficiency-maximizing surely animate *J R*'s constant use of a similar pattern: JR's insistence that Bast legally change his name to Edwerd so as to ratify a misprinted batch of business cards; PR man Davidoff's circulation of press releases about events that have to be brought about by the people reading them; JR's convincing himself that his fabricated corporate bio-blurb really does make him a "man of vision" characterized by an "austere, indrawn indwellingness" (650);[42] and

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[39] Ibid., 7.

[40] Gaddis, "Some Observations…", 8.

[41] Ibid., 8.

[42] The archive reveals that JR's faith in his fake biography's truth is one of the fundamental elements of his story: it's present in the earliest full description of *J R*'s projected plot, surviving the changes, and also appears in fragmentary notes that almost certainly precede that (Gaddis, "Summary Following Opening Part," 3).

most conspicuously, as I'll discuss later, the school staff's attempts—through that corporate-work register of "tailoring"—to get children to match pre-punched personality-template cards.[43]

J R eliminates transcriptions of human psychology just as the corporate work warns that a misguided equivalence between management and system-serving might come to eliminate the real thing. But where Johnston, LeClair, or Clune claim that *J R* is a norm-neutral novel of systems rather than of anachronistic psychology, "Some Observations…" recuperates "human judgment" as a value despite bringing it up as a problem. Gaddis suggests that eliminating the friction of human psychology from corporate systems is not only unwise but technically impossible. Kodak can't flatten the inputs or smooth the system beyond a certain point, since wherever human brains persist, there has to remain a distinction between immediate sorting and the "time and other pressures involved in decision making…"[44] *J R*'s supra-intentional flatness and flow represent a world that has ignored this warning, hence Angela Allan's reading of that world as "the disastrous fantasy of neoliberalism."[45] And, as Allan suggests, the novel examines what happens when that fantasy encounters persistent human realities.[46] The "decision making" necessary for dealing with unpredictable humanity is itself work that needs "time" and human effort, and Gaddis here defends what he had been asked to overcome: the ineliminable complications of mental work against outsiders' presumptions of, and systems' expanding demands for, simplicity and simplification.[47]

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[43] Müller shows how important punch-card technology was to the economical change happening while Gaddis did this work. Gaddis himself worked in educational technology during this period (see Chetwynd), and the punchcard plot represents an axis of his interests and the wider economic field.

[44] Ibid., 7.

[45] Allan, 45

[46] The corporate work treats these as inherent but minimizable: "[f]inally there are those threats common to any communications system: [like] the order carried around the Sales Rep's pocket for two or three days… But the more those are corrected which can be by adhering to the 'system', the less these will be felt" ("Some Observations," 13).

[47] When Gaddis notes that "it is not only Marketing's but human nature to reduce that Department's operation with 'What's so complicated? Slap a label on it and ship it out'," he makes the humans who indulge the fantasy culpable: their "judgment" ought to correct their "nature" (Some Observations…" 7).

Even in the "seek the inefficiency" speech, human unpredictability is valuable for offering occasions for judgment, since "[w]ithout the stimulus of that sovereign individual, the customer at the point of sale—there wouldn't be any reason for change. And planning is change."[48] In defending change-responsiveness, "judgment," "planning," and "decision," "Some Observations…" attaches value to the other "unreasonable" psychological categories that Gaddis' default corporate discourse sought to eliminate. *J R*, I'll show, isn't just mimicry of the world that attacks these categories, but pursues "Some Observations…"' defence of them. Ideas worked out in the corporate writing establish both the novel's central problematic and the terms of its stylistic defaults. *J R* represents a world in which the identification between "management" and the judgment-free system blindly maximizing efficiency at the expense of the human has come to pass. And as Gaddis clarifies in "Some Observations…" that world isn't essentially flat, but actively flattened by a particular corporate mindset. "Some Observations" gives us a context within which to understand *J R*'s flatness/flow axis as contingent, interested, constructed, and resistable.

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J R's central friction-problem is what place and value might persist for friction in a world and style that seem to have done away with it. My focus on recuperation requires both sentence-level analysis of how *J R* creates specific local effects, and an attention to shifts in these modes across the course of the novel. My subsequent approach thus departs from the critics I've discussed above who, for all their differences, share a tendency to treat *J R*'s 726 pages as embodying a single "form," about whose implications they talk more in general than through comparative passage-analyses.[49] The specifics of Gaddis' corporate work, I hope to show, don't just illuminate *J R*'s broadest rhetorical methods, but also the sheer variety of sentence-level modes by which he, within those broader constraints, conveys argument.

In the two sections that follow, I analyse corporate-work/novel connections that show how the forms of Gaddis' corporate work help *J R*—within stylistic terms

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[48] Phillips, "Effective Generation…", 16.

[49] There are good logistical reasons for this tendency: *J R*'s design makes its workings difficult to convey by small excerpt, and analyzing the internal structure of multiple block-quoted passages, as I do in what follows, is difficult to reconcile with the length-constraints of traditional print journals.

initially given over to flatness and flow—find stylistic ways to represent achievements of friction. In the paper's final section, I show how these achievements finally exceed the stylistic to generate narrative events and an optimistic overall rhetoric.

J R: A Slideshow Novel?

Many critics treat *J R*'s removal of conventional psychological transcription as rejecting not only the conception of subjectivity associated with the traditional novel, but the novel form itself: instead, it's "something more like a film or a play," a "transcribed acoustic collage," an interrogation of the concept of "voice" through plays on audio recording technology, or a "telephonic satire" in which crossed wires are the narrative analogue.[50] The corporate work gives us historical warrant for seeing *J R*—particularly its alternations of visually-driven narration and the flow of dialogue—in terms of another format: the slideshow.

Gaddis himself stressed *J R*'s formal connection to cinema, but even in a letter discussing a potential film adaption had nothing to say about the visual aspects of its narrative style:

> I think that in its departures from conventional fiction techniques the novel J R is essentially cinematic […] the absence of the author/narrator in my effort to make it all 'happen', to make the story tell itself in scenes cutting one into another uninterrupted by chapter breaks; absence of subjective characters, interior monologues, no "he wondered," "she felt…", "he wished…"

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[50] Levine 31; Johnston 197; O'Donnell; Conley. Regarding Levine's play comparison, Gaddis made half-hearted efforts to turn the novel into a stage drama, which consisted of cutting pages out of the book, crossing out the narrative passages, and submitting the result to a director. See William Gaddis Archive: Personal Papers. Box 145, Folder 552. This interest in drama had early origins. Among notes on "Ducdame" (a story drafted in 1948 that is the origin of central *Recognitions* characters like Otto Pivner, Recktall Brown, and Wyatt Gwyon, as well as that novel's plagiarism-plots) Gaddis left a three-page list of reasons "Why Ducdame Should be a Play," some of which stress the limitations of literary narration, such as "[b]ecause I have seen the whole of both novels as tableaux. As sequential and consequential scenes," "removal of temptations to my bad style which has grown worse of late," and "[b]ecause words should be and are spoken and done" (Gaddis, "Why Ducdame…"). He also wrote at least two fully preserved pieces of drama: the cod-Elizabethan "Faire Exchange No Robbery" in the mid-1940s, and the civil-war-aftermath family reckoning "Once at Antietam" between 1959 and 1963, early in *J R*'s development.

&c; as little description and narrative as possible beyond what the reader sees and hears from the characters themselves.[51]

J R's narrative sections often present us images outside the eyeline of "the characters themselves," and the specifically visual nature of so much of Gaddis' corporate work, which critics have barely acknowledged,[52] offers more help than this letter in explaining the workings of the narration's visuality. His earliest work on a visual project was a script for an army film about the battle of St. Vith, a script one viewer found "poetic," like "something left over from The Recognitions […] Actually, a reading of the narrative leaves one with a distinct impression of overwriting, but when the narration is put with those grim shots of violence, it all smooths out."[53] Gaddis wasn't responsible for shooting those "grim shots," and it's unclear whether he had any role in the editing that "put" them "with" his words.[54] But his increasing responsibility for the visual directions of his slideshows and film scripts eventually earned him paid work in "editorial and visual consultation," or even just "visuals."[55] How, then, did he get from scripts unfavourably compared to his first novel to developing a distinctive visual-direction style that anticipates important aspects of his second?

Two otherwise contrasting critics identify elements of *J R*'s narration that, when combined, help explain its slideshow quality. For Chénetier, the narrative passages *underlie* the dialogue, "structur[ing] a vision, establishing long distance iconic isotopes that contrast with the merely obsessive rehashed quality of reported speech."[56]

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[51] Gaddis, letter to Jack Gold, 1. The initial draft shows that "absence of subjective characters" replaced the even stronger "nothing subjective."

[52] Ralph Clare rightly suggests that "Gaddis' stint as a corporate copywriter gave him a true insider's view of the work that images and signs do in… advertising" (114), but doesn't address the fact that Gaddis himself did so much visual work.

[53] Illegible signature, undated letter to Gaddis.

[54] Hunter Low, the visuals-director and long-term friend who Gaddis first met working on this film and who was Gaddis' path to work at Eastman-Kodak, told one participant who Gaddis was scheduled to interview that "I have final editing rights on your footage" (letter to Gregor Dorfmeister). Photos Low took of work on the project show Gaddis talking to cameramen and looking through viewfinders (see Hunter Low Collection, Box 1, Folder 3).

[55] For the relevant invoices, see William Gaddis Archive: Correspondence. Box 1, Folder 18

[56] Chénetier, 261.

As slideshows offer static images under linear speech, Chénetier reads *J R*'s narrative voice as establishing a bedrock world of "quiddity" over which its dialogue merely washes, generating an overall rhetoric of discoverable depth.[57] Levine's account of narration-dialogue interaction, by contrast, emphasizes disconnection, alternation and flatness: *J R*'s dialogue is "a soundtrack in progress without a picture on the screen," its narrator-passages correspondingly a "film in progress with the sound momentarily turned off."[58] Levine's flattening of the narrative voice to "a mechanically produced impression of what lies on the surface of the scene" is belied by the very passages he cites,[59] but he does, with more linguistic precision than Chénetier attempts, highlight one crucial stylistic element: "Although [one passage] refers to a number of specific actions, assigning any one of them a specific temporal duration is difficult, mainly because of the frequent use of gerundives and the word 'as'."[60] In other words, the *J R* narrator most often presents actions through continuous-tense verbs, something native to the slideshow medium, whose static images can only ever present actions in process. This core vocabulary of gerundive verbs and the simultaneity-markers "as" and "while" matches the visual directions Gaddis wrote in his corporate work.

Gaddis' growing compositional responsibility for those directions can be traced across the three chronologically ordered documents below (see **Figure 2**):[61]

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[57] Ibid., 256.

[58] Levine, 30, 31.

[59] Ibid., 23. Levine's reading is undermined by the heavily figurative and multi-sensory aspect of his examples, such as a passage describing Bast's "rounding the corner of Burgoyne Street to course through the shrieks of saws and limbs dangling in unanesthetized aerial surgery" (Gaddis, *J R* 19; Qtd. Levine 26). Christine Brooke-Rose makes a more grammatically precise argument for reading Alain Robbe-Grillet's prose as Levine reads Gaddis': Robbe-Grillet uses "a 'scientific' present tense… This is clearly derived from film, but only a certain type of film, with a quasi-neutral camera" (138). Gaddis, by contrast, uses a combination of simple past and continuous present and, as in the passage Levine cites and passages I'll examine later, uses sound as well as sight within this grammar. For a reconciliation of the cinematic analogy with suggestions of authorial presence and character-saturated prose, see Tabbi, *Nobody Grew*, 136–7..

[60] Ibid., 23.

[61] Zornow, "A Better Way" (undated), 6; Zornow, "A Better Way" (1968), 4; Gaddis, "Software" second draft, 6.
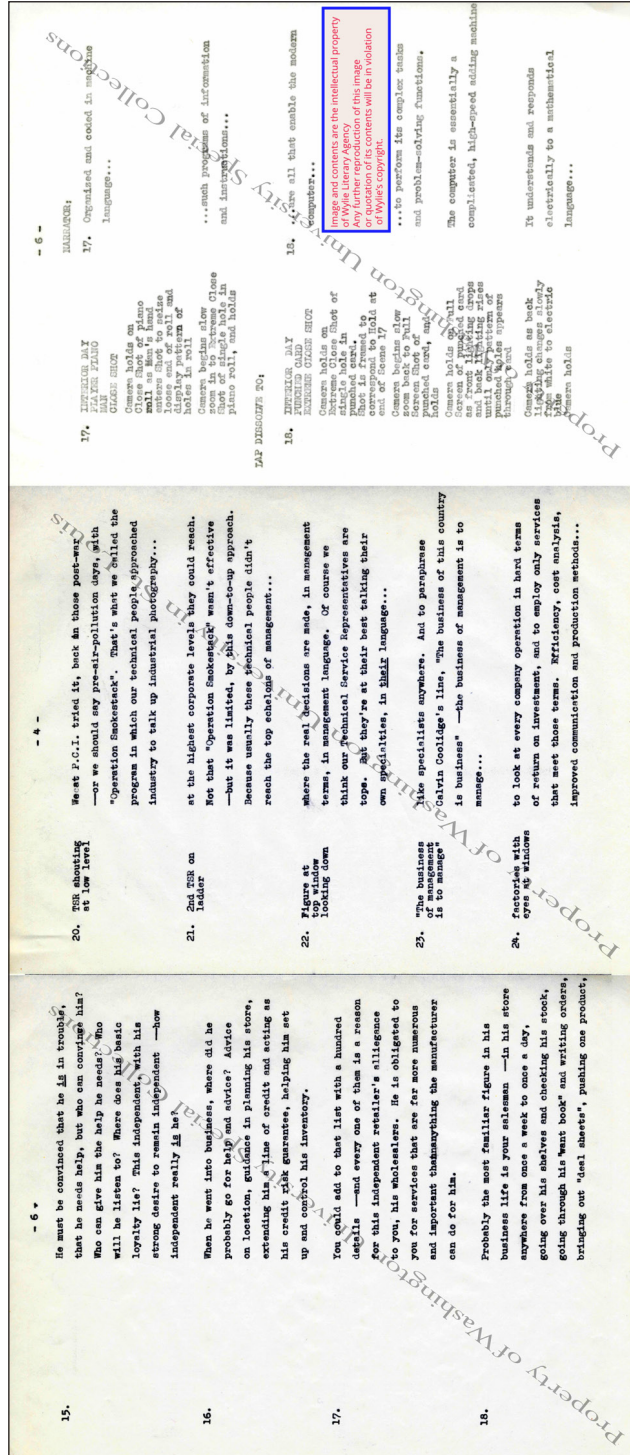
Figure 2: Three Slideshow Scripts, 1965–9.

The first pair are the first and the penultimate presented versions of the same long-toured speech on management/technician relations at Kodak.[62] Gaddis initially just broke a pre-written script into slide-numbered chunks of similar lengths without visual directions.[63] A Quiz script written for IBM around the same time seems to be where Gaddis first wrote basic directions, suggesting for example that one question be asked "over a visually dramatic sequence of a glass manufacturing operation in France, featuring the positioning of patterns into which the glass will be cut."[64] "Visually dramatic" is telling not showing, but in later iterations of "A Better Way," Gaddis had become fluent in creating drama through visual sequencing, composing directly for the capabilities of the slideshow format.

The visual directions accompanying each slide in the final version use verbs only in those present-continuous forms—"shouting," "looking"—that Levine finds distinctive to *J R*'s narration.[65] The images Gaddis specifies don't just illustrate the words of the script, but follow a narrative logic of their own, directing the viewer's visual attention between characters and perspectives, up and down the levels of a building analogized to a corporation. In his first version, each chunk ended on a sentence break, but here slide-changes happen in the middle of sentences, with words and images conditioning each other differently from slide to slide. If the slideshow format's basic logic is firstly that one image illustrate each chunk of content, one chunk explain each image, and secondly that one element remain stable while the other shifts, then Gaddis' work in the format is notable for how flexibly it makes varied significance out of each transition.

In the page I reproduce from the penultimate "Better Way" script, for example, slide 20's illustration of a technician shouting upward is only explained in the final

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[62] The final version, almost a year later, adds a section on visual-technology history, but in technical terms is only distinguished by Gaddis' visual directions adopting screenwriting jargon, for example "POP ON" to indicate slide transitions (Zornow, "A Better Way" 1969).

[63] Minimal directions internal to the speech, like an imperative to "look at the dinosaur" (Zornow, "A Better Way" undated, 2), do convey basic visual-content instructions to the technicians who would provide the illustration. Letters to Hunter Low about this speech contain "suggestions" "regarding visuals" that suggest Low was in charge of the visuals in the versions before Gaddis' own scripts started specifying them. See Hunter Low Collection Box 135, Folder 481.

[64] Gaddis, "IBM +-+-+", 11.

[65] Zornow, "A Better Way" (1968), 4.

words of its script, whose sentence then runs on to slide 21, whose image of a ladder immediately illustrates the same sentence's concluding mention of the attempt to reach" "highest corporate levels."[66] Slide 21's own final half-sentence, about the "top echelons of management," seems to develop the same ladder-image, but the transition to Slide 22 reveals that the full sentence has completely changed the narrative perspective: the image of a management "figure looking down" matches the sentence's new alignment of "we" with those "top echelons," turning the "Technical Service Representative" whose upward-shouting perspective slide 20 had called "our" into a "they" now invisible to the audience but not to the figure looking down.[67] Slide 23 abandons visual narrative to project the moral of this shift, taking three sentences of framing script to build up to the words it reiterates. Slide 24, meanwhile, returns to imagery without returning to narrative, using "eyes at windows" to show how literally "to look" is the defining verb of slide 23's stipulation of management's duty "to manage."[68] More than mere illustration, language and image interact flexibly throughout the script to complex argumentative ends – clarifying structures of mutual perception within corporate structures, or developing "management" from a single survey-perspective to a disembodied panoptical scrutiny.[69]

Gaddis' later, less frequent work in film screenplay, meanwhile, draws distinctively on his slideshow expertise, as in the third image above (taken from a rejected IBM film script on "Software").[70] Throughout this script, cinematic composition is a lot like slideshow composition, with "camera holds" being the most frequent instruc-

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[66] Ibid., 4.

[67] Ibid., 4.

[68] Ibid., 4.

[69] Ostensibly about the need for managers to consult with technicians and craftsmen, the drafts of "A Better Way" increasingly treat management as an end in itself: "the business of management is to manage…" (Ibid., 4) a project for which the relevant "terms" are "[e]fficiency, cost analysis, improved communication and production methods." These priorities match precisely the tendency Gaddis identified, from "Some Observations" to *J R*, as eliminating "human judgment" from management by treating efficiency as an end in itself.

[70] See Gaddis, letter to James Handley. Gaddis resigned over interference in the script, after his second draft failed to simplify it enough for his supervisors. Notably, Gaddis' resignation letter mentions "your stated approval of the visual content of that script," which suggests that by late 1969 his visual-work was more satisfactory to his employers than his writing.

tion, and an emphasis on slow zooms and slow changes of lighting that correspond to the brief narrations that accompany them.[71] In place of -ing verbs, Gaddis composes his continous zooms and holds through simple-present verbs like "holds," "enters," "drops," "rises," and "changes": the action-in-process here is often that of the camera itself, the visual directions conveying a constant overlap and simultaneity through the repetition of those temporal markers "as" and "while."[72] Actions overlay actions, which overlay camera movements, which overlay the narration. Words and images regulate, drag, and impel each other: a more flexible, interchangeable, in Chénetier's word "labile" version of his bedrock/overflow account of the word/image interaction in *J R*.[73] Consequently, the interaction is capable of more precise local rhetorical effects than either Levine's or Chénetier's monolithic accounts of flat disconnection or persistent depth will allow.

The formal specifics of Gaddis' corporate visual composition serve its arguments in complex, almost allegorical ways that *J R* goes on to refine. Indeed, notes toward *J R* were written on the back of off-printed corporate-work slideshow scripts.[74] This relationship makes sense when we appreciate how directly the concerns of these particular scripts match the novel's,[75] and how often too, at Kodak in particular, Gaddis was writing self-consciously *about* visual technology's capacity to provide insight into processes corporate and suprahuman.[76] This self-consciousness about

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[71] Gaddis, "Software" second draft, 6.

[72] Ibid., 6.

[73] Chénetier, 258.

[74] See in particular the notes in Box 67, Folder 273 of the Gaddis archive at Washington University.

[75] In "Software," Gaddis figures the player piano's relationship to human and inhuman thought and problem-solving; in "A Better Way" he addresses "management"'s commitment to "Efficiency," and the limitations of a "down to up approach" to organization, as well as the insight JR was born with: "you don't make money buying and warehousing. [A manager] should know that the sales dollar isn't the answer to his prosperity, but how fast he turns that dollar (Zornow, "A Better Way" 1968, 2, 8); in an untitled speech in the same folder, he addresses corporations' ways of convincing "independent"'s to let the corporation control their actions (Gaddis, "Untitled Marketing Speech," 2). And so on.

[76] He wrote, for example, about industrial photography's advances on our usual capacities of perception, as with "the camera's ability to pull motion apart [...] for a microsecond-by-microsecond analysis of a dead chicken hitting an aeroplane windshield at 450 miles per hour" (Zornow, "A Better Way" 1968, 19). These smallest perceptible chunks of imagery could then be reassembled into narratives the analysis made possible. For his work on the wider cultural aspects of visuality, see my discussion of his collaboration with Martin Dworkin in Chetwynd.

his medium led him quickly to narrative proficiency in it, making the motion from slide to slide or the fitting of sentences to zooms and holds and fades tell stories, develop concepts, in content-bearing ways beyond the capacity of language alone. Matching the slideshow work's flexibility, *J R* interweaves narration and dialogue differently from scene to scene and sentence to sentence, with a variety of rhetorical implications. As I'll now show through analyses of specific examples, these are often legible in the terms of flatness and depth, flow and friction, that I've already suggested link corporate work and novel.

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The early scene from which I draw my examples—in which Bast returns to his aunts' house to find that the outbuilding where he does his composition work has been broken into, and then explores it with his cousin Stella—is one that Tabbi discusses in stylistic and visual-media terms, stressing the degree to which perceiving consciousness saturates the prose as "[w]e follow Stella's flashlight the way our eyes might follow a panning camera in a film."[77] Like Levine and Chénetier, though, he doesn't examine how narration and dialogue *interact*, and as I'll show, it's in that interaction's service of thematic argument that the influence of Gaddis' slideshow career is most obvious.

The scene introduces Bast with a moment of formal self-consciousness that complicates the usual relationship between a visual tableau and explanatory language; his aunts' dialogue constructs him as spectacle before his own visual perceptions saturate the narrative language with conceptual content:

> —Oh, it's Edward?
>
> —Edward… but what's that he's carrying?
>
> —It looks like a can.
>
> —A beer can!
>
> —In the living room? What in the world!
>
> —You, we said he was upset Stella, but…
>
> —If he could see himself…

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[77] Tabbi, *Nobody Grew*, 136.

> But only the wallpaper's patient design responded to his obedient query,
> glancing from habit to an unfaded square of wall where no mirror had hung
> in some year. —It's empty… he brandished the can, —I just thought I'd… (67).

In slideshow terms, the dialogue builds a seemingly uncomplicated tableau of Bast in the act of "carrying."[78] But the narrative sentence that follows the aunts' incomplete conditional "if he could see himself…" dissolves indicative description; the grammatically intuitive referents of "glancing" and "empty" (the design and the square) both have to be cancelled and reinscribed (as Bast's action and the can's state). Narration and dialogue pull against each other, reflecting Bast's own awkward formal role in the scene: both the object of perception and a saturating perceiver. "Habit" frames Bast's actions as separable from self-perception and depth-psychology, and the passage's verbs, as the wallpaper "respond"s to his "query"ing glance (itself an "obedient" response to non-imperative dialogue) seem to render him a passive rather than sovereign actor. But his uncompleted "I just thought" raises the competing possibility that the narrative passage preceding it constitutes an act of reflective thinking. The conceptual content of that narration—which offers Chénetier-approved intimations of worldly solidity in the wallpaper's "unfaded" "patience"—may be either Bast's or the narrator's, an ambiguity that establishes the subsequent scene's concern with perceptual reflexivity and the origins and force of conceptual thought.

In Bast and Stella's subsequent investigation of the outbuilding, by contrast, narration and dialogue untangle themselves, impelling each other into an unbroken flow, taking it in turns to generate narrative events:

> She thrust a thigh against the heavy door pushing it in on its hinges, shoving
> the neatly broken pane with a thrust of her elbow, crushing glass under-
> foot with her entrance, asking —is there a light? And as surely finding the
> switch, dropping the heavy shadows of overhead beams down upon them,
> bringing the brooding outdoors in, paused, as he came up short behind her,

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[78] The relation between "carrying" and "brandished" here establishes that, throughout *J R*, once-narrated continuous verbs can be assumed to underlie the dialogue until cancelled by subsequent narration of other verbs.

apparently indifferent to the lingering collision of his free hand in its glide over the cleft from one swell to the other brushing up her waist to the elbow, where only the tremor of uncertainty in his grasp moved her on into the vacant confines of the room to murmur —it needs airing... (68–9).

Here, dialogue-tags remove the earlier passage's perplexities, narrative sentences incorporate dialogue, narrated actions answer vocalized questions. Yet a counter-point to this flow persists in the contrast between two types of continuous action. Stella's single-action verbs like "asking," finding," "dropping," and "bringing" move the narrative onward, but against a backdrop of impersonal nouns "brooding" and "lingering." These set her actions against suprahuman timeframes—arboreal when discussing the "lowering threat" trees pose to the front windows, diurnal in the invo-cation of "brooding night". "Lingering" even renders a "collision" static, as only still image would usually have the power to do. "Scantling," a paragraph later, takes these long-durée continuous verbs to their logical conclusion: a former gerund so perma-nent it has lost its root verb in becoming a noun. These slow backdrop verbs pull against Stella's "thrust," "pushing" and "crunching" as the previous scene set Bast against his aunts' dialogue. His "uncertainty" here matches narratorial reservations like "apparently" and "as though," establishing that Bast's perceptions *are* the root of the narration's vocabulary, and hence that the long-durée continuous verbs and the earlier passage's "patience" characterize *him* in opposition to instrumental talk and fluent action. This aligns him with the depth-implications of supra-human time against the flatter prose of Stella's "sure" action. These narrative passages thus offer depth not just as Chénetier's bedrock beneath the dialogue, but as stylistic reposi-tory for Bast's unvocalized "thought." Such thought thus retains textual space even within formal principles that notionally deny it, retains space even in the narration of apparent aimlessness, passivity, and diffident "habit."

The narrative voice's backdrop work becomes more self-conscious when the pair reach Bast's music room, where the continuous verbforms apply not to the visible, physical world, but to music's power to condition whatever it underlies. Bast and Stella converse over "strings forboding" on a "turning record":

> —Is this F-sharp? She ran a finger along the stave, bent closer, struck it turning him on his heel as her left hand rose to bracket C two octaves down in tremolo.
> —No wait what are you…
> —All the spirit deeply dawning in, is this what you're working on?
> —It's no it's nothing! He pulled the pages from the rack —it's just, it's nothing… and left her standing, the strings patterning their descent in the slope of her shoulders to remain there, as she bent to close the keyboard, in the remnant of a shrug (69).

As the passage begins with the record's "turning," so it ends by emphasizing that music's "patterning" of the scene's various components.[79] When Stella leaves the outbuilding a page later, before Bast turns off the record player, the analogy between visual and musical backdrop-conditioning of dialogue and events becomes even more explicit: "She brushed past him for the door where the strings rose again, gaily framing an empty trap in the eaves beyond" (71). In "patterning" and "framing," the scene's slideshow verbs now describe their own narrative function. The "framing" initially seems to be the action of the most recent noun, the strings, but the sentence's development clarifies that it refers to Stella's shape from Bast's visual perspective. Until this misdirection, the passage's continuous tense stems only from the music, over whose backdrop the scene's action and emotion run like slideshow speech. And the music bears grammatical agency for the scene's tendency to stillness: it's what "remain[s] there" in Stella's body, "left… standing" in a continuous whose root verb is already slideshow-static.[80]

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[79] So thorough is this saturation, indeed, that the subject-object syntax of music and physical world becomes confused: the strings "patterning their descent" may either be drawing pattern from or establishing pattern in those shoulders.

[80] The camera-hold simultaneity of "as" and "while" also contributes to this music-patterned stilling. One of the uses of "as" directs our visual attention to Stella's hands on the keyboard, which not only echoes shots from the Software script—"camera begins slow zoom in on keyboard and holds on tight shot of an octave or so of moving keys" (Gaddis, "Software" second draft, 2)—but the zoom-logic of her "bending closer" to that image narrows our visual focus on the source of music, stressing music's role in orchestrating the scene's components.

This achievement of stillness makes ever more explicit the essentially allegorical relationship between Stella and Bast. To put it simply, Stella is stylistically tagged with flatness and flow, Bast first with the depth beyond the flatness, and then with the frictive slowing of that flow. Take the scene's most direct contrast of verbs: Stella's "turning" Bast with a single note conjures that "obedient" reflexive form of agency with which he began the scene, but the "turning" record finally stills Stella herself. Bast's thought and compositional work are associated with the way the backdrop "turning" comes to constrain Stella to its rhythm. As his perceptions in the preceding passage established the slower backdrop temporality that the turning record later embodies, it's no coincidence that the words she reads from his work in progress involve "spirit deeply dawning": a phrase that yokes together the non-material, the scene's intimations of depth, and a verb with both supra-human-timeframe and mental-process connotations. Bast's composition expresses his aspiration to precisely what the "turning" record achieves: the creation of an artwork that can transmit depth and pace alternative to the Stella/JR world.

These stylistically allegorical interactions persist until the scene is bookended by another empty can. At the railway station on her way home, Stella meets Bast's fellow flow-threatened protagonist Gibbs, with whom she once had a relationship. Their dialogue is almost uninterrupted by narration, but plays out over backdrop continuous verbs from the passage in which Gibbs is introduced:

> The platform shuddered with a train going though in the wrong direction and a tremor lingered on her frame, turning away, following its lights receding as though desperate to lose distinction among lights signifying nothing but motion, movement itself stilled by distance spreading to overwhelm the eye with the vacancy of punctuation on a wordless page. She reached an empty trash bin and dropped the can clattering into it… (73–4).

As with Bast's aunts, Stella's dialogue imposes visual narration on Gibbs, who's "wandering round a train platform with your old books and papers, your hair messed and you, a hole in your trouser seat you look…" (74). But the setting's own verbs of long duration—"lingered," "following," "receding"—develop Gibbs' "wandering" less in the

urgent indicative terms of Stella's questioning—"How did you end up in a place like this?" "What are you doing here! What are you doing in a town like this…" (72)—than as a slow zoom deeper and deeper into the "vacancy" of the transit-setting that wandering has brought him to. Even though dialogue and narration are kept maximally separate in this scene, the backdrop verbs stress the dialogue's "empty" energy, as Stella's questions that don't wait for answers embody the "clattering" end-in-itself imperative of "nothing but motion."

Against this, the narrative voice develops Gibbs' perceptions beyond Stella in far more pessimistic terms than Bast's: what we get here is not "deeply" and not "patterning," but a mere "distance spreading to overwhelm the eye." If Bast's perceptions posited an alternative to Stella's thoughtless urgency that eventually had the power to "still" her, Gibbs' perceptions are inseparable from the motion they oppose, as the ambiguous agent of "spreading," which might be either movement *or* stillness, makes clear. Gibbs' perception of "distance" is essentially flattening: it serves "vacancy" and the "empty," unlike Bast's connection to "depth," which takes the narrative voice in the outbuilding scene far beyond the "empty" "can" with which the dialogue begins it. Gibbs' free-indirect narrative-voice perceptions, unlike Bast's, find no way to intrude into the dialogue to which they provide a backdrop. The narration he saturates provides only the sense of hopeless, directionless drifting that that dialogue exacerbates. These stylistic differences of perceptual framing set up the fact that it's later Bast, not Gibbs, who is finally able to achieve some compositional work.

These four passages from a single scene show how flexibly Gaddis interweaves dialogue and narration for distinct reading experiences and thematic effects. They show how the basic principles of continuous-tense tableau-establishment and the slow-zooming implication of simultaneity through "as" and "while" connect the formal mechanics of *J R* to techniques of visual rhetoric that Gaddis developed over the course of his corporate slideshow work. And they show how some of the content-bearing visual storytelling techniques he developed there allowed him to make essentially allegorical currency out of conflicting narrative paces:[81] the sentence-level

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[81] For another, very differently framed, take on *J R*'s use of conflicting temporalities rather than linear flow, see Strehle. She contrasts character-perspectives that create "disjoined fragments" that add up

modulations in dialogue/narration interaction render Gibbs and Bast's relations to Stella legible in terms of friction and flow. Gaddis' major development of slideshow logic for *J R* is—as unites all this scene's variety—to make the idea of dialogue running over a visual or musical backdrop a principle by which that backdrop's conscious-ness can propound another temporality, a frictive drag of experience or value that suggests that being, in Karl's terms, "caught in… what the flow determines" is not a done deal.

The slideshow, then, is a more capacious and archivally warranted way of think-ing about interactions between the visual, the narratorial, and the vocal in *J R* than previous critics' efforts to tag narration and dialogue with stably separate implica-tions allowed. The corporate work lets us read the variety of their interactions from scene to scene as a source of formal rhetoric. It is similarly helpful for understanding how Gaddis created meaning and addressed matters of what I'll call "ideological fric-tion" within the novel's reported speech alone.

Authorial Implication and Ideological Friction within *J R*'s Dialogue Forms

However they disagree on the role of the narrative sections, Levine and Chénetier concur that the novel's flow of *dialogue* is "flat" – incapable of bearing authorial implication beyond the immediate communicative or instrumental intent of the characters who speak it. Yet *J R's* dialogue, just like its interactions with the narra-tion, is internally organized in a variety of content-bearing ways.

Tabbi, attentive to Gaddis' "textual exposition" of systemically-constrained lay-ers of cognition, notes how *J R* conveys narrative information through novel-wide echoes: "Next to the first-order (mis)communication among characters, the narrator in J R achieves a kind of second-order communication unavailable to the characters— but available to the attentive reader who is willing to enter into this second-order conversation."[82] David Letzler too sees *J R's* formal organization in terms of infor-mation-extraction, as a "rigorous test… of readers' high-level attention modulation,"

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to "sterile circles," with a narratorial perspective that offers an "unbroken process" of more potentially productive "continuous unfolding" (119).

[82] Tabbi, "Autopoesis," 113.

honing their ability to parse out "text of genuine importance" from "within an avalanche of cruft."[83] Letzler's reading requires significant text and redundant cruft to be semantically similar, but much of the implication within *J R*'s dialogue emerges from its foregrounding of linguistic difference, especially of puns and ambiguities unintended by their speakers. "Import" for both Tabbi and Letzler means information about narrative events, but Gaddis' repertoire of intra-dialogic constructions creates "second-order" conceptual and thematic meaning above and beyond either characters' "first-order" communicative intentions, or information about fictive facts.

Such second-order implication's suggestion of underlying orchestration interrupts the dialogue's putatively author-independent flow, its pretensions to mere transcription. Semantic depths and ideological frictions grow within the very style ostensibly optimized to flatness and flow. As I'll show, Gaddis' corporate work had trained him in the elimination of such depths and frictions, and the four basic forms of intra-dialogue implication that I'll discuss are thus legible as reversals of the corporate work's polarity, restoring communicable communicative friction to a world that sought to eliminate it.

The simplest of *J R*'s flow-interrupting moments of implication come when the novel cues us to treat any of its interrupted sentences as completed by that interruption. A routine business conversation between lawyer Beamish and PR man Davidoff, for example, leads to the following confusion:

> get this grant out so there's no legal snag in the Foundation's tax exempt
> status when he goes into it for a loan to Virginia told you to get Moyst…
> —Moist?
> —Moyst Colonel Moyst told you to get him on the phone" (525).

The pun that makes "get Moyst" a lewd imperative has little thematic significance.[84] What's important is the shift in spelling: "Moist" and "Moyst" are rendered as the

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[83] Letzler, 49.

[84] Travesty of any sort does align with the novel's repeated insistence on money's profaning work, as with JR's repeated expostulation of "holy shit," which early critics treated as a rubric for the novel's argument as a whole.

character intends, rather than for auditory difference. The pun's emergence from miscommunication overcomes the speaker's intent, suggesting that external arrangement can always generate second-order meanings out of language that aspires to be self-contained or purely instrumental. That outward productivity of exceeded intent is the basic premise for the more complex examples that follow.

Perhaps the most frequent of these generative arrangements is counterpoint, in which mutually oblivious speakers cast mutual light intended by neither. Gaddis literalizes that situation in the early scene where school administrators and corporate sponsors discuss the funding of their closed-circuit TV infrastructure, and then their music education program, while watching Bast's disintegrating onscreen Mozart lecture (typographical difference reinforces the two speeches' separation):

> Of course we have you foundation people to thank…
> —**Rich people who commissioned work from artists and gave them money** (40).
> […]
> just in music alone we're already spending on band uniforms alone…
> —**three more piano concertos, two string quartets and the three finest operas ever written, and he's desperate, under-nourished, exhausted, frantic about money…** (41).

These ostensibly simultaneous and overlapping discourses create a single verbal string intelligible in terms of the novel's concern with the relation between artistic composition and finance. This orchestration points us to a composer, Gaddis, beyond the speakers. The control-room dialogue reveals how Bast's patronage problems exceed even those that he laments on Mozart's behalf: the classroom "work" that his "rich people" commission is not the *art*work for which he wants to use their money. Unlike Mozart's patrons, they are indifferent to whether or not he creates; they just require him to recite.[85] Their repetition of "alone," meanwhile, emphasizes the sepa-

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[85] This passage, included in the first published section of *J R* in 1970, was written before Gaddis' corporate career ended, and autobiographical overtones are not hard to infer.

ration between their and Bast's understanding of "music": for him a compositional practice and communicative experience, for them a discrete budget category.[86] This infrastructural separation of artist from art means that it's not Bast who gets to say the word "music," and just as the administrative sentence starts with that word but moves on to fripperies, Bast's own sentences begin with "artists" and specific forms of artwork, but run through negative mental states to end at their cause: "money." These authorially-orchestrated echoes and parallels develop a critical, historical account of the money-art relation, but unknown to the speakers who, "alone," lack the perspective to develop it.

If those two modes of implication create supplemental meaning out of the forward-tumbling overlap between speakers, then Gaddis also makes significance out of the solecism and stumbling within speech. Malapropisms, for example, often restore second-order communication to instrumental jargon. See, for example, the late scene where JR asks Bast to marry the daughter of an executive to help him regain some boardroom control:

> they got this gossip calumnist to like fix you up with her hey Bast?... she's this whole heiress of these two hundred shares of Diamond Cable hey Bast? Where she gets these rights to them once you marry her to vote them when we make this here tender offer hey? Then you get this divorce just like everybody… (657).

If the pun in "gossip calumnist" is self-explanatory cynicism, then that in "tender offer" is more thematically salient. Its technical meaning is the price a company's owners offer shareholders for a buyout. But here it's an accidental travesty of the actions and emotions involved in a marriage proposal: JR's vision hollows

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[86] Allan usefully develops Bast's communicative commitments into an account of the novel's own worldly work. "*J R* itself is formally organized around the question of how a truly social form of art might yet provide a worthy alternative to the politics of the neoliberal market" (221): for her, *J R*'s notorious formal "difficulty" makes its transmission of authorial intent necessarily complex and collaborative: it generates price-defiant sociality because it's "an *im*perfect object" of psychological exchange between reader and writer (235).

such human relations out to a repertoire of contractual moves. "Tender offer" specifically reduces affective human negotiations to a model predicated on conglomerate audiences and market determinations of worth. The pun highlights how a world like *J R*'s makes the technical meaning more first-order intuitive to a child than the affective. Here, then, Gaddis uses dialogue alone to achieve the kind of revivification of dead language that Chénetier had thought restricted to the narration.

Beyond malapropisms and travesty, Gaddis makes thematically salient wordplay out of even the stutters and stumblings that ought most clearly to embody Letzler's irrelevant "cruft." Take, for example, the passage in which headmaster Whiteback tries to explain how the school's personality-testing will match each child to an existing set of punch-cards:

> "this equipment item is justified when we testor tailing, tailor testing to the norm, and [...] the only way we can establish this norm, in terms of this ongoing situation that is to say, is by the testing itself" (22).

Whiteback's initial stumble, his "testor(ed) tailing," flips phonemes just as his testing flips the sequence of norm, data and subject.[87] Even more than the travesty of "tender offer," this articulates *J R*'s central structural principle, matching up with cart-before-horse promulgations of bureaucratic norm throughout the novel, as press-releases precede and dictate events, misspelled business cards require legal name-changes, and so on. Testored Tailing, in other words, specifies in *J R* the worldview Gaddis had, in identical terms, warned against in "Some Observations...": a system that has overridden regulatory "human judgment" "demands orders tailored to... itself." Gad-

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[87] Spencer makes the punchcard plot his main example of Gaddis' "critical mimesis," though without analyzing the language. Gaddis may have encountered this line of thinking, perhaps even specific machinic implementations of it, in his work on educational television for the Ford Foundation. In the document produced by others after he was removed from the project, we get a frank acknowledgement that Ford's stake in education is less about students' needs than "manpower requirements of business and industry," so that there's a classroom need for "reducing the useful information to machine-processable form" (International Research Associates 2, 3).

dis's corporate work—even pre-dating "Some Observations…"[88]—worked out the basic structure, and vocabulary, for *J R*'s critique of an administered society.

J R, through Whiteback, renders Gaddis' corporate-work warnings about skewing the input to the filter as stylistic comedy. And this comes at the novel's outset; Whiteback's worldview is a given, not a pending threat. His seemingly incidental spoonerism epitomizes Gaddis' stylistic mimesis of how administrative capitalism's worldview actively limits permissible inputs and hence constructs the world it claims only to reflect or enable.[89] Testored Tailing is the managerialist flow against which *J R* seeks ways to restore friction, and its clearest formulation in the novel comes through wordplay rather than narrative event.

What the four examples I've discussed have in common is their making supplemental, salient meaning out of apparent flatness or "cruft." The elements that have led so many critics to figure J R's dialogue as vacuous—its constant interruption, overlap, malapropism, stumbling—all serve at times to create semantic content rather than, in Letzler's word, dissolving it. Gaddis's fractured dialogue isn't just a device for dispersing information about narrative events, but develops moments of seeming disintegration into some of the novel's most important argument.[90]

Though most critics treat *J R*'s dialogue as undifferentiated semantic flatness and uniform chronological flow, the structures by which Gaddis makes meaning within it reveal potential depth—in Chénetier's sense of authorial conspicuousness and meaning-generative capacity—and potential friction too. As I've examined in both

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[88] The abandoned book on television education for the Ford Foundation, for example, discusses the possible misuse of classroom technology in "tailor" terms: "another surrender of content to technique, with test questions tailored to electronic capabilities and, eventually, the course material tailored to the questions" (Gaddis, *Television…*, IV-46). And this matches undated notes from the early drafts of *Agapē Agape*: "just as the product is modified by the machine's capabilities, we ourselves are conditioned for the criteria they shall set, and that decadent sequence cited earlier, leisure-boredom-entertainment-technology, has come full circle in our technology which thrusts leisure, boredom, and entertainment upon us" (Gaddis, loose note towards *Agapē*, 6).

[89] Focusing more on narrative events than style, Christopher Knight usefully suggests that *J R* is about "American capitalism's rather successful bid to identify reality with itself" (84).

[90] Letzler's claim that the novel offers training in sorting relevant and irrelevant text still holds, on my reading; the object of interest just changes from narrative information to thematic gloss, with a corresponding widening of the criteria for considering a piece of text salient.

narration and dialogue, the novel's sentences constantly seem set to mean one thing before the next word forces a reintegration of the whole, often by re-prioritizing secondary or tertiary meanings of words. This makes those hinge-words conspicuous within Letzler's "avalanche," interrupting its monolithic flow by forcing us to check, think, re-process. As Tabbi's stress on supra-intentional meaning suggests, this interferes precisely with the promulgation of Testored Tailing by individual agents: defying first-order speech goals, these moments highlight internal frictions and contradictions within the ideology's top-down dialogic flow. The organizing principles of systems aren't objectively assessable by the agents who comprise the systems, on Tabbi's reading: only from a reader's perspective, with Letzler's trained attention, are these frictions legible. But legible they are, and further framed as exploitable. The stylistic innovations I've examined clarify that the flattening instrumental speech of Testored Tailing harbours—in language's systematic capacity to exceed speakers' reductive efforts with counter- or supra-intentional meaning—the resources for its own obstruction.

These moments, then, are vehicles for what I'll call ideological friction.[91] They restore the possibility of competing meanings and perspectives to a world whose initial conditions seemed to eliminate these as anachronisms. This dynamic is another legacy of Gaddis' corporate writing.

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"Ideological friction" is a trope warranted by the way so much of Gaddis' corporate work required him to assemble ideologically "smooth" and coherent documents out of an array of contradictory source materials pushed on him by institutional agents with competing interests. *J R*'s stylistic moves restore to its world the kind of friction and depth that Gaddis' corporate work had trained him in eliminating, as in one of his earliest assignments for IBM—a 1963 brochure on their educational investment policies. The archive preserves three full and two partial drafts, which let us trace the eliminations step by step.

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[91] I use "ideology" here as loosely as possible, meaning only that the novel suggests that each speech act promotes a particular form of political and economic organization, and that, as I'll discuss in more detail later, these speech acts are figured as motivated by specific, material, and humanly embodied interests.

This was technically an internal document, but produced explicitly in order to be able to show to national audiences.[92] The sources and ongoing feedback Gaddis was asked to synthesize were correspondingly incompatible, but all leave identifiable traces in his final draft. His basic problem was the need to balance "public relations dividends"[93] with explicit discussion of how education funding served the "development" of IBM "resources."[94] Should "IBM" and "industry" be the agentive protagonists of the brochure, or should they appear only in service to "Education" and "society"? While his early drafts preserved overt conflict between industry and culture at the sentence level, the final version coherently subordinated them. His phrasing—for example on "American industry's permanent obligation to education, as the source of its own talent and vitality"[95]—stresses an "obligation to education," but leaves industry the basic value.[96] Meanwhile, he dealt with IBM's cutting down on PR-friendly "unrestricted" grants[97]—as their "contribution philosophy" "matur[ed] from one of 'charity by reaction' to one of 'investment by direction'"[98]—by reframing

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[92] As an IBM-internal speech among Gaddis' sources notes, there was usually a clear difference: "Publicly, we do report our education support activity through the Case Book published every two years by the Council for Financial Aid to Education […] Internally, the how, what, and why of our efforts is outlined in a talk which is included in the IBM speech file" (Steers, "Address to IBM Corporate Recruiting," 2).

[93] Steers, "Address to IBM Corporate Recruiting," 3. These could not be too overt: when trying to work out how to mention a grant matching program, Gaddis' notes show how he had to syntactically subordinate IBM's role: "NO – this looks like IBM taking credit" (Gaddis, "Draft notes for IBM brochure," unpaginated).

[94] Ibid., 3.

[95] Gaddis, "Brochure on IBM Support of Education," 1.

[96] Such a neat resolution allowed Gaddis, in this final draft, to restore and explicitly explain a term that his earliest drafts had used almost shame-facedly about IBM alone: "Enlightened self-interest does not merely involve industry's welfare, but that of the entire society in which it operates" (Gaddis, "Brochure," 1). Over the course of his drafts, Gaddis develops sentence structures that put non-IBM interests in the grammatically fundamental clauses, while his arguments stress those interests' practical dependence on IBM's generosity and wisdom.

[97] Gaddis thus couldn't mimic the Esso brochures he had been given as examples, which made "unrestricted" a rallying point, underlining it, beginning pages with it in capital letters and different fonts, and trumpeting the connection between Esso grants' lack of restriction and the company's wish "to increase the knowledge upon which rests the material, intellectual, and spiritual development of mankind" ("Esso Education Foundation Report," 1). Gaddis' supervisors, JC Steers in particular, encouraged him to model his rhetoric on Esso's florid approach: of the various models "this is the one we like best" (Steers, Memo to Lerner), while whatever Gaddis produced "should have the same kind of flavour" (Unattributed memo). Talking to university leaders, Steers had acknowledged that it was "the unrestricted dollar… which the college and university regard as most useful," ("The Role of Industry…", 2)

[98] Steers, "Address to IBM Corporate Recruiting," 3.

the term to apply not to IBM's money but to their abstract commitments, as in "unrestricted basic research with guaranteed freedom of inquiry…"[99] He also resolved his supervisors' contradictory advice about how to frame IBM's decreasing funding to the humanities. After initial imperatives to stress funding for maths, science, and management training, the addition of a new supervisor after the first draft saw Gaddis suddenly asked to stress IBM's commitment to humanistic education as a response to the space race, which demanded a reassertion of the difference between technologist communism and the "pluralist" "wide-ranging and free mind of the well-educated American."[100] Gaddis dealt with this by playing up IBM's increased funding for mathematical study as an increase in commitment to the liberal arts, none of which beyond maths got a mention.[101]

The clearest example of Gaddis' competence in the smoothing of ideological friction, however, comes on a topic where he made changes himself without top-down prompting. One supervisor wanted him to publicize IBM's work on "projects to facilitate adjustment to automation."[102] Gaddis thus developed it into a significant theme in his first full draft, tying it closely to discussions of "human resources" and training future workers. The conflict between automation and the "human" led early drafts into philosophical confusions, which Gaddis' notes suggest he was aware of. This was as ever a matter of the sources he was trying to reconcile. In documents for IBM audiences, the field of automation offers only "exciting prospects," its fresh achievements are "newsworthy."[103] But in the public-facing sources, automation is a pending mystery that always collocates with "social change."[104] His initial-draft rhetoric was more

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[99] Gaddis, "IBM Department of Education: 1963 Progress Report…", 3.

[100] Watson, 4, 8.

[101] This required a shift of approach: in early notes he had answered his own speculation about whether his employers "want to identify IBM with mathematics (as a humanism)?" with a marginal "NO" to the "as." ("Draft notes for IBM brochure," unpaginated.)

[102] Bowen.

[103] Steers, "Address to IBM Corporate Recruiting," 6.

[104] IBM funded academic lecture series that put this language in their titles: a "Columbia University Seminar on Technology and Social Change," and seminars at Penn State on "Problems of Technology and Social Change." See Gaddis' draft notes in Box No. 131, Folder 469. The issue's urgent high profile was not particular to IBM: for a very different audience at a 1964 free speech rally at Berkeley, Mario Savio could suggest that the "most crucial problems facing the United States today are the problem of automation and the problem of racial justice" (195).

in line with public worry than IBM celebration: treating automation as a "challenge" with unpredictable "ramifications" of which "the public becomes more aware," and above all as a "problem" next to which IBM's unspecified "positive solution"s seemed pretty unpersuasive.[105] Where IBM had wanted the topic stressed in order to emphasize their interest in getting schoolchildren exposed early, Gaddis's initial draft took a wider perspective on living "in a period of accelerating change," anticipating *J R*'s concern with unrestricted expansion and things ramifying faster than the initiators can control.[106]

The subsequent first submitted draft removes all the wavering: Gaddis mentions automation only once, discussing IBM's role in "a special teaching unit and film strip to familiarize junior high school students with computers and automation."[107] Automation here is no longer a contested novelty: it's a given, to which kindly IBM helps the world get "familiarized." Gaddis' initial attempts to juggle the attitudes handed down to him produced something morally ambivalent, but the latter draft removes the moral question. He replaced most mentions of the abstract process of "automation" with emphasis on the content of classes about "science and technology." Rather than problems of "adapting" to automation, he focuses on "revising career guidance services and educational approaches in the light of technological advance," "advance" connoting a positivity and control absent from his initial focus on "accelerating change."[108] Gaddis made these changes before he got any external feedback, and the topic of automation required no explicit revisions in his final draft. Even on this very early project Gaddis could do the work of removing ideological friction and flattening competing discourses unprompted. This was true even when the very frictions he was removing were those he would later foreground in *J R*.

The crucial revelation here, then, is that the corporate work didn't just give Gaddis a jargon to work with, but taught him exactly what that jargon was concealing and how because it was so often he who had to conceal it. The flat language of systemic business in *J R* is, as Gaddis knew from experience, a strenuously repressive

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[105] Gaddis, "IBM Department of Education: 1963 Progress Report…", 16.

[106] Ibid., 16.

[107] Ibid., 9.

[108] Ibid., 11.

construction, not just an emergent "postmodern" condition. Writing *J R* as a critique of the mindset he'd learned to work in, he could simply reverse the polarities and restore the ambivalences. He could highlight the ineliminable ideological faultlines within a discourse designed to deny them. If "Some Observations…" was Gaddis' clearest first-person engagement with friction-problems and the limits of a testored-tailing mindset, his ventriloquous and anonymous documents gave him a training in removing ideological friction and veiling the language of bad faith, corporate self-interest, and straightforward hypocrisy. This helped him write a novel that mimics the smooth flatness and flow of those documents while consistently drawing judgmental attention to the ambivalences that they strove to elide. Once again, the practicalities of the corporate work help us understand the rhetorical resources of the fictive style.

On this reading of Gaddis' "technical training," he didn't just recapitulate his corporate work through mimicry, but inverted it from the inside, finding ways to represent achievements of friction and its potentially paradigm-resistant work that, as I'll show, finally move outward from language to affect the events of the novel's narrative.

Style Guide ≠ Rhetoric Guide

John Johnston argues that "*J R* intends neither compensation nor redemption; it is simply a demonstration, in the most rigorous terms imaginable, of one aspect of the 'postmodern condition' in which we now live."[109] Such purely mimetic approaches insist on a narrative as well as a stylistic flatness: *J R* can't develop any perspective beyond the flatness and flow that characterize its basic form. The way it initially frames its world must be its entire rhetoric. Yet as I'll show, major narrative developments—like the collapse of JR's empire, Bast's success and Gibbs' failures in composition, or the switching relation to friction in Bast's relationship to *J R*—correspond to stylistic modulations. A "demonstration" reading can't attach rhetorical significance to these developments.[110] Before I examine how the "redemptive" friction-reading

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[109] Johnston, 205.

[110] The problems this causes critics committed to rhetorical flatness become clear when Clune—who for all his anti-mimetic approach still sees the novel as a hypothetical "demonstration" of a world without subjectivity—has to ignore the last third of JR's personal and business trajectory: his account of JR's "insanely successful career" (21) is based on a "five-hundred-page novel consisting entirely of dialogue" (20), wishing away the last 250 pages in which the "success" falls apart.

I've derived from the corporate-work/novel relation migrates from the stylistic to the narrative, I'll address the archive's strongest support for a rhetorical-flatness approach: Gaddis' "Style Notes on the Manuscript for the Novel J R," which Sonia Johnson uncovered and discussed for 2012's social media reading event "Occupy Gaddis" (See **Figure 3**).[111]

TO: R. Gottlieb
FROM: W Gaddis

Style Notes on the manuscript for the novel J R

Generally speaking, the purpose of style departures in this book is to present pages which are not littered with punctuation in an attempt to speed the reader along, to soften distinctions between narration and dialogue (essentially the purpose of the 1 em dash rather that quotation marks) and, since the book is largely narration, to attempt to capture sound, to remove the narrator as much as possible and oblige the story to tell itself.

commas: reflecting this attempt to capture sound, commas have been placed (or deleted) with some care and should be left as indicated in copy.

italics: please note elimination of all italics, either for emphasis or titles &c., where w initial capitals should suffice.

quotation marks: please note elimination of all single or double quote marks. Since these are not a part of spoken dialogue (as when a character reads a line from a letter, book &c.) consistency dictated removing them throughout.

hyphens: excepting for those necessitated by a word broken at the end of a line, I have tried to avoid hyphenated words as far as legitimately possible, without on the other hand running words together (her rubyred lips) as a delaying affectation in the other direction. For instance 'grownup size shoes' seems legitimate; as also does dropping the hyphen where it might be used in modifiers (tax (tax exempt bonds, rather than tax-exempt bonds) does also. This approach may create problems with spelled out figures, as 'a three thousand two hundred forty one dollar car' and I leave these to your discretion with the plea only to hyphenate as minimally as possible, where necessary.

abbreviations: since people say Mister Smith, Doctor Smith &c. I have spelled out these normally abbreviated titles throughout. Since 'Mrs Smith' presents an exception, I prefer no period after Mrs since s is the last letter of the word being abbreviated (Mistress). People also say three rather than 3, so that numbers are spelled out in dialogue.

periods: pursuant to the above, I prefer these eliminated throughout, as J R, U S Army, rather than J.R., U. S. Army. I leave to your discretion the spacing, as U S Army vs US Army: I would incline toward separation (J R rather than JR) as more consistent with spoken speech.

capitalization: I prefer to refrain from capitalization excepting where this defeats its purpose and appears a jarring affectation. Thus 'ninety sixth street' may be going to far; I should prefer 'Ninety sixth street' to 'Ninety sixth Street' but will defer if even this seems jarring (but would hope to avoid 'Ninety-sixth Street').

colons and semi-colons: are generally absent and should not be inserted unless indicated.

misspellings: while this manuscript has been quite carefully and repeatedly read, it is possible some misspellings occur which are not deliberate; however a fair number of deliberate misspellings do appear (business representive) which I have not marked 'stet' throughout; therefore the safest course is to spell as per copy throughout. This would also go for run-together words (inless marked /
appearing for instance in drunken conversation (eg 'sdisgusgusment!)

Figure 3: Gaddis' Style Guide for *J R*'s editor.

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[111] Johnson; Gaddis, "Style Notes."

Gaddis tells his editor that J R's distinguishing "style departures" function

> "to present pages which are not littered with punctuation in an
> attempt to speed the reader along, to soften distinctions between
> narration and dialogue (essentially the purpose of the l em dash rather
> than quotation marks) and, since the book is largely narration, to attempt
> to capture sound, to remove the narrator as much as possible and to
> oblige the story to tell itself."[112]

Though he doesn't use the word itself, as he would in his later Paris Review interview,[113] it's clear that Gaddis' stipulations focus almost entirely on generating the mimetic experience of "flow."[114] Removing obstacles to the inner ear and to the eye on the page, he aimed to create a textual world that would "sweep along" his readers as the dialogue of others so often sweeps Bast, Gibbs, or the lawyer Beaton, highlighting the struggle of what Karl called a "life outside what the flow determines." Explicitly constructing flow, these notes make no mention of depth, of friction, of development: of anything, that is, that would suggest Gaddis' stylistic departures left space for the representation of resistance.

It would be a mistake, though, to take these notes—which set out the overall grammar of the novel much like a newspaper's style guide sets out its conventions of punctuation, abbreviation, and citation—as a guide to what the novel does *within* the terms of those conventions. For that very reason, it clarifies that the stylistic and narrative givens of *J R*'s world make a *fait accompli* of the eliminative efficiency-dream of "smooth" flatness and flow Gaddis warned against throughout his corporate career. The "Style Notes" show Gaddis excising forms of on-page friction to establish flow as

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[112] Gaddis, "Style Notes."

[113] "it was my hope—for many readers it worked, for others it did not—that having made some effort they would not read too agonizedly slowly and carefully, trying to figure out who is talking and so forth. It was the *flow* that I wanted, for the readers to read and be swept along—to participate" (Gaddis, "William Gaddis: The Art of Fiction…")

[114] The other explicit goal here, to "capture sound" (Gaddis, "Style Notes"), recalls *J R*'s formal-self-consciousness in the Frigicom plot, but again, "Style Notes" is not the kind of document to give us any clues as to how to construe Frigicom's potential hoaxery or its relation to friction.

the novel's formal dominant. They don't, however, tell us whether or how the novel goes about putting that dominant in question. Concerned only with the experience of eyes processing the page, this document addresses systems-thinking or economic postmodernity as little as it addresses friction or resistance. Its remit is narrow. "Style" here is a matter of removals,[115] and the notes tell us nothing about interpretation or construal. As a guide for someone preparing the book, not for someone reading it, it offers little insight about rhetorical implication.[116] Its separation from the kind of style-centric reading I've offered of specific passages reflects its separation from the question of the novel's rhetorical development: this is what makes it a style-guide rather than a reading-guide.

If it takes a reader only a few pages to get to grips with the stylistic givens established by "Style Notes…," then I don't read the subsequent 700 as "flat" reiteration of those givens. I'll show finally how the stylistic rhetoric I've derived from the corporate work's correspondences with the novel—*J R's* sentence-level resources for recuperating "human judgment," resistant meaning, and ideological friction—influences events and the narrative's overall shape. In Johnston's terms, *J R* is precisely interested in the "redemption" of written-off human categories rather than mere "rigorous" "demonstration" of a supra-human "now," and that redemption happens, eventually, in narrative action as well as stylistic implication.

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[115] Gaddis' own composition-process for *J R* illuminates what he hoped to achieve with these excisions. He wants full stops, for example, "eliminated throughout, as J R, U S Army, rather than J.R., U.S. Army". The archive reveals that throughout almost all his thousands of pages of drafts toward the novel, these periods are included. The style guide thus formalizes the elimination of traces of work already expended; thousands of typed periods that could have been skipped in the drafting were instead, come the final version, deliberately removed. Gaddis didn't ask his editors to preserve a time-saving device, but asked them to insert absences to better conjure a world of time-saving. Perhaps relatedly, Amy Joubert is, throughout thousands of pages of drafts, spelled Amie; only in the last versions was her name one less letter to type. For an account of the removal-based revisions Gaddis made to a previously published section of *J R* (more than 600 in 40 pages), see Moore, 77.

[116] Fellow novelist Joseph McElroy's list of what "Gaddis left out of J R" addresses "faces, places, physical presence, gesture as language, collision, body's collusion with or clothing of the soul" (64). But, like the style guide itself, even this list leaves out the most thematically fundamental elimination: that of traditionally transcriptive thought-representation. That this could go unmentioned by Gaddis himself in "Style Notes" makes clear the document's restricted remit.

Style, Events, and *J R*'s Rhetorical Arc

To understand the axis of style and narrative on which Bast and JR's exchange of relations to friction takes place, we need to understand language's role in the Testored Tailing that links the novel's form to the corporate work's insights. The corporate work insists on this connection, from defining "improved communication" in anti-judgment managerial terms in "A Better Way," to echoing *Agapē Agape*'s preoccupation with the limits of "machine capabilities" in the late IBM software film's discussion of "a language suited to the machine's limited capabilities… which will enable it to function."[117] The models of efficiency promulgated in such work require that the psychological depths "in which decisions are made" conform to "management terms… management language."[118]

If Testored Tailing is Gaddis' stylistic rendering of how his characters get "conditioned" for "machine capabilities," then he makes clear that "management," its "terms," and its "language" are active agents of that conditioning. *J R*, like the corporate work, frames the flattening flow of Testored Tailing as intentional, top-down, directed, and uni-directional.[119] Consequently, the way aspects of language are transmitted from person to person tells us both how the system works, and where those "ideological friction" breakdowns can be identified and exploited.

Testored Tailing is not just a quirk of Whiteback's personality and language: its top-down intentionality becomes clear as the novel gradually reveals more information about his place, as school principal, in a chain of command down which language and ideology flow. Below him, administering the punchcards that will set the norms, is school psychologist Dan DiCephalis, below whom, reading classroom scripts, are teachers like Bast and Gibbs. Immediately above Whiteback is Major Hyde, a military

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[117] Zornow, "A Better Way" 1968, 9; Gaddis, "Software" second draft, 1–2. Müller examines the influence of Wall Street computerization on the culture in which *J R* was composed, without addressing Gaddis' own New York corporate-world experience.

[118] Zornow, "A Better Way" 1968, 9.

[119] For Johnston, "[t]he novel relentlessly demonstrates that it is not production or intelligible purpose but the ceaseless movement and proliferation of useless information and objects that define our world" (198). But seeing Testored Tailing as the fulfilment of the wilful identification between management and mere systemic efficiency, we can see the particular structures of movement *J R* represents as "production"s of "intelligible purpose," and criticized in those terms.

man employed by a subsidiary of Typhon International, the over-arching corporation run by Governor Cates, a politician and businessman who inspires JR early on in the novel. Cates is the clearest linguistic embodiment of the "management" ideology in the novel, the character whose speech most clearly folds decision and action into a single flow of performative sorting that can act in the world without recourse to unspoken deliberative depths, as in this passage in which he trouble-shoots issues raised by the lawyer Beaton:

> First thing I want cleaned up's these damned mining claims Beaton get Frank Black's office find out if they're worth the damn paper they're written on this outfit's in there on mineral exploration just to cut timber get hold of Monty, Interior serve them with an injunction maybe they'll be ready to do business, when Broos calls get him onto that old sheep state... (433).

This flow of instrumental talk is the norm to which the rest of the world must be tailored: a norm transmitted to schoolchildren through Bast's script, delivered to him by DiCephalis, who's supervised by Whiteback, who's employed by Hyde, who's controlled through a variety of corporate functionaries who answer to Cates, whose corporation includes the manufacturers of the school's TV equipment. [120]

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[120] Gaddis' treatment of Cates may have less to do with economic postmodernity than with ideas about the relationship between management, reason, and thinking articulated by Max Horkheimer as early as 1947: Cates is what speech looks like when "[c]omplicated logical operations are carried out without actual performance of all the intellectual acts upon which the mathematical and logical symbols are based. Such mechanization is indeed essential to the expansion of industry; but if it becomes the characteristic feature of minds, if reason itself is instrumentalized, it takes on a kind of materiality and blindness..." (23). The top-down structure of, and wilful assent to, Testored Tailing is there too in Horkheimer's worry that "the individual's self-preservation presupposes his adjustment to the requirements for the preservation of the system" (95–6). Horkheimer even pre-empts a *J R* plot point when he mentions "[t]he story of the boy who looked up at the sky and asked 'Daddy, what is the moon supposed to advertise?'" (101): at one point, Amy points the rising moon out to JR as a contrast to the world in which he sees a millionaire behind everything. Later, we find out that he, and perhaps the boy in Horkheimer's tale, were less naïve: "it's this top of this here Carvel ice cream stand? Tell her if she wants to bet her ass if there's this millionaire for that" (661). At any rate, Horkheimer's argument sets two forms of reason against each other—industrial rationalization and deliberative judgment—in much the same way as *J R*, and through a similar examination of what happens when humans choose to internalize one at the expense of the other.

But if Cates' language embodies the flatness and flow necessary for thriving in the world he wants to make in his own image, Whiteback's malapropisms, his identifying hesitations of "ahm," his incoherent jargon, all clarify that the process of transmitting management's ideological "language" down the chain is subject to human inefficiencies.[121] If Cates, as the absent aegis of this scene, is the disconnected head suggested by DiCephalis' name, then the passage shows how, at an institutional distance from their motivating source, the reductions of Testored Tailing become a practical necessity.[122] As Stephen Matanle suggests, "Whiteback's language is speaking him, dragging him along behind it," and Whiteback is dragged precisely because the language isn't "his": it's pushed on him by Cates through Hyde.[123] Everyone below Cates conditions their language towards his with the entropic imperfections of human mediation: as Joel Dana Black suggests, their half-conscious institutional willingness to reduce their inputs to match Cates' mode of thinking makes them "willing captives of a discourse they take to be their own."[124] Just as LeClair notes that Cates' flow of language and mastery of "advanced methods of collecting, sorting, and disseminating information" are maintained at the entropic expense of his body—his "failing health implies the energy cost of information sorting"[125]—so the chain of human minds down which he promulgates his mode of thinking generates language scarred by a similar "cost." As Gaddis emphasized throughout his corporate work, such problems must eventually redound back up the chain, and efficiency can

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[121] Even in the section I quoted from Cates, there's a hint of the agentive limits of his sorting-language, as he needs Beaton to 'find out" information from another "office" for him.

[122] It's no coincidence that DiCephalis' name implies headlessness, as at the bottom of the top-down hierarchy he rarely knows what his technology is for. Perplexity extends, this low on the hierarchy, to roles, even to personhood. Whiteback's initial spooneristic account follows an invocation of "Dan," so until DiCephalis speaks and is explicitly identified for the first time in the scene a page later, Whiteback's words seem to be "Dan"'s. Coming so early in a novel in which speaker-identification is a skill that has to be gradually learned through experience, readerly perplexity matches the logic through which Whiteback's linguistic perplexities mirror and reinforce DiCephalis' practical ones.

[123] Matanle, 115.

[124] Black, 165.

[125] LeClair, 95.

only be optimized in practice if the checks and balances of human judgment are acknowledged by overseers.[126]

In *J R*'s world, though, the top-down promulgation has become so hyperstatized that such feedback channels are eliminated or, more often, perverted toward Testored Tailing. DiCephalis' own most reasonable ideas get inverted to the prevailing norm as they go back up the hierarchy, as by Major Hyde:

> we key the human being to, how did you put it once Dan? Key the…
>
> —The individual yes, key the technology to the indiv…
>
> —Dan knows what I'm talking about, key the individual to the technology
>
> find the soft spots in this budget and we're in business (224).

Hyde's strenuously unconscious distortion conveys the human work involved at each step of perpetuating a system that refuses to process what LeClair calls "negative feedback."[127] Angela Allan reads *J R* as an indictment of the way "the market actively seeks to erase anything that might exist outside of it," but the work done by individuals like Hyde shows that this erasure is far from an impersonal process.[128] In portraying this system not as a natural form of organization but as a very deliberate construction by a political class of administrators, Gaddis foregrounds the opportunities for resistance that occur in the labour between levels. His moments of stylistic implication highlight moments—call them the "soft spots"—where the top-down stage-to-stage flow of an ideology comes up against ineliminable communicative imperfections. Language will always provide opportunities for surplus meaning, and

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[126] To take just documents I've already focused on, in the "seek the inefficiency" speech, "[o]nce a systematised approach to the new-product concept is established, someone, some group, some team in the company must be aware of its limitations, and in a position to modify its course, and avoid its pitfalls" (Phillips, "Effective Generation…" 13). Software, meanwhile, must reduce inputs to a machine's level, but to be of any use it must respond to new information through human intermediaries: programs should be "[c]onstantly updated and improved by their users" (Gaddis, "Software" second draft, 16). "A Better Way," meanwhile, balances treatment of management as an end in itself with advice about how it can incorporate the on-the-ground insights of technical workers in a "down-to-up" model. (Zornow, "A Better Way" 1968, 2).

[127] LeClair, 98.

[128] Allan, 227.

human communication-nodes will always provide opportunities for cultivating friction.[129] Hence Allan's insight that *J R* itself functions by highlighting its own role as an object of inevitably imperfect interpretation and interpretation.

If Whiteback's broken syntax and solecisms represent ineptitude at the thoughtless mimicry he aspires to, Bast or Beaton's own syntactical distinctions from Cates or JR represent the presence of deliberate thought. As I'll finally show, the arc of the Bast/JR relation, and the novel as a whole, is shaped by stylistic transmission: Bast gets JR not only to ask for friction, but to take on Bast's own sentence-level signifiers of hesitation and deliberation.

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In Tim Conley's framing, "Bast's 'little communication gap' with JR is essentially the plot of *J R*."[130] The sentence-level details of *J R*'s and Bast's speech-patterns map respectively onto those that align Cates with flatness and flow and Whiteback with communicative friction. The basic contrast is evident in the earlier scene where Bast first tries to get JR to pause:

> —No now stop, just stop for a minute! This, this whole thing has to stop somewhere don't you understand that?
> —No but holy, I mean that's the whole thing Bast otherwise what good is this neat tax loss carryforward and all these here tax credits and all, I mean that's all Eagle is and see where Piscator says here Eagle probably has this here limited charter so they can't buy this brewery but if the pension fund could like buy the brewery stock and the dividends could go right in it and cut down what the company had to put in then see we…
> —Stop it! […] (298).

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[129] In this respect, *J R*'s diagnosis of the contingency of the dominant economic system constrains Gaddis' corporate-work insights about systems' ability to exceed human agency to a model in which, although systems interact, human action is both original problem and only solution. For more on the ineliminable human components and motives of what's promoted as a purely, reassuringly supra-human system, see Clare on corporations' rhetoric about their own political agency.

[130] Conley, 528.

JR's form of thinking relies on momentum, as his commitment to the "neat tax loss carryforward" makes clear and the subsequent unpunctuated rush of "then"-thinking embodies in prose. The profit-mode fluency of Cates' or JR's business-thinking corresponds to vocal flow in the effectual world.[131] Yet *J R*'s flow depends for impetus on a figuration of friction: Bast's repeated entreaties to "stop". While both characters' responses to each other begin with "no," Bast's is continuous with subsequent negativity—his "Stop"'s or interrupted "I don't"'s—whereas JR reverts to active instrumentality as soon as his "no" regains conversational control. JR's "no"'s, in other words, represent only the rejection of obstacle or of others' asserted selves.[132] This conversation frames flow, then, not as an independent quality, but as a deliberate and targeted assault on friction. The world in which friction could be a physical and conceptual given is, early in *J R,* the world that language like Cates' and JR's overwhelms. And this is especially true where friction is associated with thought, with a mediating depth between judgment and effectual speech. This dynamic of threat aligns narratorial sympathy with characters granted psychological depth, like Bast the artist, Gibbs the critic, Beaton the lawyerly cog in the system.

Tabbi, stressing the fracture and incoherence internal to each speech in *J R*, claims that "[t]here is no question of staging ideological conflicts or religious crises in the conversations among characters."[133] Yet as Bast's attempts to make JR hesitate show, the ideological conflict is staged not as debate, but precisely in the orchestrated confrontation of forms of speech that stand for different modes of thought. Bast and JR differ not just in what they say *about* friction, but in its relation to the fundamental structures of their prose. *J R*'s vast array of details and dialogues finally boils down, as Gaddis himself suggested, to a single ideological conflict: "the artist

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[131] This gapless yoking of thought and speech hyperstatizes the old stylistic trope of a stream of consciousness. Where that signalled fiction's claim to remove worldly mediations from the access to consciousness, JR's speech foregrounds the obsolescence of mediating consciousness in a world defined by instrumental talk. *J R*, that is to say, inverts a modernist art-convention for thought-presentation into a presentation about the thoughtless condition of postmodern life.

[132] See Tabbi, *Nobody Grew*, on recognition of others as a *J R* theme.

[133] Tabbi, "Autopoesis", 93.

as 'inner-directed' confronting a materialistic world,"[134] or, in the corporate-stylistic rectangle of tropes I've developed, the mindset of depth/friction facing the cultural and linguistic hegemony of flatness/flow.[135] In effect, the novel represents the two *characters* as different competing types of *person*.[136] Their novel represents not just a world of flow but a set of conflicts and stakes intrinsic to that world.[137] The novel's final hundred pages, in which JR and Bast swap syntax, tells us how the novel moves beyond building a gerundive tableau of Bast "confronting a materialistic world" to suggest viable ways of resisting that world's terms.

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As *J R* aligns characters according to patterns of speech, so it develops by modulating those alignments. Stylistic contagion between speakers is one way that flow expands its flattening empire, but in the transmission that defines Bast and JR's final scene as co-workers, the discursive contagion moves in the opposite direction, conjuring thought where style and narrative had seemed to erase it. Bast and JR switch places in relation to friction and flow over the course of 400 pages, so that the latter finally comes to plead "how am I supposed to stop everything!" (647). Conspicuously invert-

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[134] "Finally, it's the artist as 'inner-directed' confronting a materialistic world—brokers, bankers, salesmen, factory workers, most politicians, the lot—that JR himself represents, and which is 'outer-directed,' if you want it in sociological terms." (Gaddis, "William Gaddis: The Art of Fiction…"). In terms of JR's capacity for depth, it's notable that even outer-direction entails the existence of more than one plane, and so exceeds its own association with flatness.

[135] Christopher Knight is one critic to have made the case that *J R* creates different kinds of character, suggesting that "we make a mistake if, propelled by our postmodern ambitions, we choose to conflate, or reduce, all of Gaddis' characters into this single posthuman type" (121). Knight doesn't go so far as to imply any structural relationship between *J R*'s "flat" and "deep" character-types, however.

[136] I use "person" here in its broadest sense of a category for different types of embodied agency, from sovereign human subjects to consciousness-imputed objects to the legal status of corporations. For a discussion of the term's changing remit and cultural relevance across twentieth century US fiction, see the first chapter of Chodat.

[137] If Johnston conflated all the novel's characters under the claim that "[w]hat we see of them in any given scene is all there is, for they cast no shadows of an interior psychological complexity" (109), Gaddis' fellow novelist Joseph McElroy identifies the ellipses in dialogue throughout *J R* and *The Recognitions* as a sign of "a self hung up in its parts, falling short, doubt's pause, second thoughts" (67): his attribution of some of what's on the page to underlying structures of unvocalized thought importantly establishes that *J R* represents persons capable of doubts, thoughts, a self at all. Both Johnston and McElroy imply that all *J R*'s characters speak the same and so are the same, whereas the core of my argument is that, by transmission of certain patterns of language, the novel posits that different forms of *personhood* become transmissible.

ing their earlier conversation's friction/flow dynamic, Gaddis casts into doubt its sug-
gestion that judgers and doubters must always stay on the back foot against the
linguistic flow of instrumental flatteners.

While the later scene's language still associates JR with frictionlessness—as in his
pleasure at reading himself described as "this like *greasy* eminence behind the whole
meteoric rise of J R Corp" (my italics, 647)—and begins with Bast still on the back
foot—"look 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!" (647)—the
situation in which they take on these roles has changed. The crisis in JR's empire, and
his dawning awareness that the number of moving parts has exceeded his process-
ing capacities, sees him looking outside himself for help, paying enough attention
to Bast to notice for once that "You looked like you weren't listening" (645). Bast's
role, and style, similarly shifts when his frustrations spill out in exasperation at JR's
self-conception as a "man of vision":

> You know it's been right from the start your surprise coup taking over Eagle
> you were more surprised than anybody, you didn't even know what X-L
> made when you had to buy it you asked me what's a lithograph you never
> thought of flooding the country with those damn matchbooks till you read
> someplace you'd already done it… (656).

Bast diagnoses JR's pretensions to the psychological category of "vision" as the chro-
nology-flipping rationalization of Testored Tailing. More importantly Bast's words
here for the first time come out as unpunctuated, as free from implication of consid-
eration or revision, as JR's own. And this forces JR into the role of doubter, hesitator,
deliberator. Nowhere else in the novel is JR so defensive and lost for words. Bast's
subsequent refusal to stay around and argue puts JR in the position of asking for
hesitation:

> —No but, hey? hey Bast? Wait up I can't hardly see where I'm, hey…? he
> came on kicking through leaves for a remnant of sidewalk, —I mean what
> did you say, this, this here man of vision I mean what's so trash about that!
> (658).

Bast's physically outpacing JR forces the latter into a querying, grasping prose exacerbated by the obstacular world under his feet, grasping physically for "a remnant" of built structuration, having to acknowledge his sightlessness while defending his claim to "vision." In this reversal, JR takes on the kind of imperative frictive or negative verbs he has always over-ridden from Bast and Amy—"wait wait hey quit" (658). And this defensiveness leads to him taking on the hesitations, reconfigurations, and other syntactical intimations of psychological depth that the novel had always associated with Bast's defensive position. For the first time in the novel, there's a gap between JR's words and his actions in which a burgeoning metacognition can take root: "I mean I'm just finding out everything's just like the opposite of how I thought" (662).

JR is consequently left to fend for himself not only against the situation spiralling beyond his processing capacity, but against the revealed contingency of the "rules" he adopted from his first meeting with Cates:

> I do what you're suppose to and everybody gets…
> —But why, why are you supposed to! That's what I've…
> —No sir boy you, I mean like […] (660–1).

The four discrete words that begin this line fail to quell Bast's question. Where their previous dialogue has been characterized by JR interrupting and negating any Bast objection with sentences that begin interchangeably with "yes", "no", or "okay" followed by a "but" and a continuation of flow, this passage suggests that, in the exhaustion of the instrumental flow style of speech, JR must grasp around for new capacities. At the scene's opening, Bast discovers he's being prosecuted for insider trading: "Inside? That's, how could I be inside there isn't any inside. How could anybody believe the, the only inside's the one inside your head like these statements you make, these tapes you play over the phone to these newspapers" (644). The scene goes on to bear out that JR does actually have an inside, that there's potentially more to him than exchange-calculations. Forced to confront a world and a worker that won't cooperate, he is left to deliberate a genuine answer to the question of "what do you expect me to do" that can't take its cues from the "you" of inherited "rules."

The scene reiterates, then, what Gaddis had always suggested throughout his corporate work: the flatness and flow of the novel's business-world dialogue was not a naturalized condition of modern economics or evolving subjectivities, but a top-down promulgated worldview that serves particular corporate interests through particular corporate structures, and that depends on wilful assent. The dead incoherence of so much of the novel's speech is not a diagnosis of all communication, but deliberately hollowed out by those interests and those structures. The JR/Bast arc, then, indicts a managerial culture's wilful degradation of human inputs, but also suggests that the "human judgment" Bast stylistically embodies can, in all its inefficiency, finally have impact outside the depths of an isolated mind. After Gaddis shows that it(s style) can be inculcated even "inside" JR('s sentences), "human judgment" in the novel's final hundred pages moves outward from the last-ditch, defensive Alamo in which it began the novel to some small, effectual achievements in the wider narrative. The two most important of these—Bast's successful composition of a small artwork, and the lawyer Beaton's redirection of control of Typhon from Cates to Amy—happen in the hospital room where Bast ends up, having collapsed with fever after the JR conversation. Both the stylistic revelation and the narrative implications of these achievements are legible in the terms I've developed above.

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Artistic composition is a paradigm for the unvocalized deliberative work of "human judgment" Gaddis values in the novel.[138] Bast's compositional achievement in the hospital scene corresponds to his vanishing from the page, and hence escaping The Flow. In four pages of dialogue in which he is addressed by name eleven times, Bast only speaks twice, to tell his lawyer "I'm just listening" and to ask "have you got a pencil?" (677/678). We only find out what he's been up to when a nurse brings him dinner, and says "let's just move all these papers and put your tray here, you have been busy haven't you?" (681). His non-presence on the page is the condition that allows him to get his own work of writing done.[139] The intimations of unvocal-

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[138] For a fuller examination of composition's significance, see Tabbi, "Compositional Self."

[139] Compare this to Gibbs, whose attempts to resume writing on his book take place out loud, so that we can hear him composing sentences, but also hear how little progress he makes on the draft he

ized depth that characterize his hesitant speech finally generate narrative objects, undermining the equation—so central to the givens structuring JR's world—between speech and the effectual.

Bast's "I'm just listening" has a dual implication of its own: he may or may not be paying attention to the language from whose on-page, on-stage flow he's absent, but the revelation of his compositional achievement afterwards clarifies that he has been "listening" to the music in his head. Bast's "listening" thus opposes an "inner-directed" form of attention to an outward one, and suggests that they might be reconciled if the former is the given and the latter the contingent possibility. Anti-narrative readers like Johnston and Levine wanted us to accept a *J R* in which no-one would speculate as to the "content of its off-stage halves of telephone conversations."[140] Absenting himself from the constant pressure of outer-directed communication that contributes to the flow of words down the page even as he notionally tries to resist it, though, Bast is able to compose because he works out a way to take himself "off-stage." His work not only creates an outward artefact of "inner-directed" personhood, but carves out a space within the novel's world-building methods for significant thought and action to happen outside the flow. Levine may characterize the novel's initial disregard for the "off-stage" accurately, but its rhetorical development argues precisely that this doesn't have to be the case.

Lawyer Beaton, meanwhile, is aligned with Bast by conversational position: always the interrupted character, the one unable to finish objections to the worldview of the language that overflows him. Finally, though, like Bast, he manages to achieve something outwardly agentive for "human judgment," revealing that he has let the period in which Amy needed to sign her rights away expire, thus handing control of the corporation to her rather than the hospitalized Cates. As Tabbi says, "the entire plot… may

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wrote ten years before. Gibbs' vocalized composition is interrupted constantly by the goings on at the apartment where he's trying to work; he is unable to get below them, and the flow of the novel's noise resists his composition rather than vice versa. Chénetier at one point describes his conception of the work the narrative passages do as "3D-ing" the novel (263). Bast succeeds where Gibbs doesn't because he is a 3D thinker, able to have thoughts without immediately, mechanically vocalizing them.

[140] Levine, 38.

depend on this single, deliberate inaction… Small as it is, Beaton's inaction shows how much the system depends on obedience, and how vulnerable it is to even a singular refusal of work and authority."[141] Beaton, having spent the whole novel having his objections talked over, finally manages to affect events because he is a figure through whom information must travel, and he chooses eventually not to let it do so free from his resentment of Cates and his sympathy for Amy. In the terms of "Some Observations…" Beaton finally refuses to process requests that *he* judges "unreasonable," not exceptional but exceptionable. And this exertion of unvocalized agency has been novel-long. In the first scene in which Beaton is directly addressed, Cates interrupts himself to ask "…bring in everything on this smaltite contract, and Beaton? My daughter's here waiting to sign those powers of attorney. What's holding things up" (94). The answer to that question, we discover finally, is Beaton himself. As Bast figures friction in relation to JR, so Beaton does to Cates, and the power relations get identically flipped.

These parallel arcs happen *within* the formal terms established by the "Style Notes," but represent a rhetorical re-figuration of them that that document makes no effort to explain. Bast's and Beaton's successes clarify exactly how Gaddis' corporate work conditioned *J R* in content and in style: the novel starts with a world where the corporate work's goals are past-perfect, world-condition givens, and then reverses the corporate work's polarities to recuperate achievements of the depth and friction that it had eliminated. Above all, the hospital scene establishes "human judgment," which Gaddis' corporate work diagnosed as the misunderstood enemy of the managerial mindset, as the most effectual source of frictive, hold-up resistance against that mindset's hegemony. This is the corporate work's fundamental contribution to *J R*.

Before 1973

"Human judgment" is a more conservative category than most critics who have wanted to align *J R*'s formal innovations with a distinctive set of insights have sought. But it's the crux upon which the corporate archive offers newly concrete ways to reconcile the novel's stylistic "departures" with the optimistic reading of its narrative

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[141] Tabbi, "Autopoesis," 102.

arc that Gaddis himself insisted on.[142] It warrants a reading of Gaddis that departs from Jamesonian understandings of postmodern formal innovation as flat economic mimesis. And it suggests that while Gaddis had thought through many of the implications of a world given over to the efficiency-momentum of supra-human systems, he was less a visionary rendering that coming world than a sceptical critic of particular humans' wish to accelerate its coming. *J R*'s roots were empirical, its economic insights derived from quotidian work in closed corporate hierarchies. Its predictive capacities and systemic scale come from Gaddis' rigorous extrapolation of the mindset he worked with day to day for almost a decade.

Critics periodize *J R* by linking its 1975 publication to "the structural changes occurring in the American economy during the 1970s," most often to 1973's centrality to the econo-mimetic Jamesonian account of postmodern form.[143] Yet Gaddis had sketched his critique of Testored Tailing as early as his Ford Foundation book project in 1963, seven years after he first posted himself a *J R* synopsis. Notes on the theme in drafts toward *Agapē Agape* may predate even that. It's important to take the novel's long gestation into account when analyzing what it draws on, responds to, or merely reflects. The corporate archive points us to 20 years of economic thinking with which Gaddis engaged at first hand, and it should offer concrete foundations upon which future critics can examine mid-century literature's relation to mid-century economics on a finer-grained basis than broad arguments about fiscal postmodernity have previously allowed.[144] Its preoccupation with friction, for example, might link *J R* to the major internal debate in 1950s and 1960s Chicago-school economics, between Milton Friedman's idea that we can write human unpredictability off for economic

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[142] For example, "it is that *real* note of hope in *JR* that is very important," (Gaddis, "William Gaddis: The Art of Fiction…"), or, "your grasp of the Art/Commerce relationship, & of seeing Bast shaped as triumph, are of course what the whole damn book is about" (Gaddis, letter to Steven Weisenburger, 365).

[143] Clare, 103.

[144] Gaddis criticism has made recent moves in this direction even without the corporate archive's help. See, for example, Clare's work on *J R*'s relation to US corporations' evolving use of the rhetoric of "family," Müller's reading of *J R* in the context of specific forms of computer-mechanisation on mid-60s Wall Street, and Allan's alignment of JR's gleeful rule-following with Milton Friedman's moral arguments in *Capitalism and Freedom.*

models in the same way physicists write off friction, and Frank Knight's insistence that the friction/thought comparison is dubious precisely because human idiosyncracy, being non-uniform, has so much more power to confound top-down modelling.[145] Scrutiny of such correspondences I leave to future work.

The corporate archive offers us a Gaddis of his time, less prophetic perhaps, certainly less invested in the rejection of conventional subjectivity, and hence less radical than many critics have wished him to be. But it offers us a precisely diagnostic, stylistically ingenious Gaddis, who didn't take mimicking the postmodern economy as sufficient rhetoric. He identified specific economic and political phenomena—not least what's now called "Capitalist Realism"—diagnosed their sources and risks, worked out a way to stylistically represent their growing cultural dominance, but then, as only Chénetier has really given him credit for, worked out *further* stylistic methods through which to posit possibilities for resisting their worldview without denying its force. His "style departures" and their optimistic rhetoric establish that not all literary innovation that departs from the conventions of psychologistic realism need reject the value of "human judgment."

Acknowledgement

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[145] See Friedman, "The Methodology of Positive Economics" (in *Essays on Positive Economics*) and Knight, "Economics and Human Action." See Allan for a brief examination of JR's relation to later Friedman, and Marsh for a reading of Gaddis' interest in human failure in terms of "a refutation of the 'eager and terrible simplification' of Friedman's positive economics, a model that assumed it could simply filter-out contingency as extraneous to its predicative capacities" (191).

Competing Interests

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