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ARTICLE

William Gaddis' "Ford Foundation Fiasco" and *J R*'s Elision of the Teacher's-Eye View

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I analyze William Gaddis' transmutation, in *J R* (1975), of material from his abandoned book on instructional TV for the Ford Foundation (1962-3). Finding previously unknown sources for numerous passages of the novel, I focus on a pattern of changed emphasis. Gaddis' work for Ford is scrupulous about the pedagogical potential of TV, which it sees as a viable classroom tool threatened by administrative misuse. The novel, however, turns material that initially focused on teachers' experiences and dilemmas into indictments of administrative culture alone. I show how central the Ford project's conception of administrative problems becomes to *J R*, trace the way that material originally organized around pedagogical concerns is repurposed to evoke administrative overreach and dysfunction, and demonstrate this transmutation-pattern's implications for understanding the novel's narrative and rhetorical drama.

The following passage may sound familiar to aficionados of postmodern fiction:

"Mozart's middle name was Amadeus which means 'loved of God'. It fitted him," a classroom teacher in one large-city elementary school system reads this morning, preparing to "shape the imagination and appreciation" of her class with the imminent studio lesson on music, as suggested here in her Teacher's Manual. "God blessed him... Mozart's life was like a fairy tale." And if this teacher knows more of that fairy tale's particulars, should she share them with her charges? of Mozart pawning his silver to pay his tour expenses, a career pursued by jealousies, a life haunted by money problems [...] Or should she continue to "foster morality, happiness and useful ability" by perpetuating the fairy-tale of art made as easy and harmless as this education is easy and irrelevant to the life her children will see when they go home from school to commercial television...?¹

Yet that familiarity won't be total: the strong authorial voice, its explicit posing of questions, its clarifying of time and place, its overt thematic exegesis, may all seem out of place. The passage it should echo is from William Gaddis' *J R* (1975), a novel that makes a virtue of minimizing such intrusive guidance. *J R*'s Mozart script is delivered via television by the novel's central adult protagonist: composer and part-time teacher Edward Bast. However, although Gaddis *is* its author, the passage above was printed 12 years before *J R*'s publication: it's from the draft first chapter of *Television for Today's Education*, the book on instructional TV that the Ford Foundation commissioned from Gaddis in 1962, before cancelling it half-written in early 1963. For all this passage's non-fictive conventions, there are good reasons to think that the teacher and the words Gaddis attributes to her are his own invention. Had the Ford project not foundered then this, rather than 1970's novel-excerpt "J. R. or the Boy Inside," could covertly have been Gaddis' first published fiction after *The Recognitions* (1955).

¹ Gaddis, *Television for Today's Education*, 1-22/3. Subsequent quotations from this document are given in-text, as are quotations from *J R*. Quotations from *Television* have page numbers of the Roman-Arabic format (I-1), whereas those from *J R* have simple arabic numerals (1).

Critics have long stressed that Gaddis' extensive archive lets us see how deliberately and creatively the fiction draws on his experiences, "integrat[ing] life and art for particular creative purpose" and "transmuting... history into a compelling narrative art."² Elsewhere in this issue of *Orbit* I examine *J R*'s debt to all Gaddis' education-focused writing for corporations in the 1960s.³ The Ford work stands out, however: for the amount of material it directly provided, and for how thoroughly it lets us trace the transmutation.

We've known since 1984 that the Ford material was "salvaged for an early sequence in *J R*,"⁴ but critical allusions have not extended to close examination of how it was "integrated" and "transmuted" toward fictive significance. The Mozart passage is a substantial chunk of salvage, most illuminating for how it mutated in the transmutation: the novel's corresponding passage removes all teacherly concern with how to "foster... useful ability." What the Ford document addresses in relation to pedagogical practice, *J R* repurposes to reflect on administrative pathologies. As I'll show, almost all the Ford material that makes its way into *J R* goes through this change not only of form and style, but of thematic emphasis.

This pattern corresponds to *J R*'s broader composition history. In the Ford work's aftermath, Gaddis briefly came to conceive of *J R* as a story of two parallel educations, with Bast and the eleven-year-old business prodigy JR "maturing: the one through acquiring a moral sense, the other through his contact with the world."⁵ His notes from the time are full of potential incidents concerning teachers, classrooms, education. But few of these make it into the final novel. As Gaddis doesn't let his young hero encounter a competent teacher, or one who even wants the job, so the Ford work's empathetic focus on such teachers establishes how deliberate a decision this must have been. In what follows I'll examine the archival record that lets us trace this decision, and then analyze how this should lead us to understand education's place within the novel's overall structure and rhetoric.

² Alberts 10; Joseph Tabbi quoted in "Papers of Prize-Winning Novelist William Gaddis Acquired by Washington University Libraries."

³ See Chetwynd, "Fuller History."

⁴ Moore and Kuehl 13.

⁵ Gaddis, "Summary Following Opening Part" 1.

Most critics have taken the novel's depiction of televised teaching to endorse JR's contention, late in the novel that bears his name, that "school's always this bunch of crap which it never has anything to do with anything real" (649). Steven Moore, for example, discusses "the disastrous results of the school's adoption of the latest educational technologies," placing "new-fangled pedagogy" alongside "the abuses of capitalism... and the farcical notion of 'corporate democracy'" as targets against which *J R* "crusades."⁶ Frederick Karl insists on *J R*'s school as a model of America: "behind the school system are all the values that feed into education and that make it and America the way they are," a way epitomized by the fact that "television is the language of the classroom."⁷ Karl's comments resound to the present day, with Lee Konstantinou's review of the novel's reissue highlighting its concern with "the way that America is hollowing out the foundation necessary to even read a book like it, an America that teaches its children via closed-circuit television..." and Nicky Marsh finding the classroom TV a symptom of "[t]he privatisation of a highly technologised and alienating system of education," and hence key to *J R*'s prophetic critique of neoliberalism.⁸

I've shown elsewhere in this issue of *Orbit* why this idea that Gaddis, and *J R*, simply reject televisual teaching as mere stupefaction cannot stand up to the seriousness with which he wrote about the topic throughout his corporate career, for Ford and after.⁹ But the Ford archive's transmutation into fiction poses equal problems for a reading of *J R* as what Tim Conley calls an "educational treatise."¹⁰ For Conley, education is the "absent center of the book," as Gaddis refuses—throughout what remains "a Bildungsroman"—to let JR encounter an "ideal teacher" who might channel his healthy instincts through a proper Rousseauvian "sentimental education."¹¹

⁶ Moore 79, 12.

⁷ Karl 189.

⁸ Konstantinou; Marsh 189.

⁹ See Chetwynd, "Fuller History."

¹⁰ Conley 128.

¹¹ *Ibid.*, 127, 128, 142. Conley's Rousseauvian framework is endorsed by the fact that Gaddis' never-published civil war aftermath play *Once at Antietam*, which he had begun alongside the earliest pre-Ford work toward *J R*, begins with explicit conversations about Rousseau: the protagonist returns

Christopher Knight, meanwhile, speculates sentimentally on an alternative world in which teacherly "responsibility" to students has not been "disregarded" in deference to "the culture's countinghouse ethos."¹² Both suggest that the novel blames teacher-figures for miseducating a fundamentally sympathetic protagonist, and that in doing so it apophatically posits a model of good education by its absence. Recently, Marsh, Angela Allan and Glen Stosic have each seen *J R* positing *itself* as this missing "alternative" to contemporary classroom methods and "values."¹³ On their shared account, its formal-aesthetic pedagogy of difficult communication, the work of engaging with its "richly allusive and suggestive texture," explicitly "combat[s] the stultifying utilitarianism of the classroom."¹⁴ Yet even as Conley acknowledges the "valuable ore in the subjects and sources of [Gaddis]'s various abandoned writing projects, re-woven into subsequent fiction," none of these Pedagogical critics address the most classroom-focused among those projects: *Television for Today's Education*.¹⁵ Attention to exactly how it was "re-woven... into" *J R* will show how Gaddis de-prioritized the experiences and responsibilities of "educators" *qua* educators, making the novel much less of an "educational treatise" than at one point he intended it to be.

In what follows, I'll argue for a reading of the transmutation process, and then sketch a compatible reading of the novel. Examining how Gaddis re-wove Ford material into *J R* with a consistent shift of emphasis from classroom to administrative perspective, and then how he omitted education-themed material and draftwork as the novel progressed, I'll first show why we need to read the novel's school material as developing its ideas about administrative culture, rather than as thematizing education *per se*. I'll then propose how this should lead us to see the novel's treatment

to the family home to ruminate on failing his uncle and "the plans that he had for me, for a great career in public life, bringing me up to read Rousseau, believing the 'natural goodness of man'..." The counterpoint to this disillusioned paralysis is the family's old slave, who they formerly saw as a "noble savage" but now can't believe fled their version of civilization. The rest of the play develops its ideas on freedom and growth outward from this Rousseau-heavy set-up (*Once at Antietam*, act 1 scene 1).

¹² Knight 106.

¹³ The three share this vocabulary: see Stosic 419, Marsh 190, Allan 437.

¹⁴ Marsh 190; Stosic 431.

¹⁵ Conley 132.

of childhood and education within its overall rhetoric: *J R* is finally, contra Conley and Knight, less concerned with young JR's own thwarted education than with his growing role as educator for a culture-wide convergence toward his childish limitations. I'll end by examining how this reading is supported by some further archivally-warranted intertexts.

A Salvageable "Fiasco"

Before I trace the transmutations, it's worth establishing the raw material. Gaddis completed three chapters of his proposed eight before the Ford project foundered, and drafted the first thirteen pages of another.¹⁶ The experience and the book-draft that, in archiving, he later labelled the "FORD FOUNDATION FIASCO" contribute more direct material to *J R* than any other single document in his corporate career. It was a research project he took seriously and explicitly connected to his parallel work on creative projects, and its cancellation was a bitter disappointment.¹⁷

The novel salvages material not only from research notes and the draft itself, but from Gaddis' experience working on it, most notably in the character of Gall: a writer who visits Bast and JR's school to observe its televisual teaching set-up for a charitable Foundation. Ford apparently told Gaddis "we want this to be your book"¹⁸—as the character Ford tells Gall "it's your book" (24)—and the preserved draft has a distinct authorial voice and argument. His working notes reserve approbation for those of his sources that he could call "outspoken," in which "positions" were "taken" and which

¹⁶ Gaddis' 8 proposed chapters had the following headings:

Chapter I: Meeting Points of Television and Education.

Chapter II: Televised Instruction in the Schools.

Chapter III: Patterns for Administration and the Burden of Logistics.

Chapter IV: Organizing the Classroom.

Chapter V: A Teaching Partnership I: The Classroom Teacher.

Chapter VI: A Teaching Partnership II: The Studio Lesson.

Chapter VII: Specialized Uses of Televised Instruction.

Chapter VIII: The Impact of New Educational Technology.

The preserved draft is of chapters I, II, IV, and the beginning of V (see "Outline" for explanations and subheadings).

¹⁷ See Chetwynd, "Fuller History."

¹⁸ Gaddis, Loose sheets headed "Ford Foundation Project." See Chetwynd, "Fuller History," section on "Ford" for discussion of this document.

did not "fear dissent," and his completed chapters live up to such models.¹⁹ Far from rejecting instructional TV as an "alienating" proto-neoliberal boondoggle, they show him most exercised by what he saw as wastes of its real potential.

Broadly, the Fiasco argues that both the boosters and the detractors of TV instruction err in believing that its effectiveness depends only on what's broadcast. Instead, Gaddis repeatedly suggests, televisual teaching can exceed the benefits of straight classroom instruction, but requires an exponentially greater degree of planning, coordination, cooperation and support to do so. In practice, he doesn't find many successful examples: the technology's early value, on his account, is that since the complexity of its pitfalls and potentials "makes good teachers rather more important than less" (I-18), its very existence demands "renewed attention to the fundamentals of effective classroom procedure" (IV-27). It has already "revitalized areas of fundamental concern in education atrophied by habit and repetition" (IV-39), with some observable effects: "contrary to the further not-uncommonly-held image of it as 'replacing the teacher', much of instructional television's real success occurs when it is used to 'free the teacher to teach'" (I-18). Gaddis reserves particular disapproval for uses of television that simply broadcast a classroom session unelaborated, "rehearsing dullness that sufficed the year before" (II-5). Sceptical about the "evangelical fervour" he encountered, he acknowledges that it has nonetheless drawn "attention back to the human elements that should never have left the classroom in the first place, and even now are petrified mannerisms in many schools where television has never been seen" (IV-39). The history he traces thus "refutes the sort of lay misconception that is always good for a Sunday supplement, proving by good and bad example alike that people are still more important than hardware" (II-3). The Fiasco material itself thereby dissolves one of *J R* criticism's most persistent "lay misconceptions": that Gaddis only salvaged the Ford work to propose that "new-fangled pedagogy" was *per se* incompatible with "human elements," "interaction," "good teachers," and "effective classroom procedure."

¹⁹ Gaddis, loose note headed "The Books".

That's not to say he's uncritical. Above all, he warns against making technology an end in itself: "effective televised instruction calls for far more extensive and incisive planning and refined techniques than does the conventional classroom, but the threat of technique submerging content is almost proportionately intensified" (II-3). Too often, he suggests, "the new approach was regarded as an emergency substitute for conventional teaching, and tested against that most immediate and obvious criterion" (II-22). By contrast, his working notes explain, "[r]ather than replacing people, it is a pitiless measure of those involved in it [...] Teaching and Television can merely exploit, extend and perpetuate one another's limitations."²⁰ Administrative inattentiveness to these complex interrelations in the rush for "replacement" causes most of the problems Gaddis identifies, and he is even more sceptical of the usual response to those failings. School administrators, he suggests, have a tendency to try to bend the world to their technology's "limitations," ending up with "test questions tailored to electronic capabilities and, eventually, the course material tailored to the questions" (IV-46). As I argue elsewhere in this issue of *Orbit*, this dynamic—and its vocabulary of "tailoring"—is central to *JR* and critiques of it appear throughout Gaddis' corporate writings:²¹ the Fiasco's critique seems to be the earliest.

Throughout the Fiasco, then, Gaddis subordinated everything to the question of pedagogical effectiveness, and warned against attention being diverted away from that standard. He developed a tight critical account of the administrative habits that tend to systematically inculcate such diversion. *JR*, as we'll see, develops that administrative account while dispensing with the benchmark of classroom experience.

Salvaging, Integrating, Reweaving, Transmuting

JR salvages various kinds of Fiasco material, from general topics, to particular incidents, to worked-out insights, to single words and phrases. Much required little active transmutation as it made its way into the mouths of *JR*'s corrupt or bumbling administrators, or of the reluctant and incompetent part-time teachers who are its adult protagonists (composer Bast, writer Jack Gibbs, potential heiress Amy Joubert).

²⁰ Gaddis, loose note headed "VI".

²¹ See Chetwynd, "Friction Problems".

In salvaging *language* from the Fiasco, Gaddis draws equally on passages of his own authorial judgment, on historical people he quoted, and—as in the Mozart scene—on fictional or hypothetical scenes. Take Gibbs' mockery of school principal Whiteback—"speak of tangibilitating unplanlessness, where'd you pick up that language Whiteback?" (50)—which has its origins in Gaddis' own unsubmitted draft-page mockery of "a jargon always dear to educational people who for some reason show a frequent awkwardness with English but are the more ready to 'tangibilitate the in-school utilization potential of itv in order to maximize unplanlessness in ongoing situations.'"²² *JR* diagnoses the deliberate social function of this "awkwardness" when Whiteback responds "[y]ou, you have to speak it when you talk to them" (50).²³ Much of the incident and language Gaddis satirized in the novel's school-scenes was, the archive confirms, only lightly repurposed from Ford-work. How, then, did Gaddis make such comparatively dry material into the novel's antic drama?

The Fiasco achieves much of its critique through precisely organising disparate discourses: as I've shown, it may well have been the first project on which Gaddis structured drafts by chopping, reorganizing, and pasting together earlier drafts, quotations, and notes: a technique he then used for *JR* and all his subsequent fiction.²⁴ *JR* is a satirical novel of competing, interrupting, self-indicting voices, one whose organizing judgments emerge—entirely implicitly—from the sequencing of that competition and interruption. The Fiasco, for all its very conspicuous authorial voice, made similarly constructive rhetoric of this method's organized polyvocality, as we can see in the Mozart passage with which I began.

That passage builds from the teacher's-eye focus on "preparing to 'shape the imagination and appreciation' of her class" toward Gaddis' authoritative judgment that her work "perpetuat[es] the fairy-tale." It organises four distinct discourses to

²² Gaddis, loose note headed "VI." Gaddis' notes themselves contain at least one seemingly unironic use of "tangibilitating," and throughout his corporate work he never utilizes "use" where "utilization" would do.

²³ He reveals later that he's fully internalized "them" to make his own professional decisions through the vocabulary: he has hired a school psychologist as "our resident psycho, ahm, keeps an eye on tangibilitating the full utilization potential of our student ahm, body" (175).

²⁴ See Chetwynd, "Fuller History," section on "Ford."

make this unequivocal case. The pedagogical imperatives it ironizes—"shape the interest and appreciation" and "foster morality, happiness and useful ability"—come from earlier quotations clearly attributed to "Caroline I. Whitenack of Purdue University" and to former President Eisenhower respectively (I-22).²⁵ Gaddis' own voice intervenes to suggest that this source language is the underlying logic of a fourth discourse: the teacher's "easy and irrelevant" script. Though the Fiasco lacks a formal citational system, Gaddis usually indicates sources for his quoted language. The teacher's speech in this passage, though, is indexed only to the generalized timeframe of "this morning" and the suggestion of immediate presence "here in her Teacher's Manual" (as I'll discuss later, "this here" is one of young JR's most significant verbal tics). The absence of Gaddis' otherwise scrupulous source-attribution suggests that this is a piece of didactic fiction within the non-fiction project: language not quoted but conjured: his invention of the *kind* of way any well-meaning but misguided teacher might translate the pedagogical theory's imperative language into practice. Where the novel dramatizes conflict between discourses and worldviews, the Fiasco invents a contrapuntal discourse in order to generate a drama-free style of stable judgment. Anticipating *J R*, then, the Fiasco itself experiments with mutually-implicating voices and more or less reticent narration, in ways that correspond to its paste-assemblage mode of composition. When *J R* integrated and transmuted this material, it also did away with both the overt judgment and the teacher's internal perspective. So how and why?

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J R's refiguration of this Mozart scene eliminates the explicit authorial voice and shifts from the teacher's to the administrator's perspective. Bast's broadcast lecture plays against a conversation between Whiteback, school board member Major Hyde, visiting congressman Pecci, and Foundation representatives including Gall, assembled together for a live demonstration of the instructional TV technology. While the

²⁵ Presumably Whitenack's name is a source for Principal Whiteback's: textbook salesman Skinner and dead author Schramm also share names with sources consulted for the Fiasco.

teacher's-eye original stresses the immediacy ("this morning," "here") of pedagogical deliberation, the novel's immediate setting is the control room in which administrators fret about their inability to control Bast's studio classroom. When the script celebrates the charm of Mozart's wife's name, Constanze, Bast's knowledge sends him off track:

the um, constant yes she, she constantly spent what little money they had on luxuries and she, she was constantly pregnant and she, finally she was constantly sick, so you can see why she, why Mozart burst into tears [...]

He, he seems to be departing somewhat from the ahm, the...

They needed a stronger key light on that waist shot when he threw out the script, get across a lot more spontaneity without it... (41).

The original adjudicates between competing priorities through a teacher's perspective, but in the novel the cross-purposes of three discourses—the divergence from script, the wish to enforce it, and the craftsman's concern with presentation details—establish a conflict of voices that, unresolved, begins to spiral out into its physical world:

um, in the um, his um playful sense of humor yes we, it shows us what a human person this great genius was doesn't it boys and um, and girls and, and you you, single child out there his letters help you, help make him somebody you can understand too... [...] to humanize him because even if we can't um, if we can't rise to his level at least we can, we can drag him down to ours...

See what I mean, there's too much bass in these commercial sets... and the foot was withdrawn as Hyde tripped over it on his way to the set where Mister Pecci stood with a control knob that had just come off in his hand.

what the um, what democracy in the arts is all about isn't it boys and girls and, and you, you... (42/3).

As Bast's departure from script, his attempt to think out loud about the education of which he's a part, devolves into ums and repetitions, so the administrative response devolves into comic pratfalls, broken knobs.

The original finds its drama in an open, conditional pedagogical dilemma: "if the teacher knows more" than her script contains, "*should* she share [this] with her charges?" Bast's speech shares the extra knowledge, but there's no conditional deliberation, no interiority. His fragmented but persistent speech is indexed only to the compulsion of a camera: while he struggles to address "you you single child out there," his only audience, since this is a test broadcast, is a roomful of administrators. This gap between the speech's addressee and its audience emphasizes the shift from pedagogical matters to administrative ones. There's no concern here with the Fiasco's question of how Bast's choices might "shape [a child's] imagination," and the "lesson" gets Bast fired not because he has failed to educate, but because he has jeopardized an infrastructure contract. As the novel abandons the teacher's-eye view, interruption, chaos, and malcoordination draw rhetorical energy away from teacherly autonomy, teacherly dilemma, student response: away, that is, from the experiences and concerns of a teacher *qua* teacher.

A compositional note shows that Gaddis quite consciously changed how he would transmute this chunk of Fiasco:

In the television sequences of Bast on Mozart, Bast's aggressive & contemptuous approach –and his free quoting from Mozart's letters, will be changed to a scene of confusion on Bast's part, his mishandling of Miss Flesch's notes & supplying material himself, and blundering into passages in Mozart letters in book Miss Flesch had supplied as a prop.²⁶

Initially, then, it seems like Gaddis envisaged this scene as an opportunity for a teacher to take control of the TV infrastructure to give the child audience an "aggressive"ly demystifying education. But the final published version shows this "blundering" Bast

²⁶ Gaddis, loose note headed "Pages 61–67."

of "confusion," with even the knowledge and language he "suppl[ies]... himself" taking on the repetition and fragmentation of the administrative situation. Bast's suggestion that to "humanize" Mozart means that "we can drag him down to our[level]" is not in the Fiasco original: by contrast to that document's qualified pedagogical optimism, *J R*'s TV-education system serves only to flatten child, teacher, administrator, "great genius" into one indistinguishable "level." This subsumption of individuals into a single system that breaks language into ums and breaks top-down "control" into disconnected "knobs" reflects *J R*'s characteristic transmutation of pedagogical material into satire on administrative systems.

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In this regard, the scene's transition from project to novel encapsulates in microcosm the shifts that distinguish their handling of the same material:²⁷ the infrastructural, institutional, and systematic matters with which Gaddis had to become familiar to address their pedagogical impact become, in *J R*, the rhetorical focus themselves.

Take for example the way that a structural pattern that dominates *J R* well beyond the school plot can be traced back to that Fiasco vision of "test questions tailored to electronic capabilities and, eventually, the course material tailored to the questions." This process of bending the world to the "limitation" of instrumental technology is established in the early scene where Whiteback and school psychologist Dan DiCephalis struggle to explain problems with a new punchcard-based psychometric testing system: "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

²⁷ The only draft version of this passage in the Ford folders contains a clause, absent from the final version, that makes the connection to *J R*'s overall preoccupations even clearer: the teacher's dilemma about rendering artistic life a fairytale occurs against the foil of "her own experience that what is worth doing takes work and its toll..." (Gaddis, loose note headed "VI"). The question of what's "worth doing" punctuates the novel (see for example 359, 477, 621, 710). To further complicate things, among the notes toward *J R* is another distinct whole-page draft of a Mozart-script-divergence scene. This version is further away from both the Ford and published-novel versions of the scene than they are from each other, making its chronological and compositional relation to them unclear. Handwritten notes to its typed text, though, contain verbatim *J R* language: "at least if we can't rise to his level we can drag him down to ours" (Gaddis, loose draft page headed "Regarding the Dminor Piano Concerto").

of this ongoing situation that is to say, is by the testing itself" (22). The spoonerism flips phonemes as the testing flips the logical sequence of norm, data and subject: students will be trained toward tests that specify personalities that the system knows how to process. Elsewhere in this issue, I document how Gaddis found and critiqued this pattern—in the language of "tailoring"—throughout his corporate work.²⁸ It's no surprise that the novel introduces it on school turf, since the Fiasco was where he first seems to have addressed it, and since it concerns the basic educational topic of how human growth can be misdirected and stymied. This is a risk whenever means are fetishized above ends: for Ford Gaddis had observed, and warned against, classes that existed only "to gauge the effectiveness of their studio presentations" (IV-45). This logic re-emerges in *J R* as the initial bridge between school matters and economic and political ones.

"Tailoring"'s association with bespoke cloth-cutting conveys how wilful is the choice to bend the world to pre-punched models. It also suggests such thinking's genealogical descent from industrial Taylorism (explicitly cited with regard to education later on in *J R*):²⁹ the immediate context for Gaddis' Ford discussion about the "threat of standardization" is "the eventual tendency of a mobile society such as ours toward interchangeable parts at every level" (I-11). The novel's critique of school administrative logic thus ties itself into a wider account of industrial business practice even before the plot has made it off school turf. Hence the conversation shifts immediately to political matters. Congressman Pecci's impending arrival leads Whiteback's board-member supervisor Major Hyde to ruminate on the necessity of some top-down work on the electorate for the funding of a pet project—"g]etting

²⁸ See Chetwynd, "Friction Problems," especially the section on "Authorial Implication and Ideological Friction within *J R*'s Dialogue Forms".

²⁹ FW Taylor's *The Principles of Scientific Management* (1911) revolutionised industrial work in the early 20th century by organizing workplaces and work duties in the light of scientific testing of efficiency-ratios between worker input and manufactured output: it led to a strong emphasis on having workers do repetitive isolated elements of broader processes, rather than being involved in all stages of the work. In *J R* Gibbs discusses Taylor in relation to the psychologist of learning EL Thorndike, whose comparable ideas on school structure, in Gibbs' reductive account, were derived from experiments on chickens (*J R* 581).

this budget across is going to take everything we can give it" (24). He repudiates an objecting superior who would "dictate to the parents of these future citizens that they can't exercise their democratic right to vote" (23/4), thus tying the freedom to vote to top-down punchcard-like constraints on what's votable for.³⁰ The tailoring conversation's development is *JR's* initial iteration of the pattern that characterizes each transmutation of Fiasco material into novel material: the movement beyond classroom concerns to a diagnosis of exponentially destructive feedback loops and their wilful systemic perpetuation.

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While the Mozart passage is the only full *scene* of the Fiasco that makes its way into the novel, the concerns of many longer passages sharpen into singular verbal flashes. What can seem mere compression, however, consistently follows the shift in rhetorical emphasis I've discussed above. The following examples all come from the early scenes of Gall's first visit:

- Miss Flesch, the teacher and "curriculum specialist"³¹ whose Mozart script Bast has to read, notes that the key to her classroom success is that "I always sign off with a singalong" (30). Gaddis in the Fiasco compares a teacher needing to keep large-class attention to "a music hall veteran" (IV-34).
- The Mozart-scene debate about audience leads Hyde to propose "a simple interference-free closed-circuit school setup where every Tom, Dick and Harry can't tune in on the kind of open-circuit broadcast you've got now and write letters telling you off on the new math" (26-7). In the Fiasco, Gaddis cites real incidents of open broadcasting in which parents unable to help their children with an up to date curriculum unrecognizable from their own childhoods end up "call[ing] the school with such indignant comments as 'I

³⁰ This slippery attempt to promote selfishness through the language of altruism is a Hyde tic, most notably as the school collapses before various investments pay out and he laments "these blacks and radicals trying to head me off at the pass every time I see a chance to score *for these youngsters*" (my italics, 455).

³¹ A phrase used with distrustful inverted commas in Gaddis' notes for the Fiasco (loose note beginning "people vs technology").

saw your lesson on the new mathematics this morning and no wonder my boy is failing, I can't understand it myself" (I-7).

- Flesch's contribution to the logistical discussions about whether the school's TV should be open or closed circuit is her reversible claims that "PRwise it can't hurt us education wise" (25) and "[e]ducationwise it isn't hurting us PRwise" (27), matching the Fiasco's lengthy examination of situations where "the school's public image absorbs so much effort and attention that education comes to serve public relations" (I-9).
- Discussing DiCephalis' promotion from teacher to administrative psychologist, his supervisors suggest that "[w]e've saved Dan's talents here for..." (22). "Save" crops up with sceptical irony throughout the Fiasco, for example in describing layoffs as "'saving' twenty-three teachers into what must be called the bargain" (IV-7). Gaddis also addresses DiCephalis' career arc—" [r]ewarding a man's ability to teach by removing him from teaching" (II-9)—at some length.
- One of the lessons that comes up as the school's board members flick through the channels looking for something to show Gall is a class on percentages: "[d]on't show them that, just Glancy writing on a blackboard" (29). In the Fiasco, Gaddis argues that TV instruction is at its most specious when it flashily does what the classroom teacher is already able to do: that "dullness that sufficed the year before," unredeemed by "the twenty-one-inch blackboard-teacher lecturing a void in the atmosphere of novelty, glamour and scientism which clings" to technology in schools (I-22).

Each of these crisp condensations abjures the Fiasco's motivating engagement with educational outcomes, shifting emphasis to the self-sustaining logic of administration.

Where the Fiasco's "new math" passage stresses that television brings public attention to curriculum, requiring better coordination between parents and teachers, the novel's administrative perspective elides the teacher-parent relationship and treats public scrutiny as a mere inconvenience. Gaddis' treatment of "music-hall"

demands in the Fiasco takes a teacher's perspective, performative pressure defining "the class which he leaves with his shirt wringing wet" (IV-34). Despite Miss Flesch's name, her "singalong" bears none of this corporeal anxiety (though the last we see of Bast in the Mozart scene is "the screen filled with a face perspiring with silent imperative" (43)). It just confirms that her classroom practice conforms to her wider equation between education and performative "PR." If the music-hall teacher may be vindicated by the fact that "his results appear in the response of the pupils," Miss Flesch expresses no interest in the singalong's pedagogical effects; as with Hyde's rationale for the closed circuit, it's just a matter of ensuring docility and minimizing dissent. Her insistence to Bast that TV is "an intimate medium, it really is, because when you look into the camera you're looking each child right in the eye" (37) recalls, in this connection, the Fiasco's warning that "in the combined force of its mass distribution and intimate terms of reception, television is a proven medium for dispensing propaganda" (I-13).

Meanwhile, Flesch and the other administrators *share* Gaddis' aversion to TV being used to broadcast something that could quite easily be done by the teacher manning the TV. Yet where Gaddis objects to such broadcast's specious claims to "novelty, glamour and scientism," the administrators reject it precisely for its lack of glamour: they just want something flashier to show off so that the Foundation will bring them into the circuit of philanthropic investments.

Teachers and parents alike threaten Flesch's ability to get her intimately-addressed students to go along with the administrators' plans, "interference free": "[i]t's not the kids [...] they have a ball. It's the parents that make the trouble" (22), she says in the opening scene, later changing her antagonist: "[i]t's teachers that make the problems the kids have a ball" (418). The kind of project that these "troubles" and "problems" threaten is made clear when she recurs to this language in helping PR man Davidoff help JR sell advert-space in school textbooks: "it's not the kids, if they find a Cheerios or Reese Peanutbutter Cups spread in the middle of their math lesson they'll think it's a ball it's not the kids, it's the parents that make the trouble" (518). She explicitly laments that such problems should have been forestalled by a televised education, since these obstructive parents are themselves the first generation

"brought up with tv they ought to be used to love stories documentaries mysteries all that bla bla bla break off for clogged sinks underarms..." (518).³² While she posits both teachers and parents as a source of possible "interference" to the administration, the novel depicts few parents and no vocational teachers, foregrounding her paranoia, not their power.

DiCephalis' career trajectory—the classroom teacher "saved" by a promotion to administrative psychometry and then saved again, once that falls apart and he is forced to resign, by "an attractive opening in industry" (455)—also hinges on docility. His original promotion, we discover, served mainly to get him onto the management side of the mooted teachers' strike that his wife is involved with: he's saved not in terms of financial efficiency, but by crossing to the power-holding side of a labour-management conflict. In the Fiasco, Gaddis quotes a North Carolina State Department of Public Instruction manual to the effect that: "the avowed purpose of instructional television is to improve the quality of instruction, not to reduce the number of teachers needed within a school" (IV-22). When it's revealed that DiCephalis' psychometric equipment and hardware for the TV circuit are among the clutter responsible for the relocation and subsequent cutting of the school's whole kindergarten program (454), and he loses his job, it's not because he has failed to "serve" the students, but because he has failed to serve the "avowed purpose" of school superintendent Vern Teakell: "[i]t's your job to make me look good and it's Dan's job to make you look good" (225). Even the stain that taking the fall for Whiteback and Teakell leaves on DiCephalis' CV, though, can't trump the appeal of his involvement with measurement technology, which instantly secures him that cushy industry job: an "atmosphere of novelty, glamour and scientism" clings to him in spite of his manifest practical, PR, and educational failures.

The revelation of those failures comes in scenes that begin with Gall's narration of the Foundation's pulling his funding. It's accompanied by the revelation of the true rationale for preferring "interference-free" circuits, as Governor Cates' lawyer Beaton reports on "the suggestion that your bank directors who also serve on

³² Ironically, it's these parents about whom Gaddis, years earlier in the Fiasco, was writing as pupils: "The fact that [they] have grown up with television has made it an accepted routine part of their lives, as old, in effect, as books. They do not see it as a new scientific wonder..." (I-3/4).

the Foundation board encouraged expanded Foundation support for closed-circuit school tele..." (423). This, then, is the nexus in which economic self-serving, the fetishization of "interference-free" system-expansion, and the Foundation's own interest in the project come into shared focus. By this point in the novel, its most explicitly critical of the thinly disguised Ford Foundation, education has even dropped out of Flesch's reversible catchphrase: "You have public relations whether you want them or not and I told him PRwise it can't hurt the company imagewise" (418).³³ Just as the school system has replaced classrooms of children and teachers with lumps of machinery, so has the novel's focus on the administrative machinations that put that machinery there departed from the pedagogical questions that first generated the Fiasco out of which its school setting grew.

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Each passage, then, reflects the school's status among *J R's* proliferating system of political and financial interests as the node most fully given over to "closed circuit" administrative mania. The TV broadcast is a "circuit" within the school system, itself a circuit within a wider cultural and economic system that operates on the principle of bringing more and more of the world under greater and greater conditions of "interference free" pre-closure, so that value can be extracted unrecoupably into the hands of those who administer from above. The mindset that the Ford document warned against has become a given in *J R*. We should see the school plot not as a discrete comment about education or crucible of pedagogical dilemmas, but as mapping the lowest level in a set of nested sub-systems that let Gaddis exemplify closed institutions' vulnerability to administrative capture and administrative pathologies.

The school's technological experiment is the first of the novel's systems to collapse in upon itself—in a mess of lawsuits, having survived the complete displacement of classroom space and teaching staff—as so much of *JR's* empire subsequently will. So given over is the school to its service of the wider system that when the instructional TV project collapses teaching drops out of the novel almost entirely: the part-time teachers withdraw to their original projects, Glancy kills himself after an investment that depended on the school goes bad, Flesch and DiCephalis go

³³ This speech itself has its vaguely-attributed origins in the Fiasco's discussions of "public relations which, as one practitioner has put it, 'you have whether you want them or not'" (1-9).

straight into industry, coach Vogel gets a fake doctorate and funds from JR Corp to do fantastical "scientific" research, and the administrators focus on their industrial, military, or financial dayjobs. Whiteback, asked just before the crash whether he could do a better job in either his school or bank work if he dropped one, replies "[y]es well of course the ahm, when I know which one of them is going to survive," revealing the crash's dependence on just such managerial indifference (340). As we'll see, JR himself is the only significant character to do any schoolteaching from this point on. *J R* dips into classroom education only to set up the classroom's eventual sacrifice to this account of systems devouring themselves.

J R maintains the Fiasco's aversion to closed systems but removes its scrupulous technical hedging, creating a starker conflict. The Fiasco had been rigorous about separating the interests of a variety of institutional actors and parsing out how learning-problems follow from the conflicts between them: politicians, funders, administrators, technicians and teachers are all clearly distinguished throughout. *J R* keeps track of all these layers of the school-system, but boils the conflict down to system-servers versus reluctant part-time teachers, widening its scope beyond classroom issues to the question of system-subservience in general. As Gaddis wrote in the Fiasco, "among adults, the more obtrusive organisation becomes, the more it invites resistance" (IV-24). There he addresses children's resistance to classroom learning, but the novel's eponymous child becomes a figurehead for the "obtrusive" forces, leaving former-teacher "adults" to pursue the "invite[d] resistance." The self-narrowing logic of tailored tests is first established on school grounds, but as the Ford project's classroom drama gives way to the portrayal of that administrative mindset triumphantly pervading not just the school but *J R*'s whole world, so the novel's drama hinges on possible resistance to that logic that characters like Bast can only pursue by leaving the school behind.

J R, in foregrounding that pursuit, sacrifices the teacher's-eye view that the Ford project had so scrupulously addressed. This is especially apparent in light of the Ford material—and the novel-notes Ford initially inspired—that *J R* systematically leaves out.

"A kingdom largely closed to the world": the Foils that Gaddis Sheathed

One reason it's surprising that Gaddis dropped so much classroom material is that the Fiasco contains scenes that seem tailor-made for the novel's bitter farce. What couldn't he have made, for example, of his image of "the effective use of good teachers as teachers, instead of as part-time pencil-sharpeners" (IV-18)? What heartstrings would not be stirred by individuals "preserving their identities as teachers through their traditional right to make or supply their own instructional materials in the face of the deluge of prefabrication that technology brings with it [...] a regular cottage industry in which they show the ingenuity and pride implicit in an elementary teacher's remark that she would not sell her set for a thousand dollars" (IV-41)? What novelist's eye would not be caught by the personal drama in quoted language about each classroom teacher's resentful relationship to "the television teacher who may, indeed, eclipse him in the eyes of his pupils. His basic emotional security is undermined and he is apt to respond with hostility, opposition, and overt or covert resistance" (V-3)?

But for all the novel's concern with "resistance" these ready-made scenes and images were not among its salvage, precisely because what's at stake in their intrinsic drama is either the "emotional security" or the "effective use" of teachers *qua* teachers. The school staff have no "identities as teachers": teaching is something they all do to fund other priorities. For "resistance" to the "deluge of prefabrication," *J R*, unlike the Fiasco, locates no hope on teaching's turf.

Gaddis' omissions, then, are as significant as what he re-wove, and three categories stand out: material on good teachers; material on competent management's educational benefits; and material on contexts less pathologically managerialized than the US.

**

Competent vocational teachers, beleaguered heroes of the Fiasco, don't exist in *J R*. The Fiasco can be actively defensive on teachers' behalfs: "often enough it is the educators themselves, so widely castigated for their resistance to change, whose time is spent in overcoming the inertia of the communities they serve" (I-6). Far

from combating inertia, though, the novel's part-time-teacher heroes mostly "serve" to "resist" JR's occasional attempts to get himself and his peers an education. Amy refuses to let him come along on a museum trip—"I mean it sounds real interesting, like it's all these olden time clothes and all [...] —No don't be silly no you're not in the sewing" (474)—and Bast to help him organize one: "look I can't listen to all the news about school now I can't listen to your plan for a field trip just tell Davidoff to..." (564). Gibbs' degree of investment, meanwhile, is summed up by his drunk response to being asked "how the hell do you keep this teaching job? —Don't show up" (410). Amy retrospectively articulates the lack of vocation that the three part-timers share: "[i]t was awfully selfish of me to do it in the first place really, taking that job, I simply had to change things for a little" (497). The novel lacks any focal character who prioritizes educational work.

The models Gaddis elides are best summed up in the unfinished material towards Fiasco chapter V, on "superior teachers who with some reason resent the intrusion of uninspired television lessons... with sufficient command of their vocations and their subject material to relegate even the 'master teacher' on television to the status of a teaching aid" (V-4). These are teachers capable of resisting the system's promulgation on their own turf and their own terms. Joseph Tabbi's biography establishes that Gaddis retained great pedagogical respect for the teachers of his own early years, who, free from "a standard imposed by a state or a corporate concern," offered "a firm foundation for later striving not to exceed others but to question them, and in this way to 'embrace change' rather than seek certainties."³⁴ Early notes toward the novel reveal that Gaddis had such under-administrated achievements in mind. A sheet headed simply "TEACHING" (see **Figure 1**)³⁵ suggests the "idea of teachers and children both trying to beat the system - & succeeding," while another plot would have stressed the conflict between practical pedagogical competence and bureaucratic credentialism: "one teacher (good?) who has got job as impostor – fired."³⁶

³⁴ Tabbi 27.

³⁵ Gaddis, loose note headed "TEACHING".

³⁶ Gaddis, loose note beginning "a magazine".

TEACHING

Being asked (H.D.) to pass boy who is son of elect of BSE - showing his compositions to Department Head, she (bleached blonde, Mrs. Diddle!) - shows this is not so bad, I think you've been a little stringent with him - he raise his average from 40 to 75 =

Being H.D. he wait he advised to teach high school because he's not professional enough - ie meetings with other teachers, talk about permissiveness - try to love them =

(A) Virginia Woolf - M. (condescendingly) I don't believe you ever come across her (she reads in what, F. D. M. N.Y. Book review?)

(Q) (H.D.) - When I look at the names of my class for a year I know that some of that marks resulting to suffer

Idea of teachers & children both trying to beat the system - & succeeding

* new study curricula - ie gymnastics, as I played a record to my class, then ~~the~~ noted them to write down on what they thought of from music - & numbering books, putting numbers of books on outside, use inside

The school psychiatrist -

Mr R. getting moved up in sch. system - bec? he went to Dunsmuir, so did his father, so did superintendent, principal -

Department Head - who (meeting in relation?) at Teachers College - she later to be in they had having lunch, all the places they looked in up in the neighborhood were full of niggers -

The ^{darkening} reference to ^{darkening} "in fact is the way it is done in Paris"

[Chapter ending with a child in Little had Ken, - Not I saw the cat, but the pig etc -]

(A) She teaches English - "Trees" the first poem =

Mr. G. in class - Board giving J. holiday off, the C's explain; May come, give J. Friday off, rescind J. holiday -

Christmas - (sep. of Ch & state - schools) - Christmas becomes "kind of ph in kid world rheindeer", no Ch carols

Mr. Diddle's teacher "Trees" & a poem about March weather dry Fall (she has days) - which M. has been teaching from

Protestant in 8th grade - her shirt short dress zip all the way up, to small - she wears shirt out, jacket that little boy sent master in all - ; which fingers up under shoulder blades, short pants =

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Figure 1: A list of potential "Teaching" plot-points for J R.

It's not *as* teachers, though, that *JR*'s resisters have any impact on "the system," and the one of the "children" who gives the novel its title is in many ways the system's greatest advocate, exponent, model.

More notes envisaged the school's teachers interacting on matters of pedagogy with their local community, whether individually—"personality clashes bet a handful of parents & teachers"—or systematically—"Community restlessness: over incompetence."³⁷ But attentive, education-minded parents are another of *J R*'s omissions. Teakell sees the community relationship resting on a tacit contract: because "the function of this school is custodial [...] strictly custodial and the rest is plumbing," there's no chance of parents supporting a strike: "by the time these kids have been lying around the house for a week their parents will march the teachers back in at gunpoint" (226). Thus on the one occasion "parents seem to feel quite strongly," it's "about the elimination of, ahm, finding the [children] a place" to be taught, or rather, to be kept custodially out of "the house." The one parent who cares enough about discovering what's going on at school to come in disguised as her daughter gets sexually assaulted by Vogel for her trouble. That *J R*'s protagonists share significantly absent parents has been widely remarked in the criticism: the post-Fiasco pedagogical plot-notes reveal the eventual absence of invested school-parents and invested teachers to be equally deliberate.

J R similarly omits direct representation of innocently incompetent teachers. The penultimate paragraph of the Ford draft begins "[e]nough of good teachers for the moment..." (V-11), hot on the heels of a denunciation of the "popular press, where tears shed for the thought that all teachers are not dedicated and brilliant are of the same crocodile sort spilled, a few pages later, over the discovery that the latest heavy-weight title winner is no gentleman" (V-5). In notes toward *J R* we find Gaddis in yet fiercer mood:

The crisis in education: the present cry that teachers are underpaid, but who has dared make next step, which is that, its being underpaid, it has

³⁷ Gaddis, loose note beginning "at school".

attracted a huge segment of really second rate people with pitifully limited minds. Now, their demands for higher pay, as though they really deserved it, whereas those presently employed are getting just what if not far more than they deserve.³⁸

This clearly prefigures Gibbs' "create a second class profession you fill it with second class people" (497 - words that JR himself utters when Gaddis resurrects him in 1987).³⁹ Again, the novel's version gives the active role to the administrative "creators" of the profession rather than those who populate it. Judgments about teacherly calibre became peripheral to Gaddis' final vision for *J R*.

The transmutation-pattern I've identified establishes why almost nothing on the "TEACHING" sheet of notes makes the novel: removing all teachers and parents with any investment in education tightens the novel's focus on "the system" its characters need to "beat," rather than on classroom issues epiphenomenal to that system. The Fiasco conveys some of its optimism through system-images, suggesting for example that TV's novelty might help break open circuits that have ossified shut, like the outdated techniques of a teacher who "[b]y limitation and habit [...] is inclined to teach what she likes and knows best, in a kingdom largely closed to the world..." (I-18). Opening the "closed" loop might generate new insight and positive change: "[w]eaknesses pointed out to us by others stand less chance of correction than those we discover for ourselves, and, to the extent that instructional television brings about such revelations among teachers and administrators, its value has been readily apparent" (II-5). This system-structured optimism, though, depends on the first-person experience of "discover[ing] for ourselves" what's become stagnant practice, and on having the authority to rectify it. *J R*, having given up on representing first-person pedagogical experience, only ever treats its "closed" laboratory-like school as system's symptom, a "circuit" "closed" to discovery top-down at its administrators' behest. The focus narrows from the Fiasco's plurality of educational actants, each with their own

³⁸ Gaddis, loose note beginning "Coffee Enema."

³⁹ Gaddis, "Trickle-Up Economics: JR goes to Washington".

standards, habits, values, limitations, potentials, to the novel's showdown between the promulgators of "closed" systems and those who have to leave the school to oppose them.

"TEACHING" and comparable notes show that, post-Fiasco, Gaddis briefly had in mind a novel that would cast light into contemporary pedagogy's closed kingdom. By 1965 his descriptions of *J R* shift from the "novel about business" of his earliest notes into a register concerned with education and "maturing," in line with the Knight/Conley reading of the final novel.⁴⁰ The "TEACHING" note is likely from this period. By 1969, though, the emphasis has shifted back to business, but particularly to Bast's struggle to find time for "work" "worth doing" outside "the minute-to-minute reality of his actual life, which is gradually shaped by a boy" - JR.⁴¹ Bast's teaching job is not mentioned here, but is implicitly among the "minute to minute reality" opposed to what's "worth doing." Gaddis' interest in school-life and classroom education as a *J R* theme for its own sake thus seems to have followed swiftly on the Ford experience, but to have dwindled almost as fast.

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The Fiasco's competent teachers are at greatest risk from one consistent villain: bad planning. Readers familiar with *J R* may be surprised by The Fiasco's optimism about instructional TV's potential. What won't surprise them is Gaddis' scepticism about present implementation. The chaos and corruption that are a *fait accompli* in *J R* feature in the Fiasco as clearly foreseeable—and hence avoidable—pitfalls. It is this sense of avoidability that the novel elides.

Gaddis begins one chapter by quoting John Dewey on the need for adaptability in education reform, particularly where

a society which is mobile, which is full of channels for the distribution of a change occurring anywhere, must see to it that its members are educated to personal initiative and adaptability. Otherwise, they will be overwhelmed by

⁴⁰ See Chetwynd, "Fuller History," especially the section on "After Ford."

⁴¹ Gaddis, letter to Rockefeller Foundation, 16 May 1969, unpaginated.

the changes in which they are caught and whose significance of connections they do not perceive (Gaddis II-1–2).

Marsh's key example of *J R's* own pedagogical methods is a passing discussion of a glamorous "name educator" that comically confuses John Dewey, Melvil Dewey, and Thomas Dewey, thus working as a fulcrum for the novel's ideas about the systemic cross-contamination of their spheres of education, politics, and public life.⁴² The allusion reflects the novel's transmutation of the Fiasco's Deweyan concerns, as it flips the focus from how "society"'s "members are educated" to how political and commercial "channels" and "connections" subjugate educational institutions.

The ability to perceive, make, and establish "connections" is the basis of the Fiasco's interest in planning, and is key to the novel's events: JR's empire collapses after he is "caught" in "changes" because his likeably immense reserves of "initiative and adaptability" are untempered by even the tiniest bit of foresight: the verbal tic by which he prefaces most nouns with "this here" establishes his exclusionary presentism. In the Fiasco, Gaddis ties TV instruction's potential for success to the people in charge of its coordination and planning beyond the scope of single schools. He finds that the

numerous successes with television in teaching in various parts of the country by 1957 [...] remained comparatively isolated for lack of any organized framework within which variables of failures and accomplishment could be compared [...] the severely limited exchange of ideas and approaches, problems and solutions, from one project and one station to another, meant that trials and errors were being duplicated and repeated practically side by side (II-21).

Since the novel only focuses on one school—one in the process of being rendered a "closed circuit"—it constructs a world in which the "severe limits" of "isolation" can't be overcome by "exchange" and "comparison." The Fiasco stresses how "effective tel-

⁴² See Marsh 189–90.

evised instruction calls for far more extensive and incisive planning and refined techniques than does the conventional classroom" (II-3). Such planning and refining are absent throughout *J R*'s world: its critique of a bad-planning mindset depends on its refusal to figure the resources for good planning.

Another of Whiteback's neologisms, drawn again from that Fiasco working note of hypothetical jargon, embodies the problem. He responds to the Foundation observers after Bast's spectacular script-departure, "Mister Gall yes you might want to see this next lesson in terms of a good deal less ahm, less unplanlessness than the one we've just..." (44). Sufficiently taken by the multi-negatory coinage of "unplanlessness," he later talks of "implementing" it when he brings in the "appliances" that will eventually crowd out the kindergarten (176). "Unplanlessness" posits Plan-Having-Ness by appending a negative prefix to its opposite, rather than through the harder work of developing a plan. The lawyer Beaton realises that planlessness—a patternless, opportunistic expansionism—defines the progress of the JR Corporation: "more recently they snapped up a producer of matchbooks whose financial position appears considerably less secure and any long-range plan in their expansion program is somewhat difficult to..." (431). While rival corporation head Governor Cates attempts to convince Beaton that JR Corp's success is evidence of some invisible plan—" [w]ish I thought they were that damn stupid" (432)—Bast later has to remind JR himself that "you never thought of flooding the country with those damn matchbooks till you read someplace you'd already done it" (656). Planlessness' consequences outrun any attempt to pin an 'un' before them. The novel satirizes that retrospective impulse, rather than figuring how successful planning and coordination might be done in a world where schools learn from each other's mistakes.

Against the positive, evidence-based case the Fiasco makes for evidence-based thinking and the potential success of the selectively technologized school, then, *J R* depicts a mania for systemization divorced from systemic checks and balances. Tracing the relationship between source material and novel lets us see this as a rhetorical streamlining, not just Gaddis' sense of how the world was.

It also clarifies Gaddis' rather unDeweyan sense of the relationship between the world and America. The Fiasco discusses failures of experimental coordination as consequences of specifically US thinking, overcome—with the attendant educational benefits—in other nations. This international perspective is absent from the novel, which instead prioritizes Hyde's insistence that schools promote his exponentially acquisitive mindset so as to show their charges "what America's all about" (23). Where the Fiasco takes pains to show American tendencies as exceptional, the novel—for all the destructive global reach of JR's empire—presents America's way as the paradigm of all closed social systems.

The Fiasco addresses, for example, the European tendency to fund TV via central state bodies like the BBC, whose studios share facilities and equipment such that "in France and England there is strict observance of a rule to confine television to doing only those things which the classroom teacher cannot do as well. Therefore, far fewer lessons are broadcast per course than in the United States" (I-9). Gaddis then takes from "BBC educational broadcaster Enid Love" the example of regional American school systems filming eleven separate Hamlets at eleven times the total price of a British one available to its whole national school system, which because of the premiums available from shared equipment and expertise could have higher production values and more paratextual teaching apparatus. He finds such uncoordinated profligacy promoted again and again in the inherited rhetoric of "what America's all about": the Love passage leads to another explicitly focalized through a "British visitor" seeing the same problems "over again" in spite of her being greeted at each new school with cant of "new and brave and adventuresome" (1-22).⁴³ Instructional TV is, on this account, just another sub-system subjected to America's overarching ideological vocabulary: "the instructional television program is as much a part of America's traditional image of itself as are state's rights, regional differences, and individual integrity, all concepts which lend themselves readily to exaggeration" (I-10). Not only is using this schtick to celebrate uncoordinated redundancy unhelpful, Gaddis wryly suggests, but it's incoherent in relation to the schticksters' own cultural goals:

⁴³ This latter language is something Gaddis initially quoted in the passage on multiple Hamlets (I-10).

there's a "basic, paradoxical difference between countries where a selective approach to public education proceeds from centralized control, and one in which centralization is resisted as a threat to individual rights and differences already united in an avowed aim at mass education" (1-12). This is the kind of neat comparative diagnosis unavailable to the novel, which in its restricted focus on the US can only argue for the system's absurdity by showing it in fullest triumphant bloom.

As with the omissions of vocational teachers and other school systems, *J R* examines America, from its schools to its banks, without any sense that the rest of the world contains preferable or tempering models. The novel consistently "integrates" the Fiasco by at once maintaining its critiques and removing its foils. The effect of each omission is to make the details Gaddis *does* depict stand for the already-accomplished world-saturation of what his central characters are trying to resist. In refusing to deploy available worldly facts and models from the Fiasco, Gaddis posited his protagonists' responsibility not just for *finding* modes of resistance, but for *creating* them: no wonder then that artistic composition is the mode he privileges. Tabbi's claims about the archive's potential to show us how Gaddis "transmuted" "his own and our collective history into a compelling narrative art" might thus be amended: the art's compellingness—its high-stakes artist-against-culture, resistance-against-exponent drama—follows as much from Gaddis' *eliding* his own historical knowledge as transmuting it.

We might, then, see these omissions as part of the process of making the novel itself a more "closed" rhetorical "circuit." *J R*'s critique of cultural closure works through its own rigorous closing off of material that could have complicated its communication-loop. This omission of relevant real-world material ironically makes the novel a less accurately *actual* model of the systems it depicts than many critics who read it as mimetic critique have presumed.

"Essentially a Childish Affair": JR as Educator

We've seen how *J R*'s critique depends on Gaddis decisively moving away from post-Ford plans for the novel to represent "teachers and children" "beat[ing] the system" as Bast and JR "matur[ed]" in parallel, and on his reformulating teacherly material

toward a systematic diagnosis of administrative pathologies. It might seem, then, that the transmutation pattern I've identified simply endorses "System" readings of *JR*—as essentially posthumanist, with all character-level differentiation subordinated to the overarching structural diagnostics—over "Education" readings like Conley's or Knight's—concerned with the character-driven normative processes by which it valorizes and defends human categories that the system threatens.

The transmutations do suggest that Conley and Knight may have sought a positive intimation of ideal education where there were only cuts: absence isn't always apophysis. But their Education readings do better justice than the Systems readings to the transmutations' insistence on the *wilful* contingency of the systems' perpetuation, and hence on matters of human responsibility and blame. JR may not be, as Susan Strehle found him in an early analysis of the novel, a "pathetic victim" miseducated into "a junior reflection of his elders."⁴⁴ He's not so passive, and he doesn't greatly suffer. But the novel does draw moralized attention to the structural relationship between him and "his elders." The transmutation-process helps us more fully understand education's—and young JR's—place in Gaddis' vision for the novel. As *JR* moves away from classroom concerns, its pedagogical attention shifts from the question of *how* to the question of *who*, emphasizing JR's structural role not as a miseducated reflection-victim, but as a harmful educator himself.

For Conley's Rousseauvian JR, a figure of blameless human nature, "[i]f 'unmitigated greed' is censurable... it follows that an ideal teacher should convey and explain the benefits of moderation. No such teaching occurs in JR, and its absence is painfully felt."⁴⁵ Gaddis' transmutation of Fiasco material downplays "teaching" as it "conveys and explains" what makes *managers* particularly "censurable," but JR's distinctive role in the wider system remains crucial, as the novel brings him onto the managerial side of that critique. JR *is* educationally sympathetic: think of the

⁴⁴ Strehle Klemtner 70/71. See also Moore's section on children in *JR* as "the real victims of modern society," which usefully itemizes how many children (*other* than JR himself, though Moore doesn't distinguish) suffer violence in the story (73–76).

⁴⁵ Conley 142.

moments when Bast and Amy stymie his attempts to join or organize field trips, or the revelation halfway through the novel that he's kept on doing and handing in his school homework even as his empire balloons. And there are moments that suggest he could transcend the relentless stream of acquisitive calculation that defines his on-page presence.⁴⁶ But these glimpses of potential bump up against administrative abuses that come untutored from JR himself.

Taking over the school to make a captive market for adverts in textbooks, forcing Bast to legally change his name to match a misspelled business card, commissioning press releases that require news events to be performed, JR needs no training in the punchcards-before-personalities inversion of world and measure that the Ford work had diagnosed as a threat to learning. In the same speech in which he bemoans school's lack of "anything to do with anything real," he explains his appointment of a new school commissioner "which he's like this branch manager, I mean he used to be this insurance man so he knows what everything's worth, you know?" (649). The putative victim celebrates and promotes the "countinghouse ethos"'s encroachment into education.

That ethos, indeed, is explicitly associated with immaturity. As one of Gaddis' early working notes clarifies: "the essential property of JR – as those he satirises – is his lack of charisma (a matter-of-fact acceptance of this) i.e. the goals are –out there-. But: business must be offered. Shown as essentially a childish affair."⁴⁷ JR is from the beginning an extreme, a paradigmatic child among children: among the child cast of the Wagner performance Bast is organizing, for example, "he's already littler than us" (35). So what exactly are these qualities that JR (junior) embodies as an extreme satirical benchmark for "those" in the "essentially... childish affair" of "business"?

⁴⁶ After the empire's total collapse, for example, Bast has berated JR for distorting a Bach piece into vulgarity—"what I heard first this lady starts singing up yours up yours so then this man starts singing up mine" (658)—through a return to the language of his Mozart lecture: "you can't get up to their level so you drag them down to yours, if there's any way to ruin something, to degrade it, to cheapen it..." (659). But as Bast recuperates in hospital, the lawyer Coen explains how he grew to love a piece by Handel, "yes when I was a child I thought the soprano here was singing get away!" (667). JR too might outgrow his degrading distortions. See also my analysis of his window-image later in this article.

⁴⁷ Gaddis, loose note beginning "little girl".

There's that forsaking of interiority in the pursuit of "goals" "out there." There's his relentless acquisitiveness: in a moment of intra-system recognition, Teakell sees JR in a field-trip photo: "this one down front here holding up the stock certificate, ever see so much greed confined in one small face?" (461). No surprise, then, that another note simply connects "JR & A Rand's 'objectivism.'"⁴⁸ JR's characteristic way of identifying his subjects—as "this here" X, notably the first of his vocal tics that Bast inadvertently picks up (445)—reflects the narrowed temporal bandwidth of his childish perception, which shares Rand's anti-Kantian presumption that we have immediate contact with reality as we manipulate it to our purposes.

The novel stresses the difference in moral culpability between JR and the business world by emphasizing their practical similarity. Tabbi's biography suggests that Gaddis' own satirical outlook and "impatience with the follies of grownups" depended on his consciously preserving qualities his young self had shared with JR.⁴⁹ But too wilful a clinging to childish instincts is "folly" in a "grownup." The generational distinction is established by another Randian punchcard-before-personality scene, in which Hyde distorts DiCephalis—"the individual, yes, key the technology to the individ... —yes, Dan knows what I'm talking about, key the individual to the technology"—while his supervisor Teakell plugs his ears to negative feedback: "[d]on't tell me things I don't want to know" (224/5). These are adults behaving like JR, and that this is all a "childish affair" is conveyed by the scene's background discussion about the displacement and cancellation of the school's *adult* education program.

This wilfulness is the key to the novel's vision of culpability. *JR's* business world valorizes its own infantilism, hence the locution that spreads through the novel once JR himself rises to a position of influence: "big boys" (525)—"boss'es within organizations, or large companies in the marketplace—are exempted from moral, legal, or credibility standards that constrain adults like Bast or the lawyers Beamish and Beaton. The connection between bigness and boyness—permissive respect and

⁴⁸ Gaddis. loose note with "objectivism."

⁴⁹ A "child's sense of immediacy, the capacity to enter into the moment-by-moment flow of life as it unfolds, not trying to make narrative sense of one's situation, and not caring overmuch if the whole setup comes crashing down" (Tabbi 23).

incomplete development—leaves lower-level business figures like PR man Davidoff putting their faith in the untutored instinct of big boys like board member Stamper, who

converted his old slave cabins to fancy guest cottages I just heard he got so mad when he saw his new tax assessment he went out and burned them all down, big overgrown kid never got past fourth grade Bast told me once the Boss [JR] never got out of sixth frankly sometimes I believe it [...] (522).

Stamper's very name conjures a toddler's tantrum. Amy early on identifies that JR comes from "a home without, I don't know. Without grownups" (246). In an "essentially childish" world "without grownups," "big overgrown kids" are a growth investment. Recall, then, the children who see JR "already littler than us": that "already" suggests that there's more childishness to be achieved, a further movement toward "kid"ness that will, ironically, make JR an ever bigger business-world "boy."

Another working note discusses "maturing" within *J R*'s culture in terms of the "welcome shrinking of horizons, meanness and survival."⁵⁰ This "welcome shrinking" reflects the business cast building their system upon a Randian celebration of "meanness and survival." A note from the same sheet as the "childish affair" diagnosis suggests that Gaddis initially pondered distinguishing JR from their world: "JR must be tied into deterministic=mechanistic(or opposite) approach – of opposite – indeterminacy – is it this insight which separates him from his bus. opponents?"⁵¹ In the final novel, JR has no greater affinity for or proficiency with indeterminacy than anyone else around him; they become less his "opponents" than collaborators in a system within which competition only feeds the shared second-order "goal" of a "welcome shrinking" of consciousness and value. Any opportunity for "gownup" development is stamped out by those in charge of the infantilizing system: hence the line Tabbi extracted to title his biography: "Nobody Grew but the Business."

⁵⁰ Gaddis, loose note headed "Bast home – consistencies".

⁵¹ Gaddis, loose note beginning "little girl".

When "maturing" entails "shrinking," what emerges is not a miseducation of JR, but adult aspiration toward *his* qualities. Critics have widely noted how the characters who come into contact with JR come to take on the phrasing and rhythm of his speech, and I've examined elsewhere how one important marker of Bast's achievement in the novel is his briefly making JR sound more like Bast.⁵² Few characters are immune from unflattering comparisons to children: when Gibbs is railing unproductively to Amy, for example—"do you think I'm eleven years old? One of your class six J eleven-year-old"—she notes how this draws him into the very system he's lamenting: "you're behaving like one" (481). The novel constantly emphasizes the wilfulness by which a system based on childishly ignoring "things I don't want to know" leads to regression: by the novel's end still no one apart from Bast—who has tried relentlessly to communicate it but been interrupted, silenced or ignored—realizes that JR Corp is run by JR the eleven-year-old. This ignorance is not accidental: the business world has paid enough attention to JR to install him as one of its own "big boys," but not enough to recognize the boy he actually is.

This silencing of perspectives that distinguish "adult" from "childish" corresponds to the wilful incorporation of the latter. When Coach Vogel, armed with a doctorate JR has bought him, gets JR Corp investment for his plan to freeze sound and teleport humans, Beamish unsuccessfully tries to stop Davidoff making a competing investment because the idea "is really quite beyond the bounds of even the most childish fan..." Davidoff, though, defers to the doctorate: "hard to believe what these science boys come up with" (529). When Bast accidentally brings JR's homework into a business meeting, the page of rudimentary information on the state of "Alsaka" gets taken as the rationale for an investment position that, for the remainder of the novel, everyone includes in their calculations about how to deal with JR Corp. The more childish or chaff-ish the material, the more enthusiastically the "big boys" bring it into their circulating system of investments and positions. The more they wilfully incorporate of JR's throwaway discourse, the more their system tends toward his basest qualities.

⁵² See Chetwynd, "Friction Problems," especially the section on "Style, Events, and *JR's* Rhetorical Arc".

JR is thus installed as the novel's most effectual educator, his pupils those who perpetuate the novel's system toward him and toward its censurable, humanly piloted collapse. Hence the novel's Fiasco-concerns, initially redirected to administration, eventually recur to education. Once the school plot starts to dwindle, JR's plans evolve from "grabbing the education market" to "taking over education and all" (421/649), and he's repeatedly framed in tutorial roles: the paradigm of childishness elevated to the positions from which the novel's adults take their cues. Eventually, of course, he ends up owning his own school, privatizing it after getting the parents to protest against education taxes, which enables him to cash in by leasing out its entire physical plant and to make a ready market for the textbooks in which he has sold advertizing. The corporation's staff have happily accepted this idea even though it leads to Beamish's resignation (517), while JR steals another "big boy" idea from Hyde in replacing grades with payments. Having colonized the classroom from an administrative position, he's then delighted to see himself described, in another "thing out of the paper," in further terms of mature authority: "that's me, the parent" (654).

The lost Fiasco-role of enthusiastic instructor is reserved for JR alone: even before the novel's halfway point he has signed his still-employed teachers Bast, Gibbs, and Amy up for speed-reading lessons (346), while later on he aims his education at students: he has recorded a tape for 8th graders in New Jersey who will repeat his class's project of "buying this share of America." That he's now making educational material for children older than him reiterates the vision of education as a "shrinking" regression toward "already littler" JR, rather than a taught development beyond "childish affairs." The encyclopedias manufactured by JR Corp go out into the world with inaccurate and falsified entries because he has refused to pay writers more than half a dollar per entry, but no adult in the organization is qualified to identify which entries are the wrong ones, so they keep circulating uncorrected JR-isms with epistemic authority.

JR's most strenuous teaching effort, however, comes amid his attempts to buy land out from under a Native American reservation. He fails to bring the isolated tribe into his circuit because they are not wired into an electricity grid that could power his gift of old fridges. Their comparable isolation from institutional education

leads his wish for a spectacle of cultural incorporation to fail because "we have to go spend this here money learning them how to row these canoes and shoot off these here bow and arrows like they can't hardly do anything for theirself?" while "they're so dumb they don't even know their own history so then we have to go pay this here topflight writer to fix them up with one" (637). The outcome of this fixed-up education is that, newly aware of what they've lost, the Native Americans chase JR Corp off their land. Education can, then, be a path to resisting the system, but when the system's big boys elevate JR to talismanic positions of educational influence, they inculcate a movement not toward new or lost knowledge, but toward *his* inability to distinguish false information from sound: their failures are in self-education rather than in miseducating JR.

The novel's ending suggests, even after the failures of JR's "empire," that he might retain and expand his influence. Failure, as he tells Bast, is no obstacle to a career in education: "you could go on this here lecture tour just like everybody hey? Where you screw everything up so then you get to go on this here lecture tour at these neat colleges and all and you write this here book and you get to go on tv where you make all this money" (663). It's perhaps no surprise, then, that his own failures put him, in the novel's final unanswered monologue, on the brink of yet greater influence: "all these here letters and offers I been getting because I mean like remember this here book that time where they wanted me to write about success [...] there was this big groundswill about leading this here parade and entering public life and all? So I mean listen I got this neat idea" (726). This is where JR may be heading, and the novel has told us repeatedly that the culture is willing to install him there. No wonder, then, that Gaddis followed up the novel with a short sketch in which "JR goes to Washington."⁵³

Intertexts and Innocence

This critique of the "childish" culture's installation of JR as its "leading" "public" figure-head develops the Fiasco's concern with wasted opportunity, misdirected authority, and—above all—wilful culpability. I'll end by showing how this approach to the novel

⁵³ Gaddis, "Trickle-Up Economics: JR goes to Washington".

makes sense of two previously unnoted, archivally-endorsed allusions that do their work squarely within the human-blame framework of the Fiasco transmutations.

In the novel's very first presentation of administrative characters, the sun "caught [Vogel] flat across the lenses, erasing any life behind them in a flash of inner vacancy" (18). The flattening erasure of "life behind" is a paradigm of the administrated world: hence the novel's excision, at the prose level, of represented interiority. What matters here, though, is the flatness' complicated source: on one hand it's imposed from without, such that Vogel is "caught... across the lenses," but it also ratifies a deep "inner vacancy" "flash"ing outward in response. The thoughtless "flat"ness that subsequently defines the administrative world is thus figured as at once default *and* culpable; its giving up of inner "life" is not passive or inevitable but involves active assent. It answers to the very motivational depths it notionally abolishes.

This seemingly incidental image was important enough to Gaddis that his notes toward the novel stipulate it as the scene's main feature,⁵⁴ and its stakes become clearer when we realize it echoes another piece of writing on the relation between thought, language, and agency. In "Politics and the English Language" (1946), George Orwell conjures "moments when the light catches the speaker's spectacles and turns them into blank discs which seem to have no eyes behind them."⁵⁵ Orwell was explaining the relationship between thoughtless language use and a "reduced state of consciousness," "favourable to political conformity," accustoming oneself to which requires deliberately "turning [one]self" toward it, like doublethink in *1984*.⁵⁶ The image thus highlights not only the thoughtless nature of the school administrators' world, but their culpability for opting into it. Among the language tics that the business world picks up from *JR* is discussion of what and how you're "suppose to" do. The dropping of the passive "d" makes "suppose" an active verb: in that world, one "supposes" in order to "do": action relies on actively thoughtless assent to existing givens.

⁵⁴ "Whitebcks pastels, lght across lenses" (Gaddis, loose note with "Whitebcks pastels.")

⁵⁵ Orwell, unpaginated. David Letzler has recently drawn on "Politics and the English Language" to explain how *J R* challenges its reader to work out which uses of jargon in the novel are content-bearing and which low-information "cruft," but he doesn't note the echoed image or suggest that the essay might be a direct source for the novel.

⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

The image's relation to education depends, though, on its further development by a counterpoint scene focusing on JR himself. Early on, a drowsy Bast listens to JR and Hyde's son in the train seat ahead of him talking about what they can get for free in the mail, laying the foundations for JR's subsequent empire. In a key moment for the question of whether JR could exceed his culture, he trails off "in a tone so low it was lost before it reached his image on the dirty pane where he stared now as though staring through at something far beyond" (129).

Where the light on Vogel's glass showed how the real depth of "life behind" was wilfully cancelled, JR's counterpart image posits "something far beyond" a flat reflection. And what that beyond must *go* beyond is "his image," which is contingent on a possible "as though": JR's current immature figure *may* be non-final, non-inevitable, even for he whose reflection it is. But the scene casts light back on Vogel's own contrasting lens-flash—wilfully vacant and beyondless—implying that *his* self-cultivation is only toward that flat child "image on the dirty pane," which his self-flattening adult system takes as its model, tutor, and "goal." Strehle was right, then, to see "reflection" as the key metaphor for intergenerational influence in *JR*, though wrong about who's reflecting who: Gaddis' reflection-images insist on the perverse flipping of generational influence and aspiration.

If this Orwell-allusion develops the Fiasco's ideas about authority, thoughtlessness, wilfulness, potential, and blame, another more contemporary allusion clarifies just how fundamentally these issues hinge on education.

In the early "already littler" scene, students complain to Bast that he's asking them to read "all these words [...] which we didn't have them yet": when he asks what grade of English they're in, they respond with "English? —Like he means Communication Skills only we didn't get those words yet" (34). Joan Didion's "Slouching Toward Bethlehem" (1967) is a scathingly sad take on the drug-deluded directionlessness of the Haight-Ashbury generation, and one of its most famous formulations is its description of the simmering counterculture as "an army of children waiting to be given the words."⁵⁷ Didion's even bleaker *Play it as it Lays* (1970) was the final reading in the class Gaddis taught on "The Literature of Failure" at Bard College.

⁵⁷ Didion 123.

"Bethlehem"'s key question is whether the California child-culture created its own incompetent spiral into confusion and self-harm, or whether blame lay with the failures of the adult world that first neglected that generation into incoherence and then, by celebrating its every new effusion, encouraged and steepened its descent.

Didion's focus on harm finds its Knight-Conley miseducation-narrative echo less in relation to JR himself than to Rhoda, squatter in the apartment Bast, Gibbs, and JR use for business correspondence. Rhoda is older than JR—old enough to be sexually exploited and addicted to cocaine—but callers who think she's a secretary suspect "she never got past fourth grade" (432). She seems to have educable potential: she manages to maintain a sceptical distance from the business circuit looping through her home, and while Gibbs initially mocks her idea that she could write a book about what she's learned by failing to fulfil her ambition of modelling—"ought to teach, too" (606)—he comes to realize hers is the attitude he should have taken to his own life's failings. However, she suffers more than JR when she finally enters the "system" for cash, as the politician contracted to "save" her from a fake suicide attempt ends up pushing her out of the window when he misunderstands her drugged use of the word "fly." This harm from incompatible delusions follows Gibbs' Didion-ian lament that she can't be "expect"ed to think like an adult: "kid like that she lives in a scene where hallucination is confused with vision" (620). Rhoda could have stepped straight out of Didion's world of inarticulate young women, acculturated through words not given and vacuums of value to empty despair or empty misdirected faith: her story, perhaps, is the closest the novel comes to developing the (negative) "educational treatise" that the Ford work briefly prompted.

Like Gaddis' nod to Orwell, Didion thus helps him develop the question of blame. It's no coincidence that, as with the Orwell, the Didion Gaddis here transmutes is concerned with unmastered "words." Without an adult world offering linguistic resources that could be used for clear conscious thought, says Didion, the "Slouching" generation can only think in narrower and narrower "platitudes," "feed[ing] back" an ad-man vocabulary as if filtered through DiCephalis' punchcards.⁵⁸ The central

⁵⁸ Ibid., 123.

rough-beast threat for Didion and Gaddis, though, is not the harm to neglected "children" like Rhoda, but what the neglectful adult world will thereby do to *itself*. Didion's titular "Toward" suggested that, in so celebrating the "aborted" infantilism that emerged from its refusal to pass on workable words, adult America might itself start tending, much more censurably, toward that same condition.⁵⁹ It might start learning from those it failed to educate. This, with *JR's* elevation to the role of "public" educator, is *JR's* worry too.

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While Didion scrutinized the counterculture and Gaddis the hegemonic managerial culture, his echoes of her and Orwell reveal a shared target: the way that promoting "childish" depthlessness leaves a notionally adult world censurable not only for failing its children, but also for failing to keep itself "grownup." *JR* partakes of a postwar anxiety about the relationship between depthlessness, language, deliberate thoughtlessness, and harm that runs from Orwell, through Hannah Arendt diagnosing Adolf Eichmann's thoughtless absorption in cliché as a key to his evil, through Gaddis' and Didion's comically despairing vision of adults installing children as instructors in thoughtlessness, to more recent critiques like medical psychiatrist Bruce Charlton's diagnosis of the deliberate "psychological neoteny" of a culture that fetishizes "Boy-genius."⁶⁰

Unlike Rhoda, *JR* goes unharmed by this culture-wide failure of maturation: he's not a victim of failed education, but a figurehead perpetrator of it. *JR*, in its language and its narrative, dramatizes a culture's interests and capacities deliberately "shrinking" to those of a greedy child. Figuring the operation as almost completed, it puts the dramatic imperative on its part-time-teacher protagonists to come up with

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, 85.

⁶⁰ Arendt in 1963 anticipates many of Gaddis' depth-tropes, as she argues that "evil is never radical, that it is only extreme, and that it possesses neither depth nor any demonic dimension. It can overgrow and lay waste the whole world precisely because it spreads like a fungus on the surface. It is 'thought-defying' as I said, because thought tries to reach some depth, to go to the roots, and the moment it concerns itself with evil, it is frustrated because there is nothing" (396). Charlton in 2006 can adopt the Gaddis/Didion trope of flipped education, as those who cultivate "flexible immaturity" "tend to thrive and succeed and now *set the tone of contemporary life*" (my italics, 681).

some way of averting it. Yet as the instructional TV system collapses, adult education gets cut, and the school personnel turn over, the prospects for resistance to grow on school turf are lost.

Stosic reads Gaddis' whole career as a self-proposed antidote to the false-authority problem within the context of aesthetic and verbal education: a standing correction to a world in which "[t]he poet-teachers, writing to please the bad taste of their critics, abdicate their responsibility to instruct, leaving the underqualified free to teach each other."⁶¹ Here, certainly, are the educational inversions that Gaddis' *Didion*-allusion highlights. But *J R* expands the dynamics Gaddis had diagnosed in his Ford-work beyond aesthetics or classrooms alone, to a whole adult world modeling itself on children. Despite the transmutation of its material away from purely classroom matters, the Ford Foundation Fiasco significantly shaped this wider final vision. It provided perhaps *J R*'s crucial germ, as Gaddis' earliest occasion to fully think through what happens when subsystems of public life are systematically captured by a mindset determined to "tailor" the world to the punchcard "limitations" of what its own childish greed can process.

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⁶¹ Stosic 428.

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