

Histoire(s) of Art and the Commodity:
Love, Death, and the Search for Community
in William Gaddis and Jean-Luc Godard

Damien Marwood

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Abstract

In the absence of a transcendental, communal ground for art, Hermann Broch declares that the artist no longer knows if he is “a saint or a salesman”. The works of William Gaddis and Jean-Luc Godard expose the limits of thinking in terms of such an opposition. Both dramatize the artist’s “imprisonment in immanence” after Kant, while also insisting on the strict separation of art and commerce to the point of devising formulations of art and truth best described as secular absolutes. Both artists desire to somehow “save” or “redeem” the world. However, by embracing the all or nothing of the Romantic “sacred flame” of art, both risk achieving only the latter. This is demonstrated via both artists’ responses to the perceived social effects of the commodity: the challenge to the *sensus communis* posed by the phantasmagoric world of advertising, and the disintegration of community in a world of relationships reduced to exchange. Though on opposite sides of the *sensus communis* debate, and working from two different conceptions of love, both artists attempt to outmanoeuvre the commodity by defining an ethics of love and the gift that is also an ethics of the Other. Despite the initial attraction of Godard’s formulation of love as eros over Gaddis’ use of agapē, ultimately both ethics are vulnerable to a similar critique: where one looks infinitely backward, the other looks infinitely forward, and both can be accused of an incompatibility with politics. That neither position is inevitable is illustrated through the work of Michel Serres and Jacques Rancière, philosophers whose critiques of harmony and consensus demand an art based not on unity, order, and truth, but on democracy, chance, and fiction.

Declaration

I certify that this work contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma in my name, in any university or other tertiary institution and, to the best of my knowledge and belief, contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference has been made in the text. In addition, I certify that no part of this work will, in the future, be used in a submission in my name, for any other degree or diploma in any university or other tertiary institution without the prior approval of the University of Adelaide and where applicable, any partner institution responsible for the joint-award of this degree.

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Gold in the mountain
And gold in the glen,
And greed in the heart,
Heaven having no part,
And unsatisfied men.

— Herman Melville, "Gold in the Mountain"

Introduction

Long since, of course, in the spirit of that noblesse oblige which she personified, Paris had withdrawn from any legitimate connection with works of art, and directly increased her entourage of those living for Art's sake. — *The Recognitions* 73

The history of art and philosophy of the twentieth century could well be written as the attempt to navigate two major discourses: on the one hand the rise of the Commodity, under the guise of various strands of postmodernism and talk of “Late Capitalism”, and on the other, a cultural and philosophical obsession with Catastrophe, both physical and metaphysical; “permanent apocalypse”, in the words of Susan Sontag (“Thinking” 75). The concepts of the Adamic Fall and the incarnatory catastrophe of the Gnostics illustrate humanity's long and rich relationship with the idea of catastrophe, yet it is also true that the twentieth century has provided more material to work with than most. Considering only those potential catastrophes related to the “engine” of capitalism, mechanization, mechanical reproduction plays its part not only in the perceived collapse of the importance, the aura, of the two most hallowed of art forms, painting and music, but also the possibility of the death of work, the anxiety of general apocalypse from the Great War to the Cold War, and most importantly, and depressingly, the Taylorization of genocide (with all of the “banality of evil” that this entails) witnessed at Auschwitz. This final event has become the absent centre of a twentieth century philosophy that is, in the words of Maurice Blanchot, “the writing of the disaster”. On the other hand, as John Frow has argued, much of the ado about modernism and postmodernism can be interpreted as the attempted superimposition of a break on what is more simply read as a “structured anxiety” over the perceived commodification of art and culture (Frow 4), and correspondingly, art's ever more porous relationship with the commodity and advertising. The two strands meet most famously, of course, in Adorno and Horkheimer's conception of the Culture Industry, but are equally as important to Walter Benjamin's commodity as phantasmagoria, and Jean-François Lyotard's abandonment of the *sensus communis*. Whether or not the commodity and this larger cultural catastrophe are as intertwined as any of these theorists propose, at the very least the two are impossible to discuss separately. The problem of the former gains its strength due to the latter;

the air of cultural and metaphysical crisis increases the demands on art at a time when the very existence of art and metaphysics itself is under question.

One of the key moments of this culture of metaphysical catastrophe was the Lisbon earthquake of 1755, a disaster that prompted a widespread rejection of Leibnizian theodicy and “Optimism”, visible artistically both in (the Parisian) Voltaire’s *Candide* (1759) and, much later, (the New Englander) Herman Melville’s *The Confidence Man* (1857); both were books designed to deflate what the authors saw as the facile spirit of Optimism/Confidence of the time. Lisbon and Leibniz would then play a part in motivating Immanuel Kant to forever put God, transcendence, out of the reach of philosophy in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (1781, 1787), an act whose impact on the arts and the artist is dramatically assumed and illustrated by famously being named as the cause of Heinrich von Kleist’s madness and suicide, the prospect of a life without recourse to an exterior measure too much to bear. Before his death, however, he would write “The Earthquake in Chile” (1807), in which a pair of star-crossed lovers are spared death by what seems like Divine Providence, only in order to die at the hands of what can no longer seem the will of the divine, but simply the vagaries of an utterly contingent, careless universe. Neither of the artists under discussion go quite so far, but their works not only bear the same unmistakable traces of Kleist’s concerns, but also point to the rise of Frow’s commodity anxiety. William Gaddis’ *The Recognitions* (1955), which features an early reference to the “unswerving punctuality of chance” (9), a mid-text probable reference to the earthquakes in both Lisbon and Chile, and a contemporary example of the cruelty of the universe “when Jimmy Concannon’s car threw a wheel, and in a crowd of eleven thousand it killed his mother” (566), ends with a profoundly metonymic collapse of a church¹. Meanwhile, the protagonist’s crisis, the crisis that propels the action of the novel and motivates Wyatt’s reversion to the possibilities of an earlier epoch’s art, is catalysed by an encounter with a mercenary art critic. Jean-Luc Godard’s *Passion* (1982) presents a similar scenario.

¹ Kleist’s story, though ostensibly based on the earthquake in Santiago in 1647, would have brought to mind the earthquake in Lisbon, particularly given the fact that the couple of Kleist’s story are saved, only to be killed by a mob in accord with “divine judgement”; in the Lisbon earthquake a large number of churches were destroyed or burned, with many killed in the churches while seeking refuge (Kendrick 59). Gaddis refers to the cave-in of a burning church in 19th century Chile (563).

Jerzy's search for the correct "light" with which to film *tableaux vivants* of Old Masters, a light associated with Simone Weil, and by association, Plato, is constantly interrupted by the financial concerns of his producers, the rules of this new game illustrated comedically by an ancillary character's constant refrain of "*mon chèque!*". In Hermann Broch's words, the artist no longer knows whether he is a "saint, or a salesman" (*Hofmannsthal* 95), and here Broch, and Kant, also provide one last concern: the question of community. A lack of saints points to a perceived lack of communal values other than market value. With art under attack by the commodity the *sensus communis* is called into question; in a century of catastrophe, can art provide redemption, or only consolation? Can it still, in some way, presage community?

The two artists under consideration here, working in two different media, provide two responses to this careless and contingent universe, to the becoming-commodity of art in a post-Optimistic century of peak catastrophe, to the fate of art and the image in the age of technological reproduction, to art as communication or hope of community. Godard, always searching for new possibilities in the cinema, exhibits a faith in the power of art as philosophy, in the possibilities inherent in a view of art as metamorphosis, and a long-held (though sometimes wavering) belief in the necessity of rethinking love, citing Arthur Rimbaud's "love must be reinvented" (*Season* 201, 266). It is no accident that Godard's other depiction of the "erasure of transcendence" (Hill, "A Form That Thinks" 400) occurs in *Hélas pour moi* (1993), a film that points out the necessarily embodied aspect of love. Gaddis, a satirist *par excellence*, mourns a perceived liquidation of authenticity in a mechanized world, holding a view of art as preservation of tradition, of not only love's labour but love itself lost, of gallows humour. Gaddis focuses on the lack of love, or more specifically agapē, in a world of exchange, in an America of debased "cash-value" pragmatism, and gestures on multiple occasions towards the tradition of a "noble" death of sacrifice or protest. Godard also identifies a depreciation, or perhaps deprecation, of love under capitalism, and declares in his later, post Dziga-Vertov work that "catastrophe is the first strophe of a love poem" ("*Une Catastrophe*"), engaging with contemporary French philosophical (and political)

discussions of eros, the gift, the sacred, and community². And while Gaddis admits to struggling to see his words making a positive contribution to society, rather getting lost in the noise, succumbing to an overall universal entropy (less a minimal vision of artistic communion among the elite in his final work) Godard retains a utopian, Bergsonian faith in the image, in the cinema, to the point where he can speak of the possibility of advancing, or formulating more effectively, the philosophy of Emmanuel Levinas, not coincidentally a philosophy of the Other³. Common to both, however, is an insistence that Art is in some sense a category unto itself; that it is not mere ornament, nor entertainment, nor rhetoric, nor a political tool, though it is also not apolitical, nor commodity, and that communication (and community) is the ideal. One should not underestimate the importance of collaboration with photographer and filmmaker Anne-Marie Miéville to Godard, formalized in the creation of the Son+Image studio. Some of Godard's most interesting pieces are not Godard pieces at all, but Godard/Miéville works, including *Soft and Hard* (1986) and *The Old Place* (1999), two works that feature actual dialogues between the two artists. Alas, not even the presence of Godard the actor has seen Miéville's solo directorial work receive a widespread release, hence their absence from this study.

Indeed if one artist searches for love, and the other arrives at a valediction of death, it is not surprising that this opposition turns on a belief in the possibility (or lack thereof) of communication. As Nicole Brenez argues, "[o]ne of the defining characteristics of Godard's œuvre is its restoration of dignity to the notion of information" (Introduction). Gaddis, on the other hand, trades metaphysical catastrophe for thermodynamic catastrophe after his first novel, and from *JR* (1975) onward focusses on the devastating effects of entropy, perceived as the inevitable degeneration of the channels of information. This last claim is counter to that of a number of Gaddis' critics, who have argued that the form of *JR*, for

² Insofar as all of these discussions were born out of responses to capitalism, fascism, and the failure of May '68, the failure of a certain way of thinking about politics and attempting to achieve political progress; and also because, as Jacques Rancière points out, "Man is a political animal because he is a literary animal who lets himself be diverted from his 'natural' purpose by the power of words [...] a theoretical discourse is always simultaneously an aesthetic form, a sensible reconfiguration of the facts it is arguing about" (*Politics of Aesthetics* 40, 65).

³ Two forms of Levinas' name appear in the general literature. The more widespread spelling, "Levinas", is employed here except in the case of direct quotation where the author has specifically used the accented form "Lévinas".

example, embodies a kind of second order information theory that restores the possibility of meaning to the reader, the world, despite the first order references to Gibbs, Wiener and entropy. Yet even if this were true of *JR*, his “participatory” (Schryer 77-8) works seem to have collapsed by the time of the appropriately posthumous *Agapē Agape* (2002) into a flickering hope of an occasional meeting of minds, a Flaubertian “passing of the torch” (*Agapē* 35) of art. Communication is limited to a shared experience that verges on an experience of Lyotard’s postmodern sublime. The key metaphor for Godard, on the other hand, is not entropy but a combination of Bergsonian consciousness and André Malraux’s idea of art as metamorphosis, a conception of art whose transmission cannot be controlled, and later, Maurice Blanchot’s reading of Malraux. Blanchot, and to a certain extent Malraux and hence Godard, here fits squarely in the tradition of the Jena Romantics, whose importance to the Western literary and philosophical legacy has been so incisively discussed by Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe (also via Blanchot). This is not to say that Godard does not exhibit in his rhetoric and artistic practice an extreme solitude, but that his faith in cinema has allowed the director to dedicate this solitude, even during the melancholic years of the *Histoire(s)*, to the service of an ideal community. Nor is it to say that Gaddis does not once again appear to be stumbling towards a renewed belief in the possibilities of art as a method of defining community in his final work; but, at least at first glance, the ideal community here is smaller than that of Godard, seemingly consisting of a few daemonically-inspired Artist/Philosopher Kings. The fact that the distance between these two artists is also a curious proximity, however, speaks to both artists’ Romanticism, and to what is perhaps a shared search for an immanent idealism.

METHODOLOGY

The question of the “ideal” returns us to the commodity, and to the form and ultimate concerns of this thesis. This work began as a comparative study of Godard’s and Gaddis’ responses to the commodity anxiety described by Frow, an anxiety that revealed itself to be impossible to extricate from the metaphysical anxiety over the loss of transcendence. As Frow has also noted, however, the commodity and its opposite, the gift, are not objects at all, but rather social relations (124). They are

fictions that describe the extreme poles of social unity and disunity: the commodity is the model of absolute alienation, the gift the model of organic unity. There is then an internal logic to the fact that both artists' "pure" versions of the commodity (and art's relation to it) are accompanied by an attempt to redefine or rediscover community, involving the gift in the case of Godard, and *agapē*, known in some forms as *caritas*, or charity, in that of Gaddis. The question of the commodity is, in other words, already the question of community. Gaddis, a secular Erasmus, satirises the folly of the contemporary world in order to draw attention to the contemporary lack of *agapē*; as Robert Elliott has pointed out, utopia and satire are inseparable, "the one a critique of the real world in the name of something better, the other a hopeful construct of a world that might be. The hope feeds the criticism, the criticism the hope" (24). Godard's cinematic experiments rarely repeat themselves in form and method, but each of his films serves as an entry into a personal conversation directed at finding the answer to "What is to be done"⁴, whether it be *Alphaville's* dystopia, *King Lear's* tone of mourning, *Nouvelle Vague's* exploration of the gift and community, or *Notre Musique's* interest in the ethics of Levinas. Both artists, in effect, seek to achieve "salvation", or utopia, via their art. Beginning with the question of the commodity, then, we ineluctably find our way to the relation of art and utopia.

Just as importantly, though, the question of this relation, and more generally the question of the effectiveness of art, is for both of these artists the question of Romanticism, a formulation of the power of art as a transhistorical force with the power of philosophy. *The Recognitions* may explicitly disavow the Romanticism of Novalis, but the constant disparagement of a world turned phantasmagoric and the more explicitly Platonic leanings of *Agape* suggest a return of the repressed. Godard's "What is to be done" may have martialled Marxism against metaphysics and idealism, but Godard's later works owe much to Bergson and Blanchot, and his rhetoric of the artist as physician and philosopher again recall Novalis. Indeed, in their continued relationship with a transformed, immanent Romanticism, Jameson's verdict regarding the Godard of *Passion* and beyond proves to be applicable to both:

⁴ The title of a manifesto of sorts by Godard published in 1970 (originally titled "Que faire?", but published in English), and prior to that an 1863 Russian Utopian novel by N.G. Chernyshevsky.

For Godard – surely as postmodern *avant la lettre* as one might have wished in the heyday of auteurist high modernism – has today in full postmodernism become the ultimate survivor of the modern as such. Who else today would reaffirm – by way of that unexpected permutation of his otherwise grotesque self-mockery (the invalid of *Carmen* [1982], the Fool of *King Lear* [1987], the Prince Myshkin of *Soigne ta droite* [1987]) into the ultimate seer and prophetic figure of the *Scénario de Passion* – the conception of the Romantic genius and creator in the strongest and most unseasonable expression it has found in our own time? (*Geopolitical* 162-3)

This return to Romanticism “solves” the problem of the commodity for both artists, insofar as such a return can be said to solve a problem (the purity and potency of art, the corrupting effect of the commodity) that Romanticism participated in formulating: it is not so much a solution, then, as the inevitable closure of the circle. Viewing the efficacy of such a Romantic practice with some suspicion, the work of Rancière and Blanchot is used to contextualise Frow’s discussion of the commodity/gift divide. In so doing, the fascinating parallels between the resultant impossible ethics of both artists not only call into question the utility of a strict commodity/art divide from an artist’s point of view, but indicate the extent to which Romanticism is perhaps not the solution that both artists would like it to be.

Both Godard and Gaddis work within very “traditional” models of authorship, and this thesis responds in kind with a traditional set of tools. The majority of the thesis is comprised of a number of close readings of key texts read within the overarching narrative of the commodity and community. These readings examine not only the formal and structural properties of the texts, as for example in an analysis of *The Recognitions*’ reliance on an Aristotelian model of anagnorisis, but also the contributions of a variety of previously ignored contexts, philosophical and political, and intertexts, philosophical and artistic. For Gaddis, to list only a few examples, *The Recognitions* is discussed in relation to Henry David Thoreau, Robert Rauschenberg, the phenomenon of the monochrome, and the work of Saul Bellow in order to demonstrate the attempted affirmation of immanence in the novel’s conclusion. *JR* and the figure of entropy are contextualised by the career and concerns of Hermann Broch,

demonstrating the novel's kinship with the latter's Platonist and Romantic worldview, the heroic existentialism of Norbert Wiener, and the entropic fixation of Oswald Spengler in order to counterbalance arguments for a postmodern Gaddis. The figure of Basie is reevaluated in light of the tradition of the confidence man of Melville, Malraux and Saul Bellow, exposing the ultimately conflicted nature of Gaddis' attempt to embrace a world of flux. Likewise, Godard's *King Lear* and the *Histoire(s)* are read alongside Malraux's *Saturn: An Essay on Goya* in order to illustrate these films' dialectic of death and rebirth, of metamorphosis, rather than simple despair and negation. *Nouvelle Vague* is read as a partial response to Duras' *The Malady of Death* and Blanchot's *The Unavowable Community* to emphasise the film's place in the re-evaluation of community since May '68. *Notre Musique* is discussed alongside both Maupassant's and Adorno's "Sur l'Eau", in order to see more clearly Godard's arrival at a new form of negative utopianism.

While the relatively small number of major works by Gaddis allows each to be considered in some detail both individually and as part of a series, the sheer quantity of works by Godard makes this impossible, and as such only the most pertinent and problematic works are considered. These works themselves raise a further problem, however, in that they are often irreducible to simple narrative synopses, or at the very least, in that much of the meaning that resides in these dense and highly allusive films often lies less in the often perfunctory plot, than in certain key scenes. The majority of work on each film is thus spent on reading these scenes through a very specific, sympathetic, thematic lens—to the point of courting the so-called intentional fallacy. Though perhaps not "traditional" film analysis, this style of reading will be more than familiar to Godard scholars. This approach does have the drawback of requiring a more than cursory knowledge of the films (and secondary literature) in question, but then this is to a certain extent unavoidable given the scope of Godard's career and the constraints and ambitions of the thesis. Meanwhile, the extensive use of the secondary literature on both authors not only acknowledges the valuable scholarly work that has gone before but aids in the demonstration of the usefulness of the narrative under construction, illustrating that a number of

interpretational ambiguities can be resolved from within the appropriate frame. Exegetic analysis becomes eisegetic, and the hermeneutic worm turns.

Finally, given that both Gaddis' books and Godard's films are highly intertextual, it is important to note that the large number of philosophers and theories discussed are not invoked for their truth value but for their influence on or, as in the case of Lyotard and Gaddis, and Baudrillard and Godard, their potential insight into the works and working philosophies of the artists. A concrete stance on cinematic or literary form and practice is deferred until the final words on Romanticism and Rancière in relation to *Film Socialisme* and *Agapē Agape*, except where it is necessary to contextualise the work in question within the larger concerns of the thesis or to productively refute a critical misconception. The only counter-examples are the work of Michel Serres and Jacques Rancière, both of whom offer, in very different ways, what I believe to be more useful approaches, artistically and politically, to living with the commodity, with catastrophe, and with chaos: approaches that bring into stark relief the classical models within which these otherwise extremely innovative artists work. These philosophers, as with the work of Frow, are used in the service of a traditional "suspicious" reading: to what extent do Gaddis' and Godard's Romantic assumptions conflict with their utopian desires?

TOPOGRAPHY

The first chapter, "Commodity, Catastrophe: the Artist Confined to Earth", begins by exploring the two artists' responses to the perceived threat of the commodity to the work of art in the face of the "loss" of transcendence. After an overview of both artists' view of the oppositional nature of the commodity and art, this chapter asks to what extent their various formally inventive and difficult works can be seen as a formal protest against art's status as a commodity. The bulk of the chapter consists of a rereading of *The Recognitions*, a novel that depicts the impossibility of transcendence in both its Platonic and Romantic forms. The protagonist may yearn for a kind of Platonic or Emersonian transcendent "enthusiasm" early in the novel, but he chooses instead the (equally problematic) Aristotelian philosophy of "living with catastrophe" and the deliberate, immanent philosophy of Henry David Thoreau, a choice paralleled in Godard's *Passion* and *Hélas pour moi*. Emerson's enthusiasm,

his artistic *ekstasis*, is, roughly put, a reformulation of the work of the English Romantic Samuel Taylor Coleridge, itself a response to German Romanticism and the attempt to restore meaning to art and sensuous experience after Kant. Wyatt therefore chooses deliberation over transcendent experience, Kant over Plato, Novalis, and the English/American Romantics. After denying the possibility of Wyatt's Platonic Idealism, and Stanley's Catholic art, Gaddis replaces it with an empty canvas, though this is markedly less despairing than one might think. I argue, in relation to the work of Robert Rauschenberg, the history of the monochrome, and Saul Bellow, that it is in fact a Thoreauvian affirmation of immanence. Yet Wyatt's (and Gaddis') attempt at a life of compromise seems short-lived. As discussion of the Romantic Catholicism of Hermann Broch (a point of reference for both artists) illustrates, by depicting the collapse of transcendence/salvation, rather than attempting to collapse the binary that results in the need for salvation and a divine guarantor, Gaddis remained susceptible to the same Romantic desire for unity that motivated Broch. In the world that Broch describes, even commerce is part of a whole, a formulation found not only in Novalis' opposition of the "noble mercantile spirit" of the Middle Ages to the "petty tradesmen" of his day ("Miscellaneous" 392), but also in Godard's description of American "studio bosses" of old as "poets of money" (*Future(s)* 76).

The consequences of this reliance on a model of unity are further explored in the second chapter, "Secular Saints, not Salesmen: Art, Thermodynamic Fire, and Sacred Fire", which discusses each artist's vision of art as a source of resistance, of unmediated communication, symbolized (though in markedly different ways) by fire. The chapter begins by attempting to balance recent aggressive claims for a systems theory or postmodern Gaddis by further investigation of the parallels between Gaddis and Broch. The American's proposal of a deliberate Thoreauvian immanence in *The Recognitions* does not help Gaddis with art as a vehicle for communication in the face of the challenges of entropy, as formulated by Oswald Spengler, just as Ernst Mach's philosophy of sensation ultimately did not help Broch. The possibility of immanent community and communication proposed in his first novel, or even of a Kantian aesthetic community under capitalism, is disabused in *JR*, which resorts to an endorsement of Norbert Wiener's heroic existentialism. Where Godard's acceptance of and debt to

Bergson (a contemporary of Mach) allows him to retain a utopian faith in the Image, Gaddis thus displays a despair of the word. *A Frolic of His Own* (1995), however, provides an interesting challenge to this trajectory by introducing a heretofore unknown element, the Melvillean (or perhaps Bellovian, Nietzschean, or even Malrucian) confidence-man, Basie; though the embodiment of Comnes' "ethics of indeterminacy", I argue that this is an unhappy incarnation for Gaddis, entirely Othered, a relatively minor character in a novel of failure, greed, likely madness and probable suicide. While *Frolic's* confidence man gestures towards another attempt at affirmation it is also firmly undermined, and contains no place for Gaddis' ideal artist. Instead, by *Agapē* the American professes an artistic passing of the torch that brings to mind not something positive, but rather, in the words of one of contemporary theory's prime Kantian interlocutors, a solitude "shared in the instants where the dreadful nothingness screeches in the emptiness of the self" (Lyotard, *Soundproof* 92). Separation and solitude are also common descriptors for Godard, though there is a difference. Godard displays a level of mourning over the myriad catastrophes of the twentieth century, including the failure of cinema to live up to its sacred obligation to the historical absolute of the Shoah, but his Bergsonism combines with a reading of Malraux's *Imaginary Museum* (and Blanchot's reading of Malraux) to create a formalist belief in Art as both Absolute and *sensus communis*. *King Lear*, the *Histoire(s)*, and the *Métamorphojean* advertisements for Girbaud all draw strongly on the Malrucian conception of artistic metamorphosis. Thus, contra readings of *King Lear* as a sign purely of artistic and cultural catastrophe, the presence in the film of Goya's *Saturn* is read in light of Malraux's *Saturn: An Essay on Goya*, a book that defines a very specific pairing of the Spanish painter, who "sought to wrench [the] mask of hypocrisy from the world", with Giotto, "who sought to remove its mask of suffering" (341). Where Gaddis focusses primarily on the negative consequences of thermodynamic "fire", Godard instead finds solace in an equation of fire with the sacred, and hence with community, "the sacred stripped of the sacred" (Nancy, *Inoperative* 35). For Godard, solitude, nothingness, is only one half of a dialectic, the other half of which is the image (and here art is rescued in part by its obligation to bear witness to history), community, and joy.

Godard's reliance on Malraux's Imaginary Museum, and Gaddis' retreat to the mind, anticipates the concerns of the third chapter, "Advertising, and other Smoke and Mirrors: the Phantasmagoria of Everyday Life", a chapter that confronts the broader effects of the commodity form in society. The possibility for community discussed in the previous chapter is exactly what has historically been considered under threat in a Dale Carnegie world reduced to purely exchange-based interactions, while the continued importance of cinema as a "vernacular" is itself under question in the "society of the spectacle", a society where the imaginary is populated less by the great painted images of Giotto, or cinematic images of a Hitchcock or Renoir, and more by the ephemera of saturation advertising. For philosophers such as Debord and Daniel Boorstin the twentieth century saw a shift from truth to spectacle and verisimilitude, or in Gaddis' terms, from Edward Bast's artistic truth to the young JR's world of publicity; for philosophers such as Baudrillard, who follows a similar trajectory to Godard up to a point, advertising co-opts the individual's desire for community, correlating with Godard's early equations of advertising with fascism. The porous relation of advertising and art thus renders desire, beauty, and the very possibility of a *sensus communis* suspect, as the world of art becomes a potential phantasmagoria. While Godard finds his way back to a belief in the *sensus communis* via Malraux, Gaddis holds to a view of the phantasmagoric world, and as with Lyotard turns to a modified version of the Kantian sublime. For both artists, however, the reduction of relationships to pure exchange, and thus the reduction of community to zero, is symbolized by the figure of the prostitute. But how to represent the opposite, the question (or answer) of love? Contra those critics who see in entertainment such as the musical an expression of utopian desire, Godard's work up to *Sauve qui peut (la vie)* (1979) exhibits a negative utopianism that attempts to understand the desire for domination, for fascism, and the mechanics of viewer manipulation. From around *Passion* onwards, however, Godard not only re-evaluates the possibilities of beauty; but more importantly, where love was a simple answer for films such as *Vivre sa vie* (1962) and *Alphaville* (1965), and the category of work was considered key to community pre-May '68, love (and desire) becomes the central question of community in late Godard, a turn illustrated precisely by the rejection of Simone Weil in *Passion* and the interest in the legacy of Georges Bataille in *Nouvelle Vague* (1990).

The fourth and final chapter, “Love and Death: Corpses *Sous l’Eau*, Community *Sur l’Eau*”, illustrates and explores this turn with an extended reading of *Nouvelle Vague* as an entry into contemporary post-1968 debates surrounding the gift, love, and the possibility for non-fascistic community, particularly through the works of Bataille, Nancy, Duras and Blanchot. Though readings of *Nouvelle Vague* in light of philosophy of the gift are not uncommon, the importance of resituating this particular film, so trenchantly named, as a key film in Godard’s attempt to think community, and Godard’s most positive utopian film, cannot be underestimated. From here (and from a focus on the Shoah in the predominantly backward-looking *Histoire(s) du Cinema* (1988-1998)) Godard shifts to an interest in the ethics of Emmanuel Levinas in the backward-and-forward-looking *Notre Musique* (2004), the most singular instance of Godard’s own utopian “(film) negative dialectics” (or truth from darkness, perhaps inherited from Melville), as will become clear in relation to both Adorno and Maupassant’s “*Sur l’Eau*”. But if Godard’s hopes rest in reformulations of the question of community and a Levinasian ethics of ethics, in contrast Gaddis’ resigned capitalism and return to a Benjaminian view of the world as phantasmagoria allows him only a continued mourning for a lost agapē and a focus on a (transcendental in spirit) noble death in the form of Empedocles, or, in “The Rush for Second Place” (1981), the Japanese tradition of suicide as protest. Though the American attempts to find another path to such a community with his final work, as exhibited in his discussion of John Kennedy Toole’s *A Confederacy of Dunces*, the positive pole of Gaddis’ satire, the insistence on the need for agapē, remains relatively constant and under-theorised. Fascinatingly, however, despite their many differences, both artists end up drawn towards ‘impossible’ ethics: one nostalgic, in Gaddis’ use of agapē, the other messianic (or perhaps infinitely deferred), in Godard’s attraction to Levinas’ ethics of the Other⁵. *Film Socialisme* (2010), though ambiguous, arguably brings the two artists even closer.

To put both of these impossible ethics into perspective, the fourth chapter concludes with a short contextualization of both the “dissensual” possibilities of Godard’s *Film Socialisme* and Gaddis’ approach to death and democracy in his later fiction, via the work of Jacques Rancière, who has

⁵ Or see Hill’s discussion of Godard in relation to Blanchot’s conception of the neuter in “A Form That Thinks”.

provided one of the most interesting paths through the minefield of commodity and catastrophe. Not only one of Godard's most attentive, if critical, readers, arguing the need for a dissensual, political art over the communal, ethical art visible in the *Histoire(s)* (and *King Lear*) and beyond, Rancière's *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* and books such as *Disagreement* and *Hatred of Democracy* also provide the perfect counterpoint to Gaddis' artistic and political elitism. *Agapē Agape*, in particular (though to a certain extent a display of heightened caricature as in Bernhard), exhibits a particular form of "hatred of democracy" that, as Jacques Rancière argues, stems from Plato, who "in his resolute hatred of democracy [...] delves much further into the foundations of politics and democracy than those tired apologists who assure us lukewarmly that we should love democracy 'reasonably,' meaning 'moderately'" (*Disagreement* 10). Where Gaddis argues for the nobility of death, Rancière states that Socrates ought to have learned the language of his critics; where Gaddis laments the low average intelligence of the American in *Carpenter's Gothic*, *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* takes as its thesis the necessity of positing the equality of intelligence; where Gaddis argues for expertise and an elite artistic community, *Hatred of Democracy* focusses on the element of *chance* essential to Plato's description of democracy, and on the necessity of directly engaging with a communal "distribution of the sensible", albeit in a dissensual manner. Too many of Gaddis' critics attempt to recuperate his elitism in one form or another, which is unfortunate, as surely the most respect one can show an artist is to take his work and its consequences seriously. On the other hand, the situation of Godard's *Film Socialisme* is more complicated, and here there are only questions to be asked. Godard's recent mention of *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* in the context of *Film Socialisme* (and also no doubt thanks to the growing influence of Rancière's ideas) has prompted certain critics to see in the film an example of filmmaking appropriate to an "emancipated spectator", to dissensus. In light of Rancière's critiques of Godard's cinema as a cinema of consensus, and of the philosopher's description of the mutual exclusivity of an actual democratic politics and the messianic politics of Levinas and Derrida (and Godard), this is not a simple position to hold; in fact, it might be a position with which it is important to dissent.

GODARD, GADDIS

Serge Daney, one of the great French film critics, commented in an interview with Godard (*Histoire(s) 2A*) that to tell the histories, the stories, of cinema, it had to be someone of Godard's generation, of the fifties and sixties, of the Nouvelle Vague; a movement that straddled not only the midpoint of the century, but the midpoint of cinema. Perhaps it even had to be Godard in particular, in the words of Alexander Kluge a "paradigm in the world of cinema" (*Cinema Stories* 105). And though Gaddis does not, per Daney, straddle the midpoint of literature as well as the midpoint of the twentieth century, an unfortunate logical impossibility, the American looks back to Plato, utilizes the poetics of Aristotle, and confronts the spectre of Romanticism in a novel that Jonathan Franzen (in an admittedly largely backhanded essay) has declared to be one of the "ur-text[s] of postwar fiction" ("Mr. Difficult" 103). Though not the most widely read of authors, Gaddis continues a tradition of grand, ambitious American writers in the vein of Herman Melville and Henry David Thoreau, writers who insist on the ability of literature to explore questions both philosophical and theological. Reading Gaddis next to Godard brings these ambitions to the forefront, hopefully contributing to a broader reading of and interest in the contribution of the American.

Two artists, then: one a writer, American, a New Yorker born and bred, the other a filmmaker, Swiss, though for a time an adopted Parisian who considers France his "first and last homeland" (Godard, *Future(s)* 55). Amusingly, while Paris has been known as the capital of the nineteenth century, New York is generally considered the capital of the twentieth; awkwardly, however, the writer (an art as old as Plato) resides in the so-called capital of the twentieth century, and the director of film (the art of the twentieth century) made his name in the capital of the nineteenth; a gaucheness that diminishes somewhat if one takes Godard at his word and thinks of cinema as an art of the nineteenth century that was played out in the twentieth (*Histoire(s) 2A*). In either case these are, after all, just titles, and these artists do not act metonymically for their cities, the (mistaken) perception of Godard as the French filmmaker par excellence and William Gaddis' curious honour of being named "state writer" for New York by the governor in the 1990s notwithstanding. Nor do they stand for their respective media, the

novel and the film, or more basically, the word and the image, though the artists themselves may sometimes act as though their formal experimentations chart the limits of their possibilities.

Despite the opposition of their respective media, it is also true (a truism) that the two artists work within exactly the same tradition; not only that of Max Weber's "Protestant ethic" (Godard was brought up in a Swiss Protestant family, New England is not only the realm of the Transcendentalists but also that of Cotton Mather and the Puritans), but simply that of 2, 500 years of Western philosophy and literature. Often the two artists share the same points of reference, Plato, Kant, Friedrich Nietzsche, Karl Marx, Sigmund Freud, Oswald Spengler, William James and Malraux, and in literature Shakespeare, Melville, Gustave Flaubert, Leo Tolstoy, Fyodor Dostoevsky, Broch, and William Faulkner. Occasionally, the difference is quite telling, as for example Gaddis' engagement with the sociology of James Frazer, versus Godard's participation in the legacy of Émile Durkheim, via Marcel Mauss and Georges Bataille. Any explicit engagement with contemporary philosophy by Gaddis after *The Recognitions* is minimal after William James, however, with the exception of a late reading of Walter Benjamin and Johann Huizinga, engaging instead with information theorists such as Wiener. Godard's intertexts, on the other hand, read like a who's who of contemporary continental philosophy, many of them indebted to James' sometime interlocutor, Henri Bergson: Bataille, Blanchot, Heidegger, Jacques Lacan, Jacques Derrida, Levinas, Nancy, to name only a few. Nor is there any point of crossover when it comes to film. While Godard makes his cinematic debts known, including F.W. Murnau, Robert Bresson, Jean Renoir, Carl Theodor Dreyer, Antonin Dovchenko, Gaddis subscribes to a rather dim view of the filmic arts, as a McLuhanesque (visual not verbal) hot medium that requires no participation on behalf of the viewer, and likely holding a similar view to that expressed by David Markson in *Reader's Block*: "Can Protagonist think of a single film that interests him as much as the three-hundredth best book he ever read?" (88)

As regards the conjunction of Godard and Gaddis, the results can only speak for themselves. These two artists are not, of course, the only options, certain other combinations recommend themselves; Markson and Godard are in many ways closer in form than Godard and Gaddis, from the

early genre films and books (*À bout de souffle* (1959) and the Harry Fannin novels (1959-61), which Markson would later recategorize as “Entertainments”) to the remarkable similarities in concern and form around the time of *King Lear* and *Wittgenstein’s Mistress* (1988). Yet Markson is deeply indebted to Gaddis, and to properly contextualize Markson would require a rereading of *The Recognitions*, leading back to this point, this thesis. Likewise, Gaddis’s work might fit more smoothly alongside the work of Robert Bresson, a profound influence on Godard whose investigations of nihilism and money in *Le diable probablement* (1977) and *L’argent* (1983) remain unsurpassed, or Michelangelo Antonioni, particularly the “*Trilogia da Incomunicabilidade*” of *L’Avventura* (1960), *La Notte* (1961), and *L’eclisse* (1962), but also *Il deserto rosso* (1964) and *The Passenger* (1975). But then Godard would speak of Antonioni’s *Il deserto rosso* as the film he would have liked to have made with *Le Mépris* (1963), and, after all, differences here are often more useful than similarities; the two extremes of Godard and Gaddis provide a sense of the breadth of the possibilities of artistic responses to the challenges of the twentieth century, and the importance of the philosophical traditions an artist engages with not only to their finished works, but their desire to work. But as well as emphasising the potential productivity of an engagement with philosophy (as in Godard, even if, for Rancière, it is at times misguided), this work also displays the potential dangers. Gaddis’ attempt to embrace a materialist, contingent universe was, ultimately, spectacularly dour, even in its humour, primarily thanks to his inflexible reading of entropy and obsession with the deleterious effects of mechanization on the arts. Yet just as Rancière demonstrates that the Platonic interpretation of democracy is not the only one available, Gaddis’ version of entropy and decline is not the only possible reading, as the work of Michel Serres in such books as *Hermes* and *The Parasite* demonstrates. Even that which one is most certain about can be an illusion; the determining metaphors of our own life and work can be either helpful, or harmful: one argument, perhaps, for a criteria not of Truth, but of “usefulness”.

William Gaddis has written five novels, and various occasional pieces; the critical corpus dedicated to his work is still relatively small, but growing, and includes figures such as Harold Bloom, Steven Moore, Tom LeClair, and Joseph Tabbi, though his influence among other artists is

predominantly limited to America. Jean-Luc Godard has made fifty-odd feature films, with another in production, and perhaps again as many short films, video works, pieces commissioned for galleries, companion pieces to his feature work, advertisements that border on art and various other uncategorizable works; Thierry de Duve has seen fit to compare the influence of Godard to that of Édouard Manet (*Look 227*), considered by many to herald the beginning of visual modernism. The body of critical work is perhaps the largest dedicated to any one filmmaker alive or dead, and includes writings by some of the most illustrious figures in philosophy and criticism (Gilles Deleuze, Rancière, Sontag, Gilberto Pérez, to name only a few), as well as a murderers' row of monographs, articles, close-readings and more. To propose a project on Godard requires a certain level of foolishness, and to write, a certain level of forgetfulness. Despite the relative imbalance in critical attention, however, I have striven to give the two artists under consideration equal weight, and if I have not entirely succeeded, I hope to have at least done them equal justice.

Commodity, Catastrophe: the Artist Confined to Earth

To begin with a counter-example: Murphy, the eponymous protagonist of Samuel Beckett's 1938 novel, failed mystic and fugitive from the world of the *quid pro quo*, finds his only happiness in darkness, silence, and a "self-immersed indifference to the contingencies of the contingent world" (6). Or, as Adorno writes, "Aesthetic transcendence and disenchantment converge in the moment of falling mute" (*Aesthetic* 79). As with *Murphy*, both *The Recognitions* and *Passion* present protagonists who seek the light but are subsequently brought down to earth; yet, as this chapter demonstrates, Godard and Gaddis face disenchantment and continue to speak, to try and move beyond solipsism. Both, in other words, stage the dilemma of the loss of transcendence within their works while holding a dichotomous view of art and the commodity, without resorting to pure artistic negation. While a more detailed discussion of Godard's *Passion* must wait for the third chapter, Gaddis' first novel is particularly useful in exploring the philosophical and artistic terms of this debate, acting as a first-principles attempt to dismantle contemporary artistic formulations of transcendence while providing a way forward. Gaddis looks back to Plato and Aristotle in order to intervene in then current discussions of Romanticism and individuality, an attempt at an affirmation of deliberation rather than inspiration, immanence rather than transcendence, unity rather than individuality. To make this argument, however, requires its own set of first principles, and given the complexities of *The Recognitions*, a certain amount of unpacking, beginning with Wyatt's Faustian pact with a particularly materialist, and materialistic, devil.

SATANIC AND CHILDISH COMMERCE / ART AND CULTURE

The urbane activity with which a man receives money is really marvellous, considering that we so earnestly believe money to be the root of all earthly ills, and that on no account can a monied man enter heaven. Ah! how cheerfully we consign ourselves to perdition! —

Melville, *Moby Dick* 44

You'd think I was wicked as hell, even if what I do for them turns out good. I'm a business man. — *The Recognitions* 141

The week before his first show of original work in Paris, Wyatt Gwyon, protagonist of *The Recognitions*, receives a visit from the renowned critic M. Crémer. As something of an innocent, Wyatt initially misunderstands Crémer's purpose, though it soon becomes clear that the critic is proposing to provide Wyatt with a positive review of his work in exchange for a share of the proceeds from any sales (70-72), in accordance with one proposed etymology of the critic's name: a French version of Kramer, German for a (petty, shifty) shopkeeper (Moore, *Reader's Guide*). Wyatt refuses, and his work receives an unsympathetic review: "*Archaïque, dur comme la pierre, dérivé sans cœur, sans sympathie, sans vie, enfin, un esprit de la mort sans l'espoir de la Résurrection*" (74)⁶. Disillusioned, the once proud artist returns to America and ceases to paint original art, drafting bridge designs for an acquaintance with neither attribution nor remuneration and, after meeting Reck tall Brown, forging Flemish artworks. Brown, dealer in forgeries, modern day Mammon, in Moore's phrase (*Gaddis* 49-50), who appears surrounded by a poor approximation of hellfire (cigar smoke), believes that "Money gives significance to anything" (*Recognitions* 144). The other half of the devil to Wyatt's Faust is Brown's partner in fraud Basil Valentine, lapsed Jesuit and aesthete, who declares in response to Wyatt's claim that Reck tall Brown does not understand reality, "Reck tall Brown is reality" (233).

⁶ "Archaic, hard as stone, derived without heart, without sympathy, lifeless, in short, a spirit of death without the hope of the Resurrection". Given Valentine's, and Gaddis', description of Wyatt as definitively lacking in the genius of a Van Gogh, for example (*Recognitions* 230), this is possibly a fair review. It might also be considered an adequate description of Gaddis' own art, as will become clear over the course of discussion.

As Benjamin quotes Charles Baudelaire, “Commerce is essentially *satanic*” (*Arcades* 376, italics in original); it is perhaps not coincidental that T.S. Eliot, one of Gaddis’ common points of reference, described Baudelaire as “a later and more limited Goethe” (“Baudelaire” 382)⁷. But where Goethe’s Mephistopheles, probably the most famous devil of all after Milton’s, was still a devil, Baudelaire’s devil is commerce itself; *reality* itself. For Baudelaire, in Walter Benjamin’s reading, the commodity and modernity were one and the same, to the point where his attempt to raise the commodity to the level of allegory was doomed, according to Benjamin, only because the “relentlessness of reality” exceeded the “relentlessness of his initiative” (*Arcades* 347). Allegory gives way to phantasmagory; there is no experience of modernity without commerce, and thus, no safe haven from the “singular debasement of things through their price as commodities” (22). For Baudelaire, then, the reign of commerce signalled a Fall, and thus the truth of experience that poetry aspired to was now the truth of the commodity; hence, in his letter of support to Manet, who had written the poet in crisis over the ridicule heaped upon his *Olympia*, Baudelaire would remind the painter that even Chateaubriand and Wagner had been derided, and “that these men were exemplary, each in his own genre, and in a world which was very rich, while you, you are only the first in the decrepitude of your art” (qtd. in Clarke 82). *The Recognitions*, in other words, continues a tradition of treating commerce as diabolic, yet inescapable, the very matter of reality.

But if Baudelaire still believed in Sin and Redemption, capitals included, as Eliot has it (“Baudelaire” 389), Gaddis, writing the last Christian novel (Gaddis, “Art of Fiction”), was attempting to demythologize satanic capitalism⁸. Doing away with salvation narratives, with redemption, means acknowledging that the devil may be dressed up as a business man, but the business man is not, per se, a devil; for after all, the only devil is man himself. When Max, the artist appropriate to his age, receives the same offer from Crémer (now in New York), he accepts happily, as a matter of simple expedience (*Recognitions* 940). Paying the critic removes the need to pay a publicist. For Max, there is

⁷ See Fuchs, for example, for a discussion of Eliot’s relation to Gaddis.

⁸ Though Benjamin, for whom Baudelaire was the poet of modernity, points out that “[t]hough Baudelaire likes to appeal to Catholicism, his historical experience is nonetheless that which Nietzsche fixed in the phrase ‘God is dead’” (*Arcades* 337).

no disconnection between art and the commodity, art and money; “As Stevenson says, we all live by selling something” (463) he declares to Otto and Stanley. And while Max is not a particularly sympathetic figure, and needs no Faustian figure such as Brown to tempt him, he is by no means diabolical, or even contemptible. This status is reserved for Brown, and, to a certain extent, Otto, guilty not necessarily of greed, but of an even greater sin for Gaddis, gross stupidity (Brown is guilty of both). Max is even shown to be quite intelligent, well-versed in the arts, unlike Otto, who has only Wyatt’s second-hand thoughts, which are often quotations themselves (459-467). Max, one might say, is the first in the decrepitude of *his* art.

Baudelaire’s satanic commerce is revealed by Gaddis to be the work of a dim, rather than intelligent and manipulative, devil, otherwise known as man. The American goes even further in demythologising capitalism by exemplifying its spirit in the form of the eponymous schoolboy in *JR*. Cheerful and voracious, though again, not particularly intelligent, there is no trace of malevolence in *JR*, a portrait even more remarkable when compared to the American figures of capitalism in an Italian filmic allegory made only a few years earlier, Luigi Comencini’s *Lo Scopone Scientifico* (1972). Here capitalism is embodied not in an innocent child but in the figure of Bette Davis at the age of 64, “*la vecia*”, the old one. Preying on the affections and desperation of her poor Italian neighbours, Davis and her browbeaten servant/lover William Holden front the couple money to play scopone every year, and every year win it back: in the final year, taking their house (barely more than a shack) and the pooled resources of their village as well despite the services of a “ringer”, a local professional gambler. *Scopone* presents Davis as childish, certainly, but also full of malice, and unconcerned with the consequences of her actions, in this case a Local Financial Crisis, forty years *avant la lettre*. Where *la vecia* is malice incorporated, “[p]art of the genius of the character *JR* is that he embodies the innocence of Capital” (Brown 152), and illustrating the “fictive” nature of commerce also reveals its innocence:

If *JR*’s actions are innocent in this sense, then why not everyone else’s too? [...] one can legally regulate and limit the scope of Capital, but it makes no more sense to speak of

corporate ethics—or to expect ethically acceptable outcomes from the normal functioning of capitalism itself—than it does to expect an ethical attitude from children. (Brown 152)

Or as Gaddis remarks in his *Paris Review* interview, capitalism is “really the most workable system we’ve produced. So what we’re talking about is not the system itself, but its abuses [...] the abundant abuses just within the letter of the law” (Gaddis, “Art of Fiction”).

Thus to a certain extent, by his own logic, when it comes to art Gaddis must allow that the commodity form may be (as Frow concludes) both “limiting and destructive” and “enabling and productive” (Frow 138) at the same time:

(a discussion: did the coming of the printing press corrupt? putting a price on authorship, originality).—Look at it this way, look at it as liberation, the first time in history that a writer was independent of patrons, the first time he could put a price on his work, make it a thing of material value, a vested interest in himself for the first time in history. (*Recognitions* 92)

More often than not, however, the commodity is associated in Gaddis with that which is bound for obsolescence, or, in the words of Baudelaire of modernity in general, that which is “the ephemeral, the fugitive, the contingent” (“Painter” 12). Stanley, for example, the character in *The Recognitions* most obsessed with craftsmanship and permanence—in what is also an early sign of Gaddis’ obsession with entropic decay—finds that all of his best suits, kept safely in his closet while he wears what are more or less rags, are filled with holes (955). Nor does the commodity limit itself to items or materials such as clothing, in such a narrative: the experience of modernity is also the realization that anything that one might consider beyond the reach of exchange value turns out to be vulnerable after all, just waiting for a price. And when everything has a price, value is lost, a “cynicism [...] of reality itself”, as Fredric Jameson writes of the unadulterated experience of capitalism of Weimar Berlin (*Brecht* 9). Or as Benjamin reports of a conversation with Gustav Glück and Kurt Weil: “Property relations in Mickey Mouse cartoons: here we see for the first time that it is possible to have one’s own art, even one’s own body, stolen” (Benjamin, “Mickey” 338). The body can be stolen, removed and owned by another; it can also certainly be bought, and sold. To the commodity form nothing is sacred.

Innocence of capitalism notwithstanding, then, commerce continually interrupts art, both its creation and appreciation, as is illustrated even more drastically by the fate of Edward Bast. Upon finding his “room of his own” vandalized Bast is forced out into the world, becoming entangled with a number of failed money-making schemes: serving as the face of JR’s company, writing the score (some “zebra music”) for a wildlife documentary, and perhaps most painful of all given Bast’s love for classical music, paid to listen to the radio by a company, Ascop, in order to (in JR’s words) “make sure if nobody’s playing their songs on the radio without paying them these royalties” (*JR* 466). Along the way, his musical ambitions dwindle from a grand opera, to a cantata, to a piece for an orchestra, to a piece for a small orchestra, to a piece for unaccompanied cello. It is Bast who is given the book’s most powerful diatribe against the effects of capitalism, berating JR for destroying the last radio station with “decent music”, now with a “popular format”:

the one station that played music great music left in the whole loud cheap pounding
stupidity of radio you find it and make it cheap and stupid like all the rest if you could, if
there was one flower out here in this mud and weeds and broken toilet seats you’d find it
and step on it [...] couldn’t even leave it alone for a few people still looking for something
beautiful, people who’d rather hear a symphony than eat (659)

To which JR, for whom the idea that something could *not* have a price is incomprehensible, can only reply “you say cheapen boy this whole deal it’s like two million dollars in it” (658-9). Even Bast’s “zebra music” (446-8) has its price, as Crawley eventually sells it for \$60,000, of which Bast will undoubtedly see nothing.

The poverty of Bast and Gaddis’ other artists and would-be-artists is not quite a straightforward idealism, however, as can be found in the work of another New York alumnus, J.D. Salinger, particularly in the later novellas involving the character of Seymour, *Raise High the Roof Beam, Carpenters* and *Seymour: An Introduction*. Here the narrator groups Seymour (who retains his purity, and perishes) in with a group of philosophers and artists, holy fools and artist-seers, the “Sick Men”: Van Gogh, Kafka,

and Kierkegaard (Salinger 79-82)⁹. Seymour and the Sick Men are unconcerned with monetary value, epitomized by Seymour's desire to be a "dead cat": "in Zen Buddhism a master was once asked what was the most valuable thing in the world, and the master answered that a dead cat was, because no one could put a price on it" (56)¹⁰. Instead there is a dismantling of the idea of the artist as seer (as will be demonstrated later in this chapter), and an internalized Puritanism, where, as Gaddis points out in interview, the problem is not simply money, or capitalism, but often the artists themselves:

careless or predisposed readers [...] see these books as chronicles of the dedicated artist crushed by commerce, which is, of course, to miss, or misread, or simply disregard all the evidence of their own appetite for destruction, their frequently eager embrace of the forces to be blamed for their failure to pursue the difficult task for which their talents have equipped them. (Gaddis, "Art of Fiction")

As T.S. Eliot writes of Puritan morality, "Failure was due to some weakness or perversity peculiar to the individual; but the decent man need have no nightmares" (Introduction xxi): Bast, in other words, is harmed as much by his own personality as the "system". Yet even this necessary pragmatism with relation to capitalism falters by the time of the posthumously published *Agapē Agape*, where Gaddis perhaps inadvertently returns to the rhetoric of damnation: "[D]ollars damn me", he writes, quoting Melville.

The fundamental opposition of art and money is a recurrent theme in the work of Godard throughout his career. In *Je vous salue Sarajevo* (1993), for example, culture (the computer, television, tourism) is declared as the rule, and art (Flaubert, Mozart, Vermeer) as the exception. The director of *King Lear* and the epic *Histoire(s)* laments the victory of a cinema of entertainment, of Hollywood, over a true cinema, a cinema that takes its artistic obligations seriously. In chapter 1A, for example, Godard

⁹ "Isn't the true poet or painter a seer? Isn't he, actually, the only seer we have on earth? Most apparently not the scientist, most emphatically not the psychiatrist" (Salinger 81).

¹⁰ Instead Gaddis quotes Faulkner in *Carpenter's Gothic*, in an exercise in monadology: "I'd come back as a buzzard Faulkner said once, nothing hates him or wants him or needs him or envies... / I don't like Faulkner. I don't dislike Faulkner" (157).

devotes a segment to Hollywood mogul Irving Thalberg, where stills from Thalberg's films are accompanied by intertitles such as "TRADE" and "POWER". Or, just after referencing Baudelaire's "*Mon coeur mis à nu*", of Howard Hughes: "The producer of *Citizen Kane* and owner of TWA. As if [Georges] Méliès owned Gallimard. As if Méliès had owned Gallimard and the national railway", as a series of images shows the combination of Capital and Cinema leading the moving image from the silent art of Chaplin to the money-spinning of music videos. Even here there is an attempted pragmatism, however, illustrated most amusingly in the television piece *Grandeur et décadence d'un petit commerce de cinéma* where Godard presents both a doomed and an ideal, stoic self. Jean-Pierre Léaud plays Gaspard, struggling and ultimately failing with finance, actors, a perceived regression of cinema, reduced by the end of the film to earning twenty francs as an extra, and Godard appears as "himself", living in relative solitude in Reykjavik, discussing calmly the vagaries of film finance with a fellow producer¹¹. To the latter's lament that Polanski is being paid billions of francs to make one film, money with which he could make ten, Godard chuckles, and asks "So what? [...] you produce ten times more. Is that what is upsetting you?" And though not quite Salinger's dead cat, Godard gives the subject of the "price" of film, the question of the commodity character of art, a mildly comic treatment in *Soigne ta droite* (1987), featuring Godard's Chaplinesque performance as "The Idiot". Stuck at a parking exit barrier designed to stop cars (and persons such as the Idiot who take everything, word and image and object, literally) a woman leans out of a car window and compliments Godard on his film canister, "That's so pretty. It shines. Lovely! Is it expensive?" to which he replies, "I don't know lady", making his escape quickly as the barrier raises to let her car pass.

But where Gaddis remained content to debunk Baudelaire's "comfortable theory of Evil" (Rancière, *Flesh* 55), and after dabbling in information theory returns to a distinctly negative reading of Benjaminian phantasmagoria with a vengeance, Godard goes further (although perhaps not much

¹¹ Of Gaspard, in an interesting piece of self-commentary, the film's Godard states that "I remember Gaspard. He was pretty good with actors", to which the other producer responds: "He's gone mad, but he's clever and very logical. Today you can't win anymore, but you might as well try." The aged, unhinged Nouvelle Vague director is a role Léaud performs admirably, as in Assayas' remarkable *Irma Vep* (1996), which features a clip from the Group Medvedkin's *Classe de Lutte* (1969).

further). In Rancière's abridged, yet useful, narrative, after Baudelaire came Rimbaud, who wished to "invent a new language for the new body of the community" (53), but recognized that his century was still a time of Christianity, of Saint-Simonian New Christianity, a century where "the poem is caught without recourse in the evil of language, in the lie that salvation itself places in its heart" (56). After Rimbaud there was Mallarmé, for whom "the poem has no opposite but commerce" (56); hence Godard's deliberate use of selections from Mallarmé's *Divagations* (1897) in the Marithé and François Girbaud (of the fashion label Girbaud) commissioned piece *On s'est tous défilé* (1988): "*Essentiellement l'oeuvre d'art; ce suffit, à l'opposé des ambitions et d'intérêts*"¹². It is between these two later poets and positions that Godard works: between the desire for a universal artistic language, now enabled by the truth of the Image, and a general disapproval of the contemporary relation between commerce and art. But then these positions are also intimately connected; not only was Mallarmé also interested in art as a "thinking of the sensory configuration able to establish a community" (Rancière, *Mallarmé* 27), but the artistic formalism that enables Godard's formulation of the image as a communal language is itself constructed within and against the framework of the Marxian commodity and its relation to the work of art.

FORMAL PROTEST, FORMALISM

[S]ince plays have become salable merchandise, they say, and in this they speak the truth, the companies will not buy them if they are not of a certain type, and so the poet attempts to accommodate the requests of the companies that pay him for his work — Cervantes, *Don Quixote* 417

The traditional Marxist view of art, rooted in the German Idealism of Kant, Hegel and Schiller, restricted itself to diagnosing a general antagonism between capitalistic commodification and the work of art. For Marx the commodity is the "elementary form" of capitalism (Marx, *Capital* 125), the completely "alienable" object whose exchange value is no longer related to its use-value, whereas artistic

¹² "Essentially the work of art is just the opposite of ambition and interest" (*Divagations* 351).

production itself was seen as the ideal unalienated human activity. In the example of the poet Milton, for example, Marx describes the production of *Paradise Lost* as akin to the manner in which “a silkworm produces silk, as the activation of *his own* nature”. He then goes on to say that “He later sold his product for £5 and thus became a merchant” (*Capital* 1044), but the point remains that for Marx true artistic production, or at least a true artistic nature (as opposed to that of “a writer who turns out work for his publisher in factory style” (1044)), could never be completely co-opted by the capitalist system. This position was later extended in the Lukácsian theory of reification, whereby the commodity form was seen to be all-pervasive, and all powerful, reshaping everything within its grasp including all “forms of subjectivity” and “life-expression” but again, with art as an exception (Markus 4-5), part and parcel of Lukacs’ championing of realist literature against all comers of the *avant garde*. For Lukács, realism (and only realism) was able to render totality artistically, able to make “the soul of the masses [...] receptive” to progress (Lukács, “Realism” 56). It is with Adorno, in essays such as “A Social Critique of Radio Music”, and later in *The Dialectic of Enlightenment*’s discussion of “The Culture Industry”, that the consequences of the Lukacsian theory of reification are considered for modern art. As he writes in the former:

today the commodity character of music tends radically to alter it. Bach in his day was considered, and considered himself, an artisan, although his music functioned as art. Today music is considered ethereal and sublime, although it actually functions as a commodity. (“Social” 211, italics in original)

According to Adorno, the dominance of exchange value over use value, the siren call of marketability, changes the very character of music, of art in general.

For the heirs of Adorno, such as Fredric Jameson, there is no escape from the commodity within Western late capitalist society, pointedly depicted in the Alain Resnais scripted, Chris Marker directed *Les statues meurent aussi* (1953), where religious or sacred art cedes to commerce, authentic, internal necessity gives way to false, external demand, and art becomes bazaar art, or craft. “Authentic” cultural production is limited only to

that which can draw on the collective experience of marginal pockets of the social life of the world system [...] and this production is possible only to the degree to which these forms of collective life or collective solidarity have not yet been fully penetrated by the market and by the commodity system. (Jameson, "Reification" 140)

The result of which is that minority status *itself* becomes a type of commodity, as Marjorie Perloff has noted (*Radical* 10-11), with the "authenticity" of its products the most prized of all. The end results of which can again be extremely exploitative, as evidenced by even a cursory look at the production and sale of the artwork of Indigenous Australians (as depicted, for example, in Warwick Thornton's *Samson & Delilah*). Not only that, but this art often owes its existence, in some respects, to the market; or at the very least, often what is considered authentic art served no such "artistic" function within the community anterior to its designation as such from the outside. Such is the case of Aboriginal Australian dot painting, to the point that, as Frow quotes Anderson and Dussart, "If non-aborigines stopped buying the paintings, the Aborigines would stop producing them" (Frow 142). This commodification of a previously solely religious practice has been handled with "remarkable grace and irony" and provided much needed income to "desperately" poor communities (137-8), according to Frow (however little this may be relative to the prices it later commands in the art market proper), but, as Anderson and Dussart go on to say, not without the potential for fundamental transformations in the way these communities approach religious/artistic practices.

Perloff goes on to observe that the obverse of minority status as commodity is that those who "question the official cultural space of 'diversity,' a space in which the dominant paradigms of representation remain quite intact, who believe that oppositionality has to do, not only with what a poem says, but with the formal, modal, and generic choices it makes [...] these poets continue to be relegated to the margins" (10-11), a critique akin to Adorno's position where it is the formal development of modern art which creates "an opposition to alienation and to the logic of exchange" (Jappe 103). Unsurprisingly, both Godard and Gaddis have been read within this tradition, given the formal difficulty and subsequent critical reactions to works such as *JR*, *Nouvelle Vague*, and *King Lear*. George Steiner,

for example, famously commented that *JR* is an “unreadable” book that will “humiliate, confound, and mock” (“Crossed” 106) the reader. This is all the more astonishing, given Steiner’s championing of authors such as Joyce and Hermann Broch and comments of woe regarding the chances for “difficult, original book[s]” in the current publishing market (Steiner, “Art”)¹³. Yet unsympathetic readers/critics such as Steiner notwithstanding, there is an abundance of humour (and entertainment) present in the novel, much of which resides in the fact that in a work almost entirely composed of dialogue, conversations that involve actual two-way communication are few and far between, with miscommunication and misinterpretation paramount. To a certain extent this is certainly a protest against the fate of the individual, the artist, and the work of art under capitalism, an attempt at a kind of realism for an age of miscommunication and alienation as in Antonioni’s *l’eclisse*. The numerous references to Wagner’s *Ring Cycle* suggest a (once again, demythologized) reference to the opposition between money and love, and also a desire to achieve with language that which Wagner attempted with his extended E-flat chord, to envelop the audience/reader, though here it is discordance rather than harmony, the music of Babel rather than the river as origin¹⁴. While Wagner’s *Twilight of the Gods* heralds the reign of Man, in *JR* there is only an entropic fall, as will be demonstrated in the next chapter.

¹³ Carlin Romano, for example, author of *America the Philosophical*, took the opportunity of Gaddis’ death to accuse him of meanness, stylistic ugliness, selfishness, pretentiousness and cynicism, calling the vision of *The Recognitions* simplistic, whilst getting the name of the main character wrong, first and last (Wayne Gwyons), finally labelling him as a “derivative pseudo-European modernist” (“William”). Amusingly, he begins by citing John Gardner’s verdict of “meanness” in *On Moral Fiction*, yet elsewhere Gardner calls Gaddis a “brilliant writer”, albeit one that he disapproves of (Gardner “Art of Fiction”), due to a misrecognition of the fact that *The Recognitions* is very much a “moral” novel, searching for a ground for the values that Gardner wants fiction to espouse (and *JR* asks whether shared values and shared aesthetic experience are still possible, as will be demonstrated). As Jennifer Rutherford points out in relation to another author accused of “pretentious and illiterate verbal sludge” using the “borrowed method” of European modernism, Patrick White, modernism is here depicted as a “dangerous foreign contaminant [...] complexities of style signify a European dissembling, a contrived dishonesty that has no place in the authentically Australian” (180-183). Romano is invested in maintaining a national, mythical, *sui generis* literary and philosophical identity, opposed in this case partly to European Idealism, equated with sophistry by the pragmatist. See also Louis Menand’s *The Metaphysical Club*, which tries to provide a *sui generis* basis for pragmatism as an American philosophical tradition, thus omitting all but a passing reference to the work of Henri Bergson. Yet William James and Bergson communicated often, and their respective writings were by their own accounts vital to each other’s work, as Kennan Ferguson has documented extensively. Given Gaddis’ comments regarding “debased” pragmatism, it is worth noting that Susan Haack has described Rorty’s philosophy as “vulgar pragmatism”, and Menand’s as “vulgar Rortyism”.

¹⁴ For an alternate, longer discussion on Gaddis’ use of Wagner see Zeidler’s “Mark the Music”.

Godard, with his history of formal combativeness and explicit use of “Papa” Brecht in *2 ou 3 choses*, is a more typical candidate for the kind of formal opposition under discussion. Godard’s *Le Vent d’est* (1969) led to Wollen’s 1972 article proposing that Godard was attempting to develop a counter-cinema, while *Six fois deux: Sur et sous la communication* (1976) led to similar claims for television. Concentrating on the post Dziga-Vertov period, however, the most extreme example of anti-entertainment can be found in *King Lear*. Originally slated to be a conventional, modernized retelling of *King Lear* written by Norman Mailer, starring Mailer and his daughter as “Don Learo” and Cordelia, Mailer supposedly quit production after a dispute over themes of incest. The film, “a film shot in the back”, instead became an essayistic/fictional inquisition into “art and fire”, into the cinema itself. The film refuses to adhere to a straightforward linear narrative, there is no plot to speak of, quotes will be read over dialogue and vice versa, and image and sound are often mismatched, with the sound of seagulls and waves (later to be heard again in *Nouvelle Vague*) from one portion of the film appearing over the top of another, perhaps indoors, or inland. The repeated mention of “Nothing” (Cordelia’s answer to her father’s demand for a public display, proof, of her love), in the form of “No thing” displayed in intertitles and in dialogue, is read by Rosenbaum as pointing “to the refusal to become a commodity, to function as an object—a refusal which [...] is basic to the film’s strategies” (Rosenbaum, “Importance” 189). Rosenbaum figures this refusal of the commodity form in terms of the difficulty of “consuming” the film, a result of extreme horizontal (linear sequence of image/image) and vertical (various elements in a film acting simultaneously, for example image/sound) montage, with a “prodigious and beautiful soundtrack” making the images seem purely functional¹⁵. Similarly Badiou, in a few brief remarks on cinema, pinpoints Godard’s “dirty sound” as an “attempt at formal purification” (*Infinite* 111-2), in opposition to contemporary production and its “demand [...] for a permanent rhythmic background accompanying every activity” (112), and Morrey, in his essay on *Eloge de Amour*, considers Godard’s technique as “not just an elitist cultural strategy, but a stubborn refusal of a disposable culture in which, as Serge Daney

¹⁵ A reading endorsed by the release of the *Nouvelle Vague* soundtrack, in full. Nor is this the only time one of Godard’s films has traversed mediums; see *Journal d’une femme mariée* (1965), the print version of *Une femme mariée* (1964), and the recent print variation on/appendix to *Film Socialisme, Film Socialisme: Dialogues avec visages auteurs* (2010).

lamented, we go to the cinema to confirm what we already know we are going to see" ("History" 127). Or as Gaddis would phrase it in *JR*:

problem most God damned readers rather be at the movies. Pay attention here bring something to it take something away problem most God damned writing's written for readers perfectly happy who they are rather be at the movies, come in empty-handed go out the same God damned way [...] Ask them to bring one God damned bit of effort want everything done for them they get up and go to the movies. (289-290)

To a certain extent Godard's formal techniques can also be seen as an amplified Bressonian cinematography, "A WRITING WITH IMAGES IN MOVEMENT AND WITH SOUNDS" (Bresson *Notes* 2, capitals in original), as has often been noted, along with the influence of Pierre Reverdy's poem "L'Image", with its emphasis on the opposition of "distant or just" ideas/realities, or montage, in the creation of the "image"¹⁶. Or one can turn to Godard's own comparison of a vertical montage of word and image with "Japanese and Chinese writing", "pictograms, ideograms" in *Scenario de Sauve qui peut*. The Chinese ideogram was the example given by Eisenstein for "intellectual montage", and while this can be considered a form of "cultural resistance", this is only a partial explanation¹⁷. While both artists refuse to create art that they see as "compromised" for the sake of their audience, a straightforward strategy of avoidance, as Rosenbaum figures it, would seem to succeed by failing, or fail by succeeding. Baudrillard has argued that attempting to avoid the commodity form, seeking "salvation in critical denial", simply results in a sterile, powerless art for art's sake, "the derisory and powerless mirror of capitalism" (*Conspiracy* 99). Nor can it be viewed solely through the lens of an Adornian

¹⁶ The importance of Bresson to Godard has been well documented. See Witt's "Montage, my Beautiful Care". Fieschi-Vivet argues for a Bressonian aesthetic in representing the sacred ("Investigation" 203), Williams writes that Bresson's *Notes on Cinematography* (1975) provides one of the "key motifs" of *Histoire(s)* ("Signs" 312), while Morrey points out the "ubiquitous" quotations from Bresson's *Notes* in *Eloge de l'amour* (2001) (*Jean-Luc Godard* 233). More tangentially, Rosenbaum reports that Godard once described *Les dames du Bois de Boulogne* (1945) as the "only" film of the French resistance (Rosenbaum, *Movies as Politics* 5).

¹⁷ In fact in Rancière's *The Future of the Image* (chapter 2, "Sentence, Image, History") he describes Godard's technique in the *Histoire(s)* as that of the "sentence-image", "the unit that divides the chaotic force of the great parataxis into phrasal power of continuity and imaging power of rupture" (46), an exemplar of the aesthetic regime of art in that it displays an artistic and material heterogeneity despite Godard's sympathies aligning more towards "the modernist teleology of purity" (41-42).

negativity; Godard's work does, however, require a different kind of viewing, and partake of another tradition of rescuing art from the marketplace.

Godard's use of Brecht's politically oriented "*Verfremdung*", "distancing/estrangement", is displayed for all to see in such films as *2 ou 3 choses que je sais d'elle* (1966); the presence of the formalist version, Viktor Shklovsky's concept of *ostranenie* (rendered as defamiliarization, estrangement, or estranging), is not quite so obvious, but of much more interest to the artistic practice of Godard post May '68. Where Brecht was concerned with raising/influencing political consciousness, Shklovsky the "first theoretician to take a semiotic approach to the cinema" (Sheldon vii), was interested in the complication and hence renewal of perception¹⁸. It is also true, however, that both were reacting, in one form or another, against capitalism, Brecht against Marxist alienation of the subject's consciousness, Shklovsky exhibiting a nascent concern for the threat of the commodity or commerce to the work of art in his first article, "The Resurrection of the Word". Here he writes that "The broad masses are satisfied with marketplace art, but marketplace art shows the death of art" (Shklovsky, "Resurrection" 45)—an essay in whose title and content one can already identify a precursor of Godard's refrain, "The Image will come at the time of the Resurrection"¹⁹. Particularly of interest here is that, contra Brecht, Shklovsky defended the idea of creative freedom during a period of intense revolutionary action. Though he had fought in the Soviet Army, and headed the Union of Artists, an organization formed after the February Revolution in opposition to the Gorky-helmed Commission on Art Affairs (formed to both protect older monuments but also to regulate the creation of new artworks), he "bitterly opposed the dangerous notion propounded by Mayakovsky and Brik that art must reflect the new class ideology" (Sheldon 88). Or as Benjamin Sher writes of Shklovsky's situation in revolutionary

¹⁸ See Stanley Mitchell and Ben Brewster for two perspectives on the possible link between Brecht/Shklovsky, *Screen* 15.2 (1974).

¹⁹ Steven Cassedy's *Flight from Eden: The Origins of Modern Literary Criticism and Theory* (1990) provides a useful discussion of the intermingling of the religious and the secular in Shklovsky, Russian and French criticism in general, some points of which will be touched on in relation to Godard's wielding of religious terminology and iconology. See also Rancière's *The Flesh of Words*. Or, as Bertrand Russell quotes Dean Inge (presumably *The Philosophy of Plotinus* (1918)), there is an "utter impossibility of excising Platonism from Christianity without tearing Christianity to pieces" (Russell *History of Western Philosophy* 284-5).

Soviet Union, “he boldly and unequivocally proclaimed the sovereignty of the artist and his vocation in a dying world that was waiting to be reborn” (Sher, “Shklovsky and the Revolution” xvii). Here art is not specifically tied to a particular political movement and progress, particularly relevant to Godard’s output in the post May ’68, post Dziga-Vertov period, a time of such general political malaise that in 1980 Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe formed the *Centre de recherches philosophiques sur le politique* (Centre for Philosophical Research on the Political). This Centre brought together a wide variety of thinkers disillusioned with received wisdom regarding the efficacy of politics for social progress such as Etienne Balibar, Luc Ferry, and Lyotard. But there is also an affinity with the life and artistic theory of another oddly apolitical artist, critic and revolutionary, and figure of underestimated importance to this period of Godard’s artistic output, André Malraux. Indeed, Frederic Jameson has made just this connection in a description of a new kind of literary history enabled by Shklovsky’s work:

not that of some profound continuity of tradition characteristic of idealistic history, but one of history as a series of abrupt discontinuities, of ruptures with the past, where each new literary present is seen as a break with the dominant artistic canons of the generation immediately preceding. It is a model of artistic history not unlike that proposed by Malraux in *The Voices of Silence*, except that where Malraux’s theory is formulated in terms of the psychology of creation and the need for each successive generation to react against his own masters, the Formalists saw this perpetual change, this artistic permanent revolution, as being inherent in the nature of artistic form itself. (*Prison-House* 52-3)²⁰

Godard’s turn to Shklovsky and Malraux would then be the first sign of what is essentially a sidestep around the commodity form into formalism, but the most interesting point, for now, is that for Shklovsky art may not be political (revolutionary) as such, but it *is* a mechanism for discovering *knowledge*, true

²⁰ Jameson here overemphasises the psychological aspect of Malraux’s work, however; though Malraux no doubt had the novelist’s weakness of psychologising artists in his narratives of metamorphosis, *The Voices of Silence* and *The Metamorphosis of the Gods* are equally capable of being read (as in Blanchot, see chapter two) such that the principle of metamorphosis is inherent to his conception of art itself, not just the artist.

knowledge of a world where “words are dead, and language resembles a cemetery” (Shklovsky, “Resurrection” 41):

After being perceived several times, objects acquire the status of “recognition” [...] in order to return sensation to our limbs, in order to make us feel objects, to make a stone feel stony, man has been given the tool of art. The purpose of art, then, is to lead us to a knowledge of a thing through the organ of sight instead of recognition. By “estranging” objects and complicating form, the device of art makes perception long and “laborious”.

(Shklovsky, “Art as Device” 6)

This has echoes in Godard’s *The Old Place*, with its mention of “so many things you haven’t seen”, things that one can “reclaim from banality”, and avoiding “readymade views”; but it is a perspective that is particularly relevant to artists who believe that the world is no longer man’s natural world, whether it be a world hidden by capitalism, by a phantasmagoria (Benjamin), or by a hallucinatory world (*Agapē*). One might question, then, if such a perceptual process is what Gaddis, a devotee of Russian literature, had in mind when writing the experiences and words of Wyatt, an artist obsessed with the problem of *seeing* a work of art: “Most paintings, the instant you see them, they become familiar, and then it’s too late” (*Recognitions* 91-92). Shklovsky, Godard and Wyatt present art as a means of penetrating to the object, the world, the process of creativity itself (“Art as Device” 6; *Recognitions* 535).

Yet if Shklovsky and Godard, despite their deployment of religious terminology, are concerned with distinctly materialist, or immanent knowledge, Wyatt’s experiences of art in *The Recognitions* often seem to be of a transcendental nature. These experiences have led to Moore’s conclusion that the novel, in part, advocates “a retreat from rational religion to irrational mysticism” (*William Gaddis* 18), and Knight’s belief that “the theme ‘something’s missing’ and the method of apophaticism are both intrinsic to Gaddis’ work” (Knight, *Hints* 7). Stanley’s frame of reference is distinctly religious, but his success ambiguous, such that Joseph Salemi can argue that Stanley’s art achieves its goal of “redemption”, while John Johnston, Weisenburger and others can claim his failure. It is my contention that while Moore is correct to see a dismissal of organized religion, contra his assertion of “mysticism” *The*

Recognitions stages the collapse of transcendence; that while Salemi misreads Stanley's ultimate success, Johnston's Deleuzean stance moves too far in the other direction. But to make this claim, Wyatt's Platonic leanings, and Gaddis' staging of the authentic versus the inauthentic, must be examined in more detail.

FORGING THE AUTHENTIC: ART AND ANAMNESIS

My dear fellow, remember Emerson's advice, Basil Valentine said, and paused [...] We are advised to treat other people as though they were real [...] because perhaps they are. —

The Recognitions 264

The "authentic" in *The Recognitions* is constantly under investigation via the figure of forgery. And indeed, it is impossible not to see in Frank Sinisterra, the same counterfeiter who, whilst counterfeiting (in his actual person) a doctor on a cruise accidentally kills Wyatt's mother, a mercenary or inverted double of Wyatt himself²¹. The descriptions of Sinisterra, associated with a classical art tradition through his love of opera, or at least of *Cavaleri do Tosca* (488), (of whom Otto, the artist manqué, has never heard), provide a quite sympathetic picture of the forger as artist:

like any sensitive artist caught in the toil of unsympathetic critics, he still smarted severely from the review given his work on page one of *The National Counterfeit Detector Monthly* [...] and soon enough thereafter, his passion for anonymity feeding upon his innate modesty amid walls of Malebolgian acclivity, he resolved upon a standard of such future excellence for his work, that jealous critics should never dare attack him as its author again. (5-6)

Sinisterra's trajectory here compares to Wyatt's transformative experience upon coming across a review of a rather more accidental forgery. Reading an art publication in order to forget the horrific review of his original work, Wyatt stumbles upon news of the discovery of an "original" Hans Memling (74-5). This is

²¹ Sinister is Latin for left, with left-handedness typically seen as a misfortune. The Romans considered the left-hand side to be unlucky; it is the "bad copy" (the forgery).

something of a (humourously inappropriate) road-to-Damascus moment for Wyatt. After a few pages detailing some anonymous Americans behaving badly in Paris, Wyatt decides to leave Paris as Raymond Lully left Ambrosia de Castello and her “bosom eaten away by cancer”, making the decisive move on to “his conversion [...], to his celebration as a scholar, a poet, a missionary, a mystic, and one of the foremost figures in the history of alchemy” (77). The article has such an intense effect on Wyatt because this “original” Memling is in fact one that Wyatt had painted while still a student of Herr Koppel in Munich, a painting he has described to Crémer previously (70), a painting that he believed lost, pointing to the fact that Koppel has sold the painting off as an original. The humour of the situation is wonderfully doubled through the subject of the painting: “a figure being flayed alive on a rack [...] and those engaged in skinning him were made to minister to the now bedridden figure” (74); already turned into an unwitting forger, the figure both embodies Wyatt’s current situation (flayed by a critic on one hand for his original work, praised on the other, though unintentionally, for his forged “Memling”), and provides the impetus to become (continue as) a forger good enough to fool the art critics, critics who would now heap praise upon his work, albeit unknowingly. In a wonderfully ironic turn, then, Wyatt becomes a forger to escape the venality of the art world. Even Sinisterra’s motives are seen as less mercenary than the art critic; at least the forger is working for his living, and takes pride in his work²².

Indeed as Frank Sinisterra describes Jim the Penman “When he was tried, you know what the defense was? He was an artist. Any of his work was worth more as a work of art than what the government was shoving. An artist, a real artist” (489). And so he was, with his forged notes selling as works of art, for more than their purported worth as currency (Osteen, *Economy* 367), though Jim the Penman’s case was unique in that he refused to copy the words “Engraved and Printed at the Bureau of Engraving & Printing”, deliberately making his forgery incomplete, original, because, as he stated at his trial, “Dey didn’t make dem” (qtd. in Osteen 367). Sinisterra, however, is not quite the master; his originality is not intentional, despite his best intentions, as he himself admits: “with a microscope in their

²² On the importance of the Dutch forger Han Van Meegeren to Wyatt’s character, including the critic’s offer of good reviews, see Sawyer.

hand, the Secret Service, they can find the smallest resemblance, even after thirty years they can see my own hand in there, a little of myself, it's always there, a little always sticks no matter what I do" (*Recognitions* 491). This accidental originality is a common state of affairs, it seems, in a world in decline where even the art of forgery is falling into mediocrity, as Sinisterra complains to Otto: "Everything's middlemen. Everything's cheap work and middlemen wherever you look. They're the ones who take the profit" (490), "There hardly is a single old master left, a real craftsman" (519).

Wyatt's obsession with the Flemish painters he so assiduously forges operates more on Jim the Penman's level than Sinisterra's, to the point where he believes that he is creating works of art equal in status to original Flemish works. So much so, in fact, that he speaks in horrified terms of other forgeries as simply "reproductions", "cheap fakes", while his works are unique, singular, the product of an anamnetic experience, of "recognitions that go much deeper, much further back [...] memories that...go beyond themselves, that go back to...where mine goes" (250-251). Wyatt's belief in the authenticity of his own production is so powerful that, as with Jim the Penman, he wants to take responsibility for the works of art that he has forged. For Recktail Brown and Basil Valentine, of course, this must be avoided at all cost, as the monetary value of his artwork relies on their supposed provenance, in a typical disconnect between value/worth. Where Brown and Valentine see money, Wyatt believes his artwork has achieved something almost transcendent, providing the experience that he himself had after visiting the Museum of Modern Art and viewing Picasso's *Night Fishing at Antibes*, a work that draws on religious tropes and imagery, that (superficially, at least) fits into the larger thematic of Wyatt/Stanley's hope of "being fished for" by, or being subordinated to, some kind of higher power²³:

Yes but, when I saw it, it was one of those moments of reality, of near-recognition of reality. I'd been...I've been worn out in this piece of work, and when I finished it I was free, free all of a sudden out in the world. In the street everything was unfamiliar, everything and everyone I saw was unreal [...] And then I saw this thing. When I saw it all of a sudden

²³ See Burgard's article for a discussion of Picasso's *Night Fishing* as a political work that draws on apocalyptic vocabulary, Romanesque manuscripts and the Revelation of Saint John.

everything was freed into one recognition, really freed into reality that we never see, you never see it. You don't see it in paintings because most of the time you can't see beyond a painting. (91-92)

This passage, along with references to “memories that...go beyond themselves” and Stanley’s description of art that touches the “origins of design”, has been described by critics such as Knight as an experience of Platonic “recognition” or anamnesis:

Platonist by nature, [Wyatt] senses that just beyond the material place there lies an ideal plane. All men have a recollection of this other plane, but their attachment to the quotidian world weakens their recall. Knowledge is recollection. Until recently, painting was a mode of knowledge that heightened this recollection (“Flemish” 60-1).

This is not, however, as straightforward as it sounds. Wyatt and Stanley seek transcendent artistic experience, certainly, but the end results of their respective searches, their success or failure, and the resultant meaning of the novel, is directly tied to the problematic relation of transcendent experience and idealism to the work of art, not only within Platonic philosophy, but also within the various Romantic philosophies after Kant.

Anamnesis occurs, as Terence Cave puts it, when “the soul, having at least partially forgotten its divine origin while in the prison of the body, at last throws off its ‘disguise’ in an act of transcendental memory, whether by means of mystical ecstasy or at the moment of death” (144-5). Knowledge becomes a matter of recollection, concerned solely with the eternal Ideas and Forms rather than that which is perceived by the senses. In other words, anamnesis is built on the original catastrophe: that of spirit become flesh. The anamnetic model provides the counterpart to Jim the Penman’s “only the forgery is original”: the idea, stated plainly in Bernhard’s *Old Masters*, that “Each Original is already in itself a Forgery” (118). For Plato mimetic art was necessarily a kind of doomed forgery; artists must fail, according to Socrates’ account in *The Republic* (section 597), as they are unable to access the realm of true forms, depicting, instead, degraded objects. The poet is an imitator, thrice-removed from reality and

truth. The body and the senses are the enemy to true knowledge, either “cognitively sterile” or “cognitively unsound” (Scott 364).

The necessary conclusion here is that viewing a work of art, as a sensual object, is not typically the road to a strictly Platonic anamnesis, which requires only reason and an immortal soul. If the icon is tolerated, as Ruthven notes, it is because “it at least attempts to reproduce an ideal reality, and can be judged by the proximity of its resemblance to it” (86); but this is already the religious appropriation of an admittedly already ambiguous Platonic doctrine that uses figures of speech (such as Plato’s cave) to denounce the figure. This ambiguity is lessened (though not completely erased given that Plato’s works arrive in the present via the written word) given that in this instance, perhaps in every instance bar that of the original (artistic) lie of *The Republic*, the employment of a figure in Socrates’ speech is guaranteed by the fact that it *is* speech, whose interpretation is guaranteed by its father, or midwife, as Socrates describes himself in the *Theaetetus* (165-8; 149a-151e). Painting and the written word, on the other hand, are not only types that rely on the relation between knowledge and perception, but are works which are orphaned and abandoned to chance. Though some would cite the model of divine inspiration in the *Ion* in support of a Platonic artist, this would seem more likely to be a ploy to reduce the artist to a vessel/prophet, part of a larger critique of Homer²⁴. And in the *Republic*, where Plato describes the “patterns for theology or stories about the gods” as requiring that “in epic, lyric, or tragedy, a god must always be represented as he is” (1017; 379a), this must be read within the context of the founding of the Republic, a city whose continuation is assured by a “noble falsehood” of autochthonic origins (1050 onwards; 414b). This falsehood must stand above all other narratives, yet it includes a previously outlawed description of a god creating the people with varying metals in their souls. By “representing a god as he is”, in other words, Plato is concerned with providing a good, fictional, moral example, rather than arguing for fidelity to the gods of Homer’s tragic world view. Thus the only way to have Plato approve of the “icon” is according to this latter criteria: as a method not of the acquisition of knowledge of a higher reality but of the appropriate civic education in the sense of inculcation, belief in

²⁴ See also the *Republic*: “I don’t understand again / I’m afraid I must be talking like a tragic poet!” (1049; 413b)

the noble falsehood that ensures the continuation of the city, whether it be the Republic or the City of God. The artist who would be a Platonist must inevitably come up against the impossibility of his task, and either renounce art or put their art in the service of the Republic or the Church, the way of later Hofmannsthal and Tolstoy, two artists who rejected aestheticism and formal difficulty in favour of the writing of fables as a catalyst for moral thinking²⁵. Art, or sensory perception at all, as a vehicle for meaning or knowledge, as Knight suggests of anamnesis ("Flemish" 60-1), actually requires a quite different framework, and either the rejection or modification of Platonism itself. The Neo-Platonism of Plotinus, for example, attempted to bridge the relation of art to Idea with mixed results, as Erwin Panofsky notes in *Idea*²⁶. Or, ignoring for the moment the work of Aristotle, the philosopher the Neo-Platonists used to modify their Platonism, there is the path taken by the Romantics.

Plato's separation of the Absolute and art has a descendant in Kant's "insistence on the incompatibility of sensible presentation and the ideas of pure reason" (Barnard and Lester ix); according to David Markson "Kant knew no music. And said that reading novels diluted the mind" (*Reader's* 101). It is the post-Kantian Idealists and those associated with German Romanticism (the Schlegels, the Athenaeum, Novalis to a certain extent) that sought most fervently to bridge this divide, to "reinvest the concept of presentation in such a way as to transform it into the kind of adequate and ever more perfect operation they perceive to be lacking in Kant" (ix). This lineage comes to form the modern Romantic conception of literature that Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe in *The Literary Absolute* (and Blanchot before them) diagnose as the underlying condition, the "essential", that "determines the age we live in as the

²⁵ Much to Gaddis' disgust in the case of Tolstoy (*Agapē* 40-1)), though he would have had plenty of scorn in reserve for Hofmannsthal, who wrote a version of the medieval morality play *The Play of Everyman*, for example, which is Faust without the ambition (or exceptionalism) in both character and text, content and form.

²⁶ As Panofsky writes in *Idea*:

[T]he Platonic attack accuses the arts of continually arresting man's inner vision within the realm of sensory images, that is, of actually obstructing his contemplation of the world of Ideas; and the Plotinian defense condemns the arts to the tragic fate of eternally driving man's inner eye beyond these sensory images, that is, of opening to him the prospect of the world of Ideas but at the same time veiling the view. Understood as copies of the sensory world, works of art are divested of a more elevated spiritual or, if you will, symbolic meaning; understood as revelations of Ideas, they are divested of the timeless validity and self-sufficiency which properly belongs to them. It seems that unless the theory of Ideas gives up its own metaphysical standpoint, it must perforce deny to the work of art either the one or the other. (31-2)

critical age par excellence" (16), the age of theory²⁷. It is this condition that Godard participates in when he professes that cinema has the power of philosophy (*Future(s)* 64), a condition that considers, in Novalis' words, "the separation into poet and thinker [to be] only apparent—and to the *disadvantage* of both—it is a sign of sickness" (*Notes* 132, italics in original)²⁸. That it is Novalis that Wyatt explicitly disavows in describing his battle with his own early Romantic tendencies, then, is of no small importance:

Tell me, have you ever fallen in love with someone already engaged away, and then won the beloved away from your rival? And then as time goes on, you begin to suspect that you look like him? Him whom you hated and found ugly [...] let me tell you what happened to me. When still a boy I read Novalis, and there was great appeal, you know. But after a few more years of study I understood the mistake I'd made, the romantic mistake I'd almost made, I saw eventually how Novalis had appealed to all the most dangerous parts of me, all the romantic and dangerous parts, so I settled down to extinguish them. After two or three years I emerged triumphant, to tell the truth, quite pleased with myself, to be rid of all those romantic threats which would have killed me if they had taken me unawares. Thus cleansed, I went on in the rational spirit, easily spotted romantic snares and stepped aside. One day I picked up the work of a man named Friedrich von Hardenberg, and my rational mind became quite inflamed, with the logical answers to just the things I'd been questioning...since I'd turned my back on Novalis, and all he stood for. (*Recognitions* 379-80)

²⁷ "Romanticism, the advent of poetic consciousness, is not simply a school of literature, nor even an important moment in the history of art. Romanticism inaugurates an epoch" (Blanchot, "The Athenaeum" 355-56). Though Nancy subsequently modified his position in *Being Singular Plural* (2000), where "we are definitely no longer in the age of Enlightenment or Romanticism" (63).

²⁸ Though Novalis is a controversial figure in regards to his place in Jena Romanticism, deemed separate by Nancy/Lacoue-Labarthe. Vinzenz Hediger has an interesting if brief discussion of the commonalities between Godard and Novalis (154-5).

Amusingly, Wyatt rejects Novalis, only to be seduced by Novalis (von Hardenberg). But one could also say that Wyatt rejects Novalis, only to be seduced by another Neo-Platonist/Romantic, Ralph Waldo Emerson, the American philosopher so often associated with the assertion of originality.

Emerson's concepts of "intuitive reason" and "enthusiasm" were derived from the foundations of the English Romantics (Wordsworth, Coleridge, Carlyle), who emphasized the importance of the sensuous and emotional, as well as the divine, against Kant's pure reason. Here enthusiasm is another name for the sublime, divine revelation, and transcendental experience, in a tradition that Emerson traces back from more recent mystics such as Swedenborg, through the conversion of Paul, Plotinus, and back to Socrates²⁹:

The character and duration of this enthusiasm varies with the state of the individual, from an extasy and trance and prophetic inspiration,—which is its rarer appearance,—to the faintest glow of virtuous emotion, in which form it warms, like our household fires, all the families and associations of men, and makes society possible. A certain tendency to insanity has always attended the opening of the religious sense in men, as if they had been "blasted with excess of light." (Emerson, "The Over-Soul" 243)

In Kantian terms, this kind of enthusiasm would be considered *Schwärmerei*, as opposed to the (positive) *Enthusiasmus*; where the former is a term of denigration, to the point where Robert Clewis (and Georges Van Den Abbeele, translator of Lyotard's *Enthusiasm*) considers "fanaticism" a more appropriate translation³⁰. To modify our earlier quotation, then, for Kant, Plato would be the father of fanaticism, rather than enthusiasm or exaltation. Emerson thus believed (with Salinger) in the existence

²⁹ Added to which, "nothing great was ever achieved without enthusiasm" (Emerson, "Circles" 262), which Patrick Keane identifies as a silent quotation from Coleridge (158-9), which concluded in the original: "For what is enthusiasm but the oblivion and swallowing up of self in any object dearer than self, or in an idea more vivid" (Keane 158-9). It is also, however, a phrase that appears in Kant (see Clewis 40); given the difference in conception of enthusiasm, it would then be a (typically Romantic) appropriation of Kant's sentiment (see following note).

³⁰ Of *enthusiasmus*, Kant states that without it "nothing great in the world could take place" (qtd. in Fenves, "A Note" xi). See also Clewis (4-6, 39-42). Fenves translates *Schwärmerei* as exaltation rather than Clewis' fanaticism, though he considers it "doubtless too positive, too closely connected with an uplifting emotion [...] it nevertheless retains a note of danger, of becoming so uplifted that there is no place to go but down" (xi-xii).

of the “seer”, someone who has transcendent insight. The poet is “the sayer, the namer, and represents beauty” (“The Poet” 289). The world, “from the beginning beautiful”, is aestheticized, conceptualized as a giant work of art, and thus “the poet is not any permissive potentate, but is empire in his own right” (289). Thus Emerson provides what was missing in Plato, the work of art as access to the Work of Art that is the universe: “poetry was all written before time was, and whenever we are so finely organized that we can penetrate into that region where the air is music, we hear those primal warblings and attempt to write them down” (289-90). While the collapse of transcendence is still obviously applicable to Platonism, given our earlier discussion of the inappropriateness of applying “Platonic anamnesis” to art, it is perhaps more accurate to describe *The Recognitions* as critiquing primarily not only the Romanticism of Novalis, but also Emersonian “enthusiasm”, with an eye to reverting to a more typically Kantian aesthetic³¹. And certainly, Gaddis here keeps good company, given that Emerson was already one of Melville’s favourite targets of satire in *Pierre* (in the figure of Plotinus Plinlimmon) and *The Confidence Man*, as indeed was Plato in *Moby Dick*: as the narrator asks, “How many, think ye, have likewise fallen into Plato’s honey head, and sweetly perished there?” (341)³²

Of course matters are not entirely clear-cut: the relation of the transcendent to the rational and the artist are a point of discussion for Wyatt and Don Bildow, for example:

Did you hear him?...An extensive leisure is necessary for any society to evolve an at all extensive religious ritual...did you hear all that?...You will find that the rationalists took over Plato’s state qua state, which of course left no room for the artist, as a creative figure he is always a disturbing element which threatens the status quo...good God, Esther. Did you

³¹ A kinship that Christopher Knight has noted in *Fiction of Longing*, drawing some connections between Gaddis and Kant’s notion of the sublime. However he does not explore what I believe to be key, and which will be explored in subsequent chapters, the problem that comes with rejecting the possibility of transcendence and adopting a Kantian aesthetics: the reliance on the *sensus communis*, or aesthetic community, in an age deemed to be one of phantasmagory rather than allegory.

³² Plotinus is one of the most famous neo-Platonists; Emerson was described in James Russell Lowell’s popular satiric poem “A Fable for Critics” (1848) as “A Greek head on right Yankee shoulders, whose range / Has Olympus for one pole, for t’other the Exchange [...] A Plotinus-Montaigne, where the Egyptian’s gold mist / And the Gascon’s shrewd wit cheek-by-jowl co-exist” (qtd. in *Confidence Man* 190-1). Melville described Emerson as a “Plato who talks thro’ his nose” (190), referring to his “Yankee” accent. For more on the role of Emerson in *Pierre* see Merton M. Sealts Jr and Mee Kyung Soon’s brief discussion.

hear us discussing quiddity? And Schopenhauer's Transcendental Speculations on Apparent Design in the Fate of the Individual? And right into the Greek skeptics... (*Recognitions* 105).

On the one hand, this could be construed as Gaddis suggesting that there was still room for the artist in Plato prior to the point that the "rationalists took over"; on the other, Wyatt would seem to be quoting Don, a critic, in a conversation regarding which Esther accuses Wyatt of rudeness, preventing such a straightforward conclusion. Wyatt "tried to talk to him" (105), but there is no suggestion that the two reached any point of agreement. In either reading, if the characters of Gaddis' first novel still search for transcendent experience at this point in the novel, the logic of the book denies its very possibility at every turn.

BROKEN WINDOWS, FALLEN STAIRS: TRANSCENDENCE DENIED

What then are these churches now if not the tombs and sepulchres of God? — Nietzsche, *The Gay Science* 120

Transcendence is undermined to a certain extent from the beginning of *The Recognitions*; the first reference to being "fished for" in the novel is most likely in reference to Charles Fort's comments regarding the possible existence of UFOs (*Moore Reader's Guide*). But the character who most convincingly undermines the possibility of transcendence, despite the depths of his longing, is Stanley. After finally completing the Requiem Mass he has been working on for years, Stanley voyages to Italy to perform his piece on the Fenestrula church organ; the church, however, collapses on top of him, the victim of the "devil's interval", or *diabolus in musica*: "Everything moved, and even falling, soared in atonement" (956)³³. Where Salemi reads the culmination of Stanley's voyage to Fenestrula, this "soaring" and "atonement" as a successful redemption of a profane world, most critics have not been so

³³ The *diabolus in musica* is used in Harry Matthews' *The Conversions* to signal a heretical work (120), or in other words a break in community, though its use was eventually condoned by the church. Where Valentine demystifies the Flemish painters in *The Recognitions*, Matthews takes a gentle stab at Stanley's model, the composer Palestrina, by having his narrator come across "a dig at the lucrative business activity of Palestrina, then composer of the Sistine Chapel: *Faenus Sixtino remissio*: Dividends are his salvation" (113).

optimistic. Knight, for example, points to the “masturbatory aspect” (*Hints* 32) of Stanley’s desire to go to Fenestrula, “If ever he should get to Italy, it was in that cathedral that he wanted to play the organ; a lonely ambition, solitary epiphany” (*Recognitions* 319)³⁴. There is a stronger argument to be made here, however. Taking into account the etymology of the fictitious Italian town to which Stanley goes to play his music, and certain other correspondences within the novel, it becomes apparent that (though darkly comic) his death in fact symbolizes the collapse of an entire belief system.

Fenestra is Latin for “window”; *Fenestrula*, the diminutive, means “small window”. Stanley’s death then has a key correspondence in the distinctly less than sacred death of Arny Munk (though he has perhaps begun an attempt at a ‘redemptive’ letter to Maude). Munk dies roughly at the same time as Stanley, after he opens a window that the reader is told had been performing a structural function in a hotel, unable to read the written French warning to leave it closed: “*On est prié de n’ouvrir pas ce fenêtre parce que le façade de l’hôtel lui compter pour se supporter*” (*sic*) [One is asked not to open the window as the façade of the hotel relies on it for support] (942). Just as Stanley was unable to understand the Italian warning not to play “*bassi...e non strane combinazioni di note, capisce*” [bass... or strange combinations of notes] (956). And here Gaddis’ use of the French *fenêtre*, similar to the Latin *fenestra*, provides a clue to the reader that the two are not just connected, but that the former serves as an interpretive key for the latter. It is the pointed reference to the “structural” nature of the window that is vital, however, referring the reader back to the symbolic use of the window in painting and philosophy. The window is the boundary between inside and outside, that which lets in light, the very possibility of transcendence, as evidenced in Emerson’s focus on vision and light in his discussion of enthusiasm; Plato compares “[w]hat the good itself is in the intelligible realm” to that which “the sun is in the visible realm” (*Republic* 1129; 508c), while Plotinus describes the soul’s contact with its pre-incorporated self as like a light illuminating a darkness (*Enneads* 77). If the material world is thought of as a hotel in which not one of us can read the instructions, the removal of the window, in Adorno’s words “[t]he

³⁴ See also Weisenburger (*Fables* 219-222) for an alternative discussion of the breadth of satire involved in Stanley’s death.

imprisonment in immanence to which [Kant] honestly and brutally condemns the mind" (*Negative* 389), which previously performed a structural function for man's view of the universe and his place within it, has caused the world to collapse around us³⁵. Just as, a century and a half earlier, Kleist's worldview collapsed upon the event of his so-called Kant-Crisis. In Stanley's own words, referring to one of the original deflators of Optimism, "even Voltaire could see that some transcendent judgment is necessary, because nothing is self-sufficient, even art, and when art isn't an expression of something higher, when it isn't invested you might even say, it breaks up into fragments that don't have any meaning" (617). Stanley's art is no longer an expression of "something higher"; the church itself fragments. Gaddis may well also be playing on the words of Nietzsche's madman who proclaims the death of God in *The Gay Science*, with the church at Fenestrula not only God's metaphorical tomb, but Stanley's literal tomb.

And what of Wyatt? Having fled to a monastery in Spain and indulged in some ambiguous restoration work on some old masters, Wyatt, now going by the name of Stephen, walks off in to the unknown, determined to "live deliberately", in Thoreau's words, "without absolutes", to continue on despite the reign of "the unswerving punctuality of chance" (*Recognitions* 9), rather than a higher purpose³⁶. Wyatt chooses not to search for another bad faith, not to await anamnestic illumination, but rather to accept the world as it is. He has, however, already missed the chance at love offered by Esme, a theme of missed opportunity that will reappear in most of his later novels, a theme already predicted in Anselm's condemnation of Stanley over his focus on divine rather than earthly love (635).

In his use of the figure of the window Gaddis is preceded by Melville, whose "The Piazza" is set in contemporary "times of failing faith and feeble knees" (3). The story concludes with the protagonist "Launching [his] yawl no more for fairy-land", for the "illusion" of the "golden window"; instead, "truth comes in with darkness. No light shows from the mountain" (29). This emphasis on truth from darkness

³⁵ There is then a bleak humour in Gaddis having Schramm defenestrate himself in *JR*, an action that has a possible variant and precursor in Clifford's wish to jump from his window and join the collective in *The House of the Seven Gables* by Nathanael Hawthorne, Melville's sometime neighbour and friend.

³⁶ A phrase present in all of Gaddis' novels, attributable to Thomas Wolfe's *Look Homeward, Angel* (612), one of the few twentieth century novelists that Hermann Broch considered as radical as Joyce when it came to the attempt to represent "totality" (Broch, *Hofmannsthal* 161). The phrase also has a lighter sense via Charles Fort, however, whose "supercelestial geography" is referenced in *The Recognitions* on page 81.

is an aspect of Godard's work that will be returned to later, but the director's own most explicit move away from Platonic transcendence is also illustrated via the question of light in *Passion*. Jerzy spends his time on set staging *tableaux vivants* of Old Masters, attempting to capture a particular light; but what light is this? It is not explicitly discussed. The viewer only knows that he is constantly dissatisfied with the results. But then Simone Weil, a figure incarnated by Godard in the actress Isabelle Huppert was not only a Catholic, but a Platonist who believed in the power of the good, in beauty, in light. This links Jerzy, romantically involved with Huppert, and his search for the correct light with a search for Platonic light, with, in other words, a search or desire for a kind of artistic transcendence. Here, fascinatingly, another point of comparison with *The Recognitions* arises. For what does Jerzy do at the end of the film? He leaves his film set, meaning that all the Old Masters will be packed up and/or fired (erased), abandons his romances with Hannah Schygulla and Huppert, and drives away, back to his troubled homeland of Poland. Perhaps not to live deliberately per se, but rather to investigate further the work of Bataille, the immanent pole of the Weil/Bataille binary set up in the film (as discussed in the final part of chapter two), just as Wyatt chose Thoreau over Emerson. But one could also cite *Hélas pour moi* (1993), a retelling of the story of Amphitryon and Alcména where references to Ernest Renan, Flaubert and Joseph Conrad mingle with quotes from *The Thin Man*. The first words of *Hélas* are a narration of the progressive loss of the sacred, combined with an ode to the power of stories, via a parable appropriated from Gershom Scholem's *Major Trends in Jewish Mysticism* (349-50). In a move reminiscent of Gaddis' use of Frazer's *The Golden Bough* in *The Recognitions*, and the numerous Mithraism/Fisher King references, Godard draws on a number of religious narratives, declaring that "the Ascension is an old idea. It existed 2000 years before Christ", and that Ziggurats were not tombs, "but stairs for the Gods, so they can come back to earth". Logically, then, "if the stairs are destroyed [...] the Gods won't come down". The film, as Leslie Hill (in his essay on Blanchot) has accurately described it, is a "fable about the erasure of transcendence" (400), though it is also an argument against the necessity for, and logical possibility of, a loving God. In *Hélas*, man does not need God, but God needs man, and in the place of transcendence Godard offers a carnal, human spirituality, where the human embrace is seen as an act of prayer—as discussed further in relation to *Je vous salue Marie* in the final

chapter. But one could also cite the *Histoire(s)*: “Something even worse is presaged by the death of god, not only have the gods and god fled, but the divine radiance has gone out in the history of the world” (1B)³⁷.

But to return to Gaddis’ first novel, the denial of transcendence, or theophanic vision, is even more obvious if one turns to the original *Clementine Recognitions*, the “first Christian novel” (Gaddis, “Art of Fiction”). Much of the drama of the *Clementine Recognitions* involves a dispute between Simon Magus and Jesus’ disciple, Peter; Simon Magus the sorcerer propounds a Gnostic philosophy and is typically viewed as the first “Faust”³⁸. But he has also been read as a cipher for Paul (Saul) of Tarsus, the same St Paul that Godard cites in the *Histoire(s)*: “The image will come at the time of the resurrection”³⁹. If anti-Pauline doctrine remains subtext in the *Clementine Recognitions*, it reaches the level of text in the alternate/supplementary work the *Clementine Homilies*, where the dismissal of theophanic vision is particularly clear⁴⁰. The following rebuke to Simon from Peter is equally applicable to Paul/Saul, who claimed to have been converted by a vision rather than by the “living voice” of Jesus:

If, then, our Jesus appeared to you in a vision, made Himself known to you, and spoke to you, it was as one who is enraged with an adversary; and this is the reason why it was through visions and dreams, or through revelations that were from without, that He spoke to you. But can any one be rendered fit for instruction through apparitions? And if you will say, ‘It is possible,’ then I ask, ‘Why did our teacher abide and discourse a whole year to those who were awake?’ And how are we to believe your word, when you tell us that He

³⁷ Morrey points out (in a comment on this thesis) that this is a quotation from Heidegger’s essay on Hölderlin, “Why Poets?”, published in French (as “*Pourquoi des poètes?*”) in *Chemins qui ne mènent nulle part*, originally translated into French in 1962. The 2002 Cambridge UP edition of *Off the Beaten Track* reads: “in the default of God notice is given of something even worse. Not only have the gods and God fled, but the radiance of divinity is extinguished in world-history” (200).

³⁸ For a discussion of Mann’s use of Simon Magus see Grimstad (174; note 10). Among the contemporary authors whom Grimstad identifies as registering Gnostic “motifs and sensibility” is William Gaddis. See also Cunningham’s interesting discussion of the deployment of Gnostic elements within Gaddis’ first novel.

³⁹ The history of this position and recent criticisms thereof are covered by Bockmuehl, chapter five, “Peter, Paul and Simon in the Pseudo-Clementines”.

⁴⁰ The *Homilies* is the Greek form of the material; the *Recognitions* derives from a Latin version (Moore, *Reader’s Guide*).

appeared to you? And how did He appear to you, when you entertain opinions contrary to His teaching? [...] For in direct opposition to me, who am a firm rock, the foundation of the church, you now stand. (*Clementine Homilies* 272)

One could say that Peter and Simon/Paul differ here over their attitudes to the knowledge attainable by theophany, rather than via instruction and reason; in other words, the *Clementine Recognitions* and the *Homilies* stages the very opposition under discussion. For Gaddis (and Mann), the modern Faust is the artist, and in the terms of this opposition, Wyatt, choosing to live “deliberately”, a life of deliberation and reason rather than a life of seeking after visions, chooses against artistic theophany, Peter over Paul; words, in other words, rather than *images*. Or, to turn to Kant’s own critique of Plato’s concept of anamnesis, with its necessity for “supernatural communication”, “mystical illumination”, or intuition: it is “a surrogate of cognition [...] which is then the death of all philosophy” (Kant, “On a Superior” 62).

ARISTOTLE AND ANAGNORISIS: LIVING WITH CATASTROPHE

we can’t even conceive of a continuum of time. Every fragment exists by itself, and that’s why we live among palimpsests, because finally all the work should be fit into one whole, and express an entire perfect action, as Aristotle says, and it’s impossible now, it’s impossible, because of the breakage, there are pieces everywhere. — *The Recognitions*
616

Thus it would be more accurate to say that while early in the novel Wyatt lives in hope of a mystical, anamnestic recognition, the book dramatizes some version of the Kantian critique of anamnesis and denial of transcendence, and Wyatt’s character arc is determined not by the logic of Plato, who Kant describes as the “father of all exaltation in *philosophy*” (“On a Superior” 62), but rather by the poetics of Aristotle, whose philosophy is, “in contrast, work” (62). Aristotle, who held a much more sympathetic view of art than Plato, developed his theory of recognition in relation to tragedy⁴¹. Cave

⁴¹ Where not only is “imitation natural to man from childhood”, but “it is also natural for all to delight in works of imitation” (*Poetics* 1457).

describes Aristotelian anagnorisis is “the moment at which the characters understand their predicament fully for the first time” (1), conjoining “the recovery [discovery] of knowledge with a disquieting sense, when the trap is sprung, that the commonly accepted co-ordinates of knowledge have gone into question” (2). Attempting to live in the sight of God, Wyatt retreats into the Flemish worldview, but in trying to create authentic art, in a kind of peripeteia, he only creates forgeries. Searching for theophanic vision, Wyatt instead recognizes (in a moment of anagnorisis) that there is only the profane world. Cave has pointed out the doubling inherent in Platonic anamnesis itself; while both anamnesis and anagnorisis turn “characters into allegorical types”, emptying “them finally of individual identity”, in anamnesis the “temporary or partial loss of knowledge” is internalized. “[T]he character is ‘doubled’, and returns to unity when he recognizes his authentic (transcendent) self” (145-6). Wyatt, on the other hand, “returns to unity” when he recognizes that there is no transcendent, authentic self, as he vows to “live deliberately” (this return to unity is perhaps, as I will suggest, something more along the lines of the immanence of Thoreau). And as Ruthven points out, “anagnorisis—the ‘shock of recognition’, in Melville’s phrase—can be achieved only by matching what we encounter with what we expect. Recognition, in other words, is less dependent on first encounters with singularities than on the secondariness of those repetitions that constitute replications” (Ruthven 126). This kind of recognition usually involved revelation of true identity, for example the case of Oedipus and his father. Thus Wyatt comes to terms with the double abandonment by *his* father, and in tragedy become farce, the father and son meeting that should have been between Otto and Mr Pivner does not happen due to a misrecognition, as Otto is unable to recognize his father, having an utterly mistaken conception of himself as (transcendent) artist.

Where anamnesis is constantly looking backwards, an archaeology of knowledge that relies on eternal essence, a vision of unity and harmony, anagnorisis demands experience and repetition, with a difference. Still, if Aristotle’s tragedy involves a certain humbling of reason and an acceptance of mystery, his conception of the good life is also a matter of harmony and order, and catharsis partially a matter of maintaining the status quo. This latter could also be described, however, as learning to *live*

with catastrophe. *The Recognitions* presents the reader with Wyatt, a character looking for an escape from the reality of Reckfall Brown, of commerce that can no longer even be figured as Satanic and thus fought against. But just as the diabolic is no longer available, neither is transcendence. Wyatt thus learns that he must live with the world as it is, a world of commerce and compromise; and rather than following Oedipus' example of gouging out his eyes, which, after all, are innocent, having never failed to see the truth of the profane world even when he did not wish to accept it, he gouges paintings that presented the false promise of a higher reality, and walks off to live deliberately, alone, accepting the fact that "we only know things in terms of other things", and choosing not to regain his dignity by dying "like Socrates" (*Recognitions* 379).

At least this is one possible interpretation, one that conforms to Sontag's description of the "*via negativa*" of the failed mystic and artist:

As the activity of the mystic must end in a *via negativa*, a theology of God's absence, a craving for the cloud of unknowing beyond knowledge and for the silence beyond speech, so art must tend toward anti-art, the elimination of the 'subject' ('the object,' the 'image'), the substitution of chance for intention, and the pursuit of silence [...] Art is unmasked as gratuitous, and the every concreteness of the artist's tools [...] appears as a trap. Practiced in a world furnished with secondhand perceptions, and specifically confounded by the treachery of words, the artist's activity is cursed [...] Art becomes the enemy of the artist, for it denies him the realization—the transcendence—he desires. Therefore, art comes to be considered something to be overthrown. ("Aesthetics of Silence" 4-5)

Yet one of the artists that Sontag discusses in this essay is Rilke, whose presence in *The Recognitions*, both explicit and implicit, Comnes has argued, indicates an Orphic sensibility in Gaddis, "the belief that life and death are interdependent states linked through the power of love" (Comnes, *Ethics* 76). Comnes is one of the few critics to emphasize the end of *The Recognitions* as an attempted affirmation (80), a reading that I believe comes the closest to an accurate gauging of the novel's intent. However Comnes' reliance on legitimate but perhaps thin readings of Rilke, rather than the more contextual reading of

narratives both artistic (Rauschenberg) and literary (Bellow) that I will argue support such a view, has resulted in critics giving his arguments rather short shrift. Nor has Gaddis' post-*Recognitions* work given much support for such a reading. The actual mechanics of a deliberate life are not spelled out, nor does the tone of Gaddis' later novels give one much confidence that the author himself found much peace in any affirmative philosophy espoused by his first novel. There were still bills to pay, after all, and even Thoreau failed in as simple a task as living by a pond at Walden, land that David Markson points out was owned by Emerson and only a ten-minute walk from Concord (*Reader's Block* 108).

RAUSCHENBERG AND *THE RECOGNITIONS*

Make up your mind about what it is that you're struggling for because you might well obtain it. — *Film Socialisme*

In his review of Bellow's *More Die of Heartbreak*, Gaddis compliments *Augie March* (1953) and *Herzog* (1964) for their "calamitous wit" ("Instinct" 173). In the latter novel Herzog has written a well-received study on Romanticism and Christianity, the second part of which he has been struggling to complete for a number of years:

his study was supposed to have ended with a new angle on the modern condition, showing how life could be lived by renewing universal connections; overturning the last of the Romantic errors about the uniqueness of the Self; revising the old Western, Faustian ideology; investigating the social meaning of Nothingness. And more. (*Herzog* 44)

Given Wyatt's words regarding separateness as "what went wrong [...] Everything withholding itself from everything else" (874), the Faustian basis for the novel, and the rejection of Novalis, this description presents an extremely suggestive reading of Gaddis' first novel. If the novel is considered as a critique of Emersonian enthusiasm, and the numerous references to Wyatt's copy of Thoreau (258, 264, 331-2, 470) are taken at face value, this becomes an even more accurate appraisal, with even greater consequences for the logic of the novel. The conclusion of *The Recognitions* would then turn on the opposition of Thoreau and Emerson, a philosophy of (arguably) immanent communion with nature set

against transcendent experience. In Thoreau's words: "Shall I not have intelligence with the earth? Am I not partly leaves and vegetable mould myself?" (*Walden* 96)⁴² Furthermore, this reading provides an interesting avenue of inquiry into the infamously ambiguous final scenes of the novel.

Wyatt, having given up his life as a forger of Flemish artworks in New York and taken on the name of Stephen, is now staying at a monastery in Spain, *el Real Monasterio de Nuestra Señora de la Otra Vez*. He has embarked upon self-proclaimed "restoration" work on some of the paintings around the monastery, though the actual work is never explicitly described; the reader learns what he can via the figure of Ludy, "a novelist successful enough to be referred to by his publishers as distinguished" (857) and by no means a trusted source. Thus as Christopher Knight notes, though Wyatt's scraping is similar to his earlier damaging of portions of his own forgeries, and despite the suggestiveness of the negative reference to "separateness", "it seems impossible to make any final determination" (*Hints* 69) as to what Wyatt is actually doing; though at the same time erasure is heavily suggested (putting the argument almost beyond doubt) via Anselm's mechanical clothes washing, "He's scrubbed holes in everything we've got by now, he can go through a shirt in half an hour if you don't take it away from him and put something else in his hands" (932), and Hannah's waxing of the floor, "I mean Chrahst, she's going to go through to the cellar in a minute" (932).

One of the stronger claims for the final scene comes from Tony Tanner, who argues that Wyatt "is pushing on to a more comprehensive idea of restoration—namely, the restoring of reality to itself, symbolized by his erasing of the interpositions of art" (Tanner 398). This reading is potentially supported not only by the context of Sontag but by Wyatt's (and Otto's) reference to Cicero, who "gives Praxiteles no credit for doing anything more than removing the excess marble, until he reaches the real form which was there all the time" (875), as well as by Otto's story of the forged Titian that was revealed to be

⁴² Moore and Knight have both discussed the presence of Thoreau in Gaddis, as has Comnes in regards to *The Recognitions*, but this would be a stronger reading of influence; and none of these critics emphasize what is most important here, the opposition of Thoreau to Emersonian, artistic transcendence. For a recent illustration of the equation of Thoreau with immanent communion there is the use of *Walden* in *Upstream Color*. Carruth's film also presents one of the most unflattering portraits of the artist as a parasite of misery (the worst parasite in a film about parasitic organisms) in the Composer's attempts to create music from the sounds of the lives upon which he is spying; to impose a harmonic vision on the chaos of the world, perhaps?

painted over an original Titian, concluding with the words “underneath that the original is there the real...thing is there” (451)⁴³. Knight at least agrees with Tanner that there is “a strong suggestion that Wyatt wishes to move beyond art [...] he seems to leave art behind, perhaps in a manner not so emotionally unlike Rothko’s own taking leave of art” (70). Unlike Tanner, Knight leaves open the possibility that Wyatt will return to art in some way, laying the blame for Wyatt’s then artistic hiatus on the “aesthetic project” of the twentieth century.

It is interesting, however, that Knight, who spends so much time discussing the tradition and the technique of art from Titian to the abstract expressionists, going so far as to discuss the shared attitudes and attributes of Wyatt and Mark Rothko—to the point of hypothesising Wyatt’s chances of achieving aesthetic success in the “real” world—ignores the most controversial happenings in the New York art world. The most useful suggestion regarding this scene comes instead, somewhat in passing (and not in the manner suggested), from John Johnston, a critic relatively unconcerned with visual art in the novel. Rather than seeing Wyatt as an essentially realist rendering of a tortured artist, a Rothko, Johnston views him as a cipher, the focal point for a Janus-faced stance between Plato and Deleuze. Johnston sees Tanner’s interpretation as potentially supported by Robert Rauschenberg’s 1953 work *Erased de Kooning*: a framed Willem de Kooning drawing in charcoal and lead which Rauschenberg had erased, with the knowledge, if not the blessing, of de Kooning⁴⁴. And, indeed, Wyatt and Rauschenberg both began erasing/destroying their own work, and then moved on to erasing the work of another, and not just any other, but someone important to their development as an artist⁴⁵. Ultimately, though, given that Tanner leaves unexplained the notion of restoring “reality to itself” Johnston prefers to see Wyatt’s final scenes as involving a “decoding” of the novel’s own conditions of being (Wittgensteinean, perhaps). A more productive reading, however, involves Rauschenberg as a signpost

⁴³ As Markson writes in *Wittgenstein’s Mistress*, speaking of Michelangelo, “Sculpture is the art of taking away superfluous material [...] He also said, conversely, that painting is the art of adding things on” (129). This Praxiteles reference is not innocent, however, given Anselm’s response to Otto: “Who the hell do you think was hiding inside his block of stone but a high-class whore” (*Recognitions* 185).

⁴⁴ For a full account, see Stevens and Swan, *De Kooning: An American Master* (2004).

⁴⁵ Wyatt had to erase or damage portions of his forgeries for the sake of seeming authenticity; he would later go on to burn the majority of his forgeries (*Recognitions* 542-67).

towards both erasure and the monochrome as affirmation. As Markson writes in *Wittgenstein's Mistress*, a novel that in its innumerable references to Gaddis can be read as an attempt to work through some of the problems faced by Gaddis⁴⁶:

Once, Robert Rauschenberg erased most of a drawing by Willem de Kooning, and then named it Erased de Kooning Drawing.

I am in no way certain what this is connected to either, but I suppose it is connected to more than I once believed it to be connected to. (56)

Just as, perhaps, Herzog believed that *everything* is connected (to more than was previously believed to be the case).

The *Erased* is an experiment in both conceptual art and the monochrome—in Rauschenberg's words a "monochrome no-image" (Rauschenberg 75)—but it is the latter that is of most relevance, and to see the monochrome in perspective it is necessary to turn briefly to photography. Walter Benjamin, one of the most influential critics to consider the possibilities of the new mechanized art forms, would define the effect of photography, the "mechanized art commodity" to use Adorno's phrase (*Philosophy* 5), on painting in the second version of his "Work of Art" essay:

when, with the advent of the first truly revolutionary means of reproduction (namely photography, which emerged at the same time as socialism), art felt the approach of that crisis which a century later has become unmistakable, it reacted with the doctrine of *l'art pour l'art*—that is, with a theology of art. This in turn gave rise to a negative theology, in the form of an idea of "pure" art, which rejects not only any social function but any definition in terms of a representational content. (Benjamin, "Work of Art" 24)

In this narrative, representation, figuration, became anathema to painting's definition of itself, the first cause in a chain that leads to New York abstract expressionism and the split between kitsch, defined

⁴⁶ It appears that Gaddis could well have served as something of a mentor to the Markson of *Wittgenstein's* in the same manner that Dworkin's conversations with Gaddis famously provided much of the material for *The Recognitions* (on the latter relationship see Tabbi (Afterword 77-8)).

loosely as single-use art designed for immediate consumption, and self-interrogatory modernism in the work of Clement Greenberg. Here the monochrome is the (unintended) endpoint of Clement Greenberg's medium-specific theory of modernism, with an emphasis on flatness and 'opticality'⁴⁷. It is also, however, a repetition of two opposing Russian artistic developments, worth noting due to Gaddis' (and Godard's) love for Russian literature (and film). For Aleksandr Rodchenko, the triptych *Pure Red, Yellow, and Blue Colour* of 1921 was a materialist dissection of painting: "I reduced painting to its logical conclusion and exhibited three canvases: red, blue and yellow. I affirmed: it's all over. Basic colors. Every plane is a plane and there is to be no representation" (*Art from 1900* 178). As part of the Constructivist movement towards Productivism (easelism to the machine) Rodchenko then gave up painting to focus on objects, architecture, graphic design, photomontage, propaganda in the service of the revolution, including collaboration with Vertov (178-9). This move away from the "purity" of traditional painting and sculpture, away from the strictures of Clement Greenberg's modernism, towards mixed media, appears in *The Recognitions* through the figure of Max. As the reader is informed of his latest piece, ponderously titled *The Worker's Soul*, it "looked as though the back of an honest workman's shirt had been mounted for exhibition, that the sleeves, collar, and tails might be found among the rubble in the fireplace" (176). Hannah refers to Max's work as "the saddest thing Max has ever done [...] an epitaph"; the "emptiness it shows, it hurts to look at it. It's real, so real" (182), which reads less as a comment on Max's representation of (or epitaph for) the soul of the worker, than on painting in general; treated as a painting upon its appearance in the text quite early in the novel, it is 500 pages later, via Anselm (623) that the reader discovers that Max has in fact cut up and exhibited an actual shirt. Through the figures of Max and Wyatt, less an artist of his own than a pastiche of the artistic currents of the day, Gaddis would then be staging this crisis of modernist painting, with Wyatt's restoration work illustrating the endgame of modernism. Or, as Stanley asserts in *The Recognitions*:

⁴⁷ This was not at all Greenberg's own position, for whom Malevich's *White on White* "remained a mere symptom of experimental exuberance, and implied nothing further" ("'American-Type' Painting" 221). See Thierry de Duve's *Kant After Duchamp* for Greenberg's position on the monochrome: "the monochrome, and certainly the blank canvas, set the limit beyond which "a picture stops being a picture and turns into an arbitrary object" (229). The following discussion is also indebted to Joseph's excellent essay on Rauschenberg's work and development, "White on White", particularly in relation to Cage.

Some of them have set out to kill art [...] And some of them are so excited about discovering new mediums and new forms [...] that they never have time to work in one that's already established. (186)

As with Rodchenko, and indeed Max, Rauschenberg moved beyond pure painting to collage work and beyond. After 1951's *White Painting (Three Panels)*, the black and red monochromes, from 1951-53 and 53-54 respectively, incorporated collage materials such as newspaper, wood and fabric.

Despite his longstanding interest in visual art and mechanization, Gaddis does not dwell on the advent of photography, reserving all of his vitriol for the player piano. He is, however, concerned with the state of art, and has admitted a lack of sympathy with modern art such that abstract expressionism is described as "part of the disorder" (LeClair 20), symptoms rather than attempts at diagnosis and cure⁴⁸. On the other hand, as the building block of cinema, one would expect photography to be dear to Godard's heart. Yet, as an artist concerned with art in general, as someone who has expressed the desire to be a painter, the director also recognizes the irrevocable effects that photography would have on both painting and the arts in general. As the viewer is told in *The Old Place*:

From an art history point of view, if Malevich can put a black square on a white canvas, I don't think World War I is such a disaster. Poisoned by photography, painting itself committed suicide, and Soulages laid it in its grave after World War II. From an art history point of view, the 20th century is the Hundred Years War.

There is certainly an element of hyperbole here, but not much; Godard is discussing, after all, the status of the Image⁴⁹. With his reference to Malevich's *Black Square* and Pierre Soulages (who painted

⁴⁸ "The process of art is the artist's working out of his own redemption [...] Modern art and music are not comments on current-values, soul-lessness, spiritual failure as they pretend to be even to themselves. But they are simply products of it. Painting has no place, most of it [is] more static than Egyptian two-dimensionals" (Gaddis' notes qtd. in Knight, "Flemish" 58).

⁴⁹ See also Pialat's *Van Gogh* (1991), in which Van Gogh's doctor, having mistakenly praised the pointillist work of another painter as Van Gogh's own, ventures an exclamation of relief and the claim that he was being hypocritical, "as if I told you that thing [gesturing towards a brown monochrome canvas on the wall] was the future of art".

predominantly in black), Godard (and, it appears, Gaddis) present a typically negative narrative of the monochrome.

Yet in his interview with LeClair, an interview held long after *The Recognitions*, a book that Gaddis almost disavows in his later novels, he also goes on to say that *The Recognitions* is not, despite Hannah and Max, a purposeful “attack on modernism.” And I would argue that it is possible to accept this narrative of the end of modernism, while also viewing Wyatt’s reference to Rauschenberg as an action repurposed for his own *positive* agenda. Describing his *White* monochromes in a letter to the curator of the gallery in which they were first exhibited, Rauschenberg writes:

they are large white (1 white as 1 God) canvases organized and selected with the experience of time and presented with the innocence of a virgin. Dealing with the suspense, excitement and body of an organic silence, the restriction and freedom of absence, the plastic fullness of nothing, the point a circle begins and ends, they are a natural response to the current pressures of the faithless and a promoter of intuitional optimism. (qtd. in Joseph, “White on White” 91)

Here returns the author of the first almost monochromes, Kazimir Malevich, whose *Black Square* Godard disparages. This canvas and the *White on White* (1918) both retained geometric figures, and were intended to embody the infinite, or transcendental pure feeling, and Rauschenberg was by no means alone in rediscovering something akin to the transcendent in painting. Barnett Newman’s own self-proclaimed “artistic breakthrough” was a painting called *Onement* (1948), a painting comprising of a “thick, irregular band on [a] smooth field of Indian Red [that] simultaneously divides and unites the composition” (“Onement”), and, appositely, a painting that (thinly veiled) is central to Kurt Vonnegut’s *Breakfast of Champions* (1973)⁵⁰. Vonnegut describes a painting by Rabo Karabekian called *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, strongly reminiscent of Newman’s painting, the simplicity and cost of

⁵⁰ Vonnegut’s is no doubt more of a “pop” approach than Gaddis’, but both are interested in living in a world without absolutes: “It is hard to adapt to chaos, but it can be done. I am living proof of that: It can be done” (210).

which leaves the author “outraged” (*Breakfast* 208). And yet it is Karabekian who turns the narrator from a deterministic “writing machine” who “no more harboured sacredness than did a Pontiac, a mousetrap, or a South Bend Lathe” (220), into “the serene Earthling which I am this day” (220), explaining that it is a portrait of “the awareness of every animal”: “[a] sacred picture of Saint Anthony alone is one vertical, unwavering band of light [...] Our awareness is all that is alive and maybe sacred in any of us. Everything else about us is dead machinery.” (221)

Newman’s single, vertical line may solve Vonnegut’s problem, but it also illustrates exactly the kind of separation that Gaddis was attempting to combat. Within a monochrome, after all, there is no fragmentation, no separateness; or, as in Max Picard’s *The World of Silence*, “Silence is nothing merely negative [...] it is a positive, a complete world in itself” (1). Picard, a possible influence on Rilke, was another man of faith in a time of faithlessness, who concluded his work with Kierkegaard’s injunction to “Bring men to silence”, as the word of God cannot be heard through the noise (232). Such a yearning for transcendence, a pure wholeness, a “response to the current pressures of the faithless”, is potentially suggestive of Wyatt’s desire for religious transcendence⁵¹. But has it not been demonstrated by Gaddis that transcendence is no longer an option, that faithlessness cannot be avoided? For this to be a positive act, it would have to be transcendence repurposed toward immanence, something that to a certain extent, in his reference to “absence”, to “nothing”, Rauschenberg’s negative theology provides. And here the work of Thoreau, and Bellow’s “universal connections”, provide a path forward⁵². For Bellow, the next phase for Herzog involves the consideration of new forms of transcendence, such as the possibility of “transcendence downward” (*Herzog* 178), or transdescendance in the work of Jean Wahl: “will the philosopher have the strength finally to transcend transcendence, and to fall valiantly into

⁵¹ Knight also points out that Titian and El Greco were colourists, interested in “harmony” and “transcendent unity”, rather than draftsmen like Van der Goes and van der Weyden, who set “a high priority on delineating reality, of separating one object from one another”, betraying their “doubt” (“Flemish” 67-8).

⁵² Or given the centrality of Delmore Schwartz, the great New York poet, to *Humboldt’s Gift* (1975) and Bellow’s career and philosophy more generally, one could posit that Schwartz, heir of T. S. Eliot, subject to Platonic yearning (“In the Naked Bed, in Plato’s Cave”, and also detailed extensively in *Humboldt*), Orphic poet who chooses Hawthorne and Baudelaire’s examination of darkness, solitude and death over Emersonian innocence (see Knapp 508-9)) is the point of reference for both. Schwarz, however, who read an advance copy of *The Recognitions*, wrote to Gaddis’ editor Catharine Carver that though Gaddis was gifted, he considered the book full of “adolescent junk and old maid resentments” (298).

immanence, without letting the value of his effort toward transcendence be lost?" (qtd. in Levinas, *Proper Names* 116). Or, as Megan Craig goes on to gloss (speaking also of William James, along with Henri Bergson a major influence on Wahl), "[w]ill the philosopher have the courage to return to the cave—to the sensible, dark and opaque world of people and things? Will the philosopher be able to turn around without seeing this turn as a defeat, a failure or retreat?" (Craig 175) This philosophical tradition provides a more than convincing context for Wyatt's erasure; it signals his desire to transcend transcendence, to fall into immanence, to seek "universal connections". And here again it is worth thinking of the final lines of Rilke *Elegies*: "And we, who have always thought of joy / as *rising*, would feel the emotion / that almost amazes us / when a happy thing falls" (*Duino* 43). Stanley attempts to transcend upwards, and dies, trapped in an immanence that he cannot accept; Wyatt attempts to transcend, and lives. By a different route, then, it is possible to achieve consensus with Comnes' reading of *The Recognitions* and Rilke, where the lesson of Gaddis' first novel is that "Unlike the mysterious angel present in the *Duino Elegies*, humans can experience true transformation only at the cost of their identity, their claim of ownership over life" (78); or, "in scraping counterfeit paintings down to their genuine white pasteboard, Stephen dramatizes what it means to look into the impersonal mirror to which Rilke refers" (80). Gaddis may also have had in mind Leon Battista Alberti's comparison of painting itself with a window (55), in which case Stanley's window on to the transcendent is transformed into a window on to a vision of immanent unity (the only *aperta finestra*, or open window, is the blank canvas)⁵³.

Bellow's own exploration of this path traverses a spiritual phenomenology indebted to Delmore Schwartz ("Pointing to the sky's inexorable blue / Old Noumenon, come true, come true!"), Goethe and Rudolf Steiner, where facts and moral values, moral realities and molecular and atomic realities, are as real as each other, are connected⁵⁴. This path is not travelled long by Gaddis, however. Focussing on

⁵³ In which case, contra Cunningham (who provides a more qualified reading of affirmation in *The Recognitions*), though he correctly points out that the "*anagnorisis* is not the *anamnesis* (634), recognition would indeed become communion.

⁵⁴ "Resisting the argument that scientific thought has put into disorder all considerations based on value...Convinced that the extent of universal space does not destroy human value, that the realm of facts and

the worst of William James' legacy, after *The Recognitions* the writer finds in America only a debased "cash-value" pragmatism; summarized in none other than Norbert Wiener's *The Human Use of Human Beings: Cybernetics and Society* (1950):

I am writing this book primarily for Americans in whose environment questions of information will be evaluated according to a standard American criterion: a thing is valuable as a commodity for what it will bring in the open market. This is the official doctrine of an orthodoxy which it is becoming more and more perilous for a resident of the United States to question [...]. The fate of information in the typically American world is to become something which can be bought or sold. It is not my business to cavil whether this mercantile attitude is moral or immoral, crass or subtle. It is my business to show that it leads to the misunderstanding and the mistreatment of information and its associated concepts. (113)

This despite the fact that in James' formulation this "cash-value" was not a mercenary conception, but rather a figure of speech to provoke his readers into focussing on words "less as a solution [...] than as a program for more work, and more particularly as an indication of the ways in which existing realities may be changed" (*Pragmatism* 46). By the time of *Carpenter's Gothic*, then, Bellow's spiritualism would be just one of many "[d]esperate fictions like the immortal soul" (*Carpenter's* 157).

By *Frolic*, in fact, it could be argued that Gaddis has arrived at an opposing interpretation of the monochrome, one where it serves as the precursor to the de-aestheticization, the de-materialization of conceptual art practice⁵⁵. An alternative lineage of the White Paintings involves John Cage (the

that of values are not eternally separated" (*Herzog* 116, see also 194-5). See also *Humboldt's Gift* and *Mr Sammler's Planet*.

⁵⁵ Though the work of Sol LeWitt is perhaps equally as important, the most famous distillation of conceptual art is contained in Joseph Kosuth's essay "Art After Philosophy", where its development is tied directly to the readymade. While it is not necessary to overestimate the influence of Duchamp on New York at the time, one would also not want to underestimate it, given Gaddis' ambitions. After his *Nude Descending a Staircase* (1912) appeared at the Armoury exhibition Duchamp was the most infamous Frenchman in New York. "Never since Manet's *Olympia* had a painting been more reproduced and caricatured in the papers" (de Duve *Kant* 130), such that "Duchamp's reputation in New York as a Frenchman was equalled only by Napoleon and Sarah Bernhardt" (124). The unveiling of the *Fountain* (1917) at the Armoury Show (after discussion with Walter Arensburg and Joseph Stella, of *Black Paintings* fame) only added to this infamy.

inspiration for film's own monochrome, Nam June Paik's *Zen for Film*⁵⁶), bringing with him the legacy of Duchamp. "The White Paintings were airports for the lights, shadows, and particles", Cage stated (qtd. in Joseph 96-97), which, as Branden Joseph rightly points out, invokes the precedent of both Man Ray's photograph "Dust Breeding", a close-up photograph of Duchamp's "Large Glass" resembling a landscape, and Duchamp's final painting (another painting meant to signal the end of art) *Tu m'* (1918). Here, then, is an interpretation which moves away from the intentional to the aleatory, away from the "fixity of pigment in favour of the reception of ambient, temporal events"; paralleled in music, of course, by Cage's silent piece, 4'33", inspired according to the composer by Rauschenberg's monochrome. For the work is not just a monochrome, but as a number of critics have noted, a performative act; the erasure is the pivotal act (see Katz, for example), resulting in a work that is proto-conceptual in that one has to be aware that there was an actual de Kooning drawing, given freely and in full knowledge of what would happen to it, that was erased. Or, as Kenner writes in *The Counterfeiters* in relation to Ad Reinhardt's black on black paintings, "to see art in this way progressively losing its skin and bowels, progressively firming and flexing its epistemological skeleton, is to see mimed the retreat of all experience whatever from full apprehensibility [...] a black-on-black by Ad Reinhardt, is less a manual achievement than an idea" (157). It is unsurprising then that when questioned as to how long it took to paint, Max responds "Thinking it out was the main thing" (175); nor that 40 years later, in *A Frolic of His Own*, Gaddis turns his sights on the results of that art practice in an indictment of (in fact a judicial ruling on) the insubstantiality of self-referential art (33):

We have in other words plaintiff claiming to act as an instrument of higher authority, namely 'art,' wherewith we may first cite its dictionary definition as '(1) Human effort to imitate, supplement, alter or counteract the work of nature.' Notwithstanding that Cyclone 7 clearly answers this description especially in its last emphasis, there remain certain fine distinctions posing some little difficulty for the average lay observer persuaded from habit

⁵⁶ Asselberghs' essay "Beyond the Appearance of Imagelessness", on John Cage, Nam Jun Paik, Jean-Luc Godard and the blank screen, exists somewhere between the gaps of this thesis.

and even education to regard sculptural art as beauty synonymous with truth in expressing harmony as visibly incarnate in the lineaments of Donatello's David, or as the very essence of the sublime manifest in the Milos Aphrodite, leaving him in the present instance quite unprepared to discriminate between sharp steel teeth as sharp steel teeth, and sharp steel teeth as artistic expressions of sharp steel teeth, obliging us for the purpose of this proceeding to confront the theory that in having become self referential art is in itself theory without which it has no more substance than Sir Arthur Eddington's famous step 'on a swarm of flies,' here present in further exhibits by plaintiff drawn from prestigious art publications and highly esteemed critics in the lay press, where they make their livings, recommending his sculptural creation in terms of slope, tangent, acceleration, force, energy and similar abstract extravagancies serving only a corresponding self referential confrontation of language with language and thereby, in reducing language itself to theory, rendering it a mere plaything, which exhibits the court finds frivolous. (*Frolic* 33)

Yet even here there is potential evidence for a positive reading of Wyatt's monochrome. Relative to Broch's description of an ideal "eternal and infinite harmony" (*Sleepwalkers* 446-7), Gaddis' use of the "devil's interval" and the structural discord of *JR*, the emphasis on "living without absolutes", "indeterminacy", and "ambiguity" point towards Cage's own stated goal of providing a "structural means" for music other than harmony:

Harmonic structure is a recent Occidental phenomenon, for the past century in a process of disintegration [...]. The disintegration of harmonic structure is commonly known as atonality [...]. Atonality is simply the maintenance of an ambiguous tonal state of affairs. It is the denial of harmony as a structural means. The problem of a composer in a musical world in this state is to supply another structural means. ("Forerunners of Modern Music" 63)

Cage restricted his ambitions to music; Gaddis' were no less than a new "structural means" for living: "[w]hat we're really talking about—what the book is so largely talking about, leaving behind alchemy and

Wyatt's 'thank God there was the gold to forge'—is precisely this courage to live without Absolutes, which is, really, nothing more than growing up" (Gaddis, "Art of Fiction")⁵⁷.

THE ARTIST ALONE

Having no alternative, Balso blamed the war, the invention of printing, nineteenth-century science, Communism, the wearing of soft hats, the use of contraceptives, the large number of delicatessen stores, the movies, the tabloids, the lack of adequate ventilation in large cities, the passing of the saloon, the soft-collar fad, the spread of foreign art, the decline of the Western World, commercialism, and, finally, for throwing the artist back on his own personality, the Renaissance. "What is beauty saith my sufferings then?" asked Balso of himself, quoting Marlowe. — West, *Balso Snell* 321

In the figures and fates of Wyatt and Stanley Gaddis articulates the familiar tragedy or challenge of modernism, the struggle of the artist to create art that is no longer grounded in some form of greater authority, whether that be, as for Kierkegaard, for example, the aesthetic, the ethical, or the holy⁵⁸. Or, in other words, Wyatt and Stanley suffer the Lyotardian "postmodern" narrative of the breakdown of belief, the withdrawal of "metaphysical, religious, and political certainties" ("Answering" 77). But what we also have is a breakdown of community, and here it is easy to see why critics would see in Joyce a precursor and influence on both modernity and Gaddis, given the rebirth of Wyatt as Stephen, a name he shares with another almost-priest in *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* (1914-5). Joyce's Stephen forswears serving that which he no longer believes, "whether it call itself my home, my fatherland or my church", seeking free expression, with his only "arms" those of "silence, exile, and

⁵⁷ Or see Spencer, who quotes Gaddis "maybe I am a postmodernist, if it does involve all the ideas of indeterminacy, as opposed to...a relative universe as opposed to an absolute, I mean, I am an anti-absolutist" (Spencer 149). As regards a world of chaos rather than harmony, one might also think of Bela Tarr's *Werckmeister Harmonies* (2000), or indeed the book on which it is based, *The Melancholy of Resistance* (1989) by László Krasznahorkai, the Hungarian "master of apocalypse" (as Susan Sontag is quoted on the cover of the book).

⁵⁸ Or see Marcel Duchamp, "Before, painting had other functions: it could be religious, philosophic, moral" (Duchamp and Cabanne 43).

cunning” (268-9). Stephen ends up “Alone, quite alone”, “separate from all others” (269), although this was exactly the fate that Gaddis intended to remedy, rather than illustrate. It is not necessary to turn to Joyce, however, when the same crisis appears in Nathanael West’s *Baldo Snell* and *Miss Lonelyhearts*, and the tradition here is equally that of the heirs of Dostoevsky and Melville, such as Albert Camus, who began his philosophical career with a study of *Christian Metaphysics and Neoplatonism*. Perhaps its most powerful enunciation, though, appears in the works of Hermann Broch, an author who, despite being referenced in both *JR* and Antonioni’s *La Notte* in what can only be understood as shorthand for a particular diagnosis of the breakdown of order and communal values, of a vision of spiritual desolation and alienation, has featured little in Gaddis scholarship outside the work of Gregory Comnes⁵⁹.

For Hermann Broch, a Jewish convert to Roman Catholicism (and then back again), art was only art if it was able to represent “totality”: “the fundamental task” of the novel is to represent “the totality of life [...] an intuited new vision of the world [...] the new idea of the human essence that stands in its midst” (*Hugo* 157), giving as an example Joyce’s “Bloom-Finnegan” and Steven Dedalus, into whom “went everything essential that ever constituted Western man” (157). Broch was not only deeply concerned with the communal function of art, hence in part his Catholicism, but he was also, as with Gaddis, aware of the (problematic) Platonic roots of the Christian religion (*Sleepwalkers* 481), speaking both of intuitions of “the higher Platonic reality of the world” (575), and of the potentially self-destructive nature of such leanings:

I said to myself:

“You are a fool, you are a Platonist, you believe that in comprehending the world you can shape it and raise yourself in freedom to Godhead. Can you not see that you are bleeding

⁵⁹ *La notte* examines the breakdown of the relationship between a writer (“the lonely craftsman / the job can’t be mechanized”) and his wife (Whenever I try to communicate, love disappears”). Marcello Mastroiani finds the book at a party of the upper class: “Who here would read *The Sleepwalkers?*” he asks out loud, though mostly to himself. Yet apart from the occasional aside such as that of Peter Wolfe, quoting Theodore Ziolkowski, “Broch longed for totality and simultaneity [...] He wanted to encompass all of life—and all at once” (Wolfe 235), the kinship between Gaddis and Broch mostly goes unremarked.

yourself to death?"I answered myself:

"Yes, I am bleeding to death." (559)

Interestingly, given Gaddis' background, Broch opposes the communal possibilities of Catholicism to those of Protestantism (see particularly chapter LXII of *The Sleepwalkers*, part eight of the "Disintegration of Values"). Here one might posit that for Broch the Protestant Revolution was the beginning of the end of social cohesion and "values"⁶⁰. For Weber, of course, whose work Broch was no doubt familiar with, Protestantism and the success of the "Spirit of Capitalism" were inextricably linked⁶¹. In Gaddis' words, Weber's work describes "Puritan and Calvinist teachings as a moral foundation for the emergence of capitalism" ("Literature of Failure" 117), and the iconoclastic tendencies or hostility to art of Protestantism are underscored in Gaddis' *The Recognitions* by the character of Wyatt's Aunt May⁶².

The Sleepwalkers thus presents the Middle Ages as an ideal time of unity between man and the world, man and his community, in a passage that perfectly encapsulates Wyatt's motivation for regressing to the world of the van Eycks and Bouts:

One cannot escape from this brutal and aggressive logic that exhibits itself in all the values and non-values of our age [...] yet a man who shrinks from knowledge, that is to say, a romantic, a man who must have a bounded world, a closed system of values, and who seeks in the past the completeness he longs for, such a man has good reason for turning to the Middle Ages. For the Middle Ages possessed the ideal centre of values that he

⁶⁰ As it was for Philip K. Dick. In *Radio Free Albemuth* (2008) the author receives help from a scientifically advanced alternate universe, ruled by a theocracy, where this revolution did not take place: "They never fought a Thirty Years War," Phil said. "That war set Europe back five hundred years...the first great religious war, between Protestants and Catholics. Europe was reduced to barbarism—to cannibalism, in fact. Look what internecine religious warfare has done to us. Look at the deaths, the destruction." (182)

⁶¹ See Harrington, for example.

⁶² As regards Weber on the Protestant ethic one thinks of Nicolas Roeg's underrated *Eureka* (1983) and the constant refrain of the protagonist, "I never earned a nickel off another man's sweat." To do so would be to not have earned his gold, and his (lonely) place in the elect; "I'll find the gold. Alone! Alone!" Opposing the protagonist is his son-in-law, for whom the gold is a communal resource, and a group of criminals who want to exploit the gold, presenting the worst face of capitalism. Incidentally, the parallels with *Carpenter's Gothic* (1985) are quite fascinating, down to the names of the protagonists, McCann and McCandless (McCannot?). Whereas McCann comes back rich, McCandless returns poor; yet both end up in more or less the same place, in despair, pursued by mobsters or the government. See also Thoreau's "Life without Principle" for the search for physical gold substituting for the search for the good.

requires, possessed a supreme value to which all other values were subordinate: the belief in the Christian God. Cosmogony was as dependent on that central value (more, it could be scholastically deduced from it) as man himself; man with all his activities formed a part of the whole world-order which was merely the reflected image of an ecclesiastical hierarchy, the closed and finite symbol of an eternal and infinite harmony [...] The dictum “Business is business” was not permitted to the medieval merchant, competitive struggle being forbidden to him; the medieval artist knew nothing of *l’art pour l’art*, but only that he must serve his faith [...] It was a world reposing on faith, a final not a causal world, a world founded on being, not on becoming; and its social structure, its art, the sentiments that bound it together, in short, its whole system of values, was subordinated to the all-embracing living value of the faith. (*Sleepwalkers* 447)

In the world that Broch describes, even commerce is part of a whole, a formulation found not only in Novalis’ opposition of the “noble mercantile spirit” of the Middle Ages to the “petty tradesmen” of his day (“Miscellaneous” 392), but also in Godard’s description of American “studio bosses” of old as “poets of money” (*Future(s)* 76). Gaddis charts this fall in *The Recognitions*, from the pre-title epigraph from Irenaeus, “*Nihil cavum neque sine signo apud Deum*”, “In God, nothing is empty of sense” (ii), to the description of the world of the novel, where “Money gives significance to anything” (144)⁶³. In *Hugo von Hofmannsthal and His Time: The European Imagination, 1860-1920* (1984), Broch goes further and attacks the appropriation of the “sacred” by art, utilising another of Gaddis’ favourite images, Babel: in such “Babylonian mental chaos—the very title *The Tower* implies Babel—in which it was no longer possible for anyone to come to an understanding with anyone else”⁶⁴. With this breakdown of values, the artist no longer knows “whether he is a saint or a salesman” (96). Neither option is acceptable to Gaddis. He does not, with Broch and Huysmans, revert/convert to religion. However, by depicting the

⁶³ And also Wyatt’s “art redeems time”, to which Brown responds “and buying it redeems money” (144). The idea of the Middle Ages as a time of unity also appears in Huysmans’ afterword to *A rebours*, an author whom Gaddis will go on to quote in *Agapē*.

⁶⁴ Gaddis’ fictional counterpart in *The Recognitions*, Willie, is writing a novel called “Baedeker’s Babel” (*Recognitions* 475); an even more appropriate title for the misunderstandings of *JR*.

collapse of transcendence/salvation, rather than attempting to collapse the binary that results in the need for salvation and a divine guarantor, Gaddis remained susceptible to the same desire for unity that motivated Broch, even despite his demythologizing of the artistic purity of the Middle Ages via Valentine⁶⁵. Though Gaddis is constantly discussing the need to live “without Absolutes”, which Gregory Comnes has spun into an “ethics of indeterminacy”, Comnes (and Gaddis) overstates his case; even after the rejection of Platonism in *The Recognitions*, Platonic harmony, a nostalgic vision of lost order, haunts every novel (complicated somewhat by the fascinating curiosity of *A Frolic of His Own*) from *JR* onward, that which Knight has pinpointed as the apophatic element of Gaddis’ work (*Hints* 6-7). In other words, refusing the position of salesman, and the idea of art as commodity that this implies, he will eventually revert not to religion but to idealism, replace the absolute of sainthood with the absolute of Platonic truth, and Godard, in the same position, will replace it with the Romantic absolute of art.

⁶⁵ For example Valentine’s remarks regarding Wyatt’s idealized version of the Flemish painters (*Recognitions* 689-90).

Secular Saints, not Salesmen: Art, Thermodynamic Fire, and Sacred Fire

Where the first chapter argues that both artists face disenchantment and continue to speak, this chapter examines that speech and its foundations more closely. An acceptance of a world without a window onto the divine is only a first step, and in many way the easiest—particularly when both artists have smuggled in a gift from Prometheus in the guise of the Romantic “sacred flame” of art, a metaphor that Broch traces to Schiller (*Hofmannsthal* 95). Otto may wield only the flame of a cigarette lighter rather than the *ignis noster* of the alchemists (*The Recognitions* 133), but Gaddis himself (and *JR*'s Edward Bast) wields the flame of art. Yet the sacred also requires faith, and in the twenty years that pass between *The Recognitions* and *JR*, twenty years in which Wyatt's tragic recognition failed to inspire a similar recognition in the novel's (few) readers, Gaddis' philosophy takes a marked turn for the negative. The flame of art comes into conflict with the thermodynamic fire of entropy, and though Bast remains the keeper of an ever-dwindling flame, the possibility of immanent community proposed in his first novel, or even of a Kantian aesthetic community under capitalism, is disabused in a novel that resorts instead to Norbert Wiener's heroic existentialism. While the confidence man of *A Frolic of His Own* (1995) proposes a philosophy of flux rather than truth, it is also firmly undermined, and the figure of artist as torchbearer reappears in *Agape*.

Godard's debt to Bergson's *Matter and Memory*, on the other hand, allows him to retain a faith in the image. Though Godard displays a level of mourning over the myriad catastrophes of the twentieth century, including the failure of cinema to live up to its sacred obligation to the historical absolute of the Shoah, his Bergsonism combines with a reading of Malraux's *Imaginary Museum* (and Blanchot's reading of Malraux) to create a formalist belief in Art as both Absolute and *sensus communis*. *King Lear*, the *Histoire(s)*, and the *Métamorphojean* advertisements for Girbaud Jeans all draw strongly on the Malrucian conception of artistic metamorphosis, of art as a fire that is born from its own ashes. Where Godard sees a cycle of death and rebirth, then, Gaddis looks to the macrocosm and sees entropic heat death; where Godard finds solace in an equation of fire with a version of the sacred defined by its relation to community, Gaddis fears the absorption of the fire of art by thermodynamic fire. Given that

this fear displays Platonic leanings, some perspective can be gained once again from the work of Hermann Broch, Platonist and Romantic, and his early hopes for the work of Ernst Mach, a philosopher who avoided the problem of entropy, at least for a time, by refusing to “believe that atoms exist” (Blackmore 206).

ART, SENSATIONS, AND ATOMS

Man has a tropism for order. Keys in one pocket, change in another. Mandolins are tuned G D A E. The physical world has a tropism for disorder, entropy. Man against Nature. [T]he battle of the centuries. Keys yearn to mix with change. Mandolins strive to get out of tune. Every order has within it the germ of destruction. All order is doomed, yet the battle is worth while. — West, *Miss Lonelyhearts* 61

In his discussion of Broch in *The Ethics of Indeterminacy*, Comnes uses the author’s hope for a new kind of literature based on contemporary philosophical models of perception and consciousness as a parallel for Gaddis’ own ambitions. Though Comnes does not specify the source of these models, relying on Ziolkowski’s brief discussion of Broch and Einstein’s relativity, Janik and Toulmin point out that for Broch and Hugo von Hofmannsthal the figure of most importance was the philosopher Ernst Mach. As Janik and Toulmin write of the conjunction of Mach and Hofmannsthal:

For Hofmannsthal, the goal of poetry was the creation of unity between the self and the world [...] at the point where they interacted: his impressions. Poetry was a recording, an articulation, of these impressions and images. “I am a poet [...] because my experience is pictorial” [...] in these images, objective content and subjective form become one. Like so many other Viennese aesthetes, Hofmannsthal found in the philosopher Ernst Mach a theory of knowledge that appeared to confirm his poetic experience completely. “The world consists only of our sensations,” Mach asserted, “in which case, we have knowledge only of sensations” [...] It seemed to Hofmannsthal [...] that if Mach was correct, the poet was surely expressing more of “reality” in his verses than the scientist could do. The scientist

stood at one remove from sensations, because he described them in a nonverbal way, by means of mathematics. (113)

Instructively, both Hofmannsthal and Broch sought a justification for their works via some kind of Platonism: Hofmannsthal, like Wyatt, sought with art (in this case lyric poetry) to awaken pre-existing knowledge. But Hofmannsthal's most famous work is perhaps "A Letter", more commonly known as "Lord Chandos' Letter", in which the task the poet has set himself proves to be an impossibility; a short story that is, in Janik and Toulmin's interpretation, a "critique of Mach's sensationalism":

Hofmannsthal's message is that such a theory of knowledge—which locates the foundation of knowledge in sensuous images—is radically deficient, because the most pressing questions about life and society are unanswerable, and cannot even be represented, in terms of sense impressions alone [...] Concepts and images cannot convey the subjectivity of truth; only experiences which could affect the innermost being, the very way of life of the audience would accomplish this. (80, 116)

Platonism and art, in other words, remain mutually exclusive. Hofmannsthal thus rejects aestheticism and goes on to write Tolstoyan, or perhaps Kierkegaardian, fables, the literature of the "masses" that Gaddis will reject in *Agapē*.

Broch, on the other hand, faced with the same dilemma, performs the thoroughly Romantic gesture of *The Death of Virgil* (which he would complete in exile in America) both a lengthy discourse on the powerlessness of art, and an expression of hope for its future. As Blanchot writes:

The Death of Virgil is the answer. Not that this work tells us where unity is, but that it represents it itself: poem, it is that sphere where the forces of emotion and reasonable certainties, form and content, meaning and expression pass into each other. So we can say that what is at stake for Broch in his work is quite a bit more than his work: if he can write it, it is because unity is possible; symbol will become reality, and the poem will be truth and knowledge. Hence the importance that, in the second part, the debate between

the poet and his art acquires: will the work of art always be only a symbol? At the farthest frontier, will it still meet only beauty? (*Book to Come* 121)

After *Virgil*, Broch will return to philosophy, to the philosophy of the crowd, and to his study of Hofmannsthal, in which the Viennese poet's view of art as a "simple ritual of knowledge" is compared unfavourably with Rilke's consideration of art "as a cognitive instrument for the gaining of faith" (*Hofmannsthal* 97). Though he will return to social and political themes in *The Guiltless*, *Virgil* will remain his major statement on art, via art.

These authors provide an invaluable context for Gaddis' work, and for Comnes' use of Broch as a model for his claim that "Gaddis' narrative enactment of contemporary epistemology [...] teaches readers a method of recovering meaning" in a world of "postmodern" flux (*Ethics* 14). In choosing to ignore the problems inherent to Hofmannsthal and Broch's project, as Comnes does, problems that forced the two authors into two paths that Gaddis has explicitly rejected over the course of his career (fables and Romanticism), Comnes also ignores the major challenges to Gaddis', to indeed any attempt at living and creating art without absolutes. Which is not to say that Gaddis faced exactly the same obstacles. The scientist of note for Gaddis is not Mach, but Willard Gibbs (via Norbert Wiener), one of the fathers of entropy, who Gaddis pays homage to in *JR*. Gibbs formulated his ideas on statistical mechanics, and indeed his equation for determining entropy, roughly at the same time as the Viennese physicist Ludwig Boltzmann arrived at his own equations; the latter cites the former in his *Lectures on Gas Theory*, and the former cites the latter as a precursor in his *Elementary Principles in Statistical Mechanics* (1902)⁶⁶. Entropy, as Gaddis quotes Norbert Wiener, mathematician and information theorist, is "nature's tendency to degrade the organized and to destroy the meaningful" (Gaddis, "Rush" 150). In Gaddis' interpretation, "[t]he more complex the message, the greater the chance for error. Entropy rears as a central preoccupation of our time" (150). And when not the result of error, it can be imputed to deceit, thus if one could describe Gaddis' first novel as deceit with a side of entropy, *JR* would be set in a world of the reverse. Fascinatingly, Mach's belief in sensations was directly opposed

⁶⁶ See, for example, Cropper (106-123, 177-200).

to the philosophies of Boltzmann and Gibbs, based on the then unpopular atomic theory, but of more interest here is Wiener's response to the concept of entropy. In *I am a Mathematician* the information theorist proposes an existential, tragic heroic conception of history in which "[e]very victory that is absolute is followed at once by the Twilight of the gods" (Wiener 324), writing of an equivalence between his response to the problem of entropy and the "pessimistic" philosophy of Kierkegaard and the existentialists:

We are swimming upstream against a great torrent of disorganization, which tends to reduce everything to the heat-death of equilibrium and sameness described in the second law of thermodynamics. What Maxwell, Boltzmann, and Gibbs meant by this heat death in physics has a counterpart in the ethics of Kierkegaard, who pointed out that we live in a chaotic moral universe. In this, our main obligation is to establish arbitrary enclaves of order and system. These enclaves will not remain there indefinitely by any momentum of their own after we have once established them [...] We are not fighting for a definitive victory in the indefinite future [...] No defeat can deprive us of the success of having existed for some moment of time in a universe that seems indifferent to us. This is no defeatism, it is rather a sense of tragedy in a world in which necessity is represented by an inevitable disappearance of differentiation. The declaration of our own nature and the attempt to build up an enclave of organization in the face of nature's overwhelming tendency to disorder is an insolence against the gods and the iron necessity that they impose. Here lies tragedy, but here lies glory too. (Wiener, *Mathematician* 324-25)

Emphasizing process over "a pre-established harmony such as that of Leibniz" (327) or Plato, and life as "the continual interplay between the individual and his environment rather than a way of existing under the form of eternity", Wiener asserts that he creates a positive existentialism that does not descend into what could be described as Emersonian Optimism, or Confidence (327-8). This emphasis on tragedy is typical of the existential attitude, identifiable in Albert Camus' description of Oedipus as one of the first absurd heroes ("crushing truths perish from being acknowledged [...] Ancient wisdom

confirms modern heroism" ("Sisyphus" 109-10)), and Malraux's view of Greek tragedy as a victory over destiny⁶⁷. "Greek tragedy deliberately gave form to those which crushed him to the ground, but, *in it*, he ceased to be their victim" (*Metamorphosis* 62-3), Malraux declares. He does not, however, cease to be atomized, and nor indeed does Wiener's tragic hero, though the information theorist's claims are in fact stronger than those of the French existentialists. Where Camus and Malraux offer an individual victory, Wiener's couching of the existential dilemma in terms of entropy, of order and chaos, claims for the individual the ability to win a larger victory, even if only for a time.

The exact relation of Gaddis' work to Wiener's philosophy is a matter of some dispute⁶⁸. Schryer views *JR* as a refutation of Wiener's epistemological optimism, citing Gibbs: "Order is simply a thin perilous condition that we try to impose on the basic reality of chaos" (Schryer 86). Drawing on Wiener, Comnes has instead argued that Gaddis asks "the reader to go beyond the confines of the deterministic action within the text" (109), and that doing so acts as a form of negentropy, that Gaddis' injunction to "read Wiener on communication" (*JR* 403) is a sign that he subscribes to Wiener's positive existentialism. This argument has some merit, for as Gaddis writes in *JR*, "that's what any book worth reading's about, problem solving" (*JR* 499), and one can certainly see *JR* as a novel that, like Broch's *Virgil*, was written to show that art was possible. In requiring a sustained effort on the part of its reader, *JR* would then contribute to order, rather than chaos: the novel as an example of what comes to look like a kind of entropic Romanticism, in other words. Comnes' argument is repeated, after a manner, more recently by Wutz, who argues that "the work of art provides a temporary stay against disorder [...]" a sort of interpretive entropy" (206-7), though with a Serres reference in place of Comnes' use of

⁶⁷ Comnes, arguing for an ethics of indeterminacy in Gaddis' work, and dismissing the "lament of the existential I" as one that "rings hollow" (30), still ought perhaps to have considered the possible relation of Simone de Beauvoir's *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (1948) to his thesis.

⁶⁸ Though both could be read within a narrative such as Cotkin's *Existential America*, a book that traces the influence of and responses to thinkers as disparate as Nietzsche, Kierkegaard, Heidegger, Sartre, Camus and Beauvoir; indeed, given that much of the action of Cotkin's narrative takes place in New York, it is a sign of Gaddis' still relatively minor status (and also, no doubt, a sign of how successfully he disavowed his earlier leanings) that Cotkin does not include any discussion of the author. In this regard it is also worth noting, as Cunningham points out, that a number of scholars have made connections between "late-classical Gnosticism and modern Existentialism" (619).

Wiener⁶⁹. While it is true that Serres' work on the convergence of science, myth and literature, his analysis of the presence of the thermodynamic model of irreversible time ("Origin" 72-3) as a structuring principle of such wide ranging authors and artists as Zola, Bergson and Turner, has much to offer an understanding of Gaddis' place in the history of literature, Wutz focusses on a rather less useful point of comparison:

Similar to his own mantra that the universe is awash in "the tide of entropy" (*Agapē* 5), that "chaos,...disorder,...discontinuity, disparity, difference, discord" are the only constants in the world (2), and ever-shifting constants at that, Serres believes in the "universal principle of disorder" perforated, momentarily and locally, by pockets of structure and order (*Hermes* xxvii). And similar to Serres's theorem that knowledge is always "local, distributed haphazardly in a plurality of spaces" (*Hermes* xiii), Gaddis's aggregate of knowledge reaches across disciplinary boundaries to produce punctual and nonauthoritarian (though author-controlled) insights. (Wutz 190)

Even a cursory reading of more of *Hermes* (1982) than Harari and Bell's introduction (or perhaps even the introduction, in a book named after the god of, amongst other things, merchants), reveals that Gaddis and Serres have entirely opposed views of the consequences of entropy. Serres' aim is to attempt to rescue, to write, what he sees as a lost tradition of Epicurus and Lucretius and the "clinamen", an embrace of the aleatory and stochastic (Venus) over the "martial neuroses" ("Lucretius" 121) of Plato, Descartes, and Bacon (Mars). In *The Parasite* (1982), for example, Serres writes that "Fluctuation, disorder, opacity, and noise are not and are no longer affronts to the rational [...] In the beginning was the noise" (13). Serres, in other words, contra Gaddis' obsession with order and entropy

⁶⁹ Although Gaddis and Serres do share a similar short-term pessimism about the future of the humanities, and a curiously similar conception of daemonic writing (Haven, "Michel Serres"), Serres would look askance at Wutz's description of the work of art as a tool with which the "gifted novelist" can take upon himself the heroic task of enabling the reader to fight back chaos and entropy. See also Schryer's attempt to associate Gaddis with "second-order" information theory rather than the "first-order" of Wiener (76-77, 82-9); though he seems to be trying to distance himself from (an unnamed) Comnes, Schryer's reliance on the recognition of the "observer's contribution" in his description of a turn to a "readerly ethic" remains perilously close to (if not indistinguishable from) Comnes' "ethics of indeterminacy" built on Broch and "relativity", and thus vulnerable to the same critique.

as death, is interested in the positive, the productive aspects of chaos and disorder. Entropy is nothing to fear. While it is strictly accurate to say that the two believe in entropy and disorder, this is a common perspective more helpfully illustrated via Wiener. A similar objection can be made to Wutz's claim for a cross-disciplinary archaeology of knowledge, given that Serres is interested in embodied knowledge, and Gaddis, as is so obvious in *Agapē*, is invested in a phantasmagoric model and desperate for eternal truth; indeed, Serres argues explicitly against a model that separates the subject and the object, "an instance of clarity and an instance of shadow [...] This separation makes everything inexplicable and unreal" ("Origin" 83). Serres' conclusion to this particular section of *Hermes*, "The Origin of Language: Biology, Information Theory, & Thermodynamics" is worth quoting at length:

Nothing distinguishes me ontologically from a crystal, a plant, an animal, or the order of the world; we are drifting together toward the noise and the black depths of the universe, and our diverse systemic complexions are flowing up the entropic stream, toward the solar origin, itself adrift. Knowledge is at most the reversal of drifting, that strange conversion of times, always paid for by additional drift; but this is complexity itself, which was once called being. Virtually stable turbulence within the flow. To be or to know from now on will be translated by: see the islands, rare or fortunate, the work of chance or of necessity. (83)

A case could be made for the relevance of Serres to *The Recognitions*, given the kinship between an ontological identification with a "crystal, a plant, an animal" and the previous argument for an attempt at Thoreauvian immanence, but not to *JR* onwards, with its turn to an individualistic, tragic heroic conception of life.

Wutz's drafting of Serres is not without an unintentional boon, however, for Serres' focus on the positive features of noise in information theory brings into sharp relief the valorization of order over chaos in Gaddis and Comnes (and Wutz), and, indeed, provides an alternative to Gaddis' entropic fixation. Entropy in Gaddis is a negative feature that must be accommodated, the limit of order; harmony, stasis, the universe as closed system, is still the ideal. Serres, on the other hand, declares himself at the level of the living organism and speaks of an open system, and the notion of

homeorrhesis. Wutz's argument and use of Serres then demonstrates that Gaddis is unable to resist the pull of order, and that, in fact, this is something of an inevitability given that Wiener's heroic existentialism is vulnerable to the same weakness: though it protests against harmony a la Leibniz, harmony remains the ideal case. The "turn" to an existential, entropic Romantic model is, then, little more than an evolution of the Aristotelian narrative in which Gaddis embeds the necessity for Wyatt's immanent endeavour, a desperate attempt to control or mitigate the catastrophic that reveals even *The Recognitions'* superficial similarities with Serres' project as false friends.

A more appropriate figure for discussion in relation to Gaddis' entropic pessimism is Oswald Spengler. Fighting for negentropy as a Sisyphean task is the obverse of Spengler's apocalyptic fixation, and the logical outcome of attempting to hold on to Plato and Aristotle in the age of thermodynamics. Gaddis' various references to Spengler are then unsurprising, and in fact though the German philosopher/historian's work, after initial worldwide success, quickly fell into disrepute, his influence is still felt, propagated not least by some of the great names of twentieth century American literature. Gaddis has pointed out that the figure of entropy in American literature is at least as old as Nathanael West and *Miss Lonelyhearts*⁷⁰; but West also introduces Spengler explicitly in *A Cool Million: or The Dismantling of Lemuel Pitkin*, with Spengler and Valery cited by Israel Satinpenney to support the statement that the "star of the paleface is sinking [...] dying of a surfeit of shoddy" (158)⁷¹. Or there is Fitzgerald, another disciple of Eliot⁷², who turns out to be a Spenglerian. In *The Love of the Last Tycoon*, his uncompleted "western" based on the life of Irving Thalberg, the Hollywood producer, Kathleen Moore is to complete her education by reading Spengler: "All the history and philosophy and harmony was all so I could read Spengler and then I left him before we got to Spengler" (91). Fitzgerald,

⁷⁰ And in "Some Notes on Miss L." the seeker after information on "Deadness and disorder" is pointed to Bunyan and Tolstoy (West, *Miss Lonelyhearts* 88).

⁷¹ A novel that serves as both a warning against fascism and capitalism, given that the literal dismantling of Lemuel's body stands next to Benjamin's Disney revelation. As the epigraph has it, "John D. Rockefeller would give a cool million to have a stomach like yours" (90).

⁷² Spengler's work bears marked similarities in theme to Eliot's *The Waste Land*, hence it is again unsurprising that those drawn to Eliot are drawn also to *The Decline of the West*. See Barry, for example, on the similarities between Spengler and Eliot, and Randall on Eliot and *The Great Gatsby*.

an artist not shy about churning out short stories for cash, made his own mental, emotional, spiritual disillusionment due to a “passionate belief in order” and “the inevitability of failure” as public as possible with a series of autobiographical articles for *Esquire* (“Cracking Up”).

Outside of these artistic vehicles for Spenglerism, Gaddis himself recalls reading and being overwhelmed by the “pessimistic vision of decline” (Gaddis and Ingendaay 17) of Spengler’s opus *The Decline of the West* (1923) at the age of twenty, a book that combines virtually all of Gaddis’ preoccupations: Faustian man (in terms of a restless striving rather than a devil’s pact), the decline of Western civilization, a pessimistic vision of communication in the age of mass media, and, perhaps most importantly, apocalypse, tied to the figure of entropy:

the mythopoetic force of the Faustian soul is returning to its origins. It was at the outset of the Gothic, just at the same time when the first mechanical clocks were being built, that the myth of the world’s end, Ragnarök, the Twilight of the Gods, arose [...] What the myth of Götterdämmerung signified of old, the irreligious form of it, the theory of Entropy signifies today—*world’s end as completion of an inwardly necessary evolution*. (Spengler 423-4, italics in original)

In light of this the combination of the many references in both form and content to Wagner’s *Ring Cycle*, combined with the overarching theme of entropy in *JR*, begins to look like a very Spenglerian manoeuvre.

Godard’s own reference to Spengler highlights the destructive nature of money “as a way of thinking”, in *Allemagne 90 neuf zéro* (1991):

No less titanic is the assault of money against spiritual power. A desperate struggle is now underway on the soil of the cities of the world, where money can arise victorious. But, since money is a way of thinking, it destroys itself once it has thought economics through to the end. Then it invents Auschwitz and Hiroshima. And so begins the final struggle. The struggle between money and blood.

Money and Blood are the two final categories of Spengler's decline; money, as a "way of thinking", the reduction of life to economics, is here pinpointed as the cause for two of the worst man-made catastrophes of the twentieth-century. Discussion of money as exchange, and its impact on the social, must wait until the next chapter, but Godard's reference points to the continued power of Spengler's thought. And indeed, despite recognising "its manifest empirical and theoretical deficiencies" (54), Adorno, a philosopher as respected as Spengler is disrespected, has argued that "[f]orgotten, Spengler takes his revenge by threatening to be right" (*Prisms* 54). Spengler's predictions of a future where "art itself becomes a sport", where the human consciousness is "expropriated" by "the centralized media of public communication" (56), of the rise of propaganda and various kinds of political manipulation, have certainly proven to be prescient. And of the flaws that Adorno identifies, more than a few are flaws that could well be applied to Gaddis, such as the "fatalistic determinism" of Spengler's conception of history, and his scientific and economic dilettantism—though this latter might well apply to virtually every author. Ultimately, though, it is the Nietzschean lack of compassion for, or interest in, the victims of history, the powerless, that Adorno sees as the greatest weakness of Spengler's philosophy, for "[i]n their protest lies the only hope that fate and power will not have the last word" (*Prisms* 72). A weakness of which any reader of Gaddis should perhaps be wary, given his late-career denigration of the masses.

FAITH IN THE IMAGE, DESPAIR OF THE WORD

Whether we are Christians or atheists, in our universal schizophrenia, we need reasons to believe in this world. — Deleuze, *Cinema 2* 172

Spengler's vision of decline explains in part Gaddis' complete diminishing faith in the power of the written word. Discussing *A Frolic of His Own* with Marc Chénétier in 1993, Gaddis was asked as to how exactly he envisaged his novel would escape the "jailhouse of discourse", given that he has "produced an image of the way [contemporary, debased language] actually works and is utilized", and therefore is in danger of the "fallacy of the mimetic". Gaddis replied: "I see no way out. No, I see it as getting worse and worse [...] the corruption is almost total, and when you get into these [...] when the law *attempts* to

clear up this problem, it simply compounds it, this problem or use of language". And of *JR*, which Chénétier sees as an attempted remedy, Gaddis states that "It may simply compound the problem". This is a distinct shift from his attitude in his 1980 interview with LeClair, where he spoke of a "disintegration of order" (26) between his first and second books, but also of the hope residing in the figure of Bast, who "vows to make a whole guided by creativity and art". Art is both order and "destructive force", a potential escape from and remedy to chaos, as has been discussed. The book in the centre of these two interviews is *Carpenter's Gothic*, with its "vision of disorder which it was beyond any one man to put right", in McCandless' words (150). Gaddis appears to have arrived at a similar state to that of Gibbs in *JR*; as Knight describes the former schoolteacher, "a prisoner of his own encyclopedic project to interweave the turn-of-the-century realms of 'government, invention, art, industry, and religion' (*JR*, 576) into a single narrative, discovers, after sixteen years, that he cannot carry it through, that he lacks the faith—both in the book and, more important, in the world—to see it through" (*Hints* 5).

Tanner has described Gaddis as participating in an American trend of distrust in language, partly attributable to the idea of entropy (though via Eliot rather than Spengler) and partly to the American reception of Ludwig Wittgenstein, where "American writers seem [...] to have felt how tenuous, arbitrary, and even illusory are the verbal constructs which men call descriptions of reality" (Tanner 27)⁷³. Yet much of this lack of faith in the book is simply a lack of faith in the audience, as Gaddis' earlier comments on film audiences suggests. In Fitzgerald, for example, a belief in the novel as "the strongest and supplest medium for conveying thought and emotion from one human being to another" is tied to a vision of the novel's readership dwindling at the hands of film, "a mechanical and communal art that,

⁷³ Wittgenstein is referenced in some fashion by authors such as Thomas Pynchon, John Barth, David Markson, and more recently Ben Marcus and Percival Everett, not to mention the work of Thomas Bernhard, so important to Gaddis' final work. One interpretation of Wittgenstein's first work of philosophy would be that it aimed to serve as a scaffolding which would lift philosophers out of the confusions of metaphysical discourse, leaving the sphere of ethics to the work of art; hence his love of Tolstoy's fables, with their emphasis on a form of indirect communication owing much to the ideas of Kierkegaard. Where Benesch discusses Kierkegaard's notion of repetition in relation to Gaddis, a more productive avenue might then be the consideration of *The Recognitions* as an attempt at a maieutic text, as (just as Wittgenstein used philosophy to try and free the reader from philosophy) an attempt to use this originally Platonic (Socratic) method of dispelling illusions and seeking original Truth to undermine Platonism and reveal that it (and transcendence itself) is an illusion.

whether in the hands of Hollywood merchants or Russian idealists, was capable of reflecting only the tritest thought, the most obvious emotion. It was an art in which words were subordinate to images” (“Cracking Up”). Fitzgerald and Gaddis do not doubt the words, they doubt that anyone is listening. It is also true, however, that the two authors found themselves on the wrong side of the text/image divide.

Even as Fitzgerald and Gaddis were lamenting the decline of the novel and the newfound power of cinema, a philosophical valorization of the Image was taking place; Lord Chandos may have fared better had he been a filmmaker. As Rancière points out, Godard contrasts the “deathly power of the text [with] the living force of the Image” (Rancière, *Future* 30-31), going so far as to associate the written word with commerce through his comment in the *Scenario* that writing was created by merchants. This living image can be discussed most vividly in relation to Deleuze, who has described the “Catholic quality to cinema”, cinema’s “special relationship with belief” (*Cinema 2* 171); “from the outset, Christianity and revolution, the Christian faith and revolutionary faith, were the two poles which attracted the art of the masses. For the cinematographic image, in contrast to the theatre, showed us the link between the man and the world” (171)⁷⁴. The cinema, then, becomes a new form of faith, or at least a new manifestation of faith in the world and our place in it, man as a seer of immanence rather than transcendence in a world suffering from a “sensory-motor break”, attributable to the Second World War, “a break in the link between man and the world. The sensory-motor break makes man a seer who finds himself struck by something intolerable in the world, and confronted by something unthinkable in thought” (169). As Deleuze goes on to write (and here the kinship with Serres, anti-Platonists both, presents itself strongly, with the individual subject broken down to sense and perception):

Man is in the world as if in a pure optical and sound situation. The reaction of which man has been dispossessed can be replaced only by belief. Only belief in the world can reconnect man to what he sees and hears. The cinema must film, not the world, but belief in this world, our only link [...] Restoring our belief in the world—this is the power of

⁷⁴ Rancière also makes the connection between Deleuze and the philosophy of the image of André Bazin, figure of such importance to the *Nouvelle Vague* (*Film Fables* 11-12).

modern cinema (when it stops being bad) [...] What is certain is believing is no longer believing in another world, or in a transformed world. It is only, it is simply believing in the body. It is giving discourse to the body, and, for this purpose, reaching the body before discourses, before words, before things are named: the 'first name', and even before the first name. (*Cinema 2* 171-2)

It is perhaps in this sense of humanity dispossessed of a place in the world (in the sun), and in need of a new form of immanent belief, that Godard has spoken of the desire to show in *Je vous salue Marie* "signs in the beginning. Signs in the sense of signals [...] when signs are beginning to grow. Before they have signification or meaning. Immaculate signs in a way. And not just to give a feeling of nature, in order to be poetic, but to show the physical process of making nature possible" (Godard and Sterritt 170). Here "immaculate signs" are opposed to the hegemony of writing, of a written religion of commandments, summed up by Lemmy's simple reply in *Allemagne 90 neuf zéro* to the information that the Bible in his hotel room has not been left by someone accidentally, but intentionally (there is one in every room): "*Allez Salauds*": "Bastards".

Most importantly here, however, the first book that Godard takes from his bookshelf in the *Histoire(s)* is Henri Bergson's *Matter and Memory*, and if Deleuze is philosophy's premiere Bergsonianist, Godard is cinema's equivalent. And more, Bergson's Image is the progenitor of Shklovsky's search for the first name; the Russian then appears as the perfect conjunction of Brecht and Bergson, the perfect expression of late Godard's interests and sensibility. As Curtis (who discusses Shklovsky's transmission of the "Bergsonian paradigm in formalism" (109)) quotes Bergson's *Laughter*: "art has no other object than to brush aside the practical, useful symbols, the conventionally and socially accepted generalities, in short, all that masks reality from us, in order to place us face to face with reality itself [...] Art is certainly only a more direct vision of reality" (qtd. in Curtis 111). Bergson's philosophy is opposed to the "anchored consciousness" of phenomenology (as in Husserl); the universe is considered as an "aggregate of images", and "the brain is only an image among other images" (Bergson *Matter* 3); "the body is but a privileged image, providing for the exercise of choice among possible reactions" (5). The

consequences of this philosophy for Godard are enormous, as it underpins the very possibility of communication: “*Je crois que la seule chose qui existe au monde, c’est la communication. Je ne crois pas que j’existe, je ne crois pas que tu existes, je crois que nous sommes un mouvement materialise de mouvements, de formes qui passent entre nous*” (Godard, *Jean-Luc Godard* 508)⁷⁵. In Deleuze’s reading, the time-image (as he defines cinema such as Godard’s, Resnais’) thus “transcends” subjective representation to become pure expression; and where Bergson attempted to create a pragmatic approach that would avoid the pitfalls of both materialism and idealism, Deleuze describes his project as one of “transcendental empiricism”. Or, as Deleuze writes of Godard in *Cinema 2*: “Is it enough to go to live in the sky, be it the sky of art and painting, to find reasons to believe (*Passion*)? Or shouldn’t we invent a ‘medium level’ between earth and sky (*First Name Carmen*)?” (167) Fascinatingly, then, the sensationalism that Hofmannsthal and Broch ultimately rejected resurfaces, and the path that Gaddis (perhaps tentatively) avows, and then vigorously disavows, is the path taken by Godard⁷⁶. What is the Bergsonian principle of consciousness as images in communication but a Romantic vision of “universal connections”? The difference may be that given the Kantian basis of Thoreau’s work he (and Gaddis) would likely be inclined to reject not only Bergson’s notion of “intuition”, akin to the transcendence Wyatt leaves behind, but also the insistence on change present in the idea of “fluidity”: a term employed in *The Recognitions* to describe the world of the sad, comic Mr Pivner, a world of electric rather than “natural

⁷⁵ “I believe that the only thing that exists in the world, is communication. I don’t believe that I exist, I don’t believe that you exist, I believe that we are a materialised movement of movements, of forms that pass between us”. See also Morrey’s *Jean-Luc Godard* for a brief discussion of this particular idea in relation to Deleuze’s rhizome and communication (151-4).

⁷⁶ Here, given the earlier discussion of Hofmannsthal and Broch, one can point out a sympathy between the philosophy of Bergson and Ernst Mach, who was also a friend of William James. According to Hayo Siemsen,

Mach read Bergson quite intensively and regarded him highly as a philosopher. He also sent some of his publications to him. In his reply letter [...] Bergson also stated his very high admiration for Mach. He states that their ‘subjects of research are different’ and their methods are ‘not the same’, but that he ‘arrives in more than one point at conclusions totally reconcilable’ with Mach’s. As Bergson was a good friend of William James, who in turn was a high admirer and friend of Mach, this is not so surprising. (Siemsen)

More amusingly, in his 1909 review of Bergson’s *Creative Evolution*, Georgi Plekhanov writes that where “Mach is clumsy in most things, even when he is right. Henri Bergson almost always astonishes us with his adroitness, even when he is wrong” (Plekhanov).

light which fell in from the sky" (282). But this reference to fluidity is ambiguous; an ambiguity that reappears in the fascinating figure of the confidence man in *A Frolic of His Own*.

AMBIGUITIES: FORGERS AND CONFIDENCE MEN

Are these false brothers sent by a diabolical father to restore his power over overly credulous Americans? But the novel is so complex that one could just as easily say the opposite: this long procession of con men would be a comic version of authentic brothers, such as overly suspicious Americans see them, or rather have already become incapable of seeing them. This cohort of characters [...] is perhaps the society of Philanthropists who dissimulate their demonic project, but perhaps it is also the community of brothers that the Misanthropes are no longer able to recognize in passing. — Deleuze, "Bartleby" 89

Deleuze's Bergsonism is also a Nietzschean anti-Platonism, a valorization of the simulacrum, the copy without an original, over the Platonic conception of the Ideal form, the authentic original and the copy. For Deleuze, the forger becomes a privileged trope, as the figure who has recognized the "power of the false" over the lie of the true. Nevertheless, the forger is still not a "true" artist. In *Cinema 2* Deleuze describes Godard's *Le Grand Escroc* (1964) (*The Big Swindler*), based loosely on an episode from Melville's *The Confidence Man*, as constitutive of his cinematic ethos, yet Godard's turn to an ethic of faithfulness in regards to History and the Shoah discounts such a view for later Godard. The question of Gaddis, however, is much more interesting. For Stanley, "the Devil is the father of false art" (*Recognitions* 464); Wyatt makes his living as a forger, but at the same time he views his forgery as not really forgery, given that he has embedded himself in the Flemish worldview. He still clings to the training of his teacher, Herr Koppel, for whom originality is "that romantic disease" (89). Ironically, however, in his attempt to seek refuge in the unity of a period of religious art, Wyatt nevertheless chooses a period that signalled the end of religious art. Gaddis refers to Giotto as an artist safely encased in a frame of reference (Gaddis, "Art of Fiction"), but as Malraux writes in *The Metamorphosis of the Gods*, "In Flanders the sacred figures had for backgrounds Gothic towns, not fabulous cities, and

it was there that finally the world of men replaced the world of God” (351). Flanders becomes the boundary between the eternal of Christian art and time of “the world of painting”, the beginning of portraiture and the discovery of easel painting (355-7).

Yet if a Platonic system, and the views of Stanley and Wyatt, make a clear distinction between the original and the copy, not all forgeries in *The Recognitions* allow such a clear distinction to be made. One of the key objects in the novel is a Bosch table of the Seven Deadly Sins that Wyatt’s father had owned, and that Wyatt had copied while young in an act more of rebellion than of greed, selling the original for “almost nothing” and replacing it with his forgery. It eventuates that Recktall Brown was the purchaser, but whether the table his father had owned was indeed the original is brought into question when he sees a Seven Deadly Sins table at Brown’s, and recognizes it as a fake. This questioning of the original leads Wyatt to have a crisis of faith, and also leads Johnston, in *Carnival of Repetition*, to claim a constant tearing down of the idea of authenticity within the novel, to the point where the novel is “haunted by a strong sense that those Platonic assumptions are now exhausted” (20). Johnston makes a diagnosis of a “structural ambivalence” between a Platonism where an object’s authentic essence guarantees recognition, and a Nietzschean/Deleuzian logic where there are only ever “creative misrecognitions, since every representation is always a displacement and a disguise” (20-21). The Bosch table without an original would then be an example of the simulacrum, the copy which has no original. This, along with the doubling of characters, Max and Otto’s conversation regarding series without originals (534), and some other marginalia, leads Johnston to conclude that *The Recognitions* “looks back at Platonic recognition and forward to Deleuzian repetition, and articulates this Janus-like state in a series of reversible images of which the copy/counterfeit series is the most obvious” (20).

Then what is the reader to make of the novel’s suggestion that Basil Valentine has simply exchanged the original for a(nother) copy?⁷⁷ Wyatt’s crisis of faith, his suspicion “that what they have been forging all this time never existed” (385), appears to be answered three hundred pages later by his

⁷⁷ “And the original? It’s on its way back to Europe where it belongs [...] Do you think he knew the difference?” (689). For Brown (in Valentine’s opinion), the nouveau riche of the nouveau monde, the copy is sufficient; only in Europe does the original still matter.

own “Thank god there was the gold to forge” (689), a line which Gaddis described in his *Paris Review* interview as the moment when he realizes that the Bosch he copied was the original, and “very much the key line to the whole book” (Gaddis, “Art of Fiction”)⁷⁸. This realization is followed by Wyatt “smashing”, “rending” and burning the forgery in question, accompanied by an exclamation of “the original!”, and a repetition of the earlier line, “yes, thank God there was the gold to forge!” (693); a validation of the original that conforms to the early example of Hannah, the poor (and possibly half-mad) artist who spends all her money on renting a Modigliani for twenty dollars a month. Only Otto, artist manqué twice over and himself a poor copy of Wyatt, “part of a series of an original that never existed” (534), sees no value in the original: “But that much money, you could buy a good print” (186).

Johnston’s work is interesting up to a point, and at the very least a welcome counterbalance to Salemi (and to a certain extent Moore and Knight); Platonic recognition and religious art are without doubt deemed to be outmoded fictions, but the fact that the copies within the novel are rendered so pathetic says little for Gaddis’ opinion of a world of simulacra. Otto is forever simply parroting the words of Wyatt, without any sense of their meaning. There is no sense of celebration or liberation in the simulacrum “as the site of creativity rather than the absence of reality”, no sense of “the ability of art to unmoor itself from reference to the real and to flourish in a realm of pure signs” (Ruthven 86). There is a great deal of looking back, very little looking forward. When Gaddis writes the “gold to forge” line for a third time, with Wyatt lying in a hospital bed, taunting himself, “Remember? Remember saying “Thank God there was the gold to forge”? (949), it is in a monologue that mentions Horace on decay from generation to generation and inherent vice (the tendency of certain pigments to decay, destroying the work of art), culminating in Wyatt’s modification of “*Aut castus sit aut pereat*”, “Be pure or perish”, to “*et pereat*”, or “Be pure and perish” (949). This would tend to suggest that the original is out of reach, in this at least Johnston is correct, however the problem remains in that the original/copy binary is still present;

⁷⁸ Although here there is still some perhaps unintended ambiguity. See Zeidler (“Hieronymus”) for a discussion of the fascinating case of forgery, venal and otherwise, to the Bosch table in question.

all that is available to the artist now are not simulacra, but ever more degraded copies, and the necessity to compromise.

Deleuze's fascination with the forger and the confidence man, and Johnston's emphasis on Deleuze, does raise a question over the relation of Melville to Gaddis' *A Frolic of His Own*, though. Both Gaddis and Melville represent the pernicious effects of transcendental idealism in *The Recognitions* and *Pierre*, but one might also think of the connection between *Moby-Dick* and *The Recognitions*, both of which end with one man surviving the catastrophe, Ishmael and Wyatt respectively, while Stanley and Ahab bring about their own death. But the most interesting parallel exists between the two authors' penultimate works, *A Frolic of His Own* and *The Confidence Man*. Melville's confidence man may be the devil, and an artful thief, preaching Confidence in order to take advantage of his fellow travellers, but he is also the most sympathetic and human character in the novella, particularly compared to the two characters based on Emerson and Thoreau, Mark Winsome and Egbert. In Gaddis' *Frolic*, sitting strangely between the bitterness of *Carpenter's Gothic*, and before *Agapē's* Bernhardian caricatures, the only character who is at "home" in the world is not the Plato-referencing playwright manqué Oscar, who discusses the *Cratylus* and the true Name (208) with Madhar Pai (opposing council), or even Harry, the talented and likeable (but despairing) corporate lawyer, but Basie, the chameleon, convicted felon and counterfeit lawyer:

He's a free spirit! That's our friend Basie isn't it? freed himself of these illusions of absolutes? takes the name Basie because he likes the swing of it even if it was someone else's with more claim as its essence, the courage to live in a contingent universe, to accept a relative world, he's thrown out those Christian fictions that got his forebears through slavery, helped retain their humanity and turn it into the strength to survive the ones who'd used it to subjugate them, to accept misery in this world for peace and equality in some imaginary next one. (*Frolic* 330-1)

Basie is not only the mastermind of Oscar's successful lawsuit, he appears as less mercenary than not only Melville's confidence man, but also Oscar (engaged in frivolous lawsuits) and Harry, and in so far

as the reader can tell he genuinely likes the misanthropic Oscar: “He wasn't just a smart lawyer and a sweet natured man a real man, he was our friend!” (491)⁷⁹. The novel also contains critical mentions of the totalitarian tendencies of Plato and the desire for order, via both Madhar Pai and Harry, and a very out of character statement that the characters are witnessing “not the breakdown of civilization but the blossoming” (135-6)⁸⁰.

Some perspective can be gained here by considering another philosophical descendant of Melville's confidence man, Ralph Ellison's Rinehart, master of chaos, from *Invisible Man* (1952), a book that takes from both Melville's “Benito Cereno” and T.S. Eliot's “Family Reunion” for its epigraphs⁸¹. Betrayed by the Brotherhood (a barely disguised Communist Party) the protagonist hides in dark glasses and hat, and finds himself mistaken for Rinehart at every turn, leading to a most unwelcome revelation:

It was true as I was true. His world was possibility and he knew it. He was years ahead of me and I was a fool. I must have been crazy and blind. The world in which we lived was without boundaries. A vast seething, hot world of fluidity, and Rine the rascal was at home. Perhaps only Rine the rascal was at home in it. It was unbelievable, but perhaps only the unbelievable could be believed. Perhaps the truth was always a lie. (401)

And a few pages later: “What was integrity? What did it have to do with a world in which Rinehart was possible and successful?” (405). Rinehartism is cynicism, and cynicism is realism (406), as with Jameson's Weimar, the world of Broch's *Realist*, Huguenaud, and even, interestingly, Malraux⁸². In *La*

⁷⁹ “[H]e admired you [...] failing at something worth doing because there was nothing worse for a man than failing at something that wasn't worth doing in the first place simply because that's where the money was” (*Frolic* 461).

⁸⁰ Harry responds to Oscar's desire for “some kind of order” with a reference to fascism: “—Make the trains run on time, that was the... [...] —I'm not talking about trains, Harry. [...] —I'm talking about fascism, that's where this compulsion for order ends up. The rest of it's opera” (*Frolic* 13).

⁸¹ Spanos has an excellent discussion of the extremely powerful story “Benito Cereno” as critique of the blindness of American exceptionalism and (briefly) its relation to Ellison's *Invisible Man* in *Herman Melville and the American Calling*.

⁸² Ellison's art and politics were heavily influenced by Malraux. Ellison tells the story in a number of different essays of being handed two of Malraux's novels, *Man's Fate* and *The Days of Wrath*, by Langston Hughes upon his arrival in New York, but he also cites Malraux's *Psychology of Art*, and quotes from Malraux litter his essays. Ellison cites Malraux's work as that which pushed him beyond being an “African-American” writer to being a

Condition humaine, or *Man's Fate*, Baron Clappique, chameleonic liar, foretells the invisible man's Rinehart moment: "Since he had changed his costume, the world around him had become transformed [...] No, men do not exist, since a costume is enough to enable one to escape from oneself, to find another life in the eyes of others" (*Man's Fate* 309). Clappique is all surface: as Claude Tannery describes it, "Profound life has become comedy, lies; but in living with lies, in accepting his destiny through lies, man has acquired no depth", going on to contrast the figure of Clappique with Malraux's emphasis on lucidity, and his numerous citations in interview of Vincent Berger's fatherly advice in *The Walnut Trees of Altenburg*: "Bear in mind that a man's most effective weapon lies in reducing the deceitful side of his character to a minimum" (Tannery 55)⁸³. So it is that the end result of Clappique's lies is "the suffocation and death of revolutionary fraternity" (Tannery 56). This is, of course, the same point at which *Invisible Man* concludes, though the fault lies with the Brotherhood's betrayal rather than with Rinehart. Nevertheless, rather than embracing Rinehartism, embracing illusion, the "invisible man" allows all his illusions to be stripped away, figured in a dream as literal castration.

Admittedly, Ellison's Rinehart, Malraux's Clappique, appear to be too explicitly negative as comparators for the oddly sympathetic Basie: more in line with Broch's Huguenau, "the man of success" who "can only destroy what impedes him" (*Sleepwalkers* 116). Gaddis' confidence man perhaps owes as much to Ellison's friend Saul Bellow (who provided the preface to Ellison's *Collected Essays*, and was one of Ellison's early champions) as to Ellison or Melville. *Frolic's* play/film adaptation/lawsuit plot is strongly reminiscent of *Humboldt's Gift*, Bellow's ode to Delmore Schwartz, which also features a confidence-man figure (Cantabile) vital to the lawsuit proceedings. Bellow's trickster is stripped of the negative implications implicit in Melville, Malraux or Ellison, more of a lovable rogue than symptom of a

"universal" writer, and one can see an embrace of Malraux's "tragic heroism" in "Though drawn from the world, 'the organized significance of art,' writes Malraux, 'is stronger than all the multiplicity of the world; [...] that significance alone enables man to conquer chaos and to master destiny.'" ("Richard Wright's Blues" 144). Of course Melville may still be at the root, here, given that in *Le Démon de l'absolu*, Malraux's biography of T.E. Lawrence, he is described by the narrator as one of "those three geniuses so definitely set apart from men" (along with Dostoevsky and Nietzsche) (qtd. in Moatti 233).

⁸³ This depth/surface opposition is also used by Gaddis. Compare Wyatt's description of his forgeries as involving "recognitions that go much deeper, much further back" (250) and Stanley's verdict that an authorized reproduction, perfect in technique, would be a Dürer, for example, "only on the surface", to that of Max (Basie's precursor): "On the surface! How much deeper do people go? The people who buy them?" (463-4).

value-bankrupt reality⁸⁴. As a Bellovian figure, Basie would appear simply as a consummate actor, “if you're black in America you're always playing a part, no way around it just got to find the right part to play where you aren't going to take your bows in a cell block” (*Frolic* 245)⁸⁵.

One needs to keep both extremes in mind, Clappique and Rinehart on one hand, and Cantabile on the other, to understand the figure of Basie. Here appears a divided Gaddis attempting to fight the “compulsion for order”. If Basie was more than a minor character one would almost suggest that Gaddis had taken the Deleuzean, the Nietzschean step towards the “power of the false”, which one might also term in the parlance of *The Recognitions*, originality; as Nietzsche (who Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe describe as one of those responsible for the indirect transmission of Romanticism) describes originality in *The Gay Science*: “What is originality? To see something that still has no name; that still cannot be named even though it is lying right before everyone's eyes. The way people usually are, it takes a name to make something visible at all. Those with originality have usually been the name-givers.” Comes is, in general, correct regarding Gaddis' ostensible goal of “living without absolutes”, and Basie is the apotheosis of the author's vision; but what Basie builds up is also torn down. Basie, marginally more positive than Rinehart or Clappique in his sincere but fleeting friendship, is still a solution that Gaddis cannot internalize, identifying more with those who would rather die than compromise (for example the Japanese tradition of a noble suicide referenced in 1981's “The Rush for Second Place”, as will be discussed in the final chapter) or change their name; hence even after Gaddis works through his own apocalyptic desire in *Carpenter's Gothic*, Oscar Crease remains in exile and alienated (and would as soon change the shape of his nose than his name (208)), and Harry achieves his own death. Basie, the

⁸⁴ Though is perhaps an over-simplification. As Bellow writes in *Humboldt's Gift*:

The reason why the Ulicks of this world (and also the Cantabiles) had such sway over me was that they knew their desires clearly. These desires might be low but they were pursued in full wakefulness. Thoreau saw a woodchuck at Walden, its eyes more fully awake than the eyes of any farmer. Of course that wood-chuck was on his way to wipe out some hard-working farmer's crop. It was all very well for Thoreau to build up woodchucks and fume at farmers. But if society is a massive moral failure farmers have something to sleep about. (396)

Even here the confidence man is an animal of “low” desire.

⁸⁵ Or, stepping around Shakespeare, there is Broch's description of his sleepwalkers as characters isolated from each other, trapped in a *mise en abyme* of symbols, incapable of communication, doomed to play-acting “in a performance no human being can escape” (*Sleepwalkers* 497).

black man with the name taken from a jazz musician is entirely Othered in comparison to the classical associations of every white protagonist in Gaddis' novels, including the earlier counterfeiter, Sinisterra. And this qualified solution, even if it is only a solution for an other (and, after all, someone else still has "more claim" to the "essence" of the name Basie), is not a vision that he can hold on to, a fact to which *Agapē Agape*, with its return to the same questions of authenticity/inauthenticity, aestheticism and disgust with the masses, attests. Thus despite Gaddis' constant protestations that his work is about living without absolutes, his longing for order and unity and fixed values and *harmony*, a la Broch, never ceases: existing in opposition to the typical jazz associations of improvisation conjured by the name Basie (see also Comnes "Excluded"). Having attempted and failed to live in immanence, caught between belief and nihilism, he returns to the yearning for transcendence embodied in the figure of Stanley, only now, at death's door, he will *choose knowingly* to collapse the roof on top of his own head, in bed, dying, raving, mourning a lost order, rather than acquiesce to the world of Basie. Here the epigraph to *Frolic*, attributed to Thoreau, in communication with Emerson, comes to make a perfect kind of sense: "What you seek in vain for, half your life, one day you come full upon, all the family at dinner. You seek it like a dream, and as soon as you find it you become its prey" (11). Gaddis, in his depiction of Basie, has realized his vision of "living without absolutes", all the family at dinner, and he shrinks from it; Basie, even in all his friendship, would devour everything that Gaddis is and holds dear. And for this to be attributed to a missive to Emerson, whom Gaddis had criticized in favour of Thoreau in *The Recognitions*, comes to look almost like a *mea culpa*. After *Frolic*, an alternate title for *Agapē*, a solitary mind trapped in a dying body, might as well be *Man the Barricades*.

UNDER THE SIGN OF GOYA'S SATURN?

This would also be a title that many would happily apply to Godard's *King Lear*. Apart from the reading of *King Lear* as an (Adornian) "violent reaction" to the market (Rosenbaum), it has been typical to read the film as a testament to the end of art or an act of cultural preservation. This is unsurprising to a certain extent, given that in the film the viewer is repeatedly told by Peter Sellers' William Shakespeare Jr the Fifth, as images of Goya's *Saturn* appear, that "it was the time of Chernobyl, and

everything disappeared. And then after a while everything came back. Everything except culture”, and again, later in the film, “this was *after Chernobyl*, we were in a time now when movies, and more generally art, had been lost, did not exist”. In Robinson’s description of the film, for example:

Godard's pleasure masks fear. These moments when he pauses in his own work to enjoy another's art seem like archaeology, further acts of recovering material that has been lost or insufficiently valued [...] Godard rails at the imminent evaporation of what is least ensured permanent value, at the temporality that the frozen experience in all cinema challenges. But for Godard, the conservative urge originates in an apocalyptic dread [...] In its deceptively serene moments of art appreciation, Lear urgently calls for the preventive accumulation of cultural material. (Robinson 22-23)

This reading is reminiscent of Burn’s (mis)reading of Wyatt’s erasure as part and parcel of the attempt to return to the worldview of the Middle Ages, as “seeking a form of protection against time’s passage in his work [...] trying to arrest the proliferation of works, the new information that renders the simplified, timeless worldview outdated. He is insanely trying to restore the world to an earlier level of knowledge” (Burn, “Collapse” 56). Morrey suggests that “art itself, at this stage of Godard’s career, begins to appear as a thing of the past. At least Godard seems to suggest that contemporary artistic production will never again attain the heights it once knew” (*Jean-Luc Godard* 167). Or, more positively, Quandt’s statement that “Cultural memory, rampart against the flux and effluvia of time, against the tide of mercantilism [...] is signified in Godard's late work by the loving rearrangement (or derangement) of key literary works and paintings” (Quandt 139). All of which certainly suits the rhetoric of the time: only a few years earlier Wenders’ *Room 666* (1982) had posed to a number of directors, including Godard, the question: “Is cinema a language about to get lost, an art about to die?”

But at the same time it is not enough just to speak of prevention. After all, “catastrophe” does not preclude new art/knowledge; from a Deleuzean point of view not only was the catastrophe of the Second World War serendipitous but this new art must necessarily be cinematic, one possible explanation for the fact that, as Williams points out, no painting after Picasso and de Staël appears in

the *Histoire(s)* (but then it is also, after all, a history, or number of histories, of the cinema). Godard's use of painting is not a sterile preservation, or simple nostalgia for a lost past, as is indicated by the Ark of artistic treasures in Alfonso Cuarón's *Children of Men* (2006), but a search, a hands on dissection of works in the hope of finding that which still "speaks". More than this, though, the repeated views of Goya's *Saturn Devouring His Children*, a painting that also appears in episode 3A of the *Histoire(s) du Cinema*, point to the fact that *King Lear* is an expression not only of mourning for art, but of faith in art⁸⁶.

Williams reads *Saturn* in Godard's films as a representation of "human arms engaged in unbearably violence", specifically "man as perpetrator of violence" ("European" 125), a horrific violence, a parent eating its child, even going so far as to describe Goya as an artist "who consciously asserted the freedom of invention (or 'caprice')", contra Velázquez, an artist "in the pay of the court" (121). This is accurate to a point, but I would argue that he not only underestimates Goya's importance to Godard, but in doing so, also underestimates a more important influence, the philosophy of art of André Malraux, author of *Saturn: An Essay on Goya* (1957). In Malraux's vision of Goya the Spaniard is an artist who is "destined to destroy the art of decoration, the art that aimed to give pleasure" (12), an artist whose genius flowered only when he "gave up aiming to please" (25); but also an artist who would restore the language of darkness to a world rationalized by Leibniz and Voltaire. He is another deflator of Confidence and Optimism, along with Melville and Gaddis. He is also, in Malraux's view, perhaps the first example of an artist who has begun to look for the devil inside man⁸⁷:

what fascinates him is not the courage of Spanish patriots, but the blinded, the mutilated, the tortured; the indictment of God. Bosch introduced men into his infernal world; Goya introduced the infernal into the world of man. With Bosch it is the devils who are cruel. Both

⁸⁶ Also, in his foreword to Truffaut's *Letters* Godard described himself and his erstwhile friend as being "devoured by Saturn. And if we tore each other apart, little by little, it was for fear of being the first to be eaten alive" (x).

⁸⁷ Wiener describes the randomness of entropy as akin to Augustinian "organic incompleteness", as opposed to the "positive malicious evil of the Manicheans": "the Augustinian devil, which is not a power in itself, but the measure of our own weakness, may require our full resources to uncover, but when we have uncovered it, we have in a certain sense exorcised it" (*Human* 144, 148), recalling, once again, Camus. The Manichaean approach is more compatible with Gnosticism.

their peoples are peoples of victims, but Goya knew that that was not all; they are peoples of men as well, torturers in their turn. Without question he is the only painter whose message in a time of war was neither intrusive nor mocking; and he is our greatest poet of blood. I have said elsewhere that for an agnostic a possible definition of the devil is that which in man aims to destroy him. This is the devil which fascinated Goya. Satan for him is not the personage seated on Bosch's throne but a dying man whose limbs have been cut off and of whom he asks, "Why?" (Malraux, *Saturn* 110-111)

In other words, whereas prior to Goya "Christian art was an answer; his art is a question" (*Saturn* 117).

Not only did Malraux write a monograph on Goya, however, but in 1958 Godard would describe Malraux as "the most fascinating personality in modern French literature" (*Godard on Godard* 75), and Chapter 3A of the *Histoire(s)* bears the same name as the fourth and final volume of *The Voices of Silence, La monnaie de l'absolu*⁸⁸. Not only does Godard cite Malraux on art and fire in *King Lear*, but in 1989, the second year of production of the *Histoire(s)*, Godard's third series of advertisements for Girbaud jeans plainly reference Malraux's privileged term for the fate of art. In this series, titled *Métamorphojeans*, the phrase "*il métamorphose*" appears over montages of a variety of images of famous artworks and fashion models: in the first advertisement one reads "*L'art ne voit pas, il métamorphose*", and in another, "*La beauté n'écoute pas, elle métamorphose*"⁸⁹. This use of photographic images of paintings, which also appears in *King Lear*, in conjunction with the idea of metamorphosis, points directly to Malraux's conception of the Imaginary Museum. In Malraux's formulation, the invention of photography has instigated the formation of a new period of art history and

⁸⁸ As Milne comments in the notes to *Godard on Godard*: "For a time, the name of Malraux was a frequent and admiring reference-point in both Godard's critical writing and his films: a copy of *La Condition humaine*, for instance, is prominently displayed in *Le Petit Soldat* [...] Godard [...] finally severed relations in 1966, in his *Letter to the Minister of 'Kultur'*" (Milne 256), after the censorship of Rivette's *La Religieuse* (1966). Williams discusses the relation of the *Histoire(s)* to Malraux in "The signs amongst us" (310-14), though without mention of either *King Lear* or the work of Blanchot. See also Godard and Ishaghpour for a brief discussion of Malraux's *Musée Imaginaire* in relation to the *Histoire(s)* (37-8), and Godard's use of Malraux's *La Psychologie du cinéma* (99).

⁸⁹ "Art does not see, it metamorphoses", and "Beauty does not hear, it metamorphoses". The three other advertisements declare that *La Guerre*, *L'Amour*, and, of course, *Le Cinéma*, also metamorphose.

appreciation: “A ‘Museum Without Walls’ is coming into being, and (now that the plastic arts have invented their own printing-press) it will carry infinitely farther that revelation of the world of art, limited perforce, which the ‘real’ museums offer us within their walls” (*Voices* 16)⁹⁰.

There is also a complicating factor here, however. Michael Temple, one of the few English language critics to discuss the conjunction of Godard and Malraux in any depth, makes great hay of the fact that Blanchot seems to have “magically” written a discussion *avant la lettre* of the techniques of Godard’s *Histoire(s)* in “The Museum, Art, and Time”, his review of Malraux’s *The Voices of Silence*. Yet on closer inspection, not only are Malraux’s concepts of the Imaginary Museum/Metamorphosis quite obviously central to Godard’s cinematic practice in this period, but the very (famous) essay that Temple cites is quoted by Godard in the *Histoire(s)* itself. In other words, it is not just Malraux who is important to Godard, but Blanchot’s version of Malraux. Such are the vagaries of writing on Godard, where references and allusions accumulate in droves, and are often over determined; no doubt a similar elision, or many, will occur in this project. Malraux is a particularly interesting case, however, because of his unique position in French criticism, partially due to his status as a “cultural icon”, his almost mythic status (not coincidentally) as France’s own (more “authentic”) T.E. Lawrence, and perhaps also due to his perceived betrayal of the left by his acceptance of an “institutional” position as Minister of Culture under de Gaulle, Malraux is often not directly named. His association with the Imaginary Museum is thus often tacitly assumed; in Rancière’s *The Future of the Image*, for example, there are a number of references to Godard’s “imaginary Museum” (30-31, 66), but the only reference to Malraux is to the director speaking with a “Malraux-style pomposity” (37-8)⁹¹. He does, however, make the connection

⁹⁰ Given Gaddis’ extremely negative opinion of photographic reproduction, and indeed the influence of Malraux among New York writers such as Ellison, it is worth noting the timing and New York reception of Malraux’s works on art. *The Voices of Silence* was reviewed in *The New York Times* in the November 22 issue of 1953 by Francis Henry Taylor, director of the Metropolitan Museum of Art. It was a decidedly mixed review, describing Malraux’s work as a “dazzling reflection of the Zeitgeist—the Spenglerian sterility which has possessed Europe for the past half century and which [...] has ended in the Existentialist sub-cellars of the Boulevard Saint-Germain”, but also taking issue with the novelty and the effect of both the notion of metamorphosis and that of the Museum Without Walls. *Voices* was an abridged, revised version of *The Psychology of Art*, a text that appeared in 1949, and received a generally positive review in *The New York Times* December 11 1949 (see Newton).

⁹¹ See also *Dissensus*, page 194.

explicit in his essay “Contemporary Art and the Politics of Aesthetics”, serendipitously enough after a discussion of Rauschenberg’s own implementation of the “museum without walls” via his silk-screening of Diego Velasquez’s *Rokeby Venus* onto pictures of various everyday objects, a truck, a statue, a key, a helicopter, and so forth: “the *Histoire(s)*, the exact equivalent of Malraux’s paper museum” (34)⁹². Similarly, Bourdieu’s *The Love of Art: European Art Museums and their Public* (1969, 1991) argues against the “sanctification of culture and art” inherent in the idea of the “currency of the absolute” (111) in an obvious attack on Malraux’s universalist view of art and its place in culture (and the development of *maisons de la culture*, making the claim that access to and understanding of art is very much class-specific), whilst making no explicit mention of Malraux⁹³. Yet Malraux, and Blanchot’s reading of Malraux, are of critical importance to Godard’s artistic practice.

⁹² A discussion that begins with a reading of Crimp’s “On the Museum’s Ruins”, in *The Anti-Aesthetic*, which makes the connection between Malraux and Rauschenberg. Crimp describes “Malraux’s dream [...] become Rauschenberg’s joke” (53), though this is somewhat undermined by the fact that he then notes that Rauschenberg did not appear to get his own joke, given his proclamation for the Metropolitan Museum’s Centennial Certificate in 1970:

Treasury of the conscience of man. / Masterworks collected, protected and / celebrated commonly. Timeless in / concept the museum amasses to / concertise a moment of pride / serving to defend the dreams / and ideals apolitically of mankind / aware and responsive to the / changes, needs and complexities / of current life while keeping / history and love alive. (qtd in Crimp 54-55)

There would then be considerable irony in Gaddis’ use of Rauschenberg, perhaps one more reason why he so vehemently rebukes his early self in *Carpenter’s* (particularly given that Max’s post *Workman’s* work is described as made up of “fragments lifted right out of Constable canvases” (*Recognitions* 623). Yet Rancière points out that despite Crimp’s allegiance to the terminology of postmodernism and the undermining of “originality, authenticity and presence” (Crimp 53), Barthes’ *Camera Lucida* and Godard’s *Histoire(s)* (to name just two examples) point to the fact that the use of photography and the rhetoric of presence are not necessarily mutually exclusive.

⁹³ See deRoo (30-35) for a summary of Malraux’s cultural policy and Bourdieu’s critique.

MALRAUX, ROMANTIC / MALRAUX, NIHILIST?

There is no end without beginning. How could the end be known as end if it weren't recounted by someone? — Lyotard, *Soundproof Room 2*

Blanchot's version of Malraux focusses on the teleological aspect of Malraux's thought, a partly Hegelian view that sees in the Imaginary Museum a culmination of the development of art, and also the possibility of salvation. Blanchot describes Malraux the Romantic:

The imaginary Museum is thus not only the contemporary of modern art and the means of its discovery; it is also the work of this art—one might say its masterwork, were it not also necessary to say, to an extent that is half secret, its compensation. That art should be nothing but its passionate contestation, the absolute brilliance of the single moment when art, denying all the rest, is affirmed marvellously in itself—this might not be tolerable were it not that art slid through the time and civilization of the world like purity at daybreak, and made suddenly visible, with all of its works, this marvellous event of our art being universal, which means that all works of all times are also our work, the work of our art, which, for the first time, reveals them to themselves, unveils them as they are. ("The Museum, Art, and Time" 18)

For Blanchot's Malraux "it is the artist alone who saves us from absurdity and contingency, he alone who transforms what would otherwise be only the formless ruins of a duration without memory, the disgusting rot of the cadaver of time, into a radiant, intelligible, and salutary present" (30-31). Salvation beckons; the new Absolute is no longer god, or the gods, but Art itself, though this Absolute is no longer the classical ambition of a fixed, eternal present, but rather a "perpetual becoming, never complete, always done and undone" (38)⁹⁴. And if it is objected that Blanchot, as he admits, perhaps goes "a little

⁹⁴ Brody, despite his other sins (see Adrian Martin's "Contempt"), has perhaps come the closest to recognizing the genius of the film:

The cinema is born of three things: invention, sacrifice, and mourning. This 1987 film is Godard's maximally pressurized condensation of his great themes: his manifesto of the image; a lost world of artistic culture, and, of course, of cinema; the hazardous bonds of paternity [...] There is no

further than Malraux's formulas would permit" (18), this is in no way an obstacle for a consideration of Godard, who reads Malraux through Blanchot.

Here, as Blanchot correctly identifies, even the darkness and solitude of Goya, of Godard, has its lightness, its hope:

It sometimes happens, even today, that he allies himself with the nocturnal powers and, like Goya, with monsters, with horror, with the night [...] a disturbing dependency that seems to signify a possession more than a mastery. But herein lies the wonder: through the work of art, possession becomes the power to possess; servitude wakes up emancipated. Goya's solitude is great, but it is not without limits, for he is a painter, and if "the painting is for him a means of reaching the mystery [...] the mystery is also a means of reaching painting" and thus of coming to light, of becoming the freedom and the brightness of the day. (30)

Art, the Imaginary Museum, does not provide individual immortality, or salvation; the artist is still subject to time, and death. But the ideal vision of itself that humanity immortalizes through Art becomes the material through which humanity continues to immortalize itself, and wrest meaning from the nothingness. This is art on a different kind of knife-edge than the earlier image of art/culture; here there is joy, and nothingness, creation, and nothingness, or in Blanchot's words, the first half of which Godard speaks in the *Histoire(s)*, and *Notre Musique*:

The image, we feel, is joy, for it is a limit beside the indefinite, the possibility of suspension at the heart of a shifting movement: through it, we believe ourselves to be the masters of an absence become form, and the dense night itself seems to open itself to the resplendence of an absolute clarity. Yes, the image is joy—but close to it lies nothingness; nothingness appears at the limit of this image, and all the power of the image, drawn from the abyss in which it is founded, cannot be expressed except by calling to nothingness.

film of "King Lear"—indeed, no act of art—that is not a rediscovery, no image of nature that is not a resurrection. ("King Lear")

Citing a famous line from his last novel [*The Walnut Trees of Altenburg*], Malraux turns it into the song of glory of artistic creation: “The greatest mystery is not that we were thrown by chance between the profusion of matter and the profusion of the stars; rather, it is that in this prison we drew from ourselves images so powerful as to negate our nothingness.” But perhaps one must add that the image, capable of negating nothingness, is also the gaze of nothingness upon us. (“The Museum” 40)

Blanchot’s Malraux is not the only version, of course. Since 1996 Lyotard has devoted two books to Malraux, *signed, Malraux* (1996) and *Soundproof Room* (2001), in which he constructs a version of Malraux consistent with his own concerns. In a section entitled “Rotting Pit”, Lyotard adds Malraux to the list of names of those who have faced the “ontological nausea” (10) of death, nihilism, repetition: Nietzsche, Céline, Bataille, Antonin Artaud, Camus (after Paul Valéry, and Spengler). Here the “worst” is not the “inevitable decline” of civilization, but that “everything will begin again. Plots resume” (12). Lyotard drafts Malraux in to his conception of the artwork as a vehicle for the sublime, for a limited pre-conceptual communication in the face of nothingness, emphasising the Spenglerian aspect of Malraux’s thought:

In no way does Malraux amend Spenglerism. His phobia of the return aggravates its despair. But this in order to better hear, through the silence of redundancies, the *strix* that sometimes calls on the writer, the painter, or the hero of History to invent the artifact in which its stridency will perhaps be echoed without falling into oblivion with the rest. He confesses that he never ceased to struggle with Spengler: not through refutation or consolation but by revealing fissures in the millstone that grinds everything—can releases, sighs of relief in the perpetual motion. The child does not repeat the musketeer: he fuses with a legendary hero who proves an exception in the cycle of the same. Art produces these lapses, threading these figures into them. And our childhood forever marvels at this. The rest is dread. (Lyotard, *Soundproof* 22)

The difference between Lyotard and Blanchot's versions of Malraux is to a certain extent a difference of emphasis, the micro and the macro, though this is no small thing (as with Wiener/Gaddis and Serres, for example). But it is also a question of faith in the power of the aesthetic, a vision of Orphic joy and light redeemed (in Godard's version, at least) from the nothingness by art, versus a vision of "lapses" within dread, a communal cold-comfort of the sublime in the wake of a breakdown of the Kantian aesthetic community, of the possibilities of the aesthetic itself, a vision that will be touched on in more depth in the next chapter, and a vision more consistent with Gaddis, in whom the reader finds so little joy, and so little hope; as Wutz observes, for Gaddis, the "communal coherence made possible by art, fissured by the advent of the mass media, has opened up to a yawning chasm and into monadic isolation" (204)⁹⁵. Yet Lyotard, and Lyotard's Malraux, would at the same time criticize Gaddis for, with Valéry, merely "bitterly diagnosing the decline" (12), blinded by ego and the prospect of individual death, and missing the worst: that everything begins again. Of course this is also that which provides hope, but only if one has a Romantic faith, with Malraux and Godard, in Art. To do what? To, somehow, save humankind.

In Godard, this mission revolves at least partly around the relation of cinema and history. For Roland Barthes, for example, the "madness" of photography forces "the loving and terrified consciousness" to "return to the very letter of Time" (Barthes *Camera* 119), providing an ecmnesic experience, a hallucinatory sensation of the past in the present, or the present in the past. Cinema, on the other hand, or the cinema of fiction, at least, is for Barthes the domestication of this madness, mere illusion, "its vision is oneiric, not ecmnesic" (117), a description with which Godard would agree. No director has been more scathing of the "cosmetic industry" of cinema, "a minor branch of the industry of lies" (*Histoire(s)* 1B), than Godard. Cinema as entertainment, the *Histoire(s)* tells us, perverted the development of a true cinema that would take up the ecmnesic obligations inherent to its position as heir to photography: "Successor of photography, yes. But by succeeding this history, cinema inherited

⁹⁵ Wutz also sees in Lyotard's work in *The Inhuman* a parallel to Gaddis' argument against art reduced to "a regime of bits" (Wutz 198). As will be visible in the following chapters, however, Lyotard's (and Gaddis') larger engagement with Kant and the sublime in a world identified as absent of a *sensus communis* have serious consequences for Wutz's argument that Gaddis' "modernist high road" (205), and language in general, remain "humanity's most effective medium of thought formation", of "meaning" (205).

not only its rights to reproduce a piece of reality, but also its duties”. Or, as Godard states in interview: “At a given moment in time, History became incarnate—or arranged itself like a tired virus—in cinema’s very substance” (qtd. in Witt, “Montage” 35).

While the documentary image is the beginning, then, it is not enough: “what there is of cinema in wartime newsreels says nothing. It does not judge. Only the hand that erases can write” (*Histoire(s)* 1A). Cinema, for Godard, is montage, the addition of an image plus an image to form a third, or, more accurately, as Deleuze stresses in his comments on the television experiment *Six fois deux*, an image AND an image (Deleuze, “Three Questions” 40-1)⁹⁶. Montage rescues the image from cliché, enables thought, and provides the means by which to judge. As Deleuze expands in *Cinema 2*, Godardian montage is not “content to enquire if ‘things are OK’ or if ‘things are not OK’ between two photos, but ‘how are things’ [*comment ça va*] for each one and for the two together” (21). If there is no image, there is no montage, no vision, no thought, no judgement, and no possibility of justice. Where much work on the Holocaust turns on the unrepresentable, or the unsayable, Godard thus unsurprisingly demands representation, demands the Image be seen, to the point where he has spoken of his conviction that images from within the gas chambers exist in an archive, somewhere, able to be found given “a good investigative reporter [and] twenty years”⁹⁷. Hence of Claude Lanzmann’s *Shoah* (France 1985), which, as Duras states, “showed the roads, the deep pits, the survivors”, Godard stated simply “It showed nothing” (Godard and Duras 144, 146). Libby Saxton reads this conviction as borne from “an insecurity with regard to the unimaged real [...] a need for vision as proof, as guarantor of truth, where the image

⁹⁶ See also *Changer d’image* (France 1982), where Godard states that “the image [does] not exist, only chains of images, and the very way these [are] assembled itself constitute[s] an image.”

⁹⁷ See Lindeperg:

The Germans are like a sick criminal who can’t keep the proof of his crime to himself, who can’t resist sending it to the police when he is in safe waters....I have no proof to support my suggestions, but I believe that if I were to work alongside a good investigative reporter, after twenty years I would find images of the gas chamber. They would show the prisoners enter and the state in which they re-emerge. We shouldn’t advocate banning things like Lanzmann or Adorno do. Their exaggerations only lead to infinite discussions over the issue of whether or not something is ‘unfilmable’—we shouldn’t obstruct people from filming, and we shouldn’t burn books either, because then we wouldn’t be able to criticize them anymore. (Godard qtd. in Lindeperg, “*Night and Fog*” 82; Note 22)

alone is the mark of the real" ("Anamnesis" 369), but it could also be read as an absolutization of history, and of cinema. And perhaps this is partly the truth, but it can also be said that in Godard's philosophy the image from the gas chamber must exist as the raw material of cinema, of thought. Without it, this unrecorded image would represent a void, inescapable, akin to the Void that consumes Anton Vowl in Georges Perec's great novel of the aftereffects of the Shoah, *La Disparition* (*A Void* 1969). As Godard states in dialogue with Youssef Ishaghpour of Cinema's failure, "the possibility of thinking was extinguished at that moment" (Godard and Ishaghpour 73).

Whether the archival images that Godard speaks of exist or not, the Cinema in general remains guilty of choosing entertainment over duty, hence the *Histoire(s)* is infused with Adorno's "sepulchral tone of time after", to quote Rancière ("Saint" 115). And indeed Godard's Cinema certainly appears to have assimilated Adorno's statement that "Philosophy, which once seemed obsolete, lives on because the moment to realize it was missed [...] Having broken its pledge to be as one with reality [...] philosophy is obliged ruthlessly to criticize itself" (*Negative* 3). Cinema, a "form that thinks", as the viewer is repeatedly told in the *Histoire(s)* (chapter 3A, for example), both art and philosophy or possibly neither, may have missed its opportunity, but it must go on, in a relentless mission of self-critique. Adorno's inclination towards the *Bilderverbot*, however, is replaced with the Image and montage-friendly (catastrophic) philosophy of history of (appropriately enough) Walter Benjamin⁹⁸. The urgency of Benjamin's words in the "Theses on the Philosophy of History" that "every image of the past that is not recognized by the present as one of its own concerns threatens to disappear irretrievably" ("Theses" 255) is felt in every frame of the *Histoire(s)*. Thus where the image that wounds for Barthes is a photograph of his mother, now deceased, for Godard it is the lack of a particular image that is the wound; for one, the presence of the absent, for the other, the absence of what should have been present. This absence does not, however, become the artistic pessimism described by Robinson,

⁹⁸ "The work of art is produced only by means of montage" (Benjamin, "Work of Art" 29). Beyond the immediate similarities in form (quotation and collage/montage) of *The Arcades Project* and the *Histoire(s)*, Benjamin is quoted or referenced directly in various forms in both *Les Enfants jouent à la Russie* (1993) and *The Old Place* (2000). See the work of Monica Dall'Asta and Alessi Ricciardi for discussions of the relation between the respective work of Benjamin and Godard.

Morrey, and Williams. The Romanticism and artistic formalism at the heart of Godard's formulation of Cinema's sacred mission also ameliorates this mission's failure⁹⁹. Art rises from its own ashes; a fate ordained by *King Lear*'s equation of art with fire, in an equivalence that is not as simple as it might first appear.

ART AND FIRE: THE PHOENIX AND THE TORCH

'I wonder,' he said, 'whether it might not be better to live, and die, unknown? What a cheat for us all if this glory we talk about existed no more than the paradise promised in the Catechism and which even children don't believe in nowadays! We've stopped believing in God, but not in our own immortality! — Zola, *The Masterpiece* 302

After the initial section on Mailer, the viewer of *King Lear* hears these words: "Anyway, I was fired. I kept on thinking about the relation of art and fire". Various paintings, including Goya's *Saturn*, are lit by a flame, suggesting to Morrey that "they are seen within the enveloping darkness of a prehistoric cave [... implying] some sort of primal relationship between art and fire stretching back to the dawn of humanity" (*Jean-Luc Godard* 190). The analogy extends to the fact that like "fire and water [...]" art and the artistic process [...] are ungraspable [...] and the same is true of art which cannot easily be contained within the form of a cultural commodity" (190). He thus relates the "irresistible attraction" of the flame to a "search for images and experiences that resist commodification" (190). Further evidence appears in the collaborative video piece *The Old Place*, authored by Godard and Anne-Marie Miéville, and its references to cave painting. During the section of *Baptême du Montage*, a cave painting with the text "-17000" overlaid appears, then a modern art painting with the text "+1910", emphasizing the connection between the two (and, perhaps, "metamorphosis"). Accepting the "darkness of a prehistoric cave", perhaps the viewer is indeed being asked to view these works as if they were indeed "cave

⁹⁹ Here Goya also provides something of an "answer"; as Krauss writes in respect to Bataille's *Manet*, "Goya [...] offers a quite different beginning for the history of modernism. Bataille characterizes it as an art of *excess*, an art that recalls the violence of the sacred, as opposed to Manet's dominant modernism's art of *absence*" (152).
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paintings”, products of a former civilization, clues to a “pre-Chernobyl” artistic existence, a reading that is supported by Bataille’s words in *Lascaux or the Birth of Art*:

Directly we enter the Lascaux Cave, we are gripped by a strong feeling we never have when standing in a museum, before the glassed cases [...] In underground Lascaux we are assailed by that same feeling of presence—of clear and burning presence—which works of art from no matter what period have always excited in us. (12)

Yet Morrey’s description of art as ungraspable is not an entirely satisfactory answer, and one might consider the description of artistic process as elemental to be a touch superficial without some further context.

The flame is certainly a privileged metaphor when it comes to art, in Élie Faure’s *History of Art*, for example, “the ‘spirit of the forms’ is the ‘central fire’ that wields them, the universal energy of collective life that does and undoes its forms¹⁰⁰. In this history, Rembrandt is the exemplary figure of the artist who seizes the spirit/fire at its source” (qtd. in Rancière, *Fables* 177)). For a deeper insight into the symbolic nature of the flame there is no better authority to turn to than Gaston Bachelard, another heir of Bergson¹⁰¹. In Bachelard’s work the four elements, though no longer of any scientific use, are still the “hormones” or elements of the human imagination. Bachelard’s primary obsession, however, was fire, the element of anima and the principle of life and death. At its most basic, or most general, the image of flame evokes “Life” (*Candle* 16), flame is “a living substance, a poeticizing substance” (45), a figure of life which consumes but also rejuvenates itself (the Phoenix). At the same time, “imagination is a flame, the flame of the psyche” (2), and “illustrates every form of transcendence” (41); “fire, air, light, everything that rises also partakes of the divine” (60). Though Bachelard reads a number of complexes associated

¹⁰⁰ In what could be considered a parallel formulation to Malraux’s Imaginary Museum, Eli Faure speaks of art as a communal language in *The Agony of Painting*. See Godard’s interview with Debray on Eli Faure and the collective language of painting and cinema (Debray 423-4).

¹⁰¹ Godard cites Bachelard briefly in the “interview” from the press release for *Film Socialisme*. François Pire identifies Bachelard’s Bergsonism in his belief that the image rather than pure intellect can provide access to knowledge (190), while Perraudin sees Bachelard’s work as an extended critique of Bergson’s philosophy rather than simple emulation.

with Prometheus, Oedipus, and Empedocles, given Godard's statement in *King Lear* that "Malraux said that art is like fire born of what it consumes in images that burn your eyes to make you see" (a sentiment repeated in *JLG/JLG: Autoportrait de décembre* (1994): "Art is like fire. Born from what it burns"), the most relevant image is that of the phoenix, the "archetype of the imagination of fire" (*Fragments* 55), that which "bursts into flame of its own fires, and rises again from its own ash" (*Fragments* 29-30), and "presides over the magic moments of life and death" (38). This is "The Triumph of Death" (38), but also the triumph of rebirth, of life; which Godard perhaps refers to cinematically with the very classical effect of reverse photography, bringing a flower back to life—an effect, and a sentiment, recalling Walerian Borowczyk (sometime collaborator of Chris Marker) and the short film *Renaissance* (1963), in which destroyed objects are reassembled, and then destroyed again by the final object to be completed, a bomb. Every work of art is the raw material from which art is created. Eventually cinema too will join the pyre, and new art will be born. Though even Godard's faith wavers: "Cinema was first made for thinking. This would soon be forgotten. But that's another story. The flame went out for good in Auschwitz. This thought is worth at least a farthing" (*Histoire(s)* 3A), it also returns in force¹⁰². In *The Old Place* (1999), for example, Godard and Miéville voice a reaffirmation:

Yes, our world has collapsed, and there's not a lot of it left. First we thought we'd lost everything, but with time we've realized that this loss wasn't all bad. Maybe not bad at all. And finally, instead of losing, we've gained the chance to make a new start.

Gaddis will also use the metaphor of the flame, for example in his discussion of the "real note of hope in *JR*", where he states of Bast that "he will rescue this one small, hard, gem-like flame" (Gaddis,

¹⁰² Another Blanchovian sentiment:

The holocaust, the absolute event of history...that utter-burn where all history took fire, where the movement of Meaning was swallowed up, where the gift, which knows nothing of forgiveness or of consent, shattered without giving place to anything that can be affirmed, that can be denied—gift of very passivity, gift of what cannot be given. How can it be preserved, even by thought? How can thought be made the keeper of the holocaust where all was lost, including guardian thought? (Blanchot, *Writing* 47)

“Art of Fiction”). And Malraux’s metamorphosis has something of a corollary in Wiener’s “information theory” model of art and information, which emphasizes process over storage:

The intrinsic limitations of the commodity nature of communication are hardly considered by the public at large. The man in the street considers that Maecenas had as his function the purchase and storage of works of art, rather than the encouragement of their creation by the artists of his own time [...] He cannot conceive of a piece of information without an owner. The idea that information can be stored in a changing world without an overwhelming depreciation in its value is false [...] *Information is more a matter of process than of storage.* (Wiener, *Human Use* 120-121, italics mine)

But information can still be lost, and rather than the sacred fire of Bataille and Malraux, in the words of Delmore Schwartz and in the spirit of the age of thermodynamics (of Turner and Carnot), “time is the fire in which we burn” (“Calmly We Walk Through This April’s Day”). In *The Recognitions*, for example, sacred fire has already become profane fire:

As embarrassed by the mention of Christ as he was charmed by the image of gold, the only thing which kept him from dismissing alchemy as the blundering parent of modern chemistry [...] was this very image of gold. Coined or in heavy bars, or exquisite dust, it came into his mind, to be fashioned in that busy workshop in less time than it takes to tell (for it was more an assembly line than a manufactory) into cuff links, cigarette cases, and other mass-produced artefacts of the world he lived in, mementos of this world, in which the things worth being were so easily exchanged for the things worth having [...]. It was with some effort, then, that Otto took his eyes from the gold cube in the Madison Avenue window, a cube capable, at the flick of a thumb, of producing a flame, not, perhaps, the *ignis noster* of the alchemists, but a flame quite competent to light a cigarette. (131-3)¹⁰³

¹⁰³ An “*Ignis fatuus*” (Markson, *Reader’s Block* 98), perhaps.

While in *Carpenter's Gothic*, starring the candleless "scion of darkness" McCandless (Ozick 21), the flame has gone out. The existence of gold, Gaddis' other favourite metaphor for art, is a matter of dispute, figured in the presence (or lack thereof) of gold in a region of Africa, that McCandless may or may not have discovered on an expedition many years ago given that he returned from his exploratory mission in a state of delirium (enthusiasm?)¹⁰⁴. Here Africa, the exploration of the "dark continent", gold, shady characters rummaging around McCandless' papers, the twenty years between the discovery of gold and anybody paying attention, all stand as barely veiled references to Gaddis' own career (see particularly pages 168-9), to his own critical reception, to academics scavenging through his notes for *The Recognitions*¹⁰⁵. Above and beyond this allegory of experience, Knight sees McCandless' words, "all that kept me from losing my mind was knowing I was losing my mind but that it was there, the gold was there" (*Carpenter's* 169) as "crucial testimony [...] to the fact that however much truth is obscured as it gets figured and disfigured in its retelling, something real did happen" (Knight, *Hints* 163), comparable to Wyatt's pivotal statement in *The Recognitions*¹⁰⁶. This interpretation may well provide some final comfort to the Gaddis of *Agapē*. But if the allegorical nature of gold is taken seriously, particularly in comparison to Gaddis' first novel, and keeping in mind the very title of the book which refers to a construction derivative of medieval Gothic but without the inspiration, "a patchwork of conceits, borrowings, deceptions [...] a hodgepodge of good intentions like one last ridiculous effort at

¹⁰⁴ Partly due to its alchemical associations, and the relation of solar fire to gold: "Michael Majer, who had seen in gold the image of the sun, spun in the earth by its countless revolutions, then, when the sun might yet be taken for the image of God" (*Recognitions* 132). The Wagner references in *JR* are another example; Alberich's dismissal of gold before he is told of its potential to bring power ("Is that all it's good for, to shine at your games? Why, then it is worthless!"), is akin to *JR*'s dismissal of aesthetic experience (*JR* 474, 661) given its lack of monetary value.

¹⁰⁵ Academics had already been taken to task in *The Recognitions* in the form of Wyatt's not at all veiled comparison of the academic or critic's practice to that of the embalmers of ancient Egypt, recounted by Esther (105-6). If the artwork is the living body (or image), the critic dissects the corpse.

¹⁰⁶ Again, see also Jack McCann's description of the search for gold in *Eureka*:

There's gold, and it's haunting and haunting. It's luring me on as of old. And it isn't the gold that I'm wanting, so much as just finding the gold. It's a great big broad land way up yonder, it's the forest where silence has lease. It's the beauty that thrills me with wonder. It's the stillness that fills me with peace.

something worth doing" (*Carpenter's* 227-8), there are some quite depressing consequences for the Gaddis of *Carpenter's Gothic*.

If the argument that gold stands in for authentic art holds, then McCandless here points out that though *The Recognitions* has finally been recognized as just such authentic art, or as being correct in pointing toward the existence of authentic art, it no longer matters. The very existence of authentic art has become just another thing to fight over, contributing to the general decay rather than redeeming it. Thus Billy's response to McCandless' story of the discovery of gold is one of hopelessness and nihilism: "Just one more four fucking thousand foot hole in the ground they'll pack with black skins to dig it out for them" (229); and as McCandless says of the next generation, "all our grand solutions turn into their nightmares" (230), inverting the theme of the previous novel, where JR's aesthetic disinterest is Bast's nightmare. And, finally, the gold that McCandless discovered is barely enough to fight over: "The vein runs out [...] Klinger blew it up into a big ore strike that Lester got hold of for his scenario and I got out, things went bad and I got out" (239). Of course, in this reading, the war that is going on over the fabled gold can be read, delightfully, as the academic war over the meaning of *The Recognitions*, of which this thesis is just another part, and McCandless' final decision to tell the powers that be that there is nothing left worth fighting over becomes the book itself, *Carpenter's Gothic*. Misunderstood, *Carpenter's* then becomes part of the academic war, fulfilling McCandless' prophecy that his efforts will be in vain, and Gaddis' next novel is *Frolic*, where the world belongs to Basie.

By *Agapē Agape* some form of faith has returned, as the reference to Flaubert and the "passing of the torch" attests¹⁰⁷. But although Blanchot also refers to the Malrucian artist as a "torchbearer", there is a clear difference in type. Gaddis' fixation on a particular conception of art (and the novel), on Spenglerian entropic decay, implies the desire to control the transmission of art; Gaddis' torchbearer seeks to rescue particular forms from the rabble, from chaos, from time, to stop the vein from running out (though at times he already believes that it has). This could be figured as Godard's adoption of a

¹⁰⁷ "[T]his fear this stigma of failure which separates the crowd from the elite when Flaubert writes to George Sand 'I believe that the crowd, the mass, the herd, will always be detestable. Nothing is important save a small group of minds, ever the same, which pass on the torch'" (*Agapē* 35).

model of Heraclitean flux (complicated by the director's absolutization of history) versus Gaddis' decaying, profane Platonism, or more simply, an embrace of photographic reproduction versus an insistence on the original and Inherent Vice. To adapt Blanchot, if for Malraux Art "was not protected from time; it was the protection of time", a statement that will be appropriated by Godard and Miéville in *The Old Place*, for Gaddis, art's redemption of time has been replaced by art's redemption of money (*Recognitions* 144). Where the Malrucian torchbearer has faith in art as an absolute, an eternal part of the human that can never be extinguished, and believes that art rescues not only the individual, but humanity, Gaddis' torchbearer must protect art. For both, it must be stressed, art remains a category distinct from that of the commodity; the difference lies primarily in its fate in the age of the commodity, mechanization and reproduction. For one, the possibility of art retreats to the mind of the artist; for the other it blossoms via mediation into a true communal form, full of possibility.

COMMUNITY: THE (SACRED) IMAGE AND THE IMAGINARY

The sacred is exactly comparable to the flame that destroys the wood by consuming it. —

Bataille, *Theory of Religion* 53

We're moving Heaven and Earth, which is no exaggeration. — *Passion*

Malraux and Godard's emphasis on the collective rather than the individual suggests one last interpretation of *King Lear's* flame. Novalis' poetry, according to Bachelard, is "an attempt to re-live primitivity" (*Psychoanalysis* 38), thus the Novalis complex involves the "impulse towards fire that is brought about by friction, the need for a shared warmth [...] it reconstitute[s], in its exact primitivity, the prehistoric conquest of fire" (40). It is "characterized by a consciousness of inner heat which always takes precedence over a purely visual knowledge of light [...] Heat is a property, a possession. It must be guarded jealously and only given as a gift to a chosen being who merits its communion in a reciprocal fusion" (40). Here fire not only is associated with the unfallen world, but with sexuality and love (Prometheus is not the "intelligent philosopher" but a "vigorous lover" (24); "Love is but a fire that is to be transmitted. Fire is but a love whose secret is to be detected" (24)). In other words, here fire

signifies community. Where Morrey correctly emphasizes the primal nature of art, then, that aspect of art that predates and (hopefully) postdates commodification, the flame can also be recognized as the possibility of shared warmth, desire for shared experience, communication, and community. Indeed if we return to Bataille's *Lascaux*, the "burning presence" of art, the beauty of "man-made things", is related to "tenderness [...] to the generous kindness which binds up souls in friendly brotherhood" (12).

This corresponds to one of Rancière's most useful insights into Godard's work, the diagnosis of the double nature of Godard's use of the image. As he writes of the *Histoire(s)*, the image is

governed by two seemingly contradictory principles. The first counter-poses the autonomous existence of the image, conceived as visual presence, to the commercial convention of history and the dead letter of the text [...] On the one hand, then, the image is valuable as a liberating power, pure form and pure *pathos* dismantling the classical order of organization of fictional action, of *stories*. On the other, it is valuable as the factor in a connection that constructs the figure of a common *history*. On the one hand, it is an incommensurable singularity; while on the other it is an operation of communalization.

(*Future* 34)¹⁰⁸

Rancière identifies the symbolic nature of Godard's use of Giotto in the *Histoire(s)*, writing that "Giotto is the painter who drew the sacred figures, inherited from the Byzantine icon, out of their solitude, the one who brought them together to make them into characters in a drama who occupy a common space" ("Saint" 117)¹⁰⁹. And indeed turning to Malraux's *Voices*, Giotto is described as the natural complement

¹⁰⁸ See also *Dissensus*, p194.

¹⁰⁹ In this early article, and in "Godard, Hitchcock, and the Cinematographic Image", Rancière appears to see this as quite probably an accidental development: "Godard may well have thought of himself as the last of the Mohicans mourning the death of cinema and predicting the reign of darkness" ("Godard, Hitchcock" 231). However, he comes to endorse the intentional nature of the communal aspect, as the earlier quotes from *Futures* and *Dissensus* illustrate. Given the lack of references to the imaginary museum in the earlier essay, and the presence of such references in the later, it seems likely that Rancière's recognition of the influence of Malraux in the films goes hand in hand with the recognition of Godard's intentions (unsurprising, given that, as deRoo points out, Malraux's maisons were part of an attempt to unify a divided nation).

to Goya. The pairing of Goya and Giotto points to a very specific binary of dark and light, critique and comfort:

Though the break with the past without which the personal schema cannot come into being and which is the starting-off point of the life's work of all great artists implies dissatisfaction, it is not necessarily an indictment; Giotto, Rubens and Chardin reacted against the forms preceding them, but not against the world at large. Whether rebellious or acquiescent, every great artist stands for a metamorphosis, but sometimes it occurs to him that, to vary Shakespeare, "there is more nobility, more happiness on earth, Horatio, than is dreamt of in your art galleries." Thus, while Goya sought to wrench its mask of hypocrisy from the world he lived in, Giotto sought to remove its mask of suffering. Though the great individualistic venture abounds in votaries of solitude, this self-imposed isolation does not always spell detachment. There were those who rebelled less against life in general than against certain distressing aspects of their age, or against what they regarded as an unworthy expression of Man; those to whom it seemed that the mask imposed on human suffering was the lie of lies and must be torn away—and such men were no less antagonistic to the forms which had given birth to their art than were those who denounced the world at large. These men I speak of belonged to the school of gentle accusers—who sometimes aspire to be redeemers. (Malraux, *Voices* 341)

Goya and Giotto, then, provide Godard with a convenient shorthand: disillusionment and solace, suffering and redemption, solitude and community, the void and the image, and it is a mistake to read one without the other.

It is also, perhaps, a mistake to read either *King Lear* or the *Histoire(s)* on their own. The appropriated Giotto that Rancière refers to is a detail of Mary Magdalene from the *Resurrection (Noli Me Tangere)* from the Scrovegni Chapel in Padua (1306). In the *Histoire(s)* (chapter 1A) Godard rotates the figure of Mary Magdalene 90 degrees, layering the Giotto over a shot of Elizabeth Taylor from *A Place in the Sun*. In *King Lear*, on the other hand, there are repeated shots of angels from Giotto's

Lamentation (The Mourning of Christ) and, in one scene, an image of an angel is followed immediately by a shot of Peter Sellars on the ground in exactly the same pose. Rather than a Malrucian/Melvillean *Struggle with the Angel*¹¹⁰, as exemplified by Jerzy's various struggles (both artistic and physical) in *Passion*, Sellars, and Godard, have made peace with them; the director in fact stands as witness along with the angels to the death of the Image, of Art. The use of the *Noli Me Tangere* in the *Histoire(s)*, then, a painting that depicts the resurrected Christ, thus completes the cycle of death and resurrection, of metamorphosis, and points to a resurrected Image, a new art. Giotto and Hollywood here share the same space, albeit a "redeemed" Hollywood for Godard thanks to George Stevens' filming at Auschwitz (compiled into *Nazi Concentration Camps (1945)*)¹¹¹.

This constant use of sacred images in dialogue with the profane, of heaven and earth, or earth and sky is a re-examination of that which was useful in the sacred, in particular the relation of the sacred to *community*. But one might also refer to Nancy's work on community, a philosopher who has not coincidentally written a monograph on the *Noli Me Tangere*, and whom Godard engages with directly in *Nouvelle Vague* (as I will argue in the final chapter)¹¹²:

just as we must not think that community is "lost" [...] so it would be foolish to comment upon and to deplore the "loss" of the sacred only then to advocate its return as a remedy

¹¹⁰ The title of Malraux's final, never to be completed novel, and, earlier, the subject of Melville's poem "Art": "What unlike things must meet and mate: / A flame to melt—a wind to freeze; / [...] Audacity—reverence. These must mate, / And fuse with Jacob's mystic heart, / To wrestle with the angel—Art".

¹¹¹ The use of Elizabeth Taylor points to Henri Lefebvre's influential work, *Critique de la vie quotidienne*, released in three parts in 1947, 1961, and 1968. Lefebvre, friend and collaborator with Guy Debord and partial inspiration for the Situationist International, cites the example of "Liz Taylor" in the pages of *Elle* magazine:

I found myths by the dozen [...] There's an understanding that we're only referring to preferences that already exist, whereas in fact, they're going to be created for us. In whose name? By what means are these choices, these suggestions, going to be imposed on us? The text tells us. It goes on: 'Liz is looking for her unattainable love.' Eternal, absolute love continues to exist in a society which in every other respect forbids, prohibits and opposes it. But in extraordinarily privileged cases, the case for example, of Liz Taylor, who is still searching for this unattainable love, a myth appears once removed. ("Myths" 101)

This paragraph comes just after Lefebvre describes the gap between "the level of the everyday and higher levels—those of politics and the State, high technology, or high culture" (100-01), as widening, a gap that one might suggest Godard attempts to collapse through his particular blend of high culture and Hollywood.

¹¹² *Noli me tangere: on the raising of the body* (2008); see also Derrida's *On Touching—Jean-Luc Nancy* (2005), which also mentions Giotto's *Noli me tangere*.

for the evils of our society [...] What has disappeared from the sacred [...] reveals rather that community itself now occupies the place of the sacred. Community is the sacred, if you will: but the sacred stripped of the sacred. (Nancy, *Inoperative* 34-5)

Shklovsky, Bergson, Bataille, and Blanchot's reading of Malraux provide Godard with a secular vision of the sacred that serves as an escape from the world of culture and commodity, while also providing the framework for his formulation of Cinema as a communal language; Art becomes an Absolute, serving the Absolute of History.

Advertising, and Other Smoke and Mirrors: the Phantasmagoria of Everyday Life

By concentrating on the question of the commodification of the artwork, discussion so far has sidelined the question of the broader, social effects of the commodity form; yet both artists' appeals to immanence, and their respective kinships with Malraux and Lyotard, as described in the previous chapters, point to the artificiality of this divide. The possibility for community is exactly what has historically been considered under threat in a world reduced to purely exchange-based interactions, while the continued importance of cinema as a "vernacular" is itself under question in a society where the imaginary is populated less by the great painted images of Giotto, or cinematic images of a Hitchcock or Renoir, and more by the ephemera of saturation advertising, the reduced images of television, and the various "lolcats" of the internet (as featured in *Film Socialisme*): the raw material of the phantasmagoria, in other words, that leads Lyotard to his concept of the sublime, and Gaddis to retreat to his own mind. Advertising poses further problems for Godard, who participates in a tradition of viewing capitalism's official art as the co-optation of the individual's desire for community; advertising is equated with fascism. The porous relation of advertising and art thus renders desire, beauty, and the very possibility of a *sensus communis* suspect. While Godard finds his way back to a belief in the *sensus communis* via Malraux's Imaginary Museum, Gaddis holds to a view of the phantasmagoric world and, as with Lyotard, turns to a modified version of the Kantian sublime. For both artists, however, the fundamental danger of the commodity lies in the reduction of relationships (love) to pure exchange. Though a full elucidation of each artists' utopian ethics of love must wait until the final chapter, discussion here focusses on the relatively simple negative utopianism of Godard's early films, such as *2 ou 3 choses*. Here, as in Gaddis' first novel, the prostitute symbolizes a larger, society-wide lack of love. While Godard attempts to understand the desire for domination and the mechanics of viewer manipulation, however, Gaddis begins with an analysis of another Faustian pact, writ large: also known as the "age of publicity".

THE AGE OF PUBLICITY

Culture [...] amalgamates with the advertisement. — Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment* 131

Raymond Williams has described advertising as the “official art of modern capitalist society: it is what ‘we’ put up in ‘our’ streets and use to fill up to half of ‘our’ newspapers and magazines” (Williams, “Advertising” 421)¹¹³. In the terms of Guy Debord, Situationist and author of *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967), the rise of advertising participates in a shift from being to having and then from having to appearing, until “the commodity has succeeded in totally colonizing social life” (Debord 21)¹¹⁴. This is in itself a slight variation of Max’s bargain with his critic/publicist, as *The Recognitions* articulates:

No matter how much you talk to them, they don't get it. It's too simple. It's too goddam simple for them to understand. They still think their cigarettes would cost them half as much without advertising. The whole goddam high standard of American life depends on the American economy. The whole goddam American economy depends on mass production. To sustain mass production you got to have a mass market. To sustain a goddam mass market you got to have advertising. That's all there is to it. A product would drop out of sight overnight without advertising, I don't care what it is, a book or a brand of soap, it would drop out of sight. We've had the goddam Ages of Faith, we've had the goddam Age of Reason. This is the Age of Publicity. (736)¹¹⁵

¹¹³ Reprinted in David Harvey, amongst others, where advertising is the “official art of capitalism” (Harvey *Postmodernity* 63).

¹¹⁴ Mulvey reads early Godard as part of a Debord “phase”, to the extent that she reads *À bout de souffle* as “*detournement*” (76). The society of “having” rather than “being” had already been described by Gaddis in 1955: “in which the things worth being were so easily exchanged for the things worth having” (*Recognitions* 131).

¹¹⁵ This function is highlighted most clearly in the post-Stalin Eastern Europe of the 1950’s attempt at “socialist advertising”, as Patterson discusses in regards to Yugoslavia’s peculiar years of “self-management socialism”. Here, advertising was justified in the name of “rationalizing consumption, increasing the efficiency and ease of purchases, stimulating demand for domestic production, increasing income, cutting costs, educating and informing consumers, satisfying needs, and promoting new and higher consumer tastes (this last sometimes paired with a lofty, if ill-defined, notion of improving the common culture)” (Patterson 218). While the emphasis was meant to be on satisfying “current” needs, rather than activating new ones, and certainly not

The advertising executive thus becomes a necessary evil, presented as the artist's failed, sleazy, even ludicrous double: "Advertising! Do you think I've sunk that low?" (*Recognitions* 151)¹¹⁶

Benny, for example, is a gross caricature of the advertising executive, "a man whose profession was as immediately obvious as that of the rickshaw boys of Natal, who whitewash their legs", with a "bow tie of propeller proportions" (572). First introduced as some kind of designer who has been secretly outsourcing his bridge designs to Wyatt (without payment), Benny's lack of talent has not stopped him from becoming successful in the field of advertising. His second appearance plumbs the depths of capitalist callousness, with Ellery and Benny discussing how best to stage an "accidental death" for publicity: "I've got the guy all lined up. We're going to pay his family when he goes through with it, half now, half on delivery. But it's got to look accidental" (573). A meeting with Wyatt, however, triggers memories of Benny's past aspirations, to "design beautiful bridges", in the words of his friend, and after finding himself made an apologist for television as "cultural medium", harassed by a "critic" about the corrupting effect of television on "tragedy", "the writer's integrity", "human suffering", attacked with accusations of purely mercenary motives, Benny snaps:

And now I understand. And you talk to me about life, about real life, about human misery
[...] I offered you work, and you were too good for it. We buy stuff from guys like you all the
time, writing under pen names to protect names that are never going to be published
anywhere else, but they keep thinking they'll make it, what they want to do, but never quite
manage, and they keep doing what they're too good for. It's a joke. It's a joke. [...] Get
where I am, and then you can be bitter [...] Do you think I like these clothes? Do you think I
like double-breasted snappy clothes, like...I'm a success, that's why I've got a right to be
bitter. God damn it. God damn it. [...] I got into this and I found everybody believed what

stimulating desires that were out of reach of the consumer, this "socialist advertising" tended to look very much like capitalist advertising.

¹¹⁶ This, again, has a precursor in West's *Miss Lonelyhearts*, "you could try advertising" (69); Gilbert Sorrentino, on the other hand, Gaddis' contemporary and another New Yorker, would prefer to see more ad-men, and fewer mediocre artists: "Give it up, Dick! Be that advertising copywriter you will be so good as, without any strings to art, however specious. The long lunches, the Perfect Manhattans, the pâté, why not?" (*Imaginative* 227).

they were doing. They all believe it, and after awhile you believe it too. You live with it for awhile and you believe it too. (602-605)

At this point Benny is a Dale Carnegie success story, a successful survivor, an example of the advertiser as symptom of a world where the only communal value is now market value. In Gaddis' words, *How to Win Friends and Influence People* (1936) was the book that

decreed virtue not for virtue's sake (as weary stoics had it); nor courtesy for courtesy (an attribute of human dignity, as civilized culture would have it); nor love (as Christ had it); nor a faith which is its own explanation and its own justification (as any faith has it); but all of these excellences oriented toward the market place. (*Recognitions* 498-599)

Benny ultimately commits suicide, taking the place of the man who was to be paid to commit the same act: an early appearance of Gaddis' endorsement of a noble, dignified death. Benny succeeds, but his success is terminal. Did he cease to believe, or was he no longer able to believe in anything else?

For Daniel J. Boorstin in his 1961 book *The Image* (1961), the wider consequence of this "Age of Publicity" is a shift in emphasis from truth to verisimilitude:

Our frenetic earnestness to attack advertising, our fear of advertising [...] prevent[s] us from seeing its all-encompassing significance as a touchstone of our changing concept of knowledge and of reality [...] What seems important is not truth but verisimilitude. In this new world, where almost anything can be true, the socially rewarded art is that of making things seem true. (Boorstin 212)

The advertising executives of *The Recognitions* are undoubtedly socially rewarded, at least in an economic sense, but Boorstin's (and Debord's) point is made most vigorously in *JR*. In the face of Bast's obvious sickness, his fever, and ever more feeble protests that the publicity pieces JR is reading are not what actually happened, JR continues to regale Bast with both a polished, completely fictional version of the rise of the "J R Family of Companies", often coming back to an ideal picture of the man JR himself, as well as stories of gala events that Bast has supposedly attended (651 onwards). The young JR, faux

capitalist extraordinaire, advertising wunderkind, cannot understand Bast's unhappiness over the disconnection between reported events and the truth. For JR, the publicity is more real than the real. Reading the press release about his company, about his fictional self, is how JR "lives", calling to mind the famous photograph of JFK giving a speech, taken from behind, such that the audience sees the "real" JFK front-on only in the television monitor; the punch-line being that collective wisdom has it that part of the reason for Nixon's loss against Kennedy was the fact that he was not simply less photogenic, but that the then-current technology of black and white television, combined with his recent ill-health, skin-tone, permanent 5 o'clock shadow and refusal of make-up rendered him sickly and unkempt in appearance. Whereas those who had listened to proceedings on the radio judged that the two were quite evenly matched, with Nixon perhaps even ahead, those who watched the debate judged that Kennedy was the victor. Whether this is true or not, the very existence and popularity of the narrative speaks to a rising mediation of reality. In this case, a portrait of the successful Kennedy should indeed be mediated by the television screen; it is a "true" portrait of the victor, Kennedy as Image, just as, from an effects point of view, the descriptions of JR as a "capitalist wunderkind" or trading genius are more accurate than the "truth" of a series of fortunate events¹¹⁷. "We fill our lives not with experience, but with the images of experience", states Boorstin (252)¹¹⁸.

A TIME TO LOVE DESIRE AND A TIME TO DIE BUY: ADVERTISING AS FASCISM

Advertising is fascism. — *The Old Place*

Boorstin's work is a distinctly American take on ideas that would come to define the work of Jean Baudrillard (simulation, the non-event), to the point where Merrin has described Boorstin as a "hitherto

¹¹⁷ The story stems from Theodore H. White's account of the campaign *The Making of the President 1960*, which went on to win the Pulitzer Prize; verifiable evidence, however is thin on the ground. See also Druckman for an attempt to quantify the effects of television on politics; or Barthes' "Photography and Electoral Appeal" in *Mythologies*. At the same time, in his essay "The Rush for Second Place", Gaddis quotes William Pfaff in his description of Nixon himself as an example of "style over substance" (159), a man who exudes success despite any number of failures.

¹¹⁸ Culminating in the very serious joke in David Cronenberg's *Videodrome* (1983), where "Professor O'Blivion" refuses to appear on television, except via television.

neglected influence” on Baudrillard’s work (46). But where Boorstin and Gaddis seem to share a blend of resigned pragmatism and mourning for a lost lived experience, Baudrillard and Godard, both working within the tradition of Feuerbach and Marx, of Debord’s Society of the Spectacle, were initially much more actively critical of the new American-style, mediated consumer society. As the narrator bluntly states in *2 ou 3 choses* of the American detergent, PAX: “Pax Americana: Jumbo-sized brain-washing”, accompanied by an extreme close-up of the box of detergent such that the word PAX fills and extends beyond the limits of the screen¹¹⁹. This “brain-washing” is on constant display throughout the film, whenever the protagonist or her female acquaintances are exposed to an advertisement they invariably end up parroting its words: “Would you like me to wear tights designed to look like knee-socks? They make daring dresses decent and flatter young slender legs”; “Have you seen Paco Rabanne’s dresses? They’re super, all made of little metal discs. They’re terrific, for evenings, of course”; even, with an inanity that stresses the automatism of the consumer, “Buy Rigerato Rubber. Rigerato Rubber offers special possibilities for rubber objects”. The role of the male, on the other hand, seems to be to work at an obviously low-paying job, play at politics, and read Carnegie-like self-help books, though as Elden notes, Lefebvre would argue in and of the 1960s “that everyday life has a more profound effect on women than men, because of the structure of societies [...] The initial title for the third volume [of *La vie quotidienne*] was *Situation of Women in the Modern World*” (117). This goes some way to contextualising the women/consumption men/politics divide in Godard’s film, and by the time of *Pierrot le fou* (1965) the effects of advertising leave no man behind.

2 ou 3 choses sits among a number of major French works that stress the necessity of analysing “la vie quotidienne”; not only those of Lefebvre but also a work that he will cite, Roland Barthes’ *Mythologies* (1957). Barthes’ work was one of the first to popularize semiological analysis of naturalized sign systems, or modern “myths”; as he states of “Soap-powders and Detergents”, these are objects “of such massive advertising that they now belong to a region of French daily life which the various types of

¹¹⁹ “What kind of peace do I mean? What kind of a peace do we seek? Not a Pax Americana enforced on the world by American weapons of war. Not the peace of the grave or the security of the slave” (Kennedy, “Commencement” 461). Not a Pax Americana enforced by violence, but by commerce, capitalism.

psycho-analysis would do well to pay some attention to if they wish to keep up to date” (35). Most tellingly, however, an advertisement consisting of a crowd of faceless people gazing towards “an idol in their midst”, a “gigantic carton of Pax [...] whose size relative to the crowd is approximately that of the United Nations building in New York” (Baudrillard, *System* 195) would later be the subject of a close reading by Baudrillard in *The System of Objects* (1968), appropriately enough in a section titled “The Presumption of Collectivity”. Here Baudrillard writes that “The collective realm is imaginary in advertising, but its virtual consumption suffices to ensure serial conditioning” (194). For Baudrillard, “every desire [...] aspires to universality” (195); thus, rather than allowing individual needs to arise “spontaneously”, advertising (via a kind of totalitarian logic) controls these needs through the mobilization of collective desire. The question of collectivity will be returned to later, but more generally, one can simply say that this formula proposes that advertising harnesses desire with the promise of happiness via consumption, a happiness that is then deferred until the next moment of consumption, and then the next, and the next, ad infinitum or at least ad mortem. As Debord and Gaddis would agree, a society that emphasizes *having/appearing* over *being*; or perhaps it would be more accurate to say, given the relative complexity of advertising today, that it conflates the two. Advertising has evolved along with its consumers and critics, embracing “being” with appeals to personal evolution and self-realization based on models such as Maslow’s hierarchy of needs, and adjusting to the demand to be “charitable” or “ethical” with the development of “cause-related marketing” (King), as corporations deploy charity as a form of corporate strategy¹²⁰.

For a lecture on the manipulations of desire close to Godard, there is no better example than Ugo Gregoretti’s *Il Pollo Ruspante*, or *Free Range Chicken*, part of *Ro.Go.Pa.G.* (1963), named for the four contributing directors, Rossellini, Godard, Pasolini, and Gregoretti, “Four stories by four writers who confine themselves to recounting the gay beginning of the end of the world”: promoted by the tag line “Let’s wash our brains”. Godard’s contribution was *Il Nuovo Mondo* (*The New World*), a piece about the loss of love after a global catastrophe, a relatively straightforward fable about the effects of capitalism

¹²⁰ As Rajagopal discusses in relation to the market for fabric wash in India, for example.

and exchange. These themes will recur later, but for now Gregoretti's piece is more apropos (as well as being the second best piece of the film, exhibiting a manic energy and brittle humour that outshines all but Pasolini's use of Orson Welles in *La Ricotta*). In *Free Range Chicken* the viewer hears a lecture on consumer manipulation given by a man with a laryngectomy and an electro larynx, while watching an Italian family struggle to attain happiness, bouncing from one purchase to the next. The film, in no way subtle and the better for it, juxtaposes the father's preference for free range chicken eggs to cage eggs, while pointing out the unavoidable nature of the father's, the family's, own cage:

It should never be forgotten that the customer is only a mixture of impulses, and unconscious motivations to direct towards the ends of consumption. Often by relying too much on the unconscious, we underrate the conscious, reason, prudence, modesty, sentiment, common sense, which are also factors of the first order, and we are faced with failures which we cannot understand. In this case however, I would be unadvisable to fall a prey to pessimism. We must always bear in mind that by now the consumer is conditioned by himself, and that competitive drive that we have now managed to impose upon society, by now is part of his nature and of his ego, and stimulates him to higher and higher goals.

(Free Range)

In the same year, Gregoretti made the (political) science fiction parody *Omicron*, in which the body of a factory worker (at a factory "troubled" by union activity and strikes) is overtaken by an advance scout for an alien race: "one day we won't be ourselves, but others who will be inside us". The film ends with the invasion taking place, and a new worker's charter: the abolition of all work breaks, the prohibition of love, speaking, and thinking, and the abolition of "emotions, of will, of charity and of dignity, and other infectious diseases of prehistoric origin". Enter *Alphaville*, a film whose totalitarian, rationalistic dictator, the artificial intelligence Alpha 60, speaks with the same electro larynx as Gregoretti's advertising theorist¹²¹.

¹²¹ Though John Carpenter's *They Live* (1988) could also be described as something of an unofficial sequel/reimagining, featuring an upper class of invaders hidden in plain sight controlling the larger population via subliminal messaging, signs that read "Obey", for example; the typography of which would then be

One could also, for an American flavour, cite Robert Downey's sometime-classic *Putney Swope* (1969), "Our job is to manipulate the consumer by arousing his desires, and then we satisfy his desires for a fixed price. It's called advertising", or Maurice Pialat's *L'Amour Existe* (1960), "Happiness is decided in research labs"; but then as Buck-Morss points out, the proposition that capitalism is based on "deception" is in fact plain for all to read in Adam Smith's writings on the economy. As he states in *The Theory of Moral Sentiments*, in regards to our ambitions for the "pleasures of wealth and greatness", "it is well that nature imposes upon us in this manner. It is this deception which rouses and keeps in continual motion the industry of mankind" (348). Or as Buck-Morss glosses,

Not demand, instrumentally and rationally calculated, but desire, deceived by commodities as decoys, is the motor force of Smith's "economy." We are caught in its orbit as self-interested monads who precisely in our unreason bring about reason's goal. Due to the deceptive nature of desire, it is impossible for the consumer to make a truly rational choice (Buck-Morss, "Envisioning" 453).

The consumer is brainwashed, the consumer is conditioned, and the consumer is deceived. Interestingly, and partaking in a larger shift within modernity that Foucault described as the "pathologization of behaviour", consumption can also be modelled as a kind of addiction, as the irrational subject of capitalism pursues the high of desire: "I come to desire the pleasure of desire itself" (452), states Buck Morss. For Debord, the society of the spectacle is "a permanent opium war designed to force people to equate goods with commodities" (*Society* 22); the new opium of the masses is not religion but the operation of capitalism itself¹²². This analogy between contemporary consumption and addiction is also a common feature not only of science fiction writers such as Frederik Pohl in *The Midas*

appropriated in the name of "art" by Shepard Fairey, and then, to complete the life cycle of appropriation or containment, turned into fashion by OBEY clothing.

¹²² See also Derrida:

[W]hen the sky of transcendence comes to be emptied, and not just of Gods, but of any Other, a fatal rhetoric fills the void, and this is the fetishism of drug addiction. Not religion as the opiate of the people, but drugs as the religion of the atheist poets—and of some others, more or less atheists, more or less poets. ("Rhetoric" 29)

Plague, where “[p]lenty is a habit-forming drug”, but also of the Beat writers (at least one of whom, Kerouac, was a friend of Gaddis). Burroughs equates addiction with capitalism in *Naked Lunch* (1959), while Ginsberg describes the “narcotic tobacco haze of Capitalism” (70) in *Howl* (1956). Unsurprisingly, then, it is a cigarette that signals a kind of acquiescence, a caesura of the desire to question in *2 ou 3 choses*. Just before the final words from the narrator there is one final scene, one final attempt at communication, between Juliet and her husband:

— Do you know the difference between true and false love? False love leaves me as I am.

Time changes me and the person I love. Do you think I’ve changed?

— I’m just tired.

— No, not you. Me. I’ve changed and I’m still the same. So, what is it?

— I don’t know.

— In that case, give me a cigarette.

This final cigarette also appears in Godard’s other film of 1966, the pop-art detective story *Made in USA*. In the final scene Anna Karina and her companion are driving away, mission more or less accomplished, when her male companion tries to comfort her:

— You shouldn’t be scared. Fascism won’t happen.

— On the contrary, it has to happen, and it will, like sailing boats, miniskirts, rock and roll.

We’ve years of fighting ahead of us, often fighting within ourselves. Have you got a cigarette?

Both scenes could be considered as homages, or more likely semi-loving parodies, of the iconic final scene of *Now, Voyager* (1942), the final rapprochement of Bette Davis and suitor over a cigarette. But the cigarette can also be read as emblematic of this fight “within ourselves”, the addiction to something that is known to be harmful, yet that continues to exert a power over us, in this case standing for a commodity system of control equated with fascism, and of course with America. The cigarette in these films is a fatalism, an already present failure to resist. And of course as well as being addictive, cigarette advertising has seen the creation of some of the most iconic figures in advertising, most famously

perhaps the Marlboro Man, a campaign headed by Draper Daniels, the real life personage upon whom the character of Don Draper from *Mad Men* is based. At one stage, in an almost Orwellian irony, Philip Morris somehow managed to sponsor the Bill of Rights to the US Constitution: Freedom, sponsored by Big Tobacco, purveyors of fine addiction (Sedgwick 138-9). Hence it is no surprise that it is a cigarette advertisement that introduces the genius of Don Draper in the first episode of *Mad Men* (“Smoke Gets in Your Eyes”) with the creation of Lucky Strike’s famous “It’s toasted” slogan; nor that his second revolutionary gesture is an open letter in newspapers/magazines “breaking up” with cigarette companies (“Blowing Smoke”).

In an amusing variation on the lies of advertising, the Lucky Strike slogan was actually introduced thirty-odd years earlier, in 1917, to distinguish from the sun-drying technique of its competitors (hence informative rather than Don’s “magical” misdirection). *Mad Men*’s take on the slogan is instead reminiscent of JR’s moment of advertising genius: in regards to a new aspirin he has somehow acquired which has the odd characteristic of being green, JR, in a move of which the Don Draper of “It’s toasted” would be proud, “Tell them to go ahead like it is that’s how we’re advertising it, just it’s green that’s all we’re saying. It’s green...! [...] Why should it have to mean anything! I said it’s green explanation point!” (471). The callous side of capitalism is exhibited at the same time: having bought a matchbook company in order to advertise on the covers, but learning from complaints to the FTC that the matches are dangerous, that they somehow “snap off”, he simply decides to advertise it as a “snapoff safety feature like they tell you when you smoke in the woods”; of course this “added feature” means they will have to raise the price.

Contra this kind of childishness, then, in *2 ou 3 choses* and *Made in USA* Godard presents not commodity fetishism but commodity fascism, associated most famously with the Frankfurt School. Living in exile in New York, having fled from the spread of fascism, members such as Max Horkheimer, Theodor W. Adorno, Leo Loewenthal, Herbert Marcuse saw few differences between the entertainment industry of capitalist democracy and fascism. In “Culture Industry Reconsidered”, composed twenty

years after the term “culture industry” was coined in Adorno and Horkheimer’s 1947 work *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, Adorno writes:

The culture industry intentionally integrates its consumers from above [...] although the culture industry undeniably speculates on the conscious and unconscious state of the millions towards which it is directed, the masses are not primary, but secondary, they are an object of calculation; an appendage of the machinery. The customer is not king, as the culture industry would have us believe, not its subject but its object. The very word mass-media, specially honed for the culture industry, already shifts the accent onto harmless terrain. Neither is it a question of primary concern for the masses, nor of the techniques of communication as such, but of the spirit which sufflates them, their master's voice.

(Adorno, “Culture Industry Reconsidered” 12)

This narrative is in fact a constant in Godard from *Le Mépris* (1963) onwards, with its evocation of fascism in the figure of Jack Palance's American film producer: “when I hear the world ‘culture’ I reach for my cheque book”. The original quote, from a pro-Nazi play by Hanns Johst (but often attributed to Hermann Göring), runs “*Wenn ich Kultur höre...entsichere ich meinen Browning!*” (Johst 27), or “When I hear the word culture... I release the safety-catch of my Browning”¹²³. From *Le Mépris* one can jump to the *Histoire(s)*, which contains a barrage of associations between spectacle, Hollywood, and fascism. Rancière, for example, reads a brief but convoluted montage sequence in chapter 4B, *Les Signes Parmi Nous*, as “creat[ing] a strict parallel between two captivations: the captivation of German crowds by Nazi ideology and of film crowds by Hollywood” (*Future* 53). Of course Germany's National Socialist party is only the most famous of a number of fascist governments that relied and rely on spectacle, in conjunction with myth and nationalistic fervour, to exert control over their populations. But then these play no less a part in many democracies of the West (if, for example, one recalls the United States’ doctrine of Manifest Destiny, or George W. Bush's aircraft carrier deck speech declaring “victory” in

¹²³ The quote is from the pro-Nazi play *Schlageter* (1933). Hence Fritz Lang's response in *Le Mépris*: “Some years ago—some horrible years ago—the Nazis used to take out a pistol instead of a cheque book.”

Iraq). And this is without any discussion of the modern rise of the acceptable face of “spin” and disinformation, the conjunction of politics and advertising¹²⁴. Aestheticization of politics is, in other words, designed as politics as consumption, an analogy that Lutz P. Koepnick, for example, has explored extensively in relation to National Socialism:

aware of the fact that over-politicization might quickly lead to apathy, the Nazi government endorsed seemingly unpolitical spaces of private commodity consumption so as to reinforce political conformity. At variance with the strict demands of ideological correctness, American-style consumerism in Nazi society delineated an ideal stage for what Theodor W. Adorno in his analysis of American mass culture considered pseudo-individualization—the “halo of free choice” on the basis of standardization itself. Unlike the homogenizing rituals on the Nuremberg rally grounds, the commodity spectacles of Nazi mass culture entertained the individual with the utopian illusion that certain spaces remained beyond control, beyond politics, beyond the effects of coordination. By satisfying the popular demand for material and cultural commodity items, the agents of power were able to undermine articulations of solidarity that had the capacity to contest Nazi politics. The cult of private consumption impaired alternative definitions of German identity and solidarity coupled to notions of individual autonomy and emancipation. (52)

And while these may be old critiques, they still have their proponents. In the words of Michel Houellebecq, one of the most infamous heirs of France’s post-May 68 pessimism: “today, we can no longer experience desire independently from advertising” (qtd. in *The Art of Struggle* viii). But of course desire itself is a contested subject.

Desire has typically been separated from reason since Plato’s postulation of the tripartite soul; here desire is the appetitive soul in a formulation based around the notion of “lack”. “[E]veryone who feels desire, desires what is not in his possession or presence, so that what he does not have, or what

¹²⁴ Even as critic/philosopher Arthur Danto’s call in *The Nation* for Clinton to become the “Arts President” was met with horrified cries from various sources citing Hitler’s love for the arts (Siebers 96-8).

he is not, or what he lacks, these are the sorts of things that are the objects of desire and love” (*Symposium* 35-6), states Plato in the *Symposium*. This “desire as lack” becomes a defining characteristic of being human, a kind of abyss of being itself, present in the work of (to name just a few of the more relevant here) Hegel, Sartre and Lacan (both drawing on Hegel’s equation of self-consciousness per se with desire). This definition of being as defined by desire and lack is exactly what Godard provides in *Juliette*: “That’s why my feelings haven’t always a specific object. Desire, for instance. Sometimes you know the object of your desire, sometimes not. For instance, I feel I’m missing something, but don’t know what” (*2 ou 3 choses*). Thus as Böhm and Batta write, from a Lacanian point of view:

it is not enough to accuse capitalism of artificially creating pseudo-needs and pseudo-desires. Marx, like his analysis of commodity fetishism, can sometimes be read in such a fashion: capital destroys original *jouissance* and our natural way of relating to the Other. Lacan does away with this language of the humanist and authentic ego. For him, commodity relations do not produce false needs or desires, ‘false consciousness’ or false consumption patterns. The Lacanian point is to show that all social relations are, in effect, ‘false’ as they are constituted by a lack that is at the heart of the subject, as well as the Other. What we call ‘capitalism’ is the regime that has managed to fill this lack with a set of social relations that are geared towards commodity fetishism and economic surplus value (Böhm and Batta 356)

However, this does not mean that capitalism does not attempt to imitate *jouissance* and fail, producing only a “mute, socially sanctioned enjoyment that is bereft of, what Freud calls, the death drive” (Böhm 356). The world of advertising, novelty and invisible obsolescence, contributes to the elision of the notion of death itself, indeed of anything beyond an eternal present; the world is no longer that of Sirk’s *A Time to Love and a Time to Die*, but a time to desire, and a time to buy.

This Lacanian (Hegelian, Platonic) construction of the self is not without its opposition. The most influential twentieth century attempt to overcome the equation of desire with lack is undoubtedly

Deleuze and Guattari's attempt to rehabilitate desire in the tradition of Spinoza and Nietzsche; if for Gaddis *agapē* is *agape*, for Deleuze "Desire is *agape*" (*Anti-Oedipus* 342)¹²⁵. Rather than desire wedded to lack, Deleuze emphasizes the productive, revolutionary nature of desire:

Desire does not "want" revolution, it is revolutionary in its own right, as though involuntarily, by wanting what it wants. From the beginning of this study we have maintained both that social production and desiring-production are one and the same, and that they have differing regimes, with the result that a social form of production exercises an essential repression of desiring-production, and also that desiring-production—a "real" desire—is potentially capable of demolishing the social form. But what is a "real" desire, since repression is also desired? How can we tell them apart? We demand the right to a very deliberate analysis. (*Anti-Oedipus* 116)

Desire "arranged" by society is opposed by desire "taken in the real order of its production, which behaves as a molecular phenomenon" (342). And Godard certainly seems to have paid this re-evaluation of desire some heed; thus as Morrey notes of *Week End*, "there is a suggestion that capitalism is reluctant to recognise the true nature of desire, the untameable desire that threatens to overrun the system and cause its collapse" (*Jean-Luc Godard* 75). However it is important to note that in *Week End* this desire running rampant is hardly depicted in a Deleuzian spirit of affirmation; desire unchained leads instead to cannibalism and general apocalypse. Morrey also reads a kind of Deleuzian approach in films such as *Numéro deux* ("a world in which everything—washing machines, headphones, political pamphlets, arses, children, television, factories—is connected in the endless flow and counter-flow, blockage and release of desiring production" (122)) and *France tour detour deux enfants* (1977-78), both of which attempt less hysterical views of desire. However this emphasis on productive desire

¹²⁵ "A sort of art for art's sake in the libido, a taste for a job well done, each one in his own place, the banker, the cop, the soldier, the technocrat, the bureaucrat, and why not the worker, the trade-unionist [and the ethical purchaser, one might add]. Desire is *agape*" (*Anti-Oedipus* 347).

was short lived, just as it was for the Lyotard of *Libidinal Economy* (1974), and it is this (relatively) overshadowed figure that provides valuable context for Godard.

Libidinal Economy had been written in a state of general disillusionment with revolutionary politics, both the anti-climax of May 1968 and the disappointment involved in the events of the Algerian war for independence on which Lyotard had written a number of articles¹²⁶. Lyotard attempted to demonstrate the constructed nature of all formulations of the body and desire; of plenitude/lack, the inside/outside, the “theatrical volume” of presence/absence, whether it be Platonic forms, God, or authentic production (the Great Zero), providing instead a figure of surface in the Moebian libidinal band. But as James Williams points out in relation to Lyotard, a libidinal theory, which is in effect a “drift away from the subject and from systematic control”, has as its logical conclusion a theory of passivity, something he also identifies as present in both the work of Deleuze and Foucault (Williams, *Lyotard* 62). This may be an “active passivity” that Williams in fact endorses, but it is still passivity, and incompatible with a theory of control; in other words, incompatible with any attempt to direct impulses and desires toward ethical, political and environmental outcomes, perhaps one reason why Lyotard abandoned the libidinal model, going so far as to call *Libidinal Economy* his “evil” book. By 1981 Lyotard was delivering the paper that would become *Enthusiasm*, his re-evaluation of Kant, the sublime, and politics, to the Centre for Philosophical Research on the Political, hosted by Nancy and Lacoue-Labarthe, and 1983 would see the publication of *The Differend*, a turn to “absolute difference” (Williams 100). Then, of course, there is his engagement with Malraux, an application and evolution of the *differend*, an engagement mirrored in Godard’s turn away from investigations of Deleuzean desire in *Week End* and *Numéro deux* towards Malraux and the imaginary Museum; though as has already been illustrated, Godard’s is a more Romantic interpretation than the qualified nihilism of Lyotard.

¹²⁶ See James Williams’ *Lyotard and the Political* for an in depth discussion of Lyotard’s work on Algeria, particularly chapter 2, “Impasse”.

BEAUTY, THE PHANTASMAGORIA AND THE SUBLIME

But certainly for the present age, which prefers the sign to the thing signified, the copy to the original, representation to reality, the appearance to the essence... truth is considered *profane*, and only *illusion* is sacred. Sacredness is in fact held to be enhanced in proportion as truth decreases and illusion increases, so that the highest degree of illusion comes to be the highest degree of sacredness. — Feuerbach, qtd. in Debord, *Society of the Spectacle* 6

To understand Malraux, and Lyotard's return to Kant, the question of beauty must be broached, and if the world's Romantic naïveté means that it has never escaped Kant, then this (re)turn is perhaps unsurprising. For Kant, "the first real Modernist", in Greenberg's words ("Modernist" 5), an understanding of beauty, in so far as it concerns taste, was at the heart of a sense of community. The *sensus communis aestheticus* is described as the foundation for a judgement of taste in the *Critique of Judgement*:

taste can be called *sensus communis* with greater justice than can the healthy understanding [...] the aesthetic power of judgment rather than the intellectual can bear the name of a communal sense, if indeed one would use the word "sense" of an effect of mere reflection on the mind: for there one means by "sense" the feeling of pleasure. One could even define taste as the faculty for judging that which makes our feeling in a given representation *universally communicable* without the mediation of a concept. (*Judgment* 175; 5: 295, italics in original)

Here lies the basis for centuries of privileging the aesthetic, the beautiful, for it is the beautiful to which the judgement of taste responds: "[t]he judgement of taste ascribes assent to everyone, and whoever declares something to be beautiful wishes that everyone *should* approve of the object in question and similarly declare it to be beautiful" (121; 5: 237, italics in original). While Kant describes the communication of one's thoughts on a particular example of beauty as requiring a "relation between the

imagination and the understanding in order to associate intuitions with concepts, and concepts in turn with intuitions, which flow together into a cognition” (175; 5: 295), the point is that it is the aesthetic, feeling and pleasure, *without* concept, that is held to be constitutive of the possibility of community. In the twentieth century, however, the idea of a *sensus communis* came under vigorous attack, partially thanks to the co-optation of beauty by advertising and fascism (and not at all helped by the entry into public consciousness of the image of art-loving Nazis). So it is that Godard, who had more or less renounced (artistic) beauty in favour of politics, is constantly questioning the concept of beauty throughout the post Dziga Vertov period¹²⁷. Jacques Aumont writes extensively on Godard’s approach to beauty in his essay “Mortal Beauty”, but it is enough here to provide just two examples, from the works of Broch and Simone Weil. On the one hand Godard uses various quotes from Broch’s *The Death of Virgil*, an author and a novel critical of worldly rather than ideal Platonic beauty, in the *Histoire(s)*, *Soigne ta droite*, and *Soft and Hard*, and on the other there is the importance of the figure of Simone Weil, catalysing figure for *Passion* and “uncompromising transcendentalist” (Rees x), for whom beauty was in some Platonic sense a political act, a method for both resisting and transforming “force”, Weil’s term for “that x that turns anybody who is subjected to it into a thing” (Weil, “Iliad” 6), into poetry (see Irwin, 64-67, 74-77, for example).

Godard’s series of advertisements for Girbaud jeans, with their use of professional models (dragons who turn out to be princesses, perhaps, given Godard’s use of Rilke’s *Letters to a Young Poet*) and Malrucian montage, would seem to signal something of a détente, or at least a more nuanced approach as discussed by Aumont, not to be found in the work of Lyotard, who instead began to look to

¹²⁷ An interesting, unconventional perspective on this comes from Gilberto Pérez, who declares contra critics such as MacCabe that “Le Petit Soldat remains Godard’s best political film”:

Among other things, the protagonist of *Le Petit Soldat* is an aesthete, and though his aesthetic orientation is connected with his right-wing politics, it is his sense of beauty—the beauty of Anna Karina in her ravishing first appearance in Godard’s films, playing the part of a woman working for the cause of Algerian liberation—that awakens him to the error of his political ways. It is not true that beauty is truth, but neither is it true that, as the likes of MacCabe assume, beauty is the opposite of truth. (338-9)

It is exactly this opposition that Godard re-evaluates after the Dziga Vertov group dissolves.

the sublime for alternate formulations of community¹²⁸. In its Kantian formulation the sublime is a subjective reaction to the “magnitude of nature” (172; 5: 292), the failure of comprehension, of Imagination, in the face of the infinite, the “absolutely (not merely comparatively) great” (138; 5: 254). If beauty is communal, the sublime is extremely subjective, “true sublimity must be sought only in the mind of the [subject] judging, not in the natural Object” (139; 5: 256), and where beauty provokes pleasure, the sublime is a combination of both pain and pleasure. Here the transcendental experience accessed by the work of art (Emersonian enthusiasm, or *Schwärmerei*) that Gaddis denies, is differentiated from the Kantian sublime: in *Enthusiasm*, Lyotard describes the difference between *Schwärmerei* and (Kantian) enthusiasm by noting that the first

is accompanied by an illusion [...] believing there is a direct presentation when there isn't any; it proceeds to a noncritical passage, comparable to the transcendental illusion (cognizing something beyond all bounds of cognition). Enthusiasm, for its sake, sees nothing, or rather sees nothingness and relates it back to the unrepresentable. (31-32)

Thus if the question of aesthetic experience is pivotal to *The Recognitions*, it is in line with philosophical/artistic developments of the period that *JR* exhibits something akin to a Kantian conception of the sublime. In *JR*, the very possibility of aesthetic experience, both shared and *at all* becomes a point of contention, as in the failed connection between JR and the two people who show any interest in him, Bast and Miss Joubert¹²⁹. Both characters attempt to share their own experiences of the aesthetic with JR, once in an experience of Nature, and once in the experience of Art in the form of

¹²⁸ These advertisements as a sign of a détente in the war between art and the commodity would be another matter, however, given that in general they read more as short films, or trailers for *King Lear* and the *Histoire(s)*, with a slightly higher than average proportion of blue jeans being worn (or not worn, as the case may be: “*En général les gens vont travailler en pantalon [...] Pas le jean américain, pantalon*” (*Closed jeans*)). See MacCabe's comments on Godard “as a *petit commerçant*. He takes orders at prices fixed by the market and then decides himself how much time and money he will devote to the production of the artifact” (MacCabe, “Commerce” 96). He also decides how close or (more likely) tangential to the original commission the final work will be, of course, as in *Changer*, and even more obviously, in *Le rapport Darty*, commissioned by the retail store Darty.

¹²⁹ There is also the example of Gibbs attempting to have Rhoda listen to Bruckner's Scherzo, only to have it drowned out by that ostensible instrument of communication, the ringing of the telephone (607-8).

music. Miss Joubert, trying to get JR to see the world in terms of something other than money, asks JR if “everything you see someplace there’s this millionaire for it?” (473)

— And over there look, look. The moon coming up, don’t you see it? Doesn’t it make...

— What over there? He ducked away as though for a better view, — No but that’s, Mrs. Joubert? That’s just, wait... (474)

This scene is revisited two hundred pages later in a conversation between JR and Bast:

— But she’s can’t you see what she, why did you duck away! Can’t you see what she was trying to tell you she ...

— What tell her it’s this top of this here Carvel icecream cone stand? Tell her does she want to bet her ass if there’s a millionaire for that? (661)

There is no word from the narrator as to whether it is Joubert or JR who is correct in their perception of the moon/icecream stand, that the “conflict between Amy’s romanticism and JR’s instrumentalism” remains “unresolved”, as Matanle notes (68); but there is also a confusion between not only advertising and art, but advertising and the sublime. Bast has a similar problem with JR when he attempts to force him to listen to Bach’s cantata number 21, trying to show him that there is “such a thing [...] as intangible assets”, that “Music’s a, it’s not just sound effects there are things only music can say” (655). And, referring to the school production of Wagner’s *Ring cycle*, attempting to communicate the sense of “sheer wonder in the Rheingold”, “How it can lift you right out of yourself make you feel things that, do you know what I’m talking about at all?” (655). JR, however, sees not the beautiful illusion, but only cut out clouds and thunder made of marbles in a pie pan. And when it comes to Bach, all JR can do is either tell Bast what he thinks the latter wants to hear¹³⁰, or give, once again, an instrumental account: “I mean what I heard first there’s all this high music right? So then this here lady starts singing up yours up yours so then this man starts singing up mine up mine [...] so then they go back and forth like that up

¹³⁰ “What like it lifted me out of myself... [...] Not what I said no you! what you heard!” (657).

mine up yours so then they go back and forth like that” (658). Bast, quite reasonably, wants no such thing, accusing JR of ruining everything he touches; he soon walks off, leaving JR to carry on alone.

What Gaddis dramatizes here, beyond a growing sense of capitalism’s hostility to art, is the fulfilment of something that held a more ambiguous state in *The Recognitions*: the preaching of Wyatt’s “yetzer hara”, the arrival at a state where there is “nothing left but knowledge and evidence, and art’s become a sort of tailbone surviving in us from that good prehensile tail we held on with then” (384-5). This is the state that Lyotard warns is the end result of the lack of an aesthetic common sense, though Lyotard presents ethics rather than evidence: “if we don’t want to make art sink into knowledge or ethics, then the spontaneous demand for unanimity implied in every judgement of taste must be founded, the appeal to an aesthetic sense common to human beings must be founded” (Lyotard, “Sensus Communis” 19). Yet, as he goes on to say, there *is* no *sensus communis*. Such a sense is a transcendental illusion:

The *sensus communis* is still therefore a hypotyposis: it is a sensible analogon of the transcendental euphony of the faculties, which can only be the object of an Idea, and not of an intuition. This *sensus* isn’t a sense, and the feeling which is supposed to affect it (as a sense can be affected) isn’t common, but only in principle communicable. There is no assignable community of feeling, no affective consensus in fact. And if we claim to have recourse to one, or a fortiori to create one, we are victims of a transcendental illusion and we are encouraging impostures. (Lyotard, “Sensus Communis” 24)

What Lyotard offers instead, via the work of Barnett Newman in *The Inhuman*, via Malraux in *Soundproof Room*, is a limited sharing of solitude (of absolute difference), of anguish or dread, in the face of artworks that provide an experience of the sublime:

Solitude is shared in these moments when dreadful nothingness stridulates from the gaping ego [...] Only extreme moments of dread have, on occasions, universal value. The gods may die and humanism as well: anguish is immortal. Whatever may be the figures by

which it is presented in the course of the ages, it will not fail, one day, somewhere, to be shared. "Heard" through the throat. (*Soundproof* 92, 94)

But if Lyotard logically works through an "aesthetics" of the sublime, Gaddis, on the other hand, falls into something of a confusion. In *Agapē* he wants his own art form of literature to allow communication, but he also states that nothing can be explained; avoiding the issue, most of his examples of a shared artistic experience involve music which, as "writing", would (as Adorno quotes Walter Benjamin) "become readable as the 'last remaining universal language since the construction of the tower'" ("Form of the phonograph" 279). He has perhaps found himself in the bind of communication without concept in the age of technological mediation, and at the limit of the use of Wiener's information theory, that Lyotard discusses in *The Inhuman*¹³¹.

Gaddis is therefore left wondering in *Agapē* whether, in regard to Beethoven and Wagner, recorded music is part of the problem, or an escape. Years earlier, in *JR*, Zona Selk wonders if she could not have John Cates "declared nonexistent, null void nonexistent" (708), thanks to his myriad replacement parts (both organic and mechanical), illustrating that a mechanization of the body, a reproducibility of the body, undermines being. As Blanchot writes:

One might say that the possibility of reproducing and of being reproduced reveals to us the fundamental poverty of being: that something could be repeated means that this power seems to presuppose a lack in being, and that being is lacking a richness that would not allow it to be repeated. Being is repeated, this is what the existence of machines means; but if being were an inexhaustible overabundance, there would be neither mechanical repetition nor mechanical perfection. Technology is thus the penury of being become the power of man, the decisive sign of Western culture. ("Museum Sickness" 43)

¹³¹ See particularly chapter 8, "Something like: 'Communication...without Communication'". Tangentially, Wyatt's approach to art is presented as a different kind of "inhuman" in *The Recognitions*. His restraint is "inhuman" (*Recognitions* 97, 489), and as Moore writes, Esther complains "of Wyatt's coldly rational reaction to Bach's ebullient Suite No.1 in C, telling Otto, "Yes but it isn't human... It isn't a way to live" (Moore, *Gaddis* 38).

Blanchot comments here on the revolt against Malraux's "Imaginary Museum", and it is also, of course, the famous thesis of the de-auratization of art as proposed by Benjamin in "The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction", which has something for both progressives and conservatives; a hope in the progressive possibilities of cinema, and a description of the de-auratization of art that recognizes the cultural liquidation that photography has abetted. If Godard unsurprisingly is associated with the former, after the attempt at even-handedness in *The Recognitions* Gaddis tends decidedly towards the conservative, particularly at the end of his career:

Mr Benjamin, with mechanization, advertising artworks made directly for a market what America's all about [...] Everything becomes an item of commerce and the market names the price. And the price becomes the criterion for everything. Absolutely Mr. Huizinga! Authenticity's wiped out when the uniqueness of every reality is overcome by the acceptance of its reproduction, so art is designed for its reproducibility. Give them the choice, Mr. Benjamin, and the mass will always choose the fake [...] Authenticity's wiped out, it's wiped out. (*Agapē* 24-5)

More generally, however, Benjamin was interested in the social experience of the commodity, describing the experience of modernity as that of a phantasmagoria, an eighteenth century optical device that would project the shadows of moving figures onto a screen, a metaphor that Gaddis also employs in *Agapē*: "Used to be the reality was the stone Doctor Johnson kicked and Doctor Johnson himself, and hallucinations took place in the head, in the mind, now everything out there is the hallucination and the mind where the work is done is the only reality" (57). From which it is a short step not only forward to the concept of ideology, but backward to Plato's cave. Hence where Marx saw fit to describe the commodity as "a very strange thing, abounding in metaphysical subtleties and theological niceties" (Marx, *Capital* 163), Rancière has in turn described the Marxian/Benjaminian analysis of the phantasmagoric commodity as "a fabric of hieroglyphs and a puzzle of theological quibbles" (Rancière, "Politics" 21).

Indeed, as regards this latter point, in a discussion of Debord's notion of "spectacle" Rancière points to the Situationist's debt to Feuerbach's critique of religion, a critique bound up with "the Romantic idea of truth as unseparateness" ("Emancipated" 274), an idea that "remains in line with the Platonic disparagement of the mimetic image" (274)¹³². As he goes on to quote Debord, "Separation is the alpha and the omega of spectacle" (274). In other words, Gaddis' desire for Thoreauvian connectedness is as much a Romantic idea as anything present in Novalis or Emerson. And does this desire for unseparateness not also go to the heart of Gaddis' indignation over the player piano? That the recording of music entrenches the smoke and mirrors of the spectacle, the phantasmagoria, while eliding the fact that it is spectacle by encouraging the illusion of participation? It is unsurprising then to find that his final novel includes a lamentation over "hallucinatory reality", nor that given Gaddis' earlier use of McLuhan, and the latter's not so incidental Catholicism, this is something of a McLuhanesque sentiment as well: "People who have made no attempt to educate themselves live in a kind of phantasmagoria of a world" (qtd. in Lipsett's *Very Nice, Very Nice*). As Krupnick writes:

McLuhan was for communal participation as encouraged by oral-aural culture and opposed to the distancing and separateness that he thought eye-dominance brought about.

Moreover, in his view, visual technologies were responsible for the analytic fragmentation of consciousness and the denudation of sensory life. (108)

Though possessed of a hope for a new electronic form of oral-aural culture, McLuhan (in Krupnick's analysis) nevertheless desired "to serve as midwife for an order that [would] restore the Catholic Middle Ages as he imagined them to have been", a time "of wholeness, unity, totality" (108).

¹³² See also Debray, who considers Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* as essentially a "plagiarism" of the works of Feuerbach, the bringing together of

two banalities, overlaying the 1840s themes of alienation, absolutely unmodified, with 1960s objects—consumer society, culture, publicity. The encounter between the old stencil and the new artefact—or the shadow which it cast—doubtless produced the effect of reality, with existential resonances, but not an effect of real knowledge, bearing new insights. ("Remarks on the Spectacle" 135)

In Debord's defence Feuerbach's influence is not hidden, given that he uses a quote on "sacredness" and "illusion" from *The Essence of Christianity* on the first page of *Society*.

Godard's appropriation of Malraux's Imaginary Museum, on the other hand, supposes the power of the aesthetic, of beauty, and some form of *sensus communis*. Indeed, it represents something of a challenge to Lyotard's sublime, hence no doubt Lyotard's necessity to write and rewrite his own version of Malraux. But there is also something of this conflict visible in the work of Godard. It is certainly true that towards the end of the *Histoire(s)* Godard appears to have less faith in Malraux's imaginary Museum than he did at the time of *King Lear*. Bourdieu had attacked Malraux's conception of a universal art on class grounds in 1969, and in *Pierre Bourdieu: la Sociologie est un sport de combat* the sociologist receives a letter from Godard that seems to express doubt over the possibility of shared aesthetic experience. Godard has written to Bourdieu to say that, after seeing a bus with a poster for *My Girl*: "I wondered, looking at this document showing people in public transport, if we are indeed both seeing the same thing and if, consequently, we could later claim to try to tell the same story, the true story. It seems—alas for us and too many Kosovars—that we can't" (*La sociologie*). Nevertheless by *Notre Musique* once again his faith seems to return, considering Godard's aforementioned quotation from Blanchot, along with what is perhaps a pointed reference to a survey (given the basis of Bourdieu's *Love of Art* in a survey of museum-goers) where, as he describes it, all those surveyed chose the same Byzantine icon-like representation of the Virgin Mary from a selection of different styles: "here is your universal art, Bourdieu", he might as well have said. And after *Film Socialisme*, Godard will cite Rancière's *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* (1987), a book that proposes the necessity of the supposition of "the equality of intelligence", in part written in response to Bourdieu's equation of art with privilege in the very same *Love of Art*.

Rancière is also one of Lyotard's strongest critics, opposing Lyotard's philosophy of the "unrepresentable" and the *differend* (in *Futures* in regard to the Shoah, and the essay "The sublime from Lyotard to Schiller: Two readings of Kant and their political significance" in regard to the sublime) with his own formulation of the "distribution of the sensible". In the latter essay on Kant, Lyotard and Schiller he points out that Lyotard's reading of Kant's sublime means "no aesthetics at all. There is either the autonomy of the mind in knowledge or its heteronomy in Ethics" (9). This dichotomy, which corresponds

markedly with both Gaddis' own retreat to the mind—"everything out there is the hallucination and the mind where the work is done is the only reality" (*Agapē* 57)—and Godard's late turn to an ethical art in films such as *Notre Musique*, is born out of the strictness of the art/commodity divide that both Lyotard and the artists in question insist upon. Rancière identifies in Lyotard the influence of a particularly Marxist conception of the connection of "the radical purity of art" with "the promise of political and social emancipation, a tradition championed by Adorno and Greenberg" (11). Here art is only political if it maintains its purity, "to the extent that its products are different from objects of consumption and are endowed with a character of unavailability" (11). Hence art must be rescued from the domain of "taste", and hence also the return to Kant, where the beautiful "is neither the agreeable nor the good" (11); yet the end of this narrative rests in little more than shared alienation. Contra Lyotard, Rancière opposes Kant's emphasis on the "free play" of the faculties, and Schiller's aesthetic education and the possibility of emancipatory aesthetic experience, "a third way between the eternity of domination and the savagery of rebellion" versus Lyotard's "enslavement or death [...] *either one disaster or another*" (14).

In this instance, however, the enemy of Godard's enemy is not his friend; Rancière has levelled at the version of Malraux's Museum present in the *Histoire(s)* accusations of mystery, co-presence, and homogeneity, claiming that a move from dialectics to symbolism is a shift from dissensus to consensus, and a "dismissal of the 'aesthetics of politics'" ("Contemporary Art" 48). Godard has certainly been "guilty" of moving from political and class concerns towards "reframing a sense of community and mending the social bond" (49), as is obvious in the use of Malraux and will become clear in the discussion of *Nouvelle Vague*, yet *Notre Musique* also deals with macro-politics; whether the political and the ethical are indeed as inimical as Rancière proposes, whether there must be either one or the other, is another question for another time. But to understand Godard and Gaddis' attempts to "mend" the social, one first has to examine the perceived damage done.

EXCHANGE, THE NULL POINT OF COMMUNITY

[I]nto this country of gift and exchange, we have introduced money. — Marker and Resnais, *Les statues meurent aussi*

Money was invented so that people wouldn't have to look each other in the eye. — *Film Socialisme*

If Goya “was the first of the moderns [...] Manet alone explicitly inaugurated modern painting” (Bataille, *Manet* 56), and the subject of Manet's *Olympia* is now a prostitute instead of an idealized Venus. In the same spirit, in *The Recognitions* Wyatt's model and muse for paintings such as *Death of the Virgin* is Esme, a “loose” woman and drug addict, and where the Gretchen of Goethe's *Faust* is originally a “pure” woman, Mann's is a prostitute¹³³. Gaddis' sympathy with Esme over Esther, Wyatt's wife, certainly seems to correspond to Teal's description of the “curious collusion” of modernism and commodity culture:

as the metaphysical categories of idealist aesthetics were to a great extent dismantled, the ethereal, transcendent form of woman traditionally celebrated by art (Goethe's “*Ewigweibliche*”) was increasingly replaced by a new “material girl”, an earth(l)y, sexualized female body, most often represented by the prostitute, *against* which the aesthetic established its autonomous, metaphysical status. The prostitute (the *Weib*), as a newly constructed “ideal” of femininity-as-flesh, stands in opposition to the artificially adorned femininity represented by commodity culture, and the *Weib* thus rather confusingly becomes an ally in modernism's campaign against bourgeois femininity (*Weiblichkeit*).
(Teal 83)

¹³³ On the other hand there is Camilla, his mother (who Esme resembles (174)), and obviously the Virgin Mary (274-5), who “died that Wyatt might live”. Between Camilla and Esme there is, eternally, the Virgin and the Whore.

This continues throughout the nineteenth century until the turn of the twentieth, when “sexuality and desire become increasingly mediated by the cerebral investment of *looking* in commodity culture (advertisement, display windows, exhibitions, catalogues, fashion shows, etc.) both the streetwalker and the brothel prostitute begin to place themselves (both consciously and unconsciously) in the same position as other objects on display for sale” (Teal 84). And as the Venus de Milo becomes a commodity (a salt shaker) in *The Recognitions*, and part of an advertisement in *A Married Woman* (the “ideal breast”, a standard of beauty to be attained, according to the magazine Charlotte reads), femininity-as-flesh becomes femininity-as-mannequin.

Advertising, and indeed capitalism, becomes tied directly to the notion of prostitution. Just before Benny’s death Morgie has taken umbrage against the idea that advertising “is the whoring of the arts, and [ad men] are the pimps”, and in Godard this is most clearly presented in the two films explicitly concerned with the topic, two of the more sociological or documentary-style films, *Vivre sa vie* and *2 ou 3 choses*¹³⁴. These two films can also be considered companion pieces; *Vivre* concerned at the individual level with the arrival at (and experience of) prostitution, and *2 ou 3 choses* concerned on the macroscopic level with the conditions of society which lead to these experiences of prostitution—the “her” of the title is at the same time the city of Paris, Marina Vlady, the actress, and Juliette Janson, the role that Marina plays. Hence where *Vivre* offers a sympathetic portrait of its protagonist, Anna Karina, the Juliette of *2 ou 3 choses* is never more than a representation of a class, a statistic, with Marina appropriately playing Juliette with an almost static, emotionless face (though one could also read this in a Žižekian manner; Juliette is driven to consume, to Enjoy, without ever truly enjoying anything). As Green, Higgins, and Hirsch discuss in regards to *2 ou 3 choses*, these works use prostitution as a “global metaphor” for a “system of exploitation manipulated by a third party”. In *Vivre* it is the pimp,

¹³⁴ Though not applicable to this discussion of prostitution as metaphor in Godard, it should be noted that recent work on prostitution also stresses various issues of empowerment rather than victimhood, for example Eva Pendleton’s work on the potentially subversive nature of prostitution in “Love for Sale: Queering Heterosexuality” (or more generally the ‘Feminism’ section in Ditmore). On a related note Kate Millett’s *The Prostitution Papers* provides a fascinating corollary to the artist/worker divide in *Tout va bien* with her account of “hell breaking loose” between academics/activists and prostitutes attending the first feminist conference on prostitution in 1971 (14-19).

whereas in *2 ou 3 choses* “Godard’s Juliette is as much a victim of American-style imperialism (through advertising) as the Vietnamese, whose oppression is evoked throughout the film” (Green et al 443). This is a state of affairs depicted without ambiguity when an American ‘john’ (appropriately called Johnny, a journalist, wearing a t-shirt with an American flag, no less) indulges in some extremely blunt “imperialism”, having Juliette and friend walk back and forth with TWA and Pan Am bags placed over their heads while he films them, before another example of complicated vertical and horizontal montage, with Marianne’s “America *über alles*” repeated over and over, interspersed with sounds of machine guns and a monologue from Juliette, over still images of dead and wounded Vietnamese. Not only are the French selling themselves to America, but the money is far from clean.

Thus where prostitution is already a naturalized phenomenon in *2 ou 3 choses*, in *Vivre sa vie* as Farocki and Silverman point out, “Nana slips so imperceptibly from conventional life into prostitution [...] It is as though Godard means to blur the dividing line—to suggest that it is not so easy to determine where conventional human interaction ends, and prostitution begins” (Silverman and Farocki 14). As David Harvey quotes Marx, the capitalist producer increasingly “plays the pimp” between the consumers and their sense of need, excites in them “appetites, lies in wait for each of [their] weaknesses—all so that he can demand the cash for the service of love” (qtd. in Harvey, *Postmodernity* 102). But the theoretician who has dealt most explicitly with the equation of money and prostitution is Georg Simmel:

we experience in the nature of money itself something of the essence of prostitution. The indifference as to its use, the lack of attachment to any individual because it is unrelated to any of them, the objectivity inherent in money as a mere means which excludes any emotional relationship—all this produces an ominous relationship between money and prostitution [...] Of all human relationships, prostitution is perhaps the most striking instance of mutual degradation to a mere means, and this may be the strongest and most fundamental factor that places prostitution in such a close historical relationship to the money economy, the economy of 'means' in the strictest sense. (Simmel, *Philosophy* 379)

When relationships have devolved to an economy of means, when the act of love has become akin to getting a “haircut” (*Recognitions* 360), community vanishes. In Simmel’s “Metropolis” essay, he once again points out the increasing rationalization and objectification of human relations in the city. The greater number of people, the anonymity, in a large city leads to a more reserved nature, the outer display of inner indifference and aversion to others. As Marina explicitly describes herself in *2 ou 3 choses*, “To define oneself in one word? Indifference”.

Marx too saw market exchange as the zero point of social community, noting that in traditional systems of society exchange occurred only on the boundary, between, not within, communities, going so far as to declare capitalist society “unsocial” (*Grundrisse*). Simmel managed to find a silver lining to this cloud, noting in *The Philosophy of Money* that this had a liberating effect on the community member thanks to the new limits placed on mutual obligation—a new, modern, form of freedom, in other words. But without such mutual obligation, the instinct for collectivity can then be exploited. Hence the success of fascist politics and advertising based on appeals to collectivity, and the success of advertising as Baudrillard discusses in relation to PAX, “Advertising plays on the presence/absence of an overall social body—on a *presumption of collectivity*” (*System* 194-5). Advertising is viewed as capitalism’s tool for generating an integrated, passive, populace, made up of consumers that accept advertising’s implicit promise that the capitalist system not only respects their individuality, but that it has their best interest, their happiness, at heart. Yet what is provided instead is a false collectivity of “lonely crowds”, a world of *Pierrot le fou*’s advertising conversations, a world where “there are no friends!” and where “must have” [spoken in English] is declared in French to mean “happiness” (*Nouvelle Vague*); a world of the “counterfeit” friendships of Agnes Deigh (Moore, *William Gaddis* 62) and Benny in *The Recognitions*. As the unfortunate Benny laments,

Friends. Do you think I have any friends? Everybody I know...I...they want something from me or I want something from them. Somebody asked me if my wife is here. My wife? I go home and we just sit and look at each other. Home? My home looks like a cocktail lounge. I read all the books. I read all the books about self-improvement, master yourself, develop

your personality, be a good God-damned Christian and get something for nothing.

(*Recognitions* 605)

UTOPIAN ENTERTAINMENT, ADDICTIVE PLEASURES

You'll meet a man who loves you. How could it be any other way? You'll work together, and maybe start a business of your own. It'll be wonderful. The world will be a better place. You'll see. We'll all be happy. [...] That's the way it must be. These troubles can't last. As long as there's food to eat we'll make it through. If not, there'll be another horror. And this time no one will be spared. But that won't ever happen again. Never again. Things always work out. — Akerman, *Window Shopping*

At this stage of the narrative, capitalism (exchange) has dissolved community and seen a turn away from sacred towards profane beauty. Collectivity is a tool for selling that, if anything, drives people further apart; and though advertising is the most obvious culprit, “entertainment” is deemed to be no less guilty of participating in the “top-down” integration of the populace, of playing a part in the manipulative smoke and mirrors of capitalism. Hence the Busby Berkeley synchronized execution squad of *Alphaville*, and, more interestingly, *Une femme est une femme* (1961). This “neorealist musical... fails to be either a musical or a comedy”, as Rosenbaum points out, thanks to Godard’s desire to take an “entertainment” apart and see how it functions (“Musical”)¹³⁵; a useful illustration of Godard’s early negative utopianism; a utopianism that relies on the dispelling of illusion, on showing the viewer that what they believe to be happiness is not happiness, but a play of light and sound in a pillar of smoke. In

¹³⁵ See Rosenbaum:

Relative to his own models, he failed to make thrillers out of *Breathless* and *Band of Outsiders*, a war film of *Les carabiniers*, a melodrama of *Contempt*, science fiction of *Alphaville* and *Anticipation* (from the anthology film *The Oldest Profession*), or even Shakespeare of *King Lear*. Part of this failure is inadvertent, part deliberate and purposeful: an ability to take things apart and understand how they function isn't always matched by an ability to put them back together again. (“Musical”)

In contrast, Chantal Akerman’s *Window Shopping* and Rivette’s *Haut, bas, fragile* demonstrate a different, more successful appropriation of the musical, the former in particular given Delphine Seyrig’s joyous final speech of hope for the future that does not deny the darkness of the past.

Godard's musical the characters sing and dance without much talent, and the story, such as it is, is banal: Angela (Anna Karina), a striptease dancer who dreams of living in a Hollywood musical, wants to have a child with her boyfriend (Jean-Claude Brialy), who does not seem to reciprocate, whereas her boyfriend's friend (Jean-Paul Belmondo), is more than willing to oblige. Packed with sly winks, cinematic tricks, in-jokes and various allusions to other films of the time, *Une femme* is certainly entertaining, but the deliberately atypical deployment of music sabotages the typical emotional effect one would expect. Godard withholds portions of the soundtrack, such that any emotional connection to the events on screen is interrupted or called into question, and characters only ever sing without musical accompaniment. The one portion of the film when a song is played in full occurs in a café with Karina and Belmondo, where the music plays from a record player; here Karina, considering Belmondo's offer, sees a photograph of Brialy and an ex-girlfriend and bursts into tears. Karina is subject to the effects of the diegetic music the way the viewer is typically affected by extra-diegetic music; in its absence, the banality of the moment and the manipulative effect of music is hammered home.

The power of music is, of course, a very old argument, one that Gaddis draws on in *Agapē*:
the real artist Plato warned us about, the threat to society and the, read Huizinga on Plato
and music and the artist as dangerous and art as dangerous and music in this mode and
that mode, the Phrygian mode to quiet you down and the tenor and bass Lydian to make
you sad and the soft and drinking harmonies. (4)¹³⁶

¹³⁶ Both Plato and Aristotle show a cautious respect for the power of music; Aristotle objected to children being educated in instruments involved in the Phrygian mode (the mode that inspires "enthusiasm"), rather suggesting that it be restricted to religious ceremonies and the theatre (*Politics* Book VIII), while Plato, the father of enthusiasm, states in his *Republic*: "As Damon says, and I am convinced, the musical modes are never changed without change in the most important of a city's laws" (1056; 424c). Godard's questioning approach to music is presented even more directly in *Sauve qui Peut*, where, as Godard describes it in his essayistic short video *Scenario de Sauve qui Peut*: "At different moments, we hear the music, like film music, at dramatic moments, when it accompanies an emotional moment. But sometimes the characters wonder, 'What is this music that we're hearing, that is always following me?' And then they say that it's next door or it's the radio". It is also true, however, that just as Godard renegotiates his views on beauty, so with music. This would be a discussion for another time, complicated even further by Godard's description of cinema as "our music" in *Notre Musique*, though the emphasis on harmony that Silverman and Farocki point out is present in *Nouvelle Vague*, playing only the most harmonious part of Schoenberg, for example, would perhaps be open to Rancière's objections to a cinema of consensus.

But there is also more recent research such as that of Salimpoor et al on the neurobiological effect of music: “Music, an abstract stimulus, can arouse feelings of euphoria and craving, similar to tangible rewards that involve the striatal dopaminergic system”. As the researchers point out, “Dopamine is pivotal for establishing and maintaining behavior”, with their “results further speak[ing] to why music can be effectively used in rituals, marketing or film to manipulate hedonic states”. It is then a short step to return to the notion of addiction, for nicotine, like music, is extremely effective at firing the reward apparatus of the nervous system, dopamine, the same neurotransmitters acted upon by psychoactive drugs such as cocaine and heroin¹³⁷. One could then describe entertainment, as Miller describes drug addiction, as performing a “self-medicating function”. A viewer feels pain, lack, scarcity, exhaustion, and medicates with a vision of abundance. The difference, one might object, is that the addict’s pleasure suggests nothing better, it is repetition of the same pleasure, an anti-social truth, in Derrida’s words: “We do not object to the drug user’s pleasure *per se*, but we cannot abide the fact that his or hers is a pleasure taken in an experience without truth” (Derrida, “Rhetoric” 26). But that might also be considered true of the musical in an age where the dominant discourse has it that there is no alternative to capitalism¹³⁸. Showering the viewer with music and colour in conjunction with a fantasy vision of capitalism and human relationships would then be about as utopian as any drug, and perhaps less useful; drug addiction at least embodies, as Slavoj Žižek has it, the limit case of capitalism’s injunction to enjoy (“Religion”).

There has, of course, been a significant amount of work proposing the opposite thesis, that entertainment presents a “utopian sensibility”. Dyer, for example, directly opposes the “traditional left-wing use of concepts of ‘manipulation’ and ‘false needs’” (375) with Hans Enzensberger’s argument that the “irresistible power” of the media is due not “to any sleight-of-hand but to the elemental power of

¹³⁷ Not to mention money itself: “The anticipation and realization of earning money is known to activate the same dopaminergic pathways as drugs and other rewards [...] and contingent management strategies use monetary rewards as a substitute for drugs in drug treatment programs” (Ascoli and McCabe).

¹³⁸ See Barker, for example, or Jameson’s *Archaeologies*, where he mourns this “universal belief” that “the historic alternatives to capitalism have been proven unviable and impossible, and that no other socioeconomic system is conceivable, let alone practically available” (5).

deep social needs which come through even in the present depraved form of these media” (Enzensberger qtd. in Dyer 375). While recognising both representational means (“stars are nicer than we are, characters more straightforward than people we know, situations more soluble than those we encounter” (373)) and non-representational means (“colour, texture, movement, rhythm, melody, camerawork” (373)), Dyer focuses on the latter due to the fact that criticism here seems “undeveloped” (374), and particularly on the power of music to embody emotion and thus inspire utopian feeling rather than presenting “models of utopian worlds”. “It presents...what utopia would feel like rather than how it would be organized” (373). The typical descriptions of entertainment “as ‘escape’ and as ‘wish-fulfilment’” (373) are simply different words for utopianism, according to Dyer. But, of course, in an all too familiar binary, this subversiveness is to a certain extent already anticipated in the “traditional left-wing” model of containment, as the work of Böhm and Batta on Lacan illustrate. Or, as Buchanan writes in relation to the work of Jameson, “the works of mass culture cannot be ideological without one at the same time being implicitly or explicitly Utopian as well” (83). While “ideology solicits our interest and investment by holding out the offer of utopia”, this is a utopia that “not only requires no action from us, not even so much as our considered belief; it could not accommodate our activity were we to decide to act. The image of the ‘good’ society underpinning the schlock romances Jameson refers to could not be realized by us, even if we wanted to, except as a fantasy” (Buchanan 95)¹³⁹.

“DECONSTRUCTING” ENTERTAINMENT, EDUCATING DESIRE

The point of discussing entertainment in conjunction with addiction is not to pathologize the former but simply to draw the connection with our earlier discussion of capitalism and addiction, to highlight that the framework within which Godard was operating denied (potentially addictive) pleasure a utopian effect within a capitalist system that is considered to rely on addictive consumption, on structured and regulated desire. At the same time, while work such as Dyer’s is part of a legitimate push

¹³⁹ See Jameson’s *Fables of Aggression*. Or, in *Archaeologies*, his amusing take on Bakhtin’s notion of carnival, “an ingenious narrative, which has no more historical relevance than any other ideological fantasy” (197-8). A more interesting approach to the unpredictable nature of desire would be Jane Bennett’s attempt to marry a kind of material vitalism with Rancière’s conception of the heterogeneous sensible in *Vibrant Matter*.

back against the extreme negativity of Adorno's conception of the culture industry, a push to create some space for the subject, some consideration of the addictive and manipulative possibilities of pleasure seems called for if one is to take this path, along with a closer analysis of desire, something more than a focus on "what utopia would feel like rather than how it would be organized" (Dyer 373).

This rather lackadaisical approach can be attributed at least partially to a legacy of misappropriation of Miguel Abensour's notion of the "education of desire". Where Jameson's early attempt to marshal some form of politicized desire, though it rested on a nostalgic feeling for an illusory plenitude, at least demanded some kind of political, critical framework, Dyer's opposition of entertainment's "how it feels" to the "how it is organized" of conventional utopian literature has its genealogy, as Christine Nadir points out, from Raymond Williams' essay "Utopia and Science Fiction" (1978), and further from E. P. Thompson's use of Miguel Abensour. Speaking of William Morris' *News from Nowhere*, Abensour identifies a move from classical utopian institution-building (as in the work of More) towards a "new utopian spirit" and the "education of desire" (Thompson qtd. in Nadir 26)¹⁴⁰. This, one would think, would be a perfect fit with cultural studies, as Abensour, in essays such as "Persistent Utopia", has worked towards understanding the "possible relations between utopia and democracy" (407). As he asks, "Is the struggle for a certain conception of democracy not one of the signs of the persistence of utopia?" (407). However, as Nadir goes on to say, the legacy of Williams' appropriation of Abensour's work was "understandings of desire, education, and utopia that contradict those in [his] actual work" (27), work built on critical theory such as Adorno and Horkheimer's *Dialectic of Enlightenment*. Nadir points out that while

utopian studies [and cultural studies] routinely treats desire as a latent yet absolutely unfixed and liberatory power when properly educated, Abensour understands desire as a space of both liberatory potential and profound vulnerability [...] To educate desire, then, is

¹⁴⁰ For a comprehensive account of the propagation of Abensour's work see Nadir (50-1, footnote 7).

to teach how utopian longing can itself lead to new forms of domination as desire is arranged and rearranged, again and again, by power and discourse. (Nadir 25)

Abensour, in other words, shows a consistent interest in “why—and how—utopian impulses give way to dystopian outcomes” (Nadir 27). Interestingly, Nadir’s critique is not new either, but one that can be traced back to Perry Anderson’s 1980 book *Arguments Within English Marxism*, pointing out Abensour’s work with Clastres and Lefort which “propound[s] the view that the origin of the State in primitive societies lies in the masochistic ‘desire’ to be dominated of the oppressed classes themselves” (Anderson 161-2); and the same can be said, as Deleuze & Guattari note, of fascism: “no, the masses were not innocent dupes; at a certain point, under a certain set of conditions, they wanted fascism, and it is this perversion of the desire of the masses that needs to be accounted for” (*Anti-Oedipus* 29)¹⁴¹. Tellingly, then, the “new utopian spirit [...] has as its task, once it has located the blind spots that carry out the reversal of modern emancipation, to inhabit them and engage in the work of deconstruction and critique so that a new path opens for utopia (Abensour qtd. in Nadir 26). It is this emphasis on “deconstruction”, however loosely the term is applied here, that is most useful in considering the subject at hand.

One should also keep in mind that while Abensour writes that what is new and powerful about Morris’ *News from Nowhere* is the “absence of educational method”, “of any ideal or plan for the moral education of humanity” (“Romance” 131), the book nevertheless offers a wide range of conditions for the newfound happiness of society, including, for example, the dissolution of “the sacred rights of property” (Morris, *News*, 91). The book itself is embedded in a whole set of specific circumstances that Abensour reads as central to Morris’ conception of the work and the (small, revolutionary audience’s) reception of the work (128), including the fact that the book was published by a radical press in a serial

¹⁴¹ Given Nadir’s insistence on pointing out the shortcomings of other scholars in relation to the lineage of Abensour’s work, not giving Abensour his “due”, one might say, it is only fair to point out that Nadir’s comments on the vulnerability of desire rings heavily of Anderson’s critique; and, as one of the few English critiques of Abensour’s ideas as read by Thompson, it is strange that Nadir’s otherwise extremely thorough essay makes no mention of it. Perhaps it is due to a wish not to credit Anderson’s larger criticism of the “obscurantism” of Abensour’s original formulation of the “education of desire” as “a fashionable philosophy of Parisian irrationalism” (161).

form; which might be compared to Godard's televisual experiments, and his comments on the closed, assembly-line nature of film in *Six fois deux*, for example¹⁴². And perhaps most importantly, "the essential technical innovations that [allow] for judgment on the progressive or revolutionary character of a work—consists in the abolition of the separation between producer and consumer [...] a call for consumers to themselves become producers" (142), bringing to mind of Deleuze and Guattari's statement in *Anti Oedipus* that "the only real relationship [is] that of production" (24). And indeed, here Deleuze and Abensour continue to show a shared interest: "If we must still speak of utopia [...] it is most assuredly not as an ideal model, but as revolutionary action and passion" (*Anti-Oedipus* 63).

The crux of the matter, however, is that in this formulation the necessary first step for any utopianism is to discuss not what utopia would look like, nor what utopia would feel like, but why humanity continues to create dystopias; why it continues to desire domination, or fascism. Neither utopia by design nor utopia by feeling are "ground-up" or grassroots, and if anything the emphasis on feeling is potentially more pernicious in that it is so *effective* (in its affectivity), if not in any utopian manner. Bill Krohn has commented that "someone once observed that utopian literature is inevitably dystopic without meaning to be because the visit to Utopia is always being shown around by an inhabitant who explains the codes of the perfect society in a way that makes them feel oppressive, whereas the inhabitants aren't even aware that they're obeying them" (39). One person's utopia is another's fascist state. But perhaps the final words on utopian entertainment should be left to William Morris himself:

As for your books, they were well enough for times when intelligent people had but little else in which they could take pleasure, and when they must needs supplement the sordid miseries of their own lives with imaginations of the lives of other people. But I say flatly that in spite of all their cleverness and vigor, and capacity for storytelling, there is something loathsome about them. Some of them, indeed, do here and there show some feeling for

¹⁴² See MacCabe for a transcription of Godard's conversation with Marcel regarding the production line of images in film (*Godard* 129-30).

those whom the history-books call “poor”, and of the misery of whose lives we have some inkling; but presently they give it up, and towards the end of the story we must be contented to see the hero and heroine living happily in an island of bliss on other people's troubles. (*News from Nowhere* 175-6)

It is exactly this that Godard points out in *2 ou 3 choses*, which concludes with a direct attack on advertising's promise of happiness. The camera cuts to a close up of a packet of Hollywood chewing gum, featuring a blissfully happy all-American couple, before the camera slowly pulls back to a wide shot, revealing the gum, and our happy couple, to be one amongst a multitude of American household products. As the camera zooms out, the narrator speaks:

Listening to the commercials on my transistor, and thanks to Esso, I drive off without a care on the road to dreams, I forget Hiroshima, I forget Auschwitz, I forget Budapest, I forget Vietnam, the housing problem, the famine in India, I forget everything except that I'm back at zero, and have to start from there.

The consumer avoids thinking about the catastrophes of the world via the soothing distractions of advertising and commodity. The choice of Hollywood gum is particularly appropriate: according to their official history, though gum was introduced into France along with US troops in the First or Second World War, there was no French chewing gum until the launch of “Hollywood” in 1952, supposedly by a returning American GI; their 1958 advertising campaign was based on “The American Dream”. What better example of a kind of American colonialism than a “French” product, introduced by American soldiers and officially introduced by another, that sells itself via Hollywood (the “dream factory”) and images of the “American Dream”? Hence the dissection of entertainment and the musical in *A Woman is a Woman*, and Godard's early concern with the prostitute as metaphor for the society of exchange; here, in relation to Abensour, one might mention that the figure of the prostitute can be construed as a perversion of the ideal synthesis of producer and consumer. Instead, as Benjamin points out, the prostitute is a synthesis of Producer and Product, “seller and sold in one” (*Arcades* 10).

AU REVOIR, TRAVAIL: WEIL, BATAILLE, MALRAUX

Le plein emploi pour une vie décente — Pialat, *L'Enfance Nue* (1968)

Which is not to say that Godard's early cinema does not also contain reference to the utopian cinema to come. In *2 ou 3 choses*, for example, though more of a dystopian than a utopian film, the narrator speaks of the desire to "create a new world", a desire that explains his need for artistic expression. The formulation of this new world, or the ability of art to contribute to such a formulation, was complicated dramatically by the events of May '68, however. During the general unrest Godard was attacked via graffiti, taking away even his status as honorary Parisian ("Godard: the supreme Swiss Maoist jerk" (anon qtd. in Knabb 451)), and repudiated on a number of occasions in the *Situationist International* (along with Baudrillard and Henri Lefebvre), as, for example, an unoriginal "Maoist liar [...] immediately *outmoded* by the May 1968 revolt" (anon qtd. in Knabb 379)¹⁴³. Despite being what many would consider the political filmmaker par excellence during the Dziga-Vertov years (and before; see Bertolucci's playful discussion of *Une femme est une femme* in *Before the Revolution*), Godard's approach to politics and art thus took a decided turn after this period. Yves Montand's passive director of advertisements in *Tout va bien* is the most obvious example of a new, questioning approach artist and worker, but perhaps the bluntest expression of a new attitude regarding art and politics appears in *Changer d'image* (1982), a video piece commissioned for the first anniversary of the election of François Mitterrand to the French presidency. Featuring no mention of Mitterrand, the piece is a paean to failure and an exercise in self-flagellation, as Godard relates an account of a failed attempt to revolutionise television in a "South American or African" country (Mozambique) over video of a man (presumably Godard himself) being interrogated and beaten by another man (presumably a State official). The most interesting fallout from May '68, however, involves the category of work, and the general upheaval in

¹⁴³ *Le Gai Savoir* (1968) would be derided for its "destructive style just as belatedly plagiarized and pointless as all the rest of his work" (qtd. in Knabb 378) by the Situationists, while on the other side of the fence, the ORTF, the government controlled television and radio network that would be of so little help to the participants of May '68 (see Sylvia Harvey 5), refused to show the film, which would also be refused a certificate for general release by the French censor (Dixon 99-100).

received Marxist wisdom regarding the centrality of the role of work and the worker to the achievement of political progress and community.

As Donald Reid notes in his article on *Film Socialisme*, at an impromptu question and answer session after a public screening of the film (having not shown up for the official press conference) “Godard said that there is less *travail* (work) now than when he was young; *emplois* (jobs) have taken its place. As a result there is less solidarity”. In its rational/Enlightenment sense, the relation of work to utopia had already been diagnosed as an illusion of sorts by Adorno and Horkheimer, speaking of the drug-induced haze of the capitalist eaters of the Lotus flowers:

This kind of idyll, which recalls the happiness of narcotic drug addicts reduced to the unendurable, is impermissible for the adherents of the rationale of self-preservation. It is actually the mere illusion of happiness, a dull vegetation, as meager as an animal’s bare existence, and at best only the absence of the awareness of misfortune. But happiness holds truth and is of its nature a result, revealing itself with the abrogation of misery. Therefore, the sufferer who cannot bear to stay with the Lotus-eaters is justified. He opposes their illusion with that which is like yet unlike: the realization of utopia through historical labor. (*Dialectic* 62-3)

And if Godard had already attempted to deconstruct the illusory *nostos* of capitalism, May ‘68 revealed the illusory nature of “that which is like yet unlike”. Scott Cutler Shershow, for example, in *The Work and the Gift*, ties the resurgence in the interest in the idea of the gift to the “historical crisis of work” (85), a crisis bound up with the historical circumstance of the limits of employment, but also with the interrogation of the idea of work as constitutive of community in Bataille, Blanchot, and Nancy. As Shershow quotes Nancy, community “is not the work of singular beings, nor can it claim them as its works”; the communism of the future thus “cannot arise from the domain of work” (Shershow 77). And if, as has been suggested, love of beauty had been scarred by association with Nazism, work did not fare any better: “*Arbeit macht frei*”, “Work liberates us; Work makes us free”, was used, as Nancy points out, to chilling effect at Auschwitz, a point made even more explicitly by Blanchot:

Concentration camps, annihilation camps [...] All the distinctive features of a civilization are revealed or laid bare (“Work liberates,” “rehabilitation through work”). Work, in societies where, indeed, it is highly valued as the materialist process whereby the worker takes power, becomes the ultimate punishment: no longer is it just a matter of exploitation or of surplus-value; labor becomes the point at which all value comes to pieces and the “producer,” far from reproducing at least his labor force, is no longer even the reproducer of his life. For work has ceased to be his way of living and has become his way of dying. Work, death: equivalents. And the workplace is everywhere; worktime is all the time.

(Blanchot, *Writing* 81)

Nancy thus turns to Bataille, the figure who “has gone farthest into the crucial experience of the modern destiny of community”, and whose work sprang from a particular “political exigency and uneasiness [...] the ordeal of seeing communism ‘betrayed’” (*Inoperative* 16) along with a “fascination with fascism inasmuch as it seemed to indicate the direction, if not the reality, of an intense community, devoted to excess” (16-17). Bataille’s *The Blue of Noon*, for example, presents a political malaise that would have seemed all too familiar post-May 68. In response to Troppmann’s demand to know why Lazare is a communist, even though “the working classes are done for”, all the latter can offer is a whisper that “One can always save one’s own soul” (49). The book also describes the unbreachable gap between bourgeois intellectual and worker; all the former can offer is his car: “I told him that there was no way for me to become a native worker, rather than a rich Frenchman in Catalonia for his own pleasure. But a car could be useful in certain cases, even when the circumstances were as risky as these” (79).

It is then no surprise that *Eloge de l’Amour* declares *The Blue of Noon* to be *the* novel of the Spanish Civil War, rather than the more typical *Man’s Hope (l’espoir)* by Malraux. However the same film also posits Simone Weil (along with Hannah Arendt) as the ideal woman, and this is a conflict that should not be underestimated. Both Bataille and Weil wrote for *La Critique sociale* and were associated with Boris Souvarine’s *Cercle communiste democratique*, yet, as Irwin notes, “their views on virtually

every topic appeared radically opposed” (Irwin 84)¹⁴⁴. One of the texts involved in their dispute was Malraux’s *La Condition humaine*; as Irwin summarizes, Bataille’s review of Malraux’s text in the November 1933 *La Critique sociale* was answered indirectly in the same issue by Weil’s review of the *Prison Letters of Rosa Luxemburg*. Bataille saw in *La Condition humaine* not only “an archetypal example of politically conscious fiction”, but support for his theories of economy as expenditure without return, on revolution as means not ends, the enabling condition for orgiastic sacrifice and communion (82). On the other hand, in her text on Luxemburg, Weil described a figure driven by “an aspiration to life and not to death, to effective action and not to sacrifice” (Weil qtd. in Irwin 85), quoting generously from “Luxemburg’s writings on the beauty and joy of life” (Irwin 85):

[f]or Weil, the ‘basis’ of Malraux’s novel and the ‘unity of all the characters’ lie in their shared, desperate hurling of themselves into the realm of action in the attempt to escape the ‘nothingness of [their] own existence.’ Revolutionary action functions for them as religion functioned for Pascal: as a means of flight from the self and its anguished emptiness [...] Under these conditions, revolutionary struggle is, like Pascalian religion, essentially an expression of psychological weakness. (Irwin 83)

Weil, as Irwin writes, “defended reason; compassionate solidarity with the oppressed; scrupulous moral reflection; pacifism; and religion” (Irwin 87). Unfortunately for Weil, her own tendencies, her own desire to sacrifice herself for the sake of the good not only undermined her arguments but eventually contributed to her death, characteristics that Bataille pinpointed specifically in the figure of the Catholic/Communist (or Christian/Marxist) Lazare, who “reeks of the grave”¹⁴⁵. If it is then unwise to discuss Bataille’s influence on Godard without discussing Weil, the answer is to return, momentarily, to Godard’s *Passion*.

¹⁴⁴ See also David Wills’ article on Bataille, Weil and *Eloge*.

¹⁴⁵ Interestingly, the “obsessed and sick” man (Weil qtd. in Irwin 87), as Weil described Bataille (and more or less as Bataille presents himself in the figure of Troppmann), and the thin-blooded, “dirty virgin”, as Bataille describes Lazare (Irwin 107), have their counterparts in *The Recognitions* in the figures of Anselm, reader of Sade, and Stanley, the good Catholic, whom Anselm would like to read Sade (183), and who eventually does (924).

For *Passion*, love and work are intertwined; the film is an investigation of “love and labour, the labour of love and the love of labour, loathing of labour” (Godard, *Scénario du film Passion*). The central narrative arc of the film concerns a Polish director, Jerzy, who is struggling to film a number of *tableaux vivants* based on classic paintings such as Goya’s *The Third of May 1808*, and Rembrandt’s *Night Watch*. There are a number of references to the troubles in Poland, including speculation as to whether Jerzy’s problems with his *Passion* are the result of concern with his homeland: to put this in some perspective, in 1982 the great Polish director Andrzej Wajda relocated to France in order to film *Danton*, examining the titular “man of the people” in his opposition to Robespierre’s Reign of Terror in a film that clearly asked questions about ethics, power, and politics relevant to the situation in Poland at the time. Relative to *Danton* there is a certain distance from such immediate political exigencies; instead *Passion* returns to more fundamental, or theoretical, questions as raised previously in films such as *Lotte in Italia* (1971), with its Marxist-Freudian description of love in the afternoon (Rohmer) as a class privilege, because the factory workers do not have the same freedom. Jerzy’s path has crossed that of Isabelle Huppert’s character, based on Simone Weil, who is attempting to organize a workers’ strike in the local factory. At the same time, though, *Passion* expands on the question of class structure by immediately setting up the correspondence of film and factory, as expressed by a factory worker who has taken a part in Jerzy’s film: “Your factory or his, it’s the same. Your factory and the film-set are just the same.” She had hoped the world of the Cinema would be calm and pleasant, full of trustworthy people, but the film extras have as much freedom as factory labour. The implicit villain here is Taylorization, the scientific organization of labour, or in Beller’s words, the “discipline and control” of the labour process and the worker. For Weil, utopia was a work-based question, where “labour is, to echo the words of Marx, ‘life’s prime want’” (McLellan 89), and the horror of mechanization resided primarily in the automatism of the factories. Labour, social and productive labour, is an essential activity. Yet Weil’s own attempt to get closer to the workers by taking employment at a factory was a dismal failure, except in so far as it provided an unvarnished, disillusioning experience of the possibilities of the worker: “[t]he slave is he to whom no good is proposed as the object of his labour except mere existence. Accordingly he must either be detached or fall to the vegetative level” (*Gravity and Grace* 180). Weil represents the

attempt to engage with the worker, but as the viewer was told ten years earlier in *Lotte*, “When you thought that you joined the masses, you drifted away from them”. Contrarily, the emphasis on movement and love, the movements of the factory and the movements of love in *Passion* is traceable to Bataille:

The two primary motions are rotation and sexual movement, whose combination is expressed by the locomotive’s wheels and pistons [...] These two motions are reciprocally transformed, the one into the other [...] It is the mechanical combination or transformation of these movements that the alchemists sought as the philosopher’s stone [...] Movement is the figure of love, incapable of stopping at a particular being, and rapidly passing from one to another [...] But the forgetting that determines it in this way is only a subterfuge of memory. (Bataille, “Solar” 6-7)

This emphasis on the movements of love come to overshadow the barely-present narrative of the strike, in line with the general philosophical trend of the time; yet in *Eloge*, not only is Weil cited, but one of the main characters is writing a cantata for Simone Weil, a cantata that is turning into an opera, in a reversal of Bast’s trajectory. Weil is then recuperated somewhat in *Eloge*, after *Passion*’s rejection of the transcendental aspects of her philosophy (as discussed in the first chapter), in what could be interpreted as a variation on the Goya/Giotto dialectic witnessed in *King Lear*.

More could be said on the struggle between the positions of Bataille and Weil in Godard, but the film that most elegantly and succinctly illustrates the substitution of love for work as the key concept of community is neither *Passion* and *Eloge*, but one of Godard’s most misread films, *Nouvelle Vague*. And though a discussion of the presence of the latter will appear in the final chapter in relation to the work of Nancy and Bataille, here it is enough to note that the intertitle “*Omnia Vincit Amor*” (“Love Conquers All”) is the first half of a quote from Virgil’s *Eclogues* X, where the love-sick Gallus wanders Arcadia. Though at first glance a positive sentiment (romantic love overcoming any obstacle), love in the *Eclogues* is a tyrant; the quote concludes with “*et nos cedamus amor*” (“and we surrender to love”). Marianne McDonald compares the victory of love in the *Eclogues* (which is a defeat for man, indeed a disaster for

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man, "Love is the same disaster for the flock and the flock's master" 3,101) with the victory of labour in the *Georgics*, with its "*Labor omnia vincit*" (1, 145): "Man suffers from *labor* as he does from *amor*, but he emerges from his sufferings with the visible fruits of his labors" (45). In Godard's film, on the contrary, man and woman both suffer from *amor* as much as labour, but only *amor* bears any fruit¹⁴⁶.

In contrast, throughout his career Gaddis displays a general lack of interest in the category of work except in so far as it concerns the artist. This is most visible in his version of the relation of the player piano to mechanization, contrasting dramatically with Kurt Vonnegut's take on the subject in the dystopian *Player Piano*, where the category of work is doomed: "Man has survived Armageddon in order to enter the Eden of eternal peace, only to discover that everything he had looked forward to enjoying there, pride, dignity, self-respect, work worth doing, has been condemned as unfit for human consumption" (Vonnegut, *Player Piano*, 254). Workers' movements, skills and expertise are recorded and transferred to machines, while the workers themselves are abandoned to the "Reclamation Corps"; in the world of *Player Piano*, there are only engineers and garbage collectors. In Gaddis' world, on the other hand, there are only artists (with minds), and the mob (with bodies); it is not workers who need fear the mechanized future, but artists, lest their art, even their vocal chords, be copied and reproduced. Love, on the other hand, is a constant concern, in fact a consistent answer to the ills of commodity society, in the form of *agapē*. The manner in which love can be an answer for Gaddis and yet lead only to death, while being a question for Godard and lead to community, is a question for the final chapter.

¹⁴⁶ This is also a contemporary revision of Dreyer's *Gertrud*, with its own opposition of work and love. Gertrud, who wants only two words on her tombstone, "*Amor Omnia*", found her first love ended by the words "A woman's love and a man's work are mortal enemies". In Godard's *Nouvelle Vague*, work's interference with love is non-gender specific.

Love and Death: Corpses *Sous l'Eau*, Community *Sur l'Eau*

Having diagnosed a society-wide lack of love, it is no surprise that both artists' most radical attempts to outmanoeuvre the commodity involve not only a reinvention of love but also draw on the commodity's traditional enemy, the gift. Working from two different conceptions of love, eros and agapē, both define an ethics of love that can also be described as an ethics of the other. Sometimes misread as Godard's most hermetic work, *Nouvelle Vague*'s investigation of eros is in fact his most intertextual and communicative, an entry into contemporary post-1968 debates surrounding the commodity's typical opposition, the gift, love, and the possibility for non-fascistic community. Though readings of *Nouvelle Vague* in light of philosophy of the gift may seem familiar, the importance of resituating this particular film, so trenchantly named, as a key film in Godard's attempt to rethink community cannot be underestimated. From here Godard turns to an interest in the ethics of Emmanuel Levinas, perhaps the most famous ethics of the other, in the backward-and-forward-looking *Notre Musique*. Where Godard's hopes begin with eros, in contrast Gaddis' rejection of a "pastoral" solution, and view of the world as phantasmagoria, allows him only a continued mourning for a lost agapē and a focus on a (transcendental in spirit) noble death. Though Gaddis attempts to find another path to such a community with his final work, *Agapē Agape*, the insistence on the need for a return to an ethic of agapē, the original ethic of the gift, or charity, remains both relatively constant and under-theorised. Common to both, then, is an 'impossible' ethics of the other: one nostalgic, and the other messianic, or perhaps infinitely deferred. *Film Socialisme*, though ambiguous, arguably brings the two authors even closer, hence the chapter concludes with a short contextualization of the "dissensual" possibilities of both Godard's *Film Socialisme* and Gaddis' approach to death and democracy via the work of Rancière, a philosopher who has provided one of the most interesting paths through the minefield of commodity, catastrophe, and Romanticism. Discussion begins, however, with a more quotidian (though no less complex) matter: the question of romance.

HISTOIRE(S) D'AMOUR

I have always made films about couples. — *Petites Notes à propos du film Je vous salue Marie*

Godard's statement in *Petites Notes* is certainly accurate; the turn from work to love exemplified by *Nouvelle Vague* could also be termed a return. The treatment of love *within* these films about couples undergoes a radical transformation, however. In Godard's city of Alphaville, for example, where societal roles (such as licenced prostitute) are assigned, not chosen, and dangerous words and meanings such as love are expunged, love makes its appearance almost as a *deus ex machina*. The spy Lemmy Caution is given a book of poetry ostensibly by Eluard in order to defeat Alpha 60, but it is the restoration of Anna Karina to individuality and the resultant restoration of love and desire that heralds the destruction of and escape from Alphaville: "[t]hink of the word love,' [Caution] tells her as they're trying to find their way out of the collapsing Alphaville, whereupon, without delay, [Karina] points them in the right direction" (Pérez 353). It is then of little surprise that, despite his interest in science fiction and utopia, Fredric Jameson has dismissed the message of *Alphaville* (very loosely based, one might note, on a pro-Platonic/anti-Aristotelian novel by A. E. Van Vogt, *The World of Null-A*) as "at best as trivial as that of *Fahrenheit 451*" (*Geopolitical* 179). The same could be said of *Anticipation*, the short film that Godard contributed to *Le plus vieux métier du monde* (*The Oldest Profession* 1967), which ends with the creation of the first kiss, and with it, perhaps, love. Though one could certainly read back the surrealist influence of Eluard, the viewer would still be left with films that are entirely too black and white, particularly when compared to the complexity (and lush colour) of his later films¹⁴⁷. As Benjamin describes it, the "love" of surrealism is more about intoxication, ecstasy, a "profane illumination", than the other person: "The lady, in esoteric love, matters least [...] Breton [...] is closer to the things that Nadja is close to than to her" ("Surrealism" 210).

¹⁴⁷ This is certainly a critique of trite readings of, or the triteness of, Bretonian surrealism, as well as Godard's films. Chris Darke, for example, writes that: "All that surrealism stood for—the creative power of love, the irrational as a liberating force, the 'marvellous' discovered in the everyday—is irreducibly hostile to a technocratic society dedicated to the values of 'logic,' 'order' and 'prudence'" (54).

By *Sauve qui peut*, perhaps Godard's darkest film, matters have become more complex. The theme of prostitution is still present in the character of Isabelle Huppert and friend (and sex for money is depicted in Godard's favourite metaphor of the assembly line), but love is no longer a simple answer. The Godard of the film is divorced with a daughter, and his current relationship is disintegrating. Everything is under question, the city, the country, the image, and most importantly, love. Here Godard stands in good company; Julia Kristeva, author of *Tales of Love* (or *Histoires d'amour*) for example, has diagnosed the lack of an "amatory code" in modern life. As she states:

we are experiencing a disintegration of "Our" civilization, and thus of the social bond in general and the lover's bond in particular [...] one of the characteristics of the crisis in the West is that we no longer have a homogeneous lover's discourse. There is no more religion, which once served as a lover's discourse but is currently breaking down. Nor is there a homogeneous aesthetic, which means that we no longer have a lover's code rooted in an aesthetic practice such as that of the troubadours or that of the romantics.

(*Interviews* 69-70.)

Everything that has been discussed up to this point, addiction, the commodity, partake of, or pretend to (try and fill the lack of), an amatory code made absent in part by the decay of the religious narrative. Helen Keane, for example, discusses addiction as a form of intimacy, and Buck Morss frames her discussion of desire for the commodity with the rhetoric of the lover: "The pleasure of mutual sympathy, when I find my companion entering into my situation as I into his, is replaced by the pleasure of empathy with the commodity [...] objects that I pursue with the fervor of a lover" (Buck-Morss 452).

But Kristeva's work also exhibits the impetus for going beyond the simplicity of *Alphaville*, for, as Julia Kristeva writes in a passage that presages much of the following discussion of Godard¹⁴⁸:

When one dreams of a happy, harmonious, utopian society, one imagines it built upon love, since love exalts me at the same time as it exceeds or overtaxes me. Yet, far from

¹⁴⁸ *Eloge de l'Amour* (*In Praise of Love*) is also the title in English of the first section of Kristeva's *Histoires d'amour* (1983) (*Tales of Love*).

amounting to an understanding, passionate love can be equated less with the calm slumber of reconciled civilizations than with their delirium, disengagement, and breach. A fragile crest where death and regeneration vie for dominance. (*Tales* 4)

Love for Kristeva, and for Godard in his later films, is not an answer but a problem to be investigated; paraphrasing Malraux on Goya, for early Godard love was the answer, in late Godard, love becomes a question. For Gaddis, on the other hand, a certain conception of love never ceases to be the answer, and also never ceases to be missing.

But how does one analyse love? Miéville's words in *Soft and Hard* (1986) set up the problem:

I think some things are inaccessible and can't be shown. For instance, when it comes to love relationships, love scenes, once you go beyond the Hollywood kiss you don't know how or what to show. You can only show other images of a process at work.

A process visible in the early equations of love and work in *Passion* (1982), the decision to adapt *Carmen* in *Prénom Carmen* (1983)—recalling that Nietzsche described *Carmen* as containing the only “conception of love [...] worthy of a philosopher”, love “translated back into nature”—and most interestingly, 1985's *Je vous salue Marie*. A modern retelling of the virgin birth, the film was denounced (generally unseen) as blasphemous by elements of the Catholic church on one hand whilst being heralded as part of a new “spiritual” Godard by some critics on the other; it was described, for example, as “re-anchoring his [Godard's] faith in the divine” (154), by critic Wheeler Winston Dixon in his 1997 survey of Godard's work. The key to *Je vous salue Marie*, however, is something entirely human. In *Petites Notes* Godard and Miéville point out the link between the Gospel and psychoanalysis; the doctor who examines Mary was at one time to be called Dr Freud, and Miriam Rousseau was originally to appear in a film based on Freud's *Dora*. As Godard states in *Petites Notes*, the work of another psychoanalyst, Françoise Dolto's *L'Évangile au risque de la psychoanalyse* (*The Gospel at the Risk of Psychoanalysis*, 1977), showed “how the texts in the Bible relate to us very deeply, and how the Church

has damaged them”¹⁴⁹. Rather than the Bible as a message from the divine, however, this is the Bible as literary text, as Godard writes again of Simone Weil in *Eloge*: “You know what she said about the Bible? That it wasn’t a theory about God but a theory about Man”. Or, as Laugier stresses of Dolto and Godard, “What is Dolto saying, and what is Godard’s cinema showing, if not that ordinary life may be heroic and that what Mary accomplishes, even if not particularly extraordinary, is ultimately miraculous?” (36) Another lesson, in other words, in *la vie quotidienne*. Though Godard has an intense interest in the sacred, this is the sacred as conceived by Bataille (whose project is variously described as atheology, or heterology), which is certainly not to be conflated with the “divine”. The sacred for Bataille is a question of communication and community, of “undetermined fusion” versus profane separation (*The Absence of Myth* 114), thus as Richardson writes in his introduction to *The Absence of Myth*, the loss of myth, the absence of the sacred, “meant a failure of communication which touched all levels of society” (13).

It is therefore within a quotidian frame of reference that *Je vous salue Marie* must be read, as an investigation of desire, jealousy, and a lesson in non-possessive love. As Dolto writes, “[t]here is always a rending, a deficiency, an impossible encounter, and not a relationship of possession” (qtd. in Laugier 28). The central scene of the film, a scene that has almost achieved “fetish status” according to Laura Mulvey (87), involves Mary in effect teaching Joseph not only “the proper way to say ‘I love you’”, as Gianvito writes (96), but how to love. To return to Nietzsche’s comments on *Carmen*, those who misunderstand love “believe one becomes selfless in love because one desires the advantage of another human being, often against one’s own advantage. But in return for that they want to possess the other person” (159). Mary, however, teaches Joseph that love and the need to possess, to master the beloved, are incompatible¹⁵⁰.

¹⁴⁹ See also Blanchot’s citation of Levinas in *The Writing of the Disaster*: “To acknowledge how literature acts upon men—this is perhaps the ultimate wisdom of the West; perhaps in this wisdom the people of the Bible will recognize itself” (141).

¹⁵⁰ The effectiveness of Godard’s critique has been criticised by some. Mulvey, for example, reads an acceptance of feminine “mystery” that results in a “femininity and female sexuality...solved and sanitized”, a critique that applies more generally to the work of Lacan (and also Levinas), hence the number of feminist critiques of Lacan (such as Irigaray and Spivak). But Mulvey also gives Godard some credit: “While trying to decode a deep-seated but interesting misogyny, I came to think that Godard’s cinema knows its own entrapment [...] For feminist curiosity, it is still a gold mine” (87); see also Callahan’s article “Gravity and
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NOUVELLE VAGUE: COMMUNITY SAVED FROM DROWNING

Madame mustn't believe that servants don't understand. However great the distance between two people, they're not so very different. Hold two hands close or far away — they're still just like each other. —Guitry, *Désiré*

The question of mastery is posed in more depth in *Nouvelle Vague*, and if Joseph and Mary were the “ideal couple” for Godard (and Dolto), the couple in *Nouvelle Vague* are “every couple” “[s]ince the beginning” (*Nouvelle Vague*, intertitle). Just as Murnau presents his couple in *Sunrise* as being “of no place and every place”, in Godard’s film, as Silverman and Farocki gloss, “since the origin of the world lovers have been metaphorically drowning each other in lakes” (221). Elena and Lennox are not typical “characters” but “archetypes”, representing the “heterosexual couple at the end of the twentieth century [...] still defined by dominance and submission” (197); here, in contrast to *Numéro deux*, the film provides an illustration of the diminishing dependence on other people (sexually and economically). There is no child to be looked after, no bills to pay¹⁵¹. The film describes a kind of “psychic ‘ledger’” of libidinal investment (204) between the couple, structured by the Hegelian/Lacanian master/slave relationship (inverted, as Silverman and Farocki point out, as in *Nouvelle Vague* it is the master, rather than the slave, who works). In the first part of the film, Elena is dominant, Lennox is passive, without memory and hence without identity. In the second part, Lennox becomes the master, takes over the business, and Elena is left a shadow of her former self.

The key shots of the film, however, focus on the hands. Over the image of Elena and Lennox’s hands reaching towards each other is heard a phrase which would have been familiar to any reader of Bernanos’ *Diary of a Country Priest* (1951), or more likely, any viewer of Robert Bresson’s adaptation:

Grace”. And, after all, he is again in good company; not only Lacan, but also Duras and Blanchot, after Bataille; whose *Madame Edwarda* suggests that feminine “mystery” does not necessarily involve solutions or sanitization. See also Aumont’s “Mortal Beauty” (107-8) for a relation of Levinas’ other to Godard’s understanding of beauty).

¹⁵¹ As Kristeva writes, “the couple, as a unity of production, is much less necessary now than it was in the past, we have become increasingly aware of the psychic autonomy and divergent psychic interests of the two sexes” (Kristeva, *Interviews* 70).

“O what wonder to be able thus to give what one does not own oneself, O sweet miracle of our empty hands”¹⁵². Bernanos was a devout man, for whom to exchange is human, to give, divine: “Among us we can speak only of an *exchange*. God alone *gives*, only he [...] Between one man’s hand and another’s there intervenes, I firmly believe, more than just the density of this world. It may well be that, from so far away, all we are capable of is the *gesture* of giving. It is God who actually gives” (qtd. in von Balthasar 532). In *Diary* the reference to “empty hands” occurs after the priest has finally “saved” a woman, the Countess, embittered by the death of her infant son; in the book, the priest continues: “The hope that was dying in my heart blossomed again in hers. The spirit of prayer I had thought irretrievably lost in myself was given back to her by God”. This, along with the obvious Sistine chapel reference, would seem to suggest, again, some kind of divine gift. However, as with *Je vous salue Marie*, as Silverman & Farocki stress, “here the force of creation is human rather than divine love” (203); God is still either unknown or an enemy, and it is explicitly stated that “Abstract love doesn’t exist”. Godard is instead participating in a tradition of rethinking the gift, love and the divine. Some years later, for example, in *On the Name* (1995), Derrida links to Plotinus the idea of giving what one does not have, in regard to the Good: “God therefore no longer has anything, and, if he gives, as the God of Plotinus [...] it is also what he does not have, insofar as he is not only beyond being but also beyond his gifts” (70)¹⁵³.

The gift, as Derrida describes its ideal formulation, is “that which interrupts economy [...] That which, in suspending economic calculation, no longer gives rise to exchange” (Derrida *Given* 7). As

¹⁵² The same quote is heard not only in the famous Elizabeth Taylor/Ravensbruck sequence of the *Histoire(s)* 1A, as well as in an adapted form, ‘O what wonder to look at what one cannot see / O sweet wonder of our blind eyes’ (Williams, “European Culture” 135), but in Godard’s ads for Girbaud. The story of the adaptation of *Diary of a Country Priest* would have been extremely well known amongst anyone related to the *Cahiers du Cinéma*, as it was one of the main examples cited in “A Certain Tendency of the French Cinema” (1954), an article by Truffaut that attacked the traditional cinema of France, the “cinema of quality”. But the film would have had a much more personal meaning for Godard, for Truffaut ended his infamous 1973 letter to Godard, the final piece of correspondence between the two former friends, with another quotation from the film: “If I had, like you, failed to keep the promises of my ordination, I would prefer it to have been for a woman’s love rather than for what you call your intellectual development” (Truffaut, *Letters* 390-1).

¹⁵³ Derrida points out that the Lacanian lineage rests on two essays, “La direction de la cure” and “La signification du phallus” (*Given Time* 2). Derrida also points out that the phrase “to give what one does not have” appears in Heidegger, in a discussion that ties intimately the gift, the hand, and money (and counterfeit money) (*Given Time* 159-60). Barthes, on the other hand, discussing Plato’s theory of the Hermaphrodites, states that “desire is to lack what one has—and to give what one does not have: a matter of supplements, not complements” (Barthes, *Lover’s Discourse* 226).

Frow notes, both the gift and the commodity are “not *objects* at all [...] but transactions and social relations” (124)¹⁵⁴. Or, as Adorno comments on the decline of the gift in *Minima Moralia* (section 21, 42-3): “All relations which are not distorted, indeed perhaps what is reconciliatory in organic life itself, is a gift.” It is not surprising, then, to find that Raoul Vaneigem, the most influential “other” member of the Situationist International, author of *The Revolution of Everyday Life* (published in the same year as Debord’s *Society of the Spectacle*), called on the gift as a new foundation for society. In a chapter entitled “Exchange and Gift”, Vaneigem contrasts the feudal version of the gift, “a sort of haughty refusal to exchange”, with a revolutionary pure gift of the proletariat. Yet Derrida points out that the gift is not only impossible, “but *the impossible*” (7). Of Mauss, then, Derrida writes that he “speaks of everything but the gift” (24); he speaks instead of the *circle*. The pure gift would result in the breaking of the circle, “Mauss has learned that the *pure* gift or the gift that is *too good*, the excess of generosity of the gift—in which the pure and good gift would consist—turns into the bad; it is even the worst” (64), the bad or poisonous gift which “puts the other in debt”, citing the equal readiness of “to give life” [*donner la vie*] and “to give death” [*donner la mort*] (12)¹⁵⁵. For the gift to be a gift, in fact, requires that there be no

¹⁵⁴ The gift is also the category to which authors turn when they want to redeem (by transforming) the commodity or the work of art as commodity in some manner. Schepperman from *JR*, for example, has signed away the rights to all of his paintings to Zona Selk; who is simply storing them away to “appreciate”, rather than be appreciated, presumably until his death (409). When Selk confiscates the one piece the artist has managed to (illegally) sell and display, Schepperman hides himself away in a small room, away from the control of his financial backer. He needs his work to be seen, to have his art communicated. Schepperman cannot create whilst his art is being used for purely mercenary purposes, but if the commodity form is truly inescapable what choice does he have? It is this quandary, or one like it, that led Lewis Hyde to propose an alternative model. In *The Gift* (1979), Hyde draws on the work of Mauss to propose that the work of art, though it may end up as a commodity, is produced as a gift. More important than this gift/art parallel, however, which is little more than an enabling myth, is the relation of the gift to the social.

¹⁵⁵ Interestingly, given the similarity of his perspective to Godard’s on consumer culture during the sixties, and the negative image of Godard he becomes after, one can also look at the role of the gift in Baudrillard. Following Gane one can identify two similar positions: the first position dominated by Marxian commodity analysis of “advanced capitalist societies, as patterns increasingly dominated by semiological relations...so that consumption could only be explained as a process involving the consumption of signs themselves”; the second position, on the other hand, follows the work of Durkheim, “radicalised through Mauss and Bataille”, resulting in a “critique of capitalist consumption as corrosive not of human relations...but of more fundamental symbolic exchange relations articulated around ritual, gift, initiation, reversibility” (Gane, *Baudrillard* 4-5). However for Baudrillard the Image is simulation, and art no longer has the power to create the possible worlds that Godard, Miéville speak of in *The Old Place* (“Art isn’t capable any longer of creating this distance, this other scene or other dimension, this alternative world, this parallel universe, which isn’t ‘art for art’s sake’, but a kind of challenge to the reality principle and to reality itself” (*Fragments* 88)), and love “and the carnal act are only so much seductive finery” (*Seduction* 86) where seduction is an “enigmatic duel” (80). For Godard, the Image is matter (reality), and the gift is the foundation for a discussion of the “duel” that is not seduction but love.

memory of the gift, for even the “simple recognition [of the gift] suffices to annul the gift” (13), and it is perhaps here that the importance of memory in the film comes into play. Having received the gift of Elena’s hand, Delon is rendered impotent, passive, unable to save himself when he falls/is pushed into the lake. Forgetting, then, is a necessary precondition for the gift qua gift for Derrida (23), but forgetting is not a viable course for the Godard of the *Histoire(s)*, providing an explanation for the disastrous consequences of Lennox’s lack of memory, exhibited through his inability to answer the gardener’s question: “Have you ever been stung by a dead bee?”¹⁵⁶ Lennox only satisfactorily answers this question at the conclusion of the film, when the economy of the pure gift has been revealed to be a false friend, and memory safe to return.

While discussion of the gift, or readings such as Silverman and Farocki’s of something like an ethics of love within *Nouvelle Vague*, are an invaluable beginning, they are not, however, the main point of interest. After his drowning, Delon re-enters as Richard, an aged version of his man of capital from Antonioni’s *L’eclisse*. His reappearance is accompanied by an intertitle from Rimbaud, “*Je est un autre*”, which carries with it once again the work of Kristeva, for whom “in love ‘I’ has been an *other*” (Kristeva, *Tales* 4)¹⁵⁷. Speaking in interview with Philippe Petit, Kristeva connects this to the project of overturning traditional notions of the self after May ‘68 in order to create “less monolithic, more polyphonic communities” (*Revolt* 64), and it is the question of community, and the importance of Bataille, that has been a key absence in discussions of the film. Of course there is a certain ambiguity built in here, given Bataille’s ties with the work of Lacan (and vice versa). A contributor to the Surrealist journal *Minotaur*, Lacan not only married Bataille’s ex-wife but his concept of *jouissance* “translates Bataille’s concepts of waste, expenditure, erotic excess and transgression” (Rabaté 18). But there is also context. In 1983 Nancy produced the essay “*La Communauté Désœuvrée*” (The Inoperative Community, or The Unworking/Idle Community), an interrogation of the concept of community removed from the traditional Marxist domain of work, beginning with the work of Bataille. Subsequently, Maurice Blanchot published

¹⁵⁶ A reference to Howard Hawks’ *To Have and Have Not* (1944).

¹⁵⁷ “*Je est un autre*” was previously also Anna Karina’s cry for help in *Vivre sa vie*. One might also consider its relation to the “true love changes me / false love leaves me as I am” of *2 ou 3 choses*.

a response to Nancy's work, *The Unavowable Community*¹⁵⁸. Giorgio Agamben's contribution, *The Coming Community*, appeared the same year as *Nouvelle Vague*; this was (and is) a conversation still very much alive. Bataille is here shown to be a precursor to poststructuralist thought, "a thought of difference" (Noys 17), as well as one of the foremost theorists of "lack" and community¹⁵⁹:

We are discontinuous beings, individuals who perish in isolation in the midst of an incomprehensible adventure but we yearn for our lost continuity. We find the state of affairs that binds us to our random and ephemeral individuality hard to bear. Along with our tormenting desire that this evanescent thing should last, there stands our obsession with a primal continuity linking us with everything that is. (Bataille, *Erotism* 15)

Death in Bataille is related to the sacred and to *sacrifice*; in *Theory of Religion* he writes that to "sacrifice is to give as one gives coal to the furnace" (Bataille 49), or in the same text, "to sacrifice is not to kill but to relinquish and to give" (48-9)¹⁶⁰. It is said that Bataille wanted the secret *Acéphale* community to be consummated with a ritual human sacrifice; a sacrifice in which the executioner would also die¹⁶¹., Bataille opposes the ordinary, profane world of individuals, the "order of things", to the world of the sacred, the "order of intimacy", of undivided continuity and animality in which humans are lost "like water in water" (19). Sacrifice is thus a search for lost intimacy, a lost immanence, a lost community. Or, as Blanchot writes:

¹⁵⁸ Nancy's essay "*La Communauté Désœuvrée*" first appeared in the journal *Aléa* issue 4 in 1983, before being gathered in book form with additional essays in 1986. Blanchot's text also appeared in 1983. For a more comprehensive discussion of the history of Nancy's text and Blanchot's rejoinder there is Nancy's own "The Confronted Community".

¹⁵⁹ See also Michelson's identification of the points of agreement of Frankfurt School critique and Bataille's, including experience of fascism, and the rule of "homogeneity"/the rule of Enlightenment (123-4).

¹⁶⁰ Literally spelled out, only half-ironically, "S.A.C.R.E.D.", when Goya's *la maja desnuda* is revealed "The disasters of war for the crimes of love [...] All deals are sacred. S.A.C.R.E.D." (*Nouvelle Vague*); the film also features an intertitle that reads "*1,2,3 Kunst Ist Frei*" (Art is Free).

¹⁶¹ Jacques Rivette, for whom the conspiracy is always of interest (as in *Out 1*), provides an interesting take on sacrifice and community in *Haut, bas, fragile*. A secret society is presented where a deal of cards supposedly decides who will die, and who will perform the execution. The execution is subsequently revealed to be a fraud, an act for the benefit of Louise; yet her "execution" of another does however both cure her vertigo and herald her successful reintegration into the "community" after a five year coma.

To remain present in the proximity of another who by dying removes himself definitively, to take upon myself another's death as the only death that concerns me, this is what puts me beside myself, this is the only separation that can open me, in its very impossibility, to the Openness of a community. (*Unavowable* 9)

So it is that where in *Vivre sa vie* the viewer is presented with a maxim of Montaigne, "*Il faut se prêter aux autres et se donner à soi-même*", of which Godard would (in interview) offer a transformative gloss, stating that the film "will prove Montaigne's saying that you to have to give yourself to others and not only to yourself", a gloss "that not only eliminates the distinction between 'lend' and 'give,' but—if anything—privileges the other over the self" (Silverman and Farocki 3), in *Nouvelle Vague* love, community and death are inextricable, and a third term is added: "We realize too late whether a heart was only lent to us, given to us, or sacrificed".

Godard also describes the falsity of a nostalgic view of immanent community, replaced by a community of "an infinity of singulars":

Could it be our view of the past is false, since we're always told about assemblies of men, but never whom they gathered around. Could it be we try to recapture what happened before we were born? [...] Could it be we say: "women", "children", "boys", unaware that these words no longer have a plural, only an infinity of singulars? It could! (*Nouvelle Vague*)

This is a view mirrored in Nancy's *Inoperative Community*, where all nostalgia for community, "present at every moment in [the Occident's] history" is false:

Community has not taken place [...] It did not take place for the Guayaqui Indians, it did not take place in an age of huts; nor did it take place in the Hegelian "spirit of a people" or in the Christian agape [...] Nothing, therefore, has been lost, and for this reason nothing is lost. We alone are lost, we upon whom the "social bond" (relations, communication), our

own invention, now descends heavily like the net of an economic, technical, political, and cultural snare. (11-12)

This felt “loss” is in fact “constitutive of “community” itself”, as the fulfilled promise of immanence “would instantly suppress community, or communication, as such” (12). The only two truths of immanence would then be death and fascism, the latter deemed a product of the Christian desire for communion (35). Nancy’s community is then a community of “finite beings”, of singularities confronted with other singularities: “the ‘origin’ of community or the originary community—is nothing other than the limit: the origin is the tracing of the borders upon which singular beings are exposed” (33). But it is also likely that Godard has already contributed to this discussion. In *Six fois deux* (1976) individuals are described as constrained by “surfaces” they wish to breach in order to reach their own image of the other person (“a third person”), and where “togetherness” is the state of two individuals at the limit of their respective surfaces.

Bataille brings Nancy (and Godard) back to the theme of love, and lovers. “For Bataille, community was first and finally the community of lovers” (*Inoperative* 36). It is lovers that touch, that expose the limit of immanence, while death (for example the lovers’ mutual suicide (12, 39)) is integral to the revelation of community: “Death is indissociable from community [...] Community is revealed in the death of others” (14-15); not only that, but intimacy is figured as a *drowning*, a joyous drowning that is both a sharing and dividing, and that exposes “the singularity of their love” to community (39). In which case one might rethink *Nouvelle Vague*, and ask if the drowning scenes do not in fact serve a dual purpose: as a representation of death, of sacrifice, in reference to Bataille, but also as a representation of the otherwise elided physical intimacy between the couple. One might also think of the importance of the “and”, here: for Nancy community “consists in the appearance of the *between* as such: you *and* I (between us)”. Though here the “*and* does not imply juxtaposition, but exposition [...] ‘you (are/and/is) (entirely other than) I’ [...] Or again, more simply: you shares me (‘toi partage moi’)” (29). Nevertheless, how can this not be an attractive “image” of community for Godard, an image where

community is revealed as a montage of singular finite beings, or more particularly, man (image) + woman (image) = community (communication).

Even more relevant to *Nouvelle Vague* is the section of *The Inoperative Community* titled “Shattered Love”, where the challenge of love is presented: “In one sense [...] love is the impossible, and it does not arrive, or it arrives only at the limit, while crossing. It is also for this reason that it is missed by philosophy and no less by poetry” (99). If Nancy aims to redress, at least partially, the former, it is reasonable to propose that Godard attempts the latter. Both, for example, are concerned with the economy of love; or the destruction of economy by love, and here Nancy also poses the question of the divine gift, while at the same time confirming humanity’s imprisonment in immanence.

Love frustrates the simple opposition between economy and noneconomy. Love is precisely—when it is, when it is the act of a singular being, of a body, of a heart, of a thinking—that which brings an end to the dichotomy between the love in which I lose myself without reserve and the love in which I recuperate myself, the opposition between gift and property [...] the separation is thus surmounted only because it is annulled in its principle: God gives only what he possesses infinitely (in a sense, he thus gives nothing), and reciprocally, he possesses only what he gives [...] Love brings an end to the opposition between gift and property without surmounting and without sublating it. (96)

The Inoperative Community describes love as a matter of arrivals and departures, of alterity and alteration that comes about by a touch, and while this is designated as a transcendence, it is only in so much as the “love break” allows for the shattering of the closure of the immanent subject, who is in effect made “transparent” by the experience of love, which is the experience of another immanent being: love, transcendence, figured as an opening up or breaking into of immanence “the disimplication of the immanence that can come to it only from the outside” (97), is nevertheless an experience of finitude: of another’s finitude, and, of course, one’s own, “finitude’s dazzling presentation” (99).

Nancy’s is a pointedly Heideggerian analysis; the meeting of finite beings is an ontological necessity of the world of Being, or Dasein, the “putting into play of Being in the Dasein and as the

Dasein is indissociable from the following: that the world of the Dasein is right away a world ‘that I share with others’, or a ‘world-with.’” (103) While acknowledging the importance of Levinas’ “metaphysics of love” as a precursor, Nancy declares that “love remains *equivocal* for Levinas, reducing itself to egotism”, criticising the dialectical aspect of Levinas’ emphasis on the primacy of the “epiphany of the face” (105). Nancy’s community of singular plural is distinct from a Levinasian community; but before rushing to label *Nouvelle Vague* a potentially Heideggerian interrogation of love on the way to the Levinasian/Blanchovian ethics of *Notre Musique*, there is a confounding factor that needs to be considered, in this case, the (often confounding) work of Blanchot¹⁶².

NOUVELLE VAGUE: A RÉCIT OF TWO LOVERS

“Mais c’est un récit que je voulais faire. Je le veux encore.” — Nouvelle Vague

Isn’t it Lacan who said (maybe an inaccurate quotation): to desire means to give what one does not have to someone who does not want it? Which does not mean that love can be lived only according to a mode of expectation or nostalgia, terms too easily reducible to a psychological register, while the relationship that is at stake here is not mundane, given that it presupposes the disappearance, even the collapse, of the world. Let us remember Isolde’s words: “We have lost the world, and the world, us.” — Blanchot, *Unavowable* 42

Nouvelle Vague is ultimately a film of great optimism, more akin to the mood of *Sunrise* than to *Gertrud*. But this optimism is even more evident when considered in conjunction with Blanchot’s *Unavowable Community*, the first part of which critiques Nancy’s project of rethinking community on the basis of a Heideggerian ontology, rather stressing a Levinasian “priority of ethics over ontology” (Hill *Extreme* 201); a pertinent point if one considers Godard’s progression to *Notre Musique*, a film that engages more explicitly with Blanchot and Levinas. The second part of Blanchot’s text is titled “The

¹⁶² Though in a sense his presence was already expected, summoned not only via Bataille, but also Nancy’s epigraph from René Char: “The poem is the fulfilled love of desire remaining desire” (qtd. in Nancy 87).

Community of Lovers”, written in accompaniment to *The Malady of Death* by Marguerite Duras¹⁶³, and it is to these two texts that *Nouvelle Vague* displays a number of striking similarities and points of departure.

Blanchot writes of Duras’ piece as a *récit*, which Pierre Joris leaves untranslated “as none of the English words that might be used to translate it—such as narration, story, tale, telling—carries the full meaning intended by Blanchot and others” (xxi). In Blanchot’s words: “The tale (*récit*) is not the narration of an event, but that event itself, the approach to that event, the place where that event is made to happen—an event which is yet to come and through whose power of attraction the tale (*récit*) can hope to come into being too” (qtd in Joris xxii). The *récit* here becomes an almost Romantic act, an act of artistic creation that hopes for incarnation. It is then of utmost interest that Godard’s first lines of the film state that he wanted the film to be a “*récit*, with nothing from outside to distract memory”; but this becomes even more significant if one takes into account Jacques Derrida’s comments on the term in relation to Blanchot’s *La folie du jour* (*The Madness of the Day*) and *L’arrêt de mort* (*Death Sentence*), “How are you going to translate that, *récit* for example? Not as *nouvelle*, ‘novella,’ nor as ‘short story.’ Perhaps it will be better to leave the ‘French’ word *récit*. It is already hard enough to understand, in Blanchot’s text, in French” (Derrida qtd. in Joris xxii; “Living On” 86). In the context of which *Nouvelle Vague* could be seen as a delightfully playful title, in line with Godard’s fondness for word games: *L’arrêt de mort* becomes *Nouvelle Vague*, a death sentence becomes a new beginning (wave)¹⁶⁴. But more importantly, given the complexity of discourse surrounding the terminology, here, not only is the translation of *récit* as “narrative” in the English subtitles of the most recent DVD release highly

¹⁶³ Duras was one of the earliest, sympathetic readers of Bataille, as Pierre Joris writes in the preface to *The Unavowable Community*. Duras both interviewed and wrote an article about Bataille as early as 1957/8, while “most young writers” were reading Sartre and Camus; according to Joris “Duras’ sense of the *récit* [...] owes much to Bataille’s writing and thinking, as Blanchot saw immediately” (xii). Duras appeared (offscreen, voice only) in *Sauve Qui Peut*, and named in *Hélas*, amongst other connections.

¹⁶⁴ Or even a vague novella: “as *arrêt de mort* that cannot be decided, neither life nor death, but rather LIVING ON [...] Living on is not the opposite of living, just as it is not identical with living. The relationship is different, different from being identical, from the difference of distinctions—undecided, or, in a very rigorous sense, ‘vague,’ *vagus*, evasive, *évasé*” (Derrida, “Living On” 135). Though one should also note that for Derrida *L’arrêt* is itself not an end, but “in series” (145).

misleading, but any reading which focusses on Godard's mention of "memory" rather than the context of the "récit", of a peculiar approach to an "event", is a fundamental misreading¹⁶⁵.

Duras' *récit* in particular concerns a man, "who has never known anybody but those like him, that is to say only other men who are nothing but the multiplication of himself" (Blanchot, *Unavowable* 35) who pays a woman (who, it is pointed out, is not a prostitute) to spend a number of nights with him, as the man has never experienced desire for a woman, never experienced love ("You don't love anything or anyone, you don't even love the difference you think you embody" (33). Compare this to the description of the Countess: "Part of her loves no one. Nothing."). Neither have a name, referred to only as "You" and "She": nameless ciphers, or archetypes, in other words. Duras' work is haunted by death, a death that the man has always carried with him (that the woman recognizes, "as soon as you spoke to me I saw you were suffering from the malady of death" (18)), or perhaps that is evoked by the woman in the first place ("You realize it's here, in her, that the malady of death is fomenting, that it's this shape stretched out before you that decrees the malady of death" (34)). The story concludes, climaxes, in a moment of ecstatic sexual intercourse, itself brought to a close with the words "It is done", or in French, "*Cela est fait*"; *Nouvelle Vague*, it will be recalled, concludes with a large intertitle, "*Consummatum est*", "It is finished." After this consummation of the relationship the woman disappears, and as for the man, "you have managed to live that love in the only way possible for you. Losing it before it happened" (55). As Blanchot describes the text:

A first reading will yield this simple explanation: a man, who has never known anybody but those like him, that is to say only other men who are nothing but the multiplication of

¹⁶⁵ The translation of *récit* as "narrative" also appears to have been standard for the theatrical release, given that in *The Films of Jean-Luc Godard: Seeing the Invisible* David Sterritt, present at *Nouvelle Vague*'s first American screening at the New York Film Festival, renders the opening line as "But I wanted this to be a narrative" (224), and subsequently describes the film as a "memory movie" (230). Though there is only space here to explore the relation of the *récit* to Blanchot and Duras, much could be gained from further investigation of the intersection of *Nouvelle Vague*, Blanchot and Derrida, particularly via the latter's discussion of the *récit* and Blanchot's *La folie du jour* and *L'arrêt de mort* (*Death Sentence*) in "The Law of Genre" and "Living On/Border Lines" (all texts written well before *Nouvelle Vague*). The latter, for example, becomes in part a discussion of "[s]urvival and *revenge*, living and returning from the dead" (108), touching on themes that appear in Derrida's later discussion of the gift: "*he* (I) does indeed *give* death, both as a gift and as a murder. In French *donner la mort* means first of all 'to kill'" (110).

himself, a man thus, and a young woman bound to him by a paid contract for a few nights, for a whole life, which has led hasty critics to talk about a prostitute though she herself makes clear that she is not, although there is a contract—a relationship that is purely contractual (marriage, money)—because she has felt from the beginning, without knowing it clearly, that, incapable of loving, he can only approach her conditionally, after concluding a transaction, just as she apparently abandons herself entirely while abandoning only that part of her that is under contract, preserving or reserving the freedom she does not alienate. From this one could conclude that the absoluteness of the relationship has been perverted from the onset and that, in a mercantile society, there is indeed commerce between beings but never a veritable “community”, never a knowledge that is more than an exchange of “good” procedures, be they as extreme as is conceivable. Power relationships in which it is the one who pays or supports who is dominated, frustrated by his very power which measures only his impotence. (*Unavowable* 34-5)

Duras’ text (and Blanchot’s reading of this text) then both speaks to Godard’s concerns, and suggests not only a source for the inverted master/slave relationship of *Nouvelle Vague* but also a path beyond his earlier fixation of the explicit metaphor of the prostitute. And yet, if in Duras’ text the “lack of feeling, the lack of love [...] signifies death, that lethal illness that smites unjustly the one while apparently sparing the other” (*Unavowable* 36), in *Nouvelle Vague* this would seem to be reversed for the screen. That onscreen death, drowning, signifies both the lack of love *and* intimacy, in the same fashion as death is both pure love and absent love for Blanchot:

This is also what the oracle suggests when, in the text, it adds to the previous answers (answers to the always repeated question, “*Where does the emotion of loving spring from?*”) this ultimate rejoinder: “*From anything...from the approach of death...*” Thus returns the duplicity of the word death, of that malady of death which at times would designate love prevented and at other times the pure movement of loving, both calling to

the abyss, to the black night discovered by the vertiginous emptiness “of the spread legs”

(how not to think here of *Madame Edwarda*?) (*Unavowable* 41)¹⁶⁶

Blanchot himself recognizes that in Duras’ text “there is neither a shared relationship nor definite lovers”, the choice of this text is “paradoxical” by design, it is the evanescence of community that arises in the unlikeliest of places and then vanishes that interests Blanchot; “It evasively consecrates *the always uncertain* end inscribed in the destiny of the community” (56). He is concerned with community “without project” (29), without work, as he states of May ’68, perhaps in the same way that “[t]he community of lovers [...] has as its ultimate goal the destruction of society” (48)¹⁶⁷. Godard’s film, in comparison, involves a man and a woman who constantly refer to their love, and given that *Sauve qui peut* has been described by Lyon as an “appropriation of Duras to stand for women’s desire”, a film where what seems to be the “possibility of difference turns into an impossibility [...] where difference can exist only at the price of lived sexual relations” (10), this is a pointed shift. The problem of *Nouvelle Vague*, and also “central to Lacan’s psychoanalytic ethics”, has become “the all-important human project [...] to sustain desire” (Silverman and Farocki 243), to ask why love goes away, and whether it can be brought back. Godard’s plot, in fact, resembles Wagner’s “*non plus ultra*” (Nietzsche *Ecce* 93), Tristan and Isolde. Isolde has rescued a mortally wounded Tristan (going by the name of Tantris) only to discover that he is the man who killed her fiancé; her attempt to kill Tristan with his own sword fails when Tristan looks her in the eye (cue Tolstoy, and Levinas). But again, where eventually both Tristan and Isolde die, released from the world of desire, or “Day”, and reunited in the world of “Night”, or Death, Godard’s couple live to love another Day¹⁶⁸. And where Blanchot concluded *La folie du jour* with: “A story [*réciť*]? No. No stories [*pas de réciť*], never again” (qtd. in Derrida, “Living On” 97), Godard’s

¹⁶⁶ And how also not to think of the less graphic, though still controversial, final scene of *Je vous salue Marie*?

¹⁶⁷ As indeed Bataille writes in “The True World of Lovers”, which notes that it would be “an error to consider it the elementary form of society” (234). See Part XI, “The True World of Lovers”, of Bataille’s “The Sorcerer’s Apprentice”.

¹⁶⁸ Žižek provides an interesting discussion of Wagner’s works, with a number of resonances for further discussion of *Nouvelle Vague*, in “‘There Is No Sexual Relationship’: Wagner as a Lacanian”. The Day/Night distinction has been read (see, for example, Magee) as displaying the influence of Schopenhauer’s variation on Kant’s Phenomenon/Noumenon divide.

opening line, “But I wanted this to be a *récit*”, is followed by a statement of reaffirmation: “I still do” (*Nouvelle Vague*).

Just as Baldwin writes of Baudrillard’s thought that it “loses an essential dimension” (“Lessons” 334) without the appropriate context of Mauss, Bataille, and Durkheim, the work of Nancy, Bataille and Blanchot provide an invaluable context to *Nouvelle Vague*. The film is incomparably richer if it is recognized as Godard’s entry into, commentary on, the work of Bataille, and Nancy and Blanchot’s open conversation on the possibility for community. It is surely no accident that this most conversational of films is graced with the title of *Nouvelle Vague*, given that Godard has stated that “if the French New Wave was powerful, it was because it was only four people or four kids who were talking to each other” (Godard and Kael 179). This title, apt though it may be thematically given the new beginning signalled at the conclusion of the film, can also be read as an attempt to begin a new conversation. Godard, deserted (after a fashion) by the fellow members of the filmic nouvelle vague, whether through death or a lapse into banality, here redefines his interlocutors, desirous of the infinite conversation and friendship of Levinas/Blanchot, or Blanchot/Bataille. But to return to our beginning, it is clear that *Nouvelle Vague* is part of a new attempt at a utopian cinema based around an investigation of the basic unit of community; but what (one might ask) is the difference between the action of *Nouvelle Vague* and Morris’ complaint regarding “the hero and heroine living happily in an island of bliss on other people’s troubles” (Morris, *News* 175-6)? It is, after all, a film with a happy ending, in a world of masters and slaves. In Godard’s defence here this happiness is only provisional and extremely fragile, it is shown to require constant work, and demands the continuous navigation of the master/slave dialectic that underpins all human interaction. The conclusion of the film is clearly a beginning in its own right, not an island of bliss, but the beginning of a new struggle, albeit one undertaken with open eyes. Work remains a barrier to love, as in *Gertrud*, but the roles of “man” and “woman”, or the “one who dominates” and “the one who submits”, the worker and otherwise, are not fixed, as might be found in Godard’s earlier films, or, perhaps, as one might find in the lovers of Bataille. This is not to say that Godard is deconstructing gender, but that the question of power is raised. After all, not even the “explosive communication” of

May '68 could escape the master/slave relationship, if one is to believe Lacan: “always, the revolutionary aspiration has only a single possible outcome—of ending up as the master’s discourse. This is what experience has proved. What you aspire to as revolutionaries is a master. You will get one” (Lacan, “Analyticon” 207), going so far as to deride the revolutionaries as helots. This, of course, was exactly Bataille’s concern, who asked the question of why popular revolt led to fascism rather than communism in his 1933 essay “The Psychological Structure of Fascism”, and concluded that given the then (and now) current “psychological situations of the democratic collectives”, “revolutionary movements that develop in a democracy are hopeless” (87). Hope lies in the fact that these situations are “transitory”, hence it is possible to imagine different “forms of attraction”, and a different outcome than the either/or of fascism or communism: “an organized understanding of the movements of society, of attraction and repulsion, starkly presents itself as a weapon” (87). And Blanchot himself has already dramatized the cyclical nature of revolution in a rather pessimistic vision of Kojève’s end of history in *Le Très-Haut* or *The Most High* of 1948, where all revolution against power becomes an assertion of power; with the possible exception of the ambiguous relationship of Henri Sorge and Jeanne Galgat.

GADDIS’ LOVE: AGAPĒ AGAPE

The root of Fitzgerald’s heroism is to be found, as it sometimes is in tragic heroes, in his power of love. — Trilling, *The Liberal Imagination* 244

Charity’s the challenge. — *The Recognitions* 383

The kind of love investigated by Godard in *Nouvelle Vague* is love as *eros*, (sexual) love between two partners, or love motivated by “the object”; love, in other words, as desire. In contrast, this tends to be an uncomfortable subject in Gaddis’ work, on the other hand, particularly in the early novels. If Benny kills himself because “Damnation is life without love” (*Recognitions* 442), Wyatt is uncomfortable with the irrational, the emotional, preferring the intellect (a theme returned to, in a sense, in *Agapē*). For Wyatt, the female represents either salvation or seduction, the Virgin or the Whore. As Esther is described early in the piece:

like other women in love, salvation was her original purpose, redemption her eventual privilege; and, like most women, she could not wait to see him thoroughly damned first, before she stepped in, believing, perhaps as they do, that if he were saved now he would never need to be redeemed. (78)

Even in an interpretation where Esme is a classical implementation of the eternal feminine, the “betrayed by lack-of-love *Ewigweibliche*, the defeated *Frau, nach der man sich sehnt* [woman after whom one longs]”, seen again in *JR*, where Madame Joubert is the “force of love, trust, hope”, an incarnation of “intuitive wisdom in a world of masculine materialism” (Gaddis, “Art of Fiction”), the domain of men and women is separate and unbreachable.

Contrarily, Knight has argued that the earrings that Wyatt’s father gave to Camilla, that Wyatt keeps in a box “just as he keeps his emotions in a box” (*Hints* 38), though found and worn by Esme, only achieve real significance to Wyatt in the final pages, when, “by intending to pass them on to his daughter he demonstrates his recognition of the emotions and especially of the strongest, most liberating emotion of all, love” (38). But as Moore notes, while “[o]riginally, Gaddis intended Wyatt to have a daughter by Pastora, and in the illegitimate daughter to be ‘at last redeemed through love’ [and] there are hints about a child later [...] Gaddis decided that such a redemption would be dishonest and facile” (Moore, *Reader’s Guide*). By rejecting the solution of redemption through love, or Pastora(l) romance, as “facile”, Wyatt is allowed by the author to essentially hurdle any real interaction with the opposite sex. Resolved to seek salvation in neither religion (Christianity or Mithraism) nor the feminine (Esme), but in charity and agapē (choosing the Augustinian *Dilige et quod vis fac*, “Love, and do what you want to” (*Recognitions* 899), over “the more popular form ‘*Amo et fac quod vis*’”, as Moore points out (*Gaddis* 38-9)), Wyatt walks a stoic road; and one is reminded, given that Tolstoy’s Pozdnyshv is one of the points of reference of *Agapē Agape*, of Tolstoy’s words in *The Kreutzer Sonata*. Speaking of love, carnal love:

If the purpose of life is happiness, goodness, love or whatever, and if the goal of mankind is what it is stated to be by the prophets, that all men are to be united by love, that swords

are to be beaten into ploughshares and all the rest of it, what prevents it from being attained? The passions do. Of all the passions, it is sexual, carnal love that is the strongest, the most malignant and the most unyielding. (54)

In the *Sonata* Tolstoy espouses the ideal of celibacy to the point of human extinction, and while the author of *Carpenter's Gothic*, the writer of the hairy Ainu jokes of *Frolic*, can certainly not be accused of strict puritanism or celibacy, at the same time there is a definite tendency towards asceticism, and love as eros or desire is neither the answer, nor by the time of *Agapē* even a question, but just an illusion¹⁶⁹. Wyatt ends up alone (though with newfound conviction, it is true), Gibbs' relationship with Miss Joubert does not survive his sense of artistic or intellectual inadequacy, and *Carpenter's Gothic* is a film of even greater frauds than his first two novels in which the one genuine moment between McCandless and Liz sours thanks to McCandless' weakness and pride. The one "strong" relationship Gaddis writes is Harry and Christina, and Harry ends up (probably) killing himself at least partly over financially rewarding but philosophically dubious work.

What of *agapē*, then? Anders Nygren, in his influential *Agape and Eros*, describes *agapē* as "the center of Christianity [...] Nothing but that which bears the impress of *agape* has a right to be called Christian love." *Agapē* would later be removed from its Christian context by W. G. McLagan in his work on "Respect for Persons as a Moral Principle", where "we might say that respect for persons and *Agape* are identical as regards [...] their practical or directive import" (MacLagan 216). And though it is based on our "natural capacity for the active sympathy of other-concern", *agapē* is "an energy of the rational will" (II 289). Or in Kristeva's interpretation, *agapē* is love without objecthood: "Prior to the existence of any object whatsoever (of any "world"), *agape*, as love of the Father for the Son, is thus other than love of an object: an internal turn within the subject" (148). It is in these latter contexts that Gaddis approaches *agapē*, thus a world of *Agapē Agape*, as Gibbs' book is called in *JR* (604-5), and as Gaddis' final work is titled, is a world suffering from a lack of concern or respect for the other. Gregory Comnes

¹⁶⁹ This tendency towards the ascetic is present in *Godard* also, which may well be what Brenez is remarking upon when she declares the director to be a "Jansenist" rather than a "hedonist" (Brenez and Wells "Q&A").

thus uses agapē, removed from its Christian context, as the basis for his description of Gaddis' "ethics of indeterminacy", as "the general structure of a consciousness informed by the virtues of alterity, risk, and responsible suffering" (5). Agapē, "a fundamental disposition of giving—nonreciprocally—in the face of any situation" (Comnes 30), is "the principle that would musically transform the strife, the Benjamin-like fragments of the world, into order" (113). But for all of Comnes' talk of agapē redeeming the world, over the decades Gaddis would do little more than mourn its passing. As if not only are the diagnosis and the cure self-evident, but that there is nothing to be done; Gaddis' agapē does not evolve between *The Recognitions* and *Agapē*, and despite Basie's friendliness, it is highly doubtful that there is room for agapē in the new, superficial world of *Frolic*, a world of flux that Gaddis rejects. In his final novel, the narrator's encroaching death brings on delirious mentions of the Other, but the book is addressed primarily to the dead (Benjamin and Huizinga, for example), and is less concerned with giving than with an elitist retreat to the mind.

None of which is surprising, given that the problem, and not a minor one, with agapē as a principle or as an ethics is that it has been deemed on a number of occasions to be impossible¹⁷⁰. As Nancy comments, Christian love is "impossible love", at the very least because it is a command, a line of thought that he traces back to Freud: "of course the answer of Christian love seems to be the best answer, but I'm afraid, [Freud] writes with irony, that it is not practiceable" (Nancy et al, "Love and Community"). Schopenhauer came to the same conclusion, writing that "pure affection (ἀγάπη, *caritas*) is of its nature sympathy or compassion" (*World as Will* Vol. I 375, italics in original), yet also declaring that a state of general benevolence (and justice) was only possible in conjunction with a piercing of the "veil of Maya", an awareness of the oneness or "identity" of all things¹⁷¹. Individuality, egoism, was inseparable from wickedness (*World as Will* Vol. II 609-10), and here the philosophy of Schopenhauer could be appended to the earlier discussion of *The Recognitions* and Thoreau. Hence, for

¹⁷⁰ Though some would disagree, obviously. See for example Francis Watson's *Agape, Eros, Gender: Towards a Pauline sexual ethic*.

¹⁷¹ *Caritas* is the Latin Vulgate translation of agape, which, in its St Augustinian form, contains elements of both agape and eros, which Nygren would go on to critique.

Schopenhauer, the necessary path forward was one of asceticism. But surely there is a serious irony in agapē, a compassionate love for every other, only being “practiceable” upon a realization that there is no other, only one-self. Yet, in a fascinating turn, and by some torturous logic, it turns out that by his final novel Gaddis’ interpretation of agapē is directly opposed to that of Schopenhauer. The loss of agapē, in this all too aptly named novel, is tied directly to the loss of the individual, the unique, and the authentic:

the whole concept of authenticity, that love for the beautiful creation before it’s created that [...] natural merging of created life in this creation in love that transcends it, a celebration of the love that created it they called agapē, that love feast in the early church yes. That’s what’s lost, what you don’t find in these products of the imitative arts that are made for reproduction on a grand scale. (*Agapē* 26)

But to return to Gaddis’ earlier, more traditional concept of agapē in *The Recognitions*, where “Charity’s the challenge” (383), one could also trace a relatively short path from Gaddis to Derrida via St Augustine. The “*dilige, et quod vis fac*” (love and do what you will) of the latter is in essence an ethics founded on the tenet of “love thy neighbour”; as Scanlon points out, Augustine’s inversion of “God is love” into “Love is God” has the consequence that “love for neighbour is the absolute condition for love of God” (228), and from there it is only a short step to Derrida’s description of God as “Wholly Other” combined with the notion that “*tout autre est tout autre*” (qtd. in Scanlon 227). It is an even shorter path to the ethics of Levinas, however. Recalling the tradition of Jean Wahl mentioned in relation to *The Recognitions* in the first chapter, Christophe Wall-Romana writes that Levinas recognized in Wahl’s transcendence “a crucial piece of the puzzle by which the “*transascendance*” of eschatology toward the godhead may be countered, so that ethical responsibility to the other, unescapable and obsessive, remains within or replaces the subject” (646).

Derrida’s (and Levinas’) own brand of impossible ethics will reappear shortly, but there is also an interesting distinction that bears noting. Gaddis explored the sacred in the form of religion in *The Recognitions*, a book transformed from more humble beginnings thanks to a reading of Frazer’s *The*

Golden Bough. Frazer allowed Gaddis to move beyond an interest solely in Christianity to an interest in the common narrative thread of all religions, and yet Frazer remains nonetheless, as Morphy points out, “more a popularizer and compiler of data than an original thinker” (16). To quote Max: “As Frazer says [...] the whole history of religion is a continuous attempt to reconcile old custom with new reason, to find sound theory for absurd practices” (*Recognitions* 535). The work of Durkheim, on the other hand, formulated partly in opposition to Frazer’s writings on religion, according to Morphy, offers something new. Durkheim’s “sacred” is concerned at heart with the process of community, or society, rather than its simple narratives. As Mellor writes, “the sacred is a representation of the dynamic, contagious and ambiguous processes through which individuals become ‘social beings’” (65), where the Durkheimian sacred is defined less as a fixed concept than in terms of “heterogeneity” (66-8). Though to a certain extent only anecdotal, this contrast between the anthropologist who seeks community and the writer who seeks the common thread of truth has a parallel in the fates of the artists who follow them. Where Godard expresses his faith in communication and community, and attempts to reinvent his early productive friendships, Gaddis communicates only with the immortals of the dead in *Agapē*, and collapses into an abyss of mourning and loss:

Loss, loss all just loss wherever you look, only refuge I’ve got left for my, for what’s left of my memory my discover what I thought was my, would be sort of my vest pocket immortality and my, yes for my generosity and dignity, none of it left anyplace else I just took off in the wrong directions. Wrong about everything all so long ago, about everybody especially friends, thought we were all friends so full of who I thought I was some buffoon all two dimensional some cartoon minute I turned sideways they couldn’t see me at all (37).

CATASTROPHE: GODARD'S LOVE POEM

Heaven having no part, / And unsatisfied men. — Melville, “Gold in the Mountain”

In line with Godard's turn towards community and the community of lovers after *Sauve qui peut* catastrophe becomes the “first strophe of a love poem”¹⁷². And in *Nouvelle Vague's* utopian romance, filled with staccato rhythms, chopped music, layered dialogue and narration, that results in a film experience that encourages openness rather than closure, one can perhaps identify a current of Derridean catastrophe, “There is strophe (there is strophe in every sense, apostrophe and catastrophe, address in turning the address [always toward you, my love], and my post card is strophes)” (Derrida, *The Post Card* 66); strophe in its original sense derived from the verb *strephein*, as Malabou writes, of “to come and go”, or “to turn toward” (*Counterpath* 4). The catastrophe signifies both “the *end* (the end of a life, or the *dénouement* of a dramatic plot and the end of the play)”, but also “a *reversal* or upset, the tragic and unforeseeable event that brings about the ruin of the established order” (4). Godard's world (our world), Derrida's world, is already a post-catastrophe world; catastrophe is “in fact another name for a promise, promise of a voyage that [...] is always in the process of arriving” (28). The world, then, is always on the cusp—in Purgatory perhaps.

That the world is a world of disaster is rendered most dramatically in *Notre Musique*, with its triptych structure, of Hell, Purgatory, and Heaven. Hell pummels the viewer with oversaturated images of war and destruction; and Heaven brings to mind nothing more than Adorno's comments on “eternal peace” in the short section “Sur l'Eau” from *Minima Moralia*, “*Rien faire comme une beté* [sic], lying on water and looking peacefully at the sky” (*Minima* 157), a passage also cited by Abensour as the final words of his discussion of Morris, in conjunction with a quote from *Negative Dialectics* (1996): “fullness is inseparable from craving [...] there is no hope without quenching of the desire” (Abensour, “Politics” 146)¹⁷³. Appropriately, then, given both Abensour and Godard's engagement with Adorno, in the same

¹⁷² This phrase recurs often in Godard's work, for example in *Passion, Détective*, and his short piece for the Viennale.

¹⁷³ Given Jameson's engagement with the “grand figure” of Morris (*Archaeologies* 172), Adorno's “Sur l'Eau” in *Late Marxism* (114-117) and again in *Archaeologies* (173-4), along with the wider discussion of a utopian

essay Abensour provides a remarkably apt justification for *Notre Musique*'s particular structure. Writing of the greatness of Morris' "modern utopia", Abensour states that "the dialectical image [is] simultaneously present as the golden age, the reactivating of the classless society, and as hell, the reactivating of suffering—as if the suffering of past generations, the shadow of injustice, stood at the gates of the homeland, barring the path that leads back home" (153). Hell stands behind us, preventing a nostalgic desire for return, and presenting the necessity to come to terms with the disaster of history, and Heaven stands in front, imaginable only as the surcease of desire. These references would seem to sit uneasily with the Godard of *Nouvelle Vague*; it is no coincidence that this film is marked by an absence of couples. But this is partly a matter of interpretation of Adorno; Dieter Thomä has suggested that contra Habermas' reading of "marginalize[d] intersubjectivity", here "Adorno is eager to build bridges between different modes of reconciliation", with the powerful image of "lying on the water" meant not "to dilute the political agenda and turn 'peace' into a somewhat lofty, otherworldly ideal", but is rather meant as "a reminder of an experience of balance and harmony that helps broaden our understanding of the social sphere" (124)¹⁷⁴.

Verso's edition of *Minima Moralia* (2005) provides a note to Adorno's "Sur l'Eau", describing it as a reference to the "book of sketches about sailing by Maupassant" (155), in other words *Afloat* (*Sur l'Eau*) (1888). Gerhard Schweppenhäuser, however, instead details the plot of the early short story "Sur l'Eau" (1881), in which a boatman finds his boat inextricably stuck at night in the middle of a river. At the onset of a fog, he panics; upon its dissipation, he manages to appreciate the beauty of the night¹⁷⁵. Come the morning, a fisherman comes to the boatman's aid, and they discover that his anchor had

"program" versus a utopian "impulse", his general disinterest in the work of Abensour is interesting. The phrase "education of desire" appears only in the context of Ruth Levitas' critique of "a Utopian 'impulse'" in *Concept of Utopia*, a book declared "central to the constitution of Utopian studies", where it is described as applicable to "Bloch, Morton, and Thompson" (*Archaeologies* 2-3, footnote 2).

¹⁷⁴ See also, for example, Pizer's commentary on Jameson's reading of Adorno's concept of utopia "as fundamentally divorced from all association with the communal sphere [...associating it] with negation, absence, stasis, transience, and nothingness" (Pizer 143).

¹⁷⁵ Which began as "En canot", or "In a canoe [dinghy]" first published in 1876. The translation of "Sur l'Eau" into "On the River" has more recently, and even less usefully, become "Out on the River" in David Coward's translation.

been caught on a *masse noir*, the corpse of an old woman with a stone around her neck.

Schweppenhäuser's use of this story is extremely productive, and perhaps even fills a partial gap in Adorno criticism; there appears to be no obvious reason to think that Adorno was not referring to both texts, given that the note referring to *Afloat* was editorial. The short story is certainly equally relevant to Adorno's piece, and perhaps even more suggestive: underneath every discovered peace, there is a corpse. Rereading Maupassant's story one is struck by the fact that the corpse is present from the first page: "a river is the most sinister cemetery there is: a graveyard where the dead don't have graves" (3). Fusco argues that the corpse of the "murdered woman [though is it not more likely a suicide?] has no integral meaning in the boatman's life" beyond a certain gothic savour (25-6), but whether this is true for Maupassant or not, and it seems arguable, for Adorno and Godard there is no meaning without a recognition of, and faithfulness to, the dead. Thus, as Schweppenhäuser has it, Adorno perhaps uses "Sur l'Eau" as

an allegory of the aporia of progress in bourgeois society; like the man in the boat, we never get anywhere because, while we are able to dominate nature, we remain trapped in the hidden context of destructive violence, which we long to escape. So long as we fail in this, we cannot lie on the water peacefully, but only in panic and under threat. The peace that we sometimes experience, enchantment by natural beauty, is illusory, so long as the world is organized in such a way that human beings must commit suicide and, from below, hold the living in their spell. (87)

With this in mind *Notre Musique* can be read as an interesting evolution of *Nouvelle Vague*'s discussion of community into ethics and politics, into a new, more complex negative utopianism (though still involved in the dispelling of illusion). Rather than *The Most High*'s end of history, or advertising/capitalism's glossing over of catastrophe, Purgatory, the *Histoire(s)*, *Eloge*, all go out of their way to resist the erasure of history, to use cinema to restore history (the river and the cemetery of time),

to show respect to the spectres of the world and open the way to the future¹⁷⁶. Here the reappearance of the question “So, Miss Lerner, have you ever been stung by a dead bee?” (*Notre Musique*, Purgatory), which had previously been addressed to Alain Delon, is not addressed to a character within the film, but asked in general; the world of this film is our world, unlike the allegorical world of *Nouvelle Vague*’s récit, and the question has more of a sting. Judith Lerner’s memory is in question; the viewer’s memory in question; and with it, our ability to parse history: hence, in part, the film’s distinction between those who act and those who tell stories, those who start revolutions and those, the most ‘humane,’ who build libraries (and cemeteries).

The centrepiece of the film, Purgatory, set in Mostar, Sarajevo, in the aftermath of the Bosnian conflict, is of even more interest, however. In his short piece *Je vous salue Sarajevo* (1993), Godard describes Mostar as an example of the “art of living”, and one could argue that the central character of the film is not the Palestinian poet Mahmoud Darwish, nor the Jewish pair of Judith and Olga, nor Godard himself, but a bridge, the *Stari Most* or Old Bridge at Mostar¹⁷⁷. Destroyed during the Muslim-Croat war, the bridge was built in honour of Sultan Suleiman the Magnificent in 1566, designed by the Ottoman architect Hajrudin, and constructed by Croatian stonemasons, and is generally regarded as a representation of the possibility of “multi-ethnic coexistence” (Balic 77)¹⁷⁸. Godard places such symbolic value in the Old Bridge that it is even described in terms of montage, “two faces and one truth—the bridge”, and it is at the Old Bridge that the pivotal moments of *Notre Musique* take place. At the bridge

¹⁷⁶ Communist totalitarianism is as guilty as capitalism in its attempt to gloss over catastrophe and the dead, of course. Dušan Makavejev’s *Sweet Movie* (1974) is perhaps the most effective portrayal of capitalism and totalitarianism’s equal failure in this regard.

¹⁷⁷ Darwish’s poem “Identity Card” was previously vital to the Dziga Vertov group’s attempted film of the PLO, *Jusqu’à la victoire*, which eventually became *Ici et Ailleurs* (1976). A supporter of a two-state solution, Darwish nevertheless resigned from the executive committee of the PLO after the signing of 1993’s Oslo Accord due to doubts regarding the effectiveness of the Accords.

¹⁷⁸ In a fascinating turn, however, and something that one might propose has contributed to the anger of *Film Socialisme*, on November 26, 2005, the city of Mostar unveiled as a symbol of unity a bronze statue of Bruce Lee, in what has turned out to be a general trend of adopting popular culture figures rather than national figures (see the articles by Vvork and Dan Bilefsky). From Bilefsky’s article, Serbian visual artist Milica Tomic describes the statues as “a dangerous joke in which history is being erased and replaced by Mickey Mouse.” And in Zitiste, a statue of Rocky Balboa is planned: “Bojan Marceta, a 28-year-old cameraman who raised 5,000 euros [...] to commission the statue, said Rocky was a universal hero and far more deserving of respect than Serbia’s own recent leadership.”

Judith reads Levinas' *entre nous: On Thinking-of-the-Other* (1991), the first explicit hint of what Godard has described as his desire to

make a film with a real reverse-shot. There has never been one [...] we don't know what a real reverse-shot is. Lévinas often has good ideas, but when he talks about the gaze of the other that cannot be killed, the other who is such that he can't be killed, he is doing a bad reverse-shot. Film can touch on such questions perhaps. I can't because I don't have Lévinas's intellectual capacity, but if we were working together, we'd manage to come up with a phrase that is deeper, worked out with greater care, in that domain only. (*Future(s)* 64)

Acting as counterpoint to Olga's suicidal voyage, Judith manages to see in the reconstruction of the bridge the possibility of hope, symbolized by her vision of the three bystanding Native Americans with their pickup truck and denims transformed into tribal dress on horseback. The appearance of the Native Americans, which could be a moment of grief, is instead one of happiness, the fulfilment of words heard moments earlier, "we must restore the past to make the future possible." Rather than a wound to be mourned, catastrophe in *Notre Musique* becomes simply the prelude to the possibility for thinking the future. As per the work of Darwish, the Native Americans here become a symbol for any and all of the "vanquished", the "oppressed past", in what is at the same time an expansion or more positive presentation of the haunting present in the *Histoire(s)*, ably described in another context by Derrida in *Spectres of Marx* (1994)¹⁷⁹:

haunting is historical, to be sure, but it is not *dated*, it is never docilely given a date in the chain of presents, day after day, according to the instituted order of the calendar. Untimely, it does not come to, it does not happen to, it does not befall, one day, Europe, as if the latter, at a certain moment of its history, had begun to suffer from a certain evil, to let itself

¹⁷⁹ Godard has a forerunner here, and an illustrious one at that. As the narrator points out in Chris Marker's *Le Souvenir d'un avenir (Remembrance of Things to Come)* (2003), Henri Langlois saw in Jean Gabin's pre-war film roles a prefiguration of the Resistance fighter.

be *inhabited* in its inside, that is, haunted by a foreign guest [...] Haunting would mark the very existence of Europe. (3, italics in original)

Cinema, then, would be marked by the violence of World War II and the absence at its centre from its very creation, just as for Derrida the existence of Europe is marked in the most untimely fashion by haunting itself. Haunting is a concern for justice beyond the present, for those no longer present the “*non-contemporaneity with itself of the living present*” (xviii, italics in original) that unhinges time, that allows for justice, contra Marx’s injunction to “let the dead bury the dead”¹⁸⁰. As the viewer is told in *Notre Musique*:

As our age has endless destructive force it now needs a revolution of a comparable creative force that reinforces memory, clarifies dreams, and gives substance to images.

That reserves for the dead a better fate, gives ephemera a splendid sense of its transparency, and escorts the living on a safer, more serene crossing of darkness.

Or as Derrida elaborates in *Echographies* (2002), the word “spectre” is an anagram of the word “respect”, a sign of the “law of the other” (*Echographies* 124). And here it is interesting to note that Darwish, “the voice of Palestinian resistance”, is one of many living spectres in the sense of the “being-there of an absent or departed one” (Derrida, *Spectres* 5). Palestinians such as Darwish, who fled their homes after the Nakba and then attempted to return to their homes, now part of Israel (and in the case of Darwish’s village of al-Birwi, destroyed), found themselves categorized as “present absent aliens” (Akash and Forché xvi)¹⁸¹. But most importantly, this spectral justice is not simply a matter of faithfulness to the dead, but rather is the precondition of the future, of what Derrida describes as the “democracy to come” (*Spectres* 21). Yet as Derrida himself points out, “It would not be possible to

¹⁸⁰ Again, there are resonances with the work of Benjamin, in a passage quoted in Arnaud des Pallières’ *Drancy Avenir*: “To articulate the past historically does not mean to recognize it ‘the way it really was’ (Ranke). It means to seize hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger [...] Only that historian will have the gift of fanning the spark of hope in the past who is firmly convinced that even the dead will not be safe from the enemy if he wins” (“Theses” 255).

¹⁸¹ See also the story of Ahmed al-Kateb, the Kuwaiti born son of Palestinian refugees left in detention in Australian legal limbo for years.

derive a politics from what I was just saying about the absolute *arrivant*. Not in the traditional sense of the word ‘politics’, not a politics that could be implemented by a nation-state”; it is “an apolitical and inadmissible proposition” (17). Nevertheless, it remains necessary, for a “politics that does not retain a reference to this principle of unconditional hospitality is a politics that loses its reference to justice” (17).

Given *Notre Musique*’s engagement with Levinas one might also be tempted to amend the earlier discussion of *Nouvelle Vague*. For Levinas the exteriority of the other is a relation with Mystery; a relation that is discussed in terms of Eros and struggle, rather than agapē and communion, contingent on a relation with death; a relationship, finally, that is achieved via (explicitly non-Platonic) “light” (*Time and the Other* 75-6). In “The Other, Utopia, and Justice”, the final essay of *entre nous*, Levinas emphasizes the importance of Bergson not only to his own formative thinking and philosophy but also to philosophers such as Heidegger, and given the closeness of the working relationships of Bataille and Blanchot, and Blanchot and Levinas, and Godard’s engagement with all four, it is unsurprising that there is a confluence of interests¹⁸². Blanchot points out, for example, that “What Bataille and Levinas have in common, or what is similar in one and in the other, is the gift as the inexhaustible (the infinite demand of the other and of others, a demand that calls for nothing less than impossible loss: the gift of interiority)” (*Writing* 110). There is, however, another aspect of death to be considered. Godard’s *Sauve qui peut* ends with the possible intentional death of the director; Paul Godard (Jacques Dutronc, who would go on to play Jerzy in *Passion*) steps back into traffic, and a crash is heard. This might seem like a rather banal evocation of a voluntary death, but to a certain extent Bresson’s *Le diable probablement* (1977), his penultimate work before the masterful exploration of money, nihilism and hope, *l’Argent* (1983), had already banalized “noble” suicide. And though the matter arises somewhat facetiously in *For Ever Mozart* (“Suicide is the only serious philosophical problem, *The Rebel*, page one”), it is the work of

¹⁸² There is no direct connection between Bataille and Levinas, on the other hand, though in “*L’Existentialisme au primat de l’économie*” (“From Existentialism to the Primacy of Economy”) Bataille discusses Levinas’ “*De l’existence à l’existant*” (“Existence and Existents”), a text that reads Blanchot’s *Thomas l’obscur*. Jill Robbins provides a translation of Bataille’s essay, along with an excellent discussion of the relation of Blanchot, Bataille, Levinas and Wahl not only to each other, but to existentialism and its shortcomings.

Gaddis that provides a true illustration of the consequences of a philosophical approach to voluntary death.

VOLUNTARY DEATH: GADDIS' WORLD OF STRIFE

it is of the nature of man, when he is not diseased, to take pleasure in his work under certain conditions. And, yet, we must say in the teeth of the hypocritical praise of all labour, whatsoever it may be, of which I have made mention, that there is some labour which is so far from being a blessing that it is a curse; that it would be better for the community and for the worker if the latter were to fold his hands and refuse to work, and either die or let us pack him off to the workhouse or prison — which you will. — Morris, “Useful Work” 287

William Morris' essay “Useful Work versus Useless Toil” is a description, witting or otherwise, of the fate of Melville's famous Bartleby the scrivener, or human photocopier, and former employee of the Dead Letter Office¹⁸³. Melville's figure has become a figure of importance for a number of French philosophers, including Deleuze, Agamben, and Blanchot, but curiously, despite the emphasis on suicide and death as protest in “The Rush for Second Place”, and the many Melville references of *Agapē*, Gaddis does not draw on the figure of Bartleby. Nevertheless, despite this absence, Joseph Tabbi has drawn a line between Beaton's disobedience, his “single, deliberate inaction” in *JR* (Tabbi, “William Gaddis” 101) and Bartleby:

Small as it is, Beaton's inaction shows how much the system depends on obedience, and how vulnerable it is to even a singular refusal of work and authority. Refusal, as Melville's “Bartleby” shows, is the beginning of a liberatory politics; but as Hardt and Negri point out, ‘refusal in itself is empty’. (102)

¹⁸³ Though “witting” fits chronologically. “Bartleby” was first printed in *Putnam's Magazine* in 1853, and received an official UK printing in *The Piazza Tales* in 1856; “Useful Work versus Useless Toil” was first delivered as a lecture in 1883.

Disregarding the arguable nature of this last claim, perhaps the reason for Gaddis' elision of Bartleby is that he prefers a more dramatic statement, a more "positive" negative than Bartleby's "infiniteness of patience" (Blanchot, *Writing* 17), described by Agamben as far as possible away from "the heroic pathos of negation" ("Bartleby" 256) that Gaddis describes in "The Rush for Second Place"¹⁸⁴. This general investigation of the theme of failure and suicide in American life through figures such as Willy Loman, "racked by the shame and guilt of failure when the system itself goes sour" (153), culminates in a discussion of the work of another Morris, Ivan Morris' *The Nobility of Failure: Tragic Heroes in the History of Japan*:

Morris wrote of another type of hero, in the complex Japanese tradition, who 'represents the very antithesis of an ethos of accomplishment. He is the man whose single-minded sincerity will not allow him to make the manoeuvres and compromises that are so often needed for mundane success [...] He is wedded to the losing side and will ineluctably be cast down. Flinging himself after his painful destiny, he defies the dictates of convention and common sense, until eventually he is worsted by his enemy, the 'successful survivor' [...] Faced with defeat, the hero will typically take his own life in order to avoid the indignity of capture, vindicate his honour, and make a final assertion of his sincerity'. [...] It is, in effect, a final assertion of accountability. Here at home, on the other hand, where suicide is a sin, a crime, a confession of failure, or at least a desperate avoidance of failure, we have only 'successful survivors'. (159)

¹⁸⁴ See Blanchot's take on refusal in *Writing* (17), Deleuze's essay "Bartleby", and Rancière's "Deleuze, Bartleby, and the Literary Formula" where (though not assured) at best Bartleby's refusal "erodes the attorney's reasonable organization of work and life. It shatters not just the hierarchies of a world but also what supports them: the connections between causes and effects we expect from that world, between the behaviors and motives we attribute to them and the means we have to modify them" (146-7). Gaddis might have done well to have taken Melville's character more seriously, given that his beloved Flaubert ended his career with *Bouvard and Pecuchet*, a novel in which two scribes in the valiant pursuit of all forms of knowledge and the good life, fail dismally in their pursuit of both and return to the practice of their former profession, mindless copying.

Or, as Philip K Dick describes Juliana's thoughts of suicide in *The Man in the High Castle*¹⁸⁵: “Learned that, she thought, from Japanese. Imbided placid attitude towards mortality, along with money-making judo. How to kill, how to die. Yang and yin. But that's behind, now; this is Protestant land” (35)¹⁸⁶.

Gaddis' use of Morris, of honour vindicated and sincerity asserted, is itself startlingly sincere. Far from Wyatt's acceptance of compromise in his first novel, Gaddis mourns the American inability to be like Salinger's Seymour. Or indeed like the philosopher of love and strife referenced explicitly in *JR*, and dramatically in *Carpenter's Gothic*, Empedocles.

In an instructive parallel, Friedrich Hölderlin struggled for years, and through a number of versions, to complete his *Death of Empedocles: A Mourning-Play*. Both Empedocles and Hölderlin are often represented as noble or innocent figures surrounded by vice and greed, two of Gaddis' favourite preoccupations. After reading Diogenes Laërtius' account of Empedocles' death, Hölderlin would write of having “experienced there something that I've encountered before, namely, the fact that the transiency and mutability of human thoughts and systems strike me as well-nigh more tragic than the destinies one usually calls the only real destinies” (qtd. in Krell 6), which could well be read as an early version of Gaddis's obsession with entropy¹⁸⁷. While Diogenes' account of Empedocles is rather derisory, writing of his arrogance and aspirations to divinity, attributing his death by volcano to a desire to leave no body and thus convince the populace that he had ascended to heaven, Hölderlin attempts to

¹⁸⁵ Philip K. Dick's novel also features a pointed reference to *Miss Lonelyhearts*; the American merchant's greed and lack of knowledge of West's novel contributes to his appearance of superficiality and boorishness, in contrast to the care for philosophy and aesthetics of the Japanese characters.

¹⁸⁶ Yet at the same time, in a cruel double-bind, Alvarez (another author on Gaddis' “Literature of Failure” syllabus) writes in relation to the work of Durkheim that

egoistic suicide occurs when the individual is not properly integrated into society but is, instead, thrown on to his own resources. Hence Protestantism, with its emphasis on free will and grace, tends to encourage suicide more than the Catholic Church, which insists on a greater subservience to its rituals and doctrines and so involves each believer in its circumscribed, collective religious life. (Alvarez 113)

And Broch, of course, would agree. On the other hand this view of Japanese culture is itself nostalgic, given that the Japan of Yasuzo Masumura's *Giants and Toys* brushes off (American) advertising/corporate culture as child's play, whereas in Japan “it's a desperate fight just to survive”. The same executive states that “Japan is America”, and repudiates the principles of bushido, of conscience and decency, in favour of the brain-washing of a public conceived of as thoughtless beasts.

¹⁸⁷ Indeed, Gaddis has Wyatt reading Diogenes Laërtius in *The Recognitions* (81).

restore a sense of nobility to Empedocles' death. In the first version of the play, in response to Pausanias' question, "Is honor found in death alone?" (99; 1812) Empedocles responds (with the stage direction "with love") "Yet am I a knave, shall I / Survive the day of my dishonor?" (100; 1818). In other words, "Shall I be made impure, and not perish?"¹⁸⁸

Yet here Hölderlin has a problem. As Krell writes:

Why does the love of Pausanias, or that of Panthea, fail to hold Empedocles back? If it is neither idealism nor melancholy nor haughtiness, is it a failure to love that destroys the thinker? These doubts may prevent Hölderlin from successfully completing any of the three drafts. If the historical Empedocles leaps into the crater, Hölderlin's dramatic hero remains perched on the crater's rim forever. (Introduction 10)

Going on to state that Hölderlin's marginalia insist that if Empedocles "is to rejoin his gods through a voluntary death", this death must be an "essentially affirmative act, an act of love rather than strife" (36).

Turning to Hölderlin's second version, Empedocles is thus accused by Delia:

you hate yourself / And hate what loves you, hate what would approach you; / You would be someone other than the one you are, / Are restive with your honor; you sacrifice yourself / To alien things. You will not stay, you want / To perish. Alas! in your breast there is even less / Tranquillity than there is in mine. (130; 519-525)

After the endorsement of suicide in "Rush", Gaddis restages exactly this confrontation in the figures of Liz and McCandless in *Carpenter's Gothic*. Liz challenges McCandless' apocalyptic tendencies, his resignation to defeat, his hatred of people which she diagnoses as a simple envy of those who can still hope (183-4). The story diverges, in that unlike Diogenes' Empedocles, Gaddis' protagonist halts at the

¹⁸⁸ Here one thinks of Chatterton, "the most famous of all literary suicides" (Alvarez 210), poet, Bristol scrivener and possible model for Bartleby:

It is my PRIDE, my damn'd, native, unconquerable Pride, that plunges me into Distraction. You must know that 19-20th of my Composition is Pride. I must either live a Slave, a Servant; to have no Will of my own, no Sentiments of my own which I may freely declare as such;—or DIE—perplexing alternative! (Chatterton qtd. in Alvarez 213-214)

precipice, even attempting to perform a positive act. Yet, in a bitter turn, this only sets the stage for further misfortune. McCandless attempts to embrace love, and is rewarded not with love requited but with the death of Liz's brother, who would not have been on the plane bound for Africa if it had not been for one of McCandless' screeds, and with the utterly meaningless, accidental death of Liz. In the end Gaddis' vision of darkness exceeds even Laërtius' account of a successful suicide, which is after all somewhat comically told; Gaddis has his Empedocles substitute decide to return to the village that exiled him, only for Pausanias to fall into the volcano and Delia to have a stroke¹⁸⁹. And *Frolic* will not make the same mistake. Christina's love will not save Harry from bringing about his own, utterly banal, death.

The Recognitions' own, less nihilistic version of this confrontation had Esther accusing Wyatt of the inability to see the joy of the world, of an abdication from life (589-90). *Carpenter's Gothic's* rejection (or internalization of the criticism) of *The Recognitions* via Liz's description of McCandless' first novel as "mean and empty like everybody in it", a book that "falls to pieces" (139), suggests that Gaddis is attempting to give eros a chance. The fate of Liz, McCandless, and Paul, demonstrates that not only that despite his best efforts, Gaddis remains fixed on the negative pole of Empedocles' binary, strife (see also Empedocles' presence via Gibbs in *JR* (45, 161, 406)), but also that the positive pole has all but vanished. The proliferation of broken clocks in *JR*, which Strehle presents as evidence of artistic resistance via Bergson's *durée* in an admirably optimistic reading, then more likely suggests an early example of the victory of strife over love. a victory that Krell declares logically necessary in an Empedoclean system: "if the self-division of the sphere as such derives from strife, then the rule of strife in the sphere arguably never ends [...] love has no identity apart from the petulant strivings of languor and the sometimes noisy, sometimes silent strife of mournful languishment" (22-23).

¹⁸⁹ If Bresson's *Le diable probablement* serves as Godard's intertext, Sydney Pollack's American Depression-era fable *They Shoot Horses, Don't They?* (1969) would serve as Gaddis'. The film more or less endorses assisted suicide as an alternative to being a Bernhardian "Loser", or a successful survivor in Gaddis' terms, in a world of, once again, play-acting, where the show is rigged and "justice" is no more than an other-worldly, implacable Law. The one act of love in the film, Robert's gift of death to Fonda, is punished. And where Bresson's suicide is unceremoniously shot and forgotten mid-sentence, Fonda is rewarded, the dance marathon left behind as she falls down peacefully in a wild field of flowers in death.

Tabbi, another optimist, has proposed that in his final novel Gaddis goes beyond Bartleby's refusal and in fact flirts with the idea of death as the harbinger of community. Drawing on Gaddis' references to Huizinga's savage and the "magic ritual kangaroo dance", Tabbi argues that the "narrator in his extremity [...] identifies himself fully and finally with the dying animal other" ("William Gaddis" 99). Certainly there is no doubt that Gaddis' last hopes are of authorial-reader communication, something more than Lyotard's shared solitude; as Gaddis writes, "the fierce authenticity of Hawthorne between the reader and the page what it's all about, that solitary enterprise between him and the individual reader" (*Agapē* 38). But these hopes are also undercut by the statement that "you can't really explain anything to anybody" (56). Gaddis' use of the "other" in the context of the "kangaroo dance" reads more as a creative portrayal of the betrayal of his body, or even, as in the reference to Glenn Gould (27-29), the reduction of the body to machine (to Vonnegut's "dead machinery"): "he wanted to be the Steinway because he hated the idea of being between Bach and the Steinway because if he could be the Steinway he wouldn't need Glenn Gould he'd be the other. He'd be the Steinway and Glenn in one like the kangaroo he'd be the other! He'd be in control" (*Agapē* 27). The machine, mechanically reproducible, is thus opposed by the intellect, inspiration, the dangerous creative artist, through the various mentions of Homer's daemon, of the "self who could do more" (64), Jung's (and Nietzsche's) aristocratic Nature (the eternal truth of elitism, of men of gold and men of bronze) Plato's Truth ("Eternal truth that's what it's all about isn't it" (33)), and more:

it was Democritus saying the finest poems were composed with "inspiration and a holy breath" I remember that phrase, inspiration and the holy breath that sets us apart from reason and above reason, some inner revelation, some inner ecstasy even some abnormal mental state why they're out to eliminate us, why they'd say I'm afraid of the death of the elite because it means the death of me. (*Agapē* 33)

Thus Gaddis proposes not a democratic approach to art and beauty, nor Malraux's community, nor even the hopeful deliberation of *The Recognitions*, but a "small group of minds, ever the same, to pass

on the torch" (35), and rather than love as Eros, embodied love is just another fiction, along with the kangaroo:

strip the romantic veil off the naked animal's only purpose being used to perpetuate the race sex with girls sex with boys not for pleasure no out of sheer despair [...] this Other I bought it for was a fiction kangaroo and all the rest of it I can't, can't tell if I'm shivering [...] Pleasure deprives man of the use of his faculties, any greater pleasure than sensual love? No, nor a madder, true love is beauty and order so no intemperance or madness allowed near our true loving couple all of it fictions falsehoods lies, people weeping, dying, marrying, and I should sit down and write books telling "how she loved him"? says Tolstoy, it's shameful! The ultimate fiction the maddest of them all yes the most tyrannous because they believe it kill for it, die for it, only you! Has to be the most absurd, the most overwhelming fiction because of the enormity of what it has to conceal till it's too late yes, these illusions this fiction of love true love mad love strip it all away and lay things bare
(*Agapē* 46-7)

Death here is not union, but the final betrayal of the mind by the body, a final separation. And though he leaves his works behind him, just as the presence of the "old suit of Japanese armour" (3) on the first page suggests, Gaddis' narrator faces death and dismantlement with "high ideals" intact.

It is these ideals that are at the heart of voluntary death as a transcendental act; as Laërtius writes of Empedocles' divine longings: "Hail to ye, [...] I, an immortal God, no longer mortal [...] Now live among you" (Laërtius 364). Or indeed, in Novalis' diagnosis (in an early version of Camus' statement in *The Rebel*): "The genuine philosophical act is suicide; this is the real beginning of all philosophy [...] this act alone corresponds to all the conditions and characteristics of the transcendental attitude" (qtd. in Krell 7). Blanchot thus pinpoints Hölderlin's shift away from Empedocles as a shift away from the transcendent: "Empedocles is the desire to go into the other world, and it this desire which is now called inauthentic. It must be bent back toward the earth" (*Space* 270-1). This trajectory can only bring to mind Rilke once again, and *The Recognitions*, and demonstrate just how far Gaddis has fallen, though in the
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wrong direction. Rather than transcending downwards, having begun with earth, he is now falling upwards.

It is also true, however, that this voluntary death in the face of forced immanence, in the face of the absence of an ideal measure and relativism, is already lurking in the “evil heart” of *The Recognitions*, though at this stage the dilemma is staged in Socratic (Platonic/Aristotelian) rather than Empedoclean terms: “Yetzer hara, the evil heart, were Adam and Eve in love? What I mean is, do we only know things in terms of other things? Well then, I’ll die like Socrates, there’s dignity” (*Recognitions* 379). Though Wyatt manages to overcome this sentiment in order to live, Gaddis is unable to follow the lead of his creation. From here, then, one can endeavour a larger critique of Gaddis’ politics, beginning from Rancière’s comment that Socrates, rather than take his own life, should have learned the language of his critics:

Socrates, the “ignorant one,” thought himself superior to the tribunal orators; he was too lazy to learn their art; he consented to the world’s irrationality. Why did he act like this? For the same reason that defeated Laius, Oedipus, and all the tragic heroes: he believed in the Delphic oracle; he thought that he was the elect of the divinity, that she had sent him a personal message. He shared the madness of superior beings: the belief in genius. (*The Ignorant Schoolmaster* 96)

Rancière’s *The Ignorant Schoolmaster* takes as its thesis the equality of intelligence; the schoolmaster of the title is Joseph Jacotot, who argued (and demonstrated) that a teacher can teach without expertise. Despite Gaddis’ inclusion of John Holt’s *How Children Fail* on his Literature of Failure syllabus, the thesis of which is that all children are intelligent but the culture of fear in traditional education prevents learning, this is something that Gaddis appears to explicitly deny:

Falsehood’s the common currency and we’re back where we started, not the pure unadulterated falsehood but what Plato calls the lie in words that’s only sort of an imitation, a shadowy image that’s useful sometimes when you’re dealing with an enemy for instance that’s all we do isn’t it? Why Tolstoy says it’s our duty to edify the masses, our vocation to

edify mankind *even for the ones who think you can teach without knowing anything* since artists and poets teach unconsciously, that music, literature, painting all the arts are just a stew of nonsense and falsehood if the masses don't support them. (40, italics mine)

He appears to want, in fact, for the artist to be considered a kind of secular or rational *sacer vates* or soothsayer, and for his work to be treated as a textbook, a handbook of Truth¹⁹⁰. Where Rancière deems the Socratic method to be “a perfected form of stultification” (29), and demands instead that everyone learn for themselves, Gaddis reverts to a model of the “divinely” inspired artist as seer; to a variant of the model previously rejected in *The Recognitions*. Again, this is not strictly Platonic, for in the *Ion* Plato reduces the Homeric poet to someone who in fact knows nothing; an empty vessel. His model would be that of Plato’s interlocutor, before Plato has had his way with him, though in his emphasis on intelligence Gaddis perhaps conflates the two. Homer’s daemon inspires, the artist, the person who can understand and transmit knowledge via the work of art, translates for the ignorant. In either case, Gaddis becomes the bad teacher, the Old Master, lamenting the stupidity and ignorance of his students (the American people) in *Carpenter’s Gothic*, and committing to a view of art as born from strife, as well as to an elitist Platonic/Aristotelian basis for democracy, in *Agapē*:

Since all writing worth reading comes, like suicide, from outrage or revenge, there must still be a way to deal with some serious ideas here without risking this seal of Tolstoy edifying the masses [...] Talk about the classic contributions of Aristotle and Plato in the participatory democracy of ancient Athens in creating the sense of community, just scare them all away. Places like Athens and Laodicea might as well be on the moon. (43)

¹⁹⁰ Abensour’s discussion of William Morris’ own desire to be a *vates* provides an interesting contrast to Gaddis. With an eye to the unitary society of the Middle Ages, Morris participates in the Romantic movement to collapse the divide between art and life: “the true secret of happiness lies in taking a genuine interest in all the details of daily life and in elevating them to art” (Morris qtd in Abensour, “Politics” 137). In this case “[a]rt must renounce its ‘sacred’ character” (Abensour 143) and the task of the artist becomes to participate in a reactivation of the “function of communication that once belonged to art, to enlarge it, to transform the apparatus of production to the point where the roles of producer and consumer become interchangeable” (142), a task that Abensour connects to the work of Benjamin and technical innovation. Godard walks this path for a while, as for example in *Six fois deux*; whereas for Gaddis, “technical innovation” only offers the producer/consumer pseudo-revolution of the player piano, something that only reinforces the “truth” of elitism.

Yet a reliance on superiority and expertise, and on Platonic and Aristotelian models of government, has certain problems, certain ramifications for a view of democracy in general that Rancière details in *Hatred of Democracy*, where the “divine” model for Plato’s Republic is opposed to the “crime” of democracy. Rancière points out that, for Plato, “republic” is not the government of the people, but rather the “name of the government that assures the reproduction of the human herd by protecting it from its bulging appetite for individual goods and collective power” (*Hatred* 30). The “republic” is no more than “pastoral government” in the care of the divine pastor, and “Democratic crime has its origin [...] in the primitive scene that consists in forgetting the pastor” (30):

Le Meurtre du pasteur [...] gives a concrete figure to the 'transcendence' so bizarrely invoked by the new champions of the secular and republican School. The distress of democratic individuals, it says, is that of people who have lost the standard by which the One can be harmonized with the multiple and everyone can unite in a whole. This standard cannot be based on any human convention but only in the care of the divine pastor, who looks after both the whole flock and each member of it. This standard manifests itself in a power that democratic speech will forever lack, the power of the Voice, the shock which all Hebrews felt on that night of fire, whilst the human shepherd, Moses, was given the exclusive responsibility of listening to and of explaining the Word, according to whose teachings he was to organize the people. (30-31, italics in original)

A hatred of democracy, in other words, participates in a desire for divine authority, which necessitates a belief in higher and lower—the power of the elite. Socrates, in refusing to speak the language of the people who accused him, was standing outside his community, outside of democracy. He assumed the position of the pastor, a god: the position of Empedocles, who could not be questioned, or could be questioned but not answer without losing his status (recalling here the often inhuman aspect that Socrates takes in Plato’s works, performing feats both physically and mentally impossible for others). But as Rancière goes on to point out, there is another angle from which to view democracy: the recognition that at the basis of democracy is not the power of expertise or money or privilege, but the

power of chance. Reading Plato's *Laws*, he examines the seven titles of the city, and focuses on the element of *chance* essential to Plato's description of democracy, as evidenced in the "seventh title". According to Rancière this final title, assigned by drawing lots, undermines the other six titles, assigned by birth, wealth, strength, or expertise. "[P]olitics commences" only with this final title,

a title that is not a title, and that, the Athenian tells us, is nevertheless considered to be the most just [...] the choice of the god of chance, the drawing of lots, i.e., the democratic procedure by which a people of equals decides the distribution of places.

Therein lies the scandal: the scandal for well-to-do people unable to accept that their birth, their age, or their science has to bow before the law of chance [...] And yet the 'seventh title' shows us that breaking with the power of kinship does not require any sacrifice or sacrilege. All it requires is a throw of the dice. (40-41)¹⁹¹

The spectre of chance, Gaddis' enemy, reappears once again, and here it is also worth noting that chance is the key metaphor for Bataille in regards to love, in the form of the game of cards (Bataille, "Sorcerer's" 230); another reason for an artist obsessed with order to side with *agapē*¹⁹². More importantly, though, Rancière here provides a context for Gaddis' own hatred of democracy, his elitism, which certain critics have attempted to justify via modernist poetics and cybernetic theory, but which appears not only so obviously in *Carpenter's Gothic* and *Agapē*. The career-long obsession with mechanization would appear to be merely the façade over the desire for the resurrection of the divine pastor and artist. And indeed, in *The Recognitions* the impression is quite clearly given that "Willie" and Plato would happily sit down and sort out the masses' lives for them: "Good lord, Willie, you are drunk.

¹⁹¹ Contra René Girard, perhaps, and representations of primitive societies and primal sacrifice as in Shohei Imamura's masterpiece, *The Profound Desires of the Gods* (1968), which also manages a rather acerbic commentary on the shift from gift to exchange economy.

¹⁹² This argument reappears in Badiou's argument against the calculated love of dating services in *In Praise of Love*; the fault lies not solely with Plato, in other words. A point of clarification is also required here. Gaddis explicitly equates mechanization and the player piano with a "fear of chance, of probability and indeterminacy", but this is then further equated with an American "stigma of failure which separates the crowd from the elite" (2-3). Chance is here given a very slim field of play.

Either that or you're writing for a very small audience [...] So...? how many people were there in Plato's Republic?" (478).

At first glance, Gaddis' position contrasts markedly with Godard's own rhetoric of equality in the autobiographical *JLG/JLG*:

I said that I love. That is the promise. Now, I have to sacrifice myself so that love exists on earth. As a reward at the end of this long undertaking I will end up being he who loves. I gave myself. A man, nothing but a man, no better than any other, but no other better than him.

For Godard, art is the expression of faith that others, that love, exists, and also an attempted proof; a position that can be related to Iris Murdoch's statement that "Love is the perception of individuals. Love is the extremely difficult realization that something other than oneself is real. Love, and so art and morals, is the discovery of reality" (Murdoch 215). Murdoch holds up the figures of Tolstoy and Shakespeare as two of the greatest ethical artists, while T.S. Eliot comes under attack for demanding that one attend not to other people, but to God, in a by now familiar opposition. At the same time, Godard's rhetoric does not seem all that far from Gaddis' extreme solipsism, and Valentine's use of Emerson in *The Recognitions*. Does not the Romantic (Brochian) nature of this gesture, in which personal salvation is universal salvation, not still imply a privileged role for the artist?¹⁹³ Just as importantly, if this is indeed an ethical position, as Murdoch holds, where does it leave the question of politics?

¹⁹³ This is also visible in the Romantic-despite-itself gesture that was *The Recognitions*, where salvation becomes the task of art; as Gass reported of Gaddis, "he and the earlier Russian writers had the same target, and that he was attempting to save his version of an acceptable country as they were endeavouring to redeem theirs" (Gass, "Snapshots" 15). See also Hölderlin's own struggle with this desire through the figure of Empedocles in "The Basis of Empedocles" and "The Fatherland in Decline", both collected in *The Death of Empedocles*.

QUELQUES MOTS INJUSTES: FILM SOCIALISME, DISSENSUS

Whence all the passion towards conformity anyway?—diversity is the word. Let man keep his many parts and you'll have no tyrant states [...] Life is to be lived, not controlled; and humanity is won by continuing to play in face of certain defeat. Our fate is to become one, and yet many. This is not prophecy, but description. — Ellison, *Invisible Man* 465

In contrast to Gaddis' quite obvious artistic elitism, the case of Godard is more problematic. No doubt partly thanks to Godard's reference to Rancière's *The Ignorant Schoolmaster*, critics such as O'Rawe and Sturgeon have been quick to see in *Film Socialisme* a film that advocates "dissensus". In O'Rawe's words, the film belongs to that

dissident or 'dissensual' category of artwork capable of 'emancipating the spectator' by disturbing [...] 'the distribution of the sensible' in that it generates gaps, openings, and spaces, poses questions, invokes associations but never posits a fixed position, imposes an interpretation, or allows itself to invest in the illusion of expressive objectivity and the stability of meaning. ("Fraternity")

Brenez has a less specifically positioned but perhaps similar argument, stating that it emerges "from a 'republic of images,' in other words from forms of montage that de-hierarchize formats, techniques, textures, and qualities, to the benefit of a more far-reaching, more political perspective and at the expense of technophilic and economic criteria", designating it a piece of "a symbolic utopia" (Brenez and Foreman "L'Art"). Discussion to this point at the very least demonstrates that these are not statements that can be made lightly. Films that Rancière has criticized as films of "consensus" have made use of the same methodology that O'Rawe points to as evidence of "dissensus", and the latter's almost Brechtian description of *Film Socialisme* as an artwork that can "emancipate" the spectator is beyond problematic. For Rancière media or entertainment is not in itself "utopian", certainly, but neither is the spectator "integrated from above" and in need of being emancipated: the spectator is already emancipated. The challenge lies in creating artworks that do not attempt to force the viewer to take a single (the artist's) perspective. And how different is Brenez's description, for example, from what

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Jameson describes as high art's "original vocation" to "experiment or tinker with reality" (*Archaeologies* 6), a "tinkering" that Miéville states is the basis for art in *The Old Place*?

Artistic thinking begins with the invention of a possible world, or a fragment of a possible world, then using experience and work, painting, writing, filming, to confront it with the outside world. This endless dialogue between imagination and work allows for the formation of an ever clearer representation of what we agree to call reality. (*The Old Place*)

But there is more to bear in mind here. Brenez herself points out in "The Forms of the Question" that "[t]he founding Godardian model proves Socratic" (160), though the description of Socrates that Brenez references is decidedly idiosyncratic¹⁹⁴. Trevor Stark, on the other hand, has opposed Marker's Medvedkin Group, with its emphasis on the disintegration of signifying categories such as worker and intellectual, to Godard's adherence to the special place of the Marxist vanguard artist in the vein of Lucien Goldmann. Stark applies the concept of Nancy's inoperative community, along with the work of Rancière, to the result of the Medvedkin efforts, to which he attaches the worker's claim of the right to create, "a gesture as threatening to the factory bosses as it was to the official organs of the left, with their vision of the worker acceding to a state of being-in-oneself through work" (149). And here one would need to consider Daney's discussion of 70s Godard in terms pedagogical: "The privilege of the school is that it retains its pupils so that they retain what they are told; the master retains his knowledge (he doesn't say everything) and punishes the bad pupils with detention" ("Theorize/Terrorize (Godardian Pedagogy)" 119). Can one be a Jacotot-style "tutor" and "terrorize" at the same time? Perhaps: as Daney states, "Godard is not the conveyor—still less the originator—of these discourses which he asks us to believe in (and subject ourselves to) [...] His role is more like that of a tutor [*répétiteur*]" (118). Godard is "only interested in (re)transmission" (118): the very definition of Jacotot? Not, one would think, if the viewer is expected to believe in, to "subject themselves to", a master discourse, as Daney

¹⁹⁴ "He had nothing of his own; he took from others and adapted things. One plus One, it went a lot further and people said to him: 'We want to stay at One.'" (Godard, qtd. in Brenez, "Forms" 160). An interpretation that is (superficially, at least) anti-Platonic, almost Aristotelian. Though there is no room for such a discussion here, a more in-depth analysis of Godardian pedagogy and dissensus might begin from Brenez's formulation of the "Question-Image" ("Forms" 171-7).

suggests. Asselberghs states that with *Film Socialisme* the era of pedagogy is definitively over, quoting Godard in interview in 2010: "I don't want to say anything, I try to show, or make one feel, or allow for something else to be said afterwards" (qtd. in Asselberghs "Late"). But is not the rhetoric still the same? Declaring the time of pedagogy over would then seem to misunderstand Godard's pedagogy, or at least Daney's representation of it, where (now as before) the school is opposed to the "bad" cinema, a place where "to hold on to your public, you have to give them things to see and enjoy, tell a story (spin a yarn)" (Daney 119). Godard has long lamented the "assembly line" nature of film, after all, and he and Miéville had previously investigated the subject of education in 1978's fascinating *France/tour/détour/deux/enfants*. The question is not then one of form, but of the compatibility of Godard's interests in the ethical, as his continued interest in Levinas and Blanchot illustrates, with the political. A more deliberate analysis of *Film Socialisme* is required, then.

Such an analysis might begin with the fact that *Film Socialisme* is set on an ocean liner, the height of capitalistic indulgence and (one would think) the very antithesis of the kind of borderlessness that Rancière is interested in: the very definition of a politics-free zone. It is not a *memory*-free zone, however, if one considers it to be a reference to Andrzej Munk's ocean liner-based film of the Shoah, *Pasazerka* (1963), one filmic "ship" reference that O'Rawe does not make, and, given its use in the *Histoire(s)* (1A), one of the most important. Munk's film stages a passenger's coming-to-truth, an overcoming of self-deception, whether voluntarily or out of fear of discovery is arguable, regarding her complicity as a concentration camp kapo after seeing one of her victims board the ocean liner¹⁹⁵. Godard would then be returning to the familiar theme of attempting to restore memory, history (as the viewer hears in *Allemagne*: "I'd like to give history back to those who have none"), though the rather pulp Nazi gold plot does little justice to such an attempt, leading one to suspect (or hope for) some level

¹⁹⁵ James Price argues that "after [Liza's] initial evasion and self-deception, even perhaps knowing she will fail, she painfully and obsessively sets out" to admit the truth (46), while my own reading is less sympathetic, judging Lisa to be motivated purely by fear of reprisal, hence a desperate attempt to find some version of the story that contains enough of the truth that it will stand up to scrutiny while also containing enough fiction to minimise her culpability. On the other hand Stuart Liebman sees only the negative, and sees a "naïve and contrived" tale of a "bizarre reprise of the master-slave dialectic" where "[a]ccording to Liza, she was [...] the true victim of the [camp's moral] grey zone because [...] it was Marta who allegedly preserved her inner freedom by rejecting Liza's blandishments and order" (65).

of irony, and the unfinished nature of *Pasazerka* thanks to Munk's untimely death makes for a fair amount of ambiguity¹⁹⁶. Yet, this coming-to-truth, or coming-to-consciousness, of which he gives as the "best example" Godard's *Ici et Ailleurs* (133), is argued in another context by Rancière to be merely part of the master's discourse, "Demystification is part of stupefaction" ("A Child" 131). To the "dismantling of traps of sound and image by which we love to be fooled" (133) he opposes the atopic roving of Ingrid Bergman in Rossellini's *Europa 51*, who "leaves the frame" (116), "takes a step to the side" (117), sees for herself, lets go of "consciousness of the social relations" which "is shown to be the homologue of the assembly line" (120-1). To the realism of the social, of the factory, of History, he opposes the scandal of a child who kills himself, for "[h]owever rigorous the pursuit of lies might be, who can fail to see its price?" (133) And thus, with admirable symmetry, to Godard's earlier *Allemagne* one might oppose the death of another child, the famous death of the small German boy in one of *Allemagne*'s primary source texts, Rossellini's *Germany Year Zero*.

Perhaps the most obvious "ship" intertext is in fact Maupassant's *Sur l'Eau (Afloat)*, a book that speaks of the intoxication of solitude and of a disgust for humanity, of the impossibility of progress, on the uselessness of art, of "the omnipotence of stupidity" (60). "We know nothing, we understand nothing, we can do nothing, we foresee nothing, we imagine nothing, we are shut up, imprisoned in ourselves" (65). There is only (recalling Godard's comments on "*travail*" and "*emplois*") "sterile labour", useless toil, an absence of *beau travail*, "[f]or mankind changing not, their useless art is immutable" (66), and man is only an animal that cannot change: "Ah yes, we shall ever continue to live borne down by the old and odious customs, the criminal prejudices, the ferocious ideas of our barbarous forefathers, for we are but animals, and we shall remain animals led only by instinct, that nothing will ever change" (82).

¹⁹⁶ See also *Eloge*: "Americans have no real past. Those in the north, not the Mexicans. Not Brazil. Yes, the Americans of the north. They have no memory of their own. Their machines do, but they have none personally. So they buy the past of others. Especially those who resisted". Though in response one might consider Walter Abish's *In the Future Perfect*, which features two epigraphs: the first, a quote from Godard's *Masculin/Feminin*, and the second, a line from another Swiss director, Alain Tanner: "My country has escaped history for a very long time" (vi). In regards to the figure of Goldberg, would it be overreaching to suggest that the translation of the Jewish name Goldberg into "Gold Mountain" can be related to Melville's "Gold in the Mountain", rather than an example of what unsympathetic critics would call an example of "unnecessary" anti-Semitism? Perhaps.

Maupassant joins Lyotard's list of those who have faced the ontological nausea; amusingly, all of this misanthropic thinking takes place on the *Bel-Ami*, a name that literally translated means "Beautiful Friend", but also the title of Maupassant's second novel and the nickname of the protagonist Georges Duroy, a soldier returned from Algeria. Duroy, now a talentless journalist, navigates his way up the social ladder in a completely corrupt France via seduction and lies, in a book that ends happily by way of *Bel-Ami* achieving his goals of wealth and power: marrying the daughter of a wealthy woman he has previously seduced, by means of blackmail, in a church. If *Notre Musique's* Heaven provided a representation of Adorno's "Sur l'Eau", solitude, desire sated, peace, *Film Socialisme*, in its Purgatory equivalent, shows the present day (corrupt) capitalist attempt at a substitute. Rather than the *Bel-Ami*, Godard presents the floating pleasure palaces such as the *Costa Concordia*, as aptly (ironically) named as Maupassant's boat, adding some weight to the relevance of "Sur l'Eau" to the film. Here Jameson's words on Adorno's "minimalist" Utopianism, on the "fleeting and ephemeral moment" of happiness (a representationless representation of happiness, perhaps) set against "society's 'blind fury of activity'" (*Archaeologies* 173) are of particular relevance. Jameson points out that for Adorno

Happiness cannot [...] become an end in its own right, without being sucked back into that Weberian system of means and ends from which it was to have been an escape in the first place. Happiness is thus at one with the refusal of content, an intransigence not to be sullied by nostalgia for archaic systems like the gift, nor by the futurist visions concocted by bearded socialists either. The claims of need are to remain absolute and apodictic: the resultant guilt will then reincorporate that of the Holocaust and intimidate Utopians of Left and Right alike: 'cleaving', as Adorno liked to say, 'to the determinate negation'.

(*Archaeologies* 173)

As for Abensour (reading Adorno, after all) and Levinas, the importance of suffering features strongly, and "the attempt to replace suffering with pleasure is to be denounced as frivolous and insulting to the

victims" (172). No joy, no utopia, is possible without it¹⁹⁷. As with film, no positive is possible without the negative. This binary exists not only in films such as the *Histoire(s)*, *King Lear*, *Notre Musique*, but is present even within his early criticism, praising Sirk's *A Time to Love and a Time to Die* (1958) for its juxtaposition of love and war in "Speed and Tears":

Love at leisure, says Sirk approvingly with every shot in homage to Baudelaire, love then and die. And his film is beautiful because one thinks of the war as one watches these images of love, and vice versa. A very simplistic idea, you may say. Perhaps, after all, it is a producer's idea. But it needed a film-maker to bring it safely to port, and to discover the truth of pleasure behind the convention of tears. (*Godard on Godard* 138)

Perhaps the "simplistic idea" of love juxtaposed with war is an idea (even if it is only "a producer's idea") that Godard never let go, but rather than "the truth of pleasure behind the convention of tears" (138), Godard is now searching for greater truths (a new master discourse?): the truth of guilt behind the phantasmagoria of pleasure. In Alan Wright's words: "Montage=Happiness+Catastrophe" (50); but then montage is the cinema, and the cinema testifies to History, and Godard would like to give us back our History so that we can live. Godard's own negative dialectics, in other words, a dialectic that has metamorphosed depending on the thinkers with whom he has engaged: Sirk, Reverdy, Malraux's Goya and Giotto (and Blanchot's Malraux), Bataille and Weil, Levinas, Derrida, Adorno. (Thus, also, due to an unrepentant consistency, Godard's emphasis on the necessity for images of the gas chambers, in contradiction of the general Adornian/Beckettian "prohibition of images"). And, of course, this truth out of darkness is also a profoundly Melvillean idea:

The intensest light of reason and revelation combined, can not shed such blazonings upon the deeper truths in man, as will sometimes proceed from his own profoundest gloom.

Utter darkness is then his light, and cat-like he distinctly sees all objects through a medium

¹⁹⁷ Further connections in this direction would no doubt surface after a more sustained reading of the relative oeuvres of Adorno and Levinas. The work of de Vries in *Minimal Theologies: Critiques of Secular Reason in Adorno and Levinas* provides a useful starting point.

which is mere blindness to common vision. Wherefore have Gloom and Grief been celebrated of old as the selectest chamberlains to knowledge? Wherefore is it, that not to know Gloom and Grief is not to know aught that an heroic man should learn? (*Pierre* 169)

This, rather than the confidence-man (as Deleuze would have it), is likely to be Melville's legacy to Godard¹⁹⁸. And that modern Plato (in Žižek's words) Badiou's distancing of himself from the melancholy of Godard's cinema/philosophy in his book *In Praise of Love* (99-100), a book whose title was taken from Godard's film of the same name, becomes perfectly logical, and a source of some entertainment, as Plato and Melville live to fight another day. Godard's use of Badiou in *Socialisme* becomes a rather more curious matter, however. Is the failure of an audience to turn up to hear his lecture a comment on the speaker, the audience, or both? Given the loud, distracting, almost phantasmagoric way that the club/disco scenes are shot (compared with Denis' *Beau Travail*, for example), one could certainly read the film not as dissensual, but exactly the opposite, a filmic analogue for Gaddis' *Agapē*, a diatribe against capitalism and the masses, against those who have no concern for Darkness, Truth, or Art (with Manet mistaken for Renoir; a less egregious error than that of the various "artists" and critics of *The Recognitions* who could not identify a plagiarised Rilke (622-3), one must admit); the Guiltless, in other words, of both Broch and Adorno. This interpretation is perfectly in line with Godard's comparison in the *Histoire(s)* of Hollywood with fascism (Rancière, *Future* 53), and the delightful irony here would be that Godard attacks "bad" communality, fascism/Hollywood, while arguing for "good" community, Malraux/art.

Indeed Arnaud des Pallières' *Drancy Avenir*, relative of Godard's *Histoire(s)* and whose cameraman Godard employed for *Eloge*, incorporates selections of Conrad's undoubtedly apropos but

¹⁹⁸ Even as the question of love becomes more complex for Godard, the binary of light and dark remains constant. "What transforms darkness into light? *La poésie*" (*Alphaville*), "light must come from the back" (*King Lear*), and "For one last time the dark gathers its strength to conquer the light. But it is in the back that light will strike dark" (*Histoire(s)* 1B). An interesting point of comparison then is Leos Carax's Arte TV version of his *Pola X* (1999) (*Pierre, Ou Les Ambiguités*), which is structured accordingly: episode 1, *À la lumière* (To the light), episode 2, *À l'ombre des lumières* (To the shadow of light), episode 3 *Dans le sang* (In the blood). Without reading too much into things, it is also worth noting that *Pola X* begins not only with black and white documentary images of war and destruction, but these images are then followed by words from *Hamlet*, "the time is out of joint"; which leads back to Derrida's *Spectres* and *Notre Musique* both. Also, Isabelle, the dark bringer of truth, wonders aloud if there are corpses under the surface of the river.

nevertheless problematic *Heart of Darkness*, heard over a point of view shot from the prow of a boat navigating a river: “The idleness of a passenger, my isolation amongst all these men with whom I had no point of contact, the oily and languid sea, the uniform sombreness of the coast, seemed to keep me away from the truth of things, within the toil of a mournful and senseless delusion” (*Drancy*; Conrad 15-6)¹⁹⁹. On the other hand a book on seamanship is described as “luminous [...] unmistakably real” (46), with the phantasmagoria illustrated at its height by the mist that envelops Marlowe’s steamer prior to meeting Kurtz. Yet Conrad’s is a critique of the civilizing mission of Europe, of the attempt to bring Europe’s “sacred fire” (5) to Africa that instead created a raging fire of death and suffering, the consequences of which can in part be traced forwards to the fate of the post-colonial Cape Verdeans in the slums of Fontainhas. Where Pedro Costa, the “premier poète” of disagreement (Rancière, “Ventura” 9), would then be exploring the darkness, filming Fontainhas’ own light, listening to the inhabitants’ own words (that Conrad’s helmsman never has the chance to speak), Godard, one might say in a distinctly unfair analogy, appears rather to still be on the boat, trying to bring the sacred fire of artistic civilization, and the ethical truth of Catastrophic History, to the heathens. But Conrad has already seen that at the heart of any such mission is the nihilism of Kurtz, of Lyotard’s Malraux, not to mention the Romantic melancholia over the impotence of art.

A more convincing argument for *dissensus* might be the shift from the privileged figure of the couple to the travails of the Martin family, inserting the opposition of government and governed rather than master and slave, politics, not ethics, perhaps, along with the shift from *Notre Musique*’s Hell/Purgatory/Heaven to a less allegorical triptych of Capitalism and History, Family and Politics, Humanity and Art²⁰⁰. O’Rawe writes of the two Martin children as “students à la Jacotot, who teach

¹⁹⁹ “When you have to attend to things of that sort, to the mere incidents of the surface, the reality—the reality, I tell you—fades. The inner truth is hidden—luckily, luckily” (Conrad 42). One might also think, in relation to Gaddis, of Sorrentino’s final novel, with its title and epigraph taken from Henry James: “He sat and stared at the sea, which appeared all surface and twinkle, far shallower than the spirit of man. It was the abyss of human illusion that was real, the tideless deep” (Sorrentino, *Abyss* xiii).

²⁰⁰ In *Carpenter’s Gothic*, on the other hand, Gaddis writes that “Clausenitz [sic] was wrong, it’s not that war is politics carried on by other means it’s the family carried on by other means” (241).

themselves about liberty, equality, and fraternity”²⁰¹. But then Florine repeats the refrain of the State that wants to be one and the individual that wants to be two, attributed to Bataille, in other words the motif of the couple, and in the end, surely Florine’s platform of “no power, a society, not a state” is not a politics, it is a utopia. And though this potential display of intellectual equality may be admirable, if schematic, one might also suggest that it verges on bad art.

And what of this last section, “*Nos Humanités*”? Is it a eulogy or a reminder of common heritage? And if the latter, can this not just as easily be read as potentially indicative of a dangerous nostalgia? If Capitalism maps onto Hell (the past and its absence in the present), Family and Politics onto Purgatory (an allegorical exploration of the present), then Humanity and Art, the past, Europe’s cultural heritage, becomes Heaven. What is the relation here, then, to Godard’s Malrucian leanings? Ellison’s work points to the fact that a profound debt to Malraux is not mutually exclusive with a desire for diversity; but Ellison also never managed to complete his sophomore novel, never managed to progress beyond the degree zero of the basement. Perhaps more importantly, can a film such as *Film Socialisme*, which deals with politics and with people only in the abstract, truly be considered dissensual in Rancière’s sense of the term, as opposed, for example, to the films of Costa, Sylvain George’s *Qu’ils reposent en révolte (Des figures de guerre)* (2010), or even Rossellini’s *Europa 51*? As Lucie Dugas has pointed out, “On the one hand, Godard asks that the spectator has the necessary knowledge to get what he’s saying but, on the other hand, he wishes this to remain submerged by the image and sound and only to bear fruit through what they reveal, which is hardly possible if one doesn’t understand the references he calls on” (qtd. in Darke 93). Yet Godard has spoken of his *Histoire(s)* as a film that does not need a “comprehensive key” (Godard and Ishaghpour 39), unlike the films of Van der Keuken, and certainly many of Godard’s allusions do indeed “bear fruit”²⁰².

²⁰¹ It is also worth noting that it is the family that is used by Levinas in *Totality and Infinity* (1969) to oppose the State. See Robert Gibbs (240-242).

²⁰² Godard speaks of Van der Keuken and Chris [Marker] as two filmmakers who may someday make cinema/video somewhere “between the video game and the CD-ROM [...] another way of making films, which would be a lot closer to Borges and people like him” (Godard and Ishaghpour 39); though diaristic, one might consider Marker’s *Immémory* a step toward such a “film”. And here one might be tempted to posit that perhaps the best piece of criticism from which to begin to analyse Godard’s position in regards to the “people”,
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Of course *Film Socialisme* more than meets Brenez's less stringent standards for a "politically committed film" ("L'Art")²⁰³. And in blurring the boundaries between ethics and politics (and here one might also think of Denis' *L'Intrus*, partially inspired by the work of Nancy), is Godard not doing exactly what Rancière asks in "Contemporary Art", blurring "the very borders of what is recognized as the sphere of the political" (49)? But whether this is a mere sophistry or not remains to be seen; in the majority of readings of Levinas, politics can only be subordinated to the ethical exposure to the other, and politics in essays on the State of Israel tends towards only an "ethically necessary" politics of defence of one's neighbours (Levinas, "Ethics and Politics" 292); for Rancière such a subordination to meta-ethics (and reinforcement of borders) is a betrayal of politics, the practice of democracy lost in the infinite responsibility to the other, a criticism that would hold equally as well for Gaddis' impossible agapistic ethics, and the crossing of this particular divide is a bridge that would seem too far even for Godard²⁰⁴. A better question for the matter at hand, a better question with which to depart, might be this: why *Film Socialisme*, and not *Film Democracy*?

and the relation of the artist's solitude to the community, is not via discussion of dissensus but rather via Rancière's *Mallarmé*, with the Book replaced by the Cinema, and absence by presence.

²⁰³ "A politically committed filmmaker is first of all someone who thinks of collective history, thus someone who thinks in terms of the future that he wishes to call forth, and who sows the seeds of justice in the form of images knowing that, at best, they will grow later" (Brenez and Foreman "L'Art").

²⁰⁴ See, for example, Rancière's critique of Derrida in *Dissensus* (59-60). In contrast to the ethical and the utopian, one might turn to conceptions of heterotopia: "The 'fictions' of art and politics are therefore heterotopias rather than utopias" (Rancière, *Politics of Aesthetics* 41). Yet work is also being done on recuperating an "ethico-political" possibility in Levinas. See Madeleine Fagan's "The inseparability of ethics and politics: rethinking the third in Emmanuel Levinas", for example.

Concluding Remarks

For misanthropy, springing from the same root with disbelief of religion, is twin with that. It springs from the same root, I say; for, set aside materialism, and what is an atheist, but one who does not, or will not, see in the universe a ruling principle of love; and what a misanthrope, but one who does not, or will not, see in man a ruling principle of kindness? Don't you see? In either case the vice consists in a want of confidence. — Melville, *The Confidence Man* 163

Gaddis and Godard both plot an often contradictory course somewhere between pragmatism and metaphysics, between earth and sky. On the one hand, Godard has explored the possibilities of immanent community, yet he holds a Romantic conception of Cinema and History, demanding infinite difference and/or infinite justice, even if infinitely deferred, not just for the living but the dead, in the company of Lyotard's *differend*, Blanchot's refusal, Levinas and Derrida's ethics of ethics, Adorno's negation. On the other, there are those who say with Gaddis that "You get justice in the next world, in this world you have the law" (*Frolic* 13); though at the same time, the author appeals to eternal verities, struggling with the implications of a world of provisional truths, of Darwinian nihilism and "the naked animal" of *Agapē*, the conflict between Darwinian nature and human history with which Maupassant and Adorno struggled.

Gaddis' response is, ultimately, fundamentally negative, the consequence not only of his pessimism, both Spenglerian and in regards to the possibility of a *sensus communis*, but also, perhaps, the attempt to retreat from what Rancière has described as the equality of the aesthetic regime, past the representative regime of Aristotle, to the outmoded ethical regime of art, the standard of which is Gaddis' long time point of reference Plato's *Republic*; and here, amusingly, Gaddis would be guilty of that which Stanley had been indicted long ago²⁰⁵. Given Gaddis' appreciation of Dostoevsky, one thinks

²⁰⁵ A worthwhile discussion for another time is suggested by Rancière's "Why Emma Bovary Had to Be Killed", which posits that the true lesson of Flaubert's novel, and of Proust, is "the true enjoyment of the equality between preindividual haecceities", the weaving of artistic appreciation of sensation into "the fabric of an

of *The Brothers Karamazov*, and the famous phrase, “If there is no immortality of the soul, then there is no virtue, and therefore everything is permitted” (82). In the context of Gaddis and Rancière’s aesthetic regime, this can more usefully be thought of as “If there are no eternal truths, then everything is equal”, an outcome that the American, ultimately, finds unacceptable. Whereas for Rancière, art in the aesthetic regime has an important part to play in the democratic, political sphere. His description of the “distribution of the sensible”, an image of a common “sensible”, a common set of fictions that can be effected in order to reconfigure our already fictional understanding of a non-existent “real”, redefines (contra Lyotard, contra Gaddis) the *sensus communis*. As Steven Corcoran writes,

With the aesthetic regime this knot between *poiesis* and *aesthesis* is undone, and humanity is lost. But the loss brings with it a promise of a new form of individual and community life [...] art now addresses itself, at least in principle, to the gaze of anyone at all, can be used by anyone to intervene in whatever situation (15-16).

If this is the case there is no need, with Godard and Malraux, to find the artistic ties that bind people together, but a need to recognize that these ties are part of a particular framing of reality.

impersonal sensory life” (244), over sensation written into “the plot of a subject of desire” (244). Referencing Flaubert’s previous novel *The Temptation of Saint Anthony*, Rancière states that the bad artist and the Flaubertian character “mistake one art for another and one life for another [...] they think that life is defined by aims and purposes. They have not listened to the lesson of the Devil: life has no purpose” (243). The writer encourages health by disabusing the reader “from the idea of individuality and the dream of love” (247). He goes on to say that “[t]he schizophrenic writer is a good doctor [...] Moreover, he remains cognizant of the old Aristotelian poetics which turns ignorance into knowledge through peripeteia and recognition. Thus he can cure the hysterics at the cost of having some of them die” (247). Rancière gives the example of Woolf’s *The Waves*, in which (c.f. Gaddis’ first novel) Woolf “split the identity of the individual into six characters, who embody six ways of dealing with sensation”, the most important of whom are Bernard, plot driven, and Rhoda, who wants to break “away from ‘the insanity of personal existence’” (247) (embracing true versus writerly, healthy schizophrenia), and thus dies, off-page, “in passing with no explanation” (248). I would argue that Gaddis’ first novel provides an even more black and white example of Rancière’s thesis; and that, terminological variation aside, Rancière’s article provides solid retroactive support for the work done in the first chapter. It also points to a possible explanation for Gaddis’ post-*Recognitions* crisis:

[Rhoda] dies as the impossible figure of the writer as a healthy schizophrenic. She dies as the one who has the eye of the writer, the senses of the writer, but who cannot write precisely because of this. Therefore there can be no fiction of her death, no lesson from her death [...] Such is the conclusion that the writer has to draw if he or she takes the matter of schizophrenia seriously. This also means that the death of the character can still save the narrator. But it can no longer save the writer. (248)

Does not the burden of history remain, however? Can even the positive alternatives to Gaddis, Serres and Lucretius' clinamen, or Rancière's random democracy, be enough? Adorno once wrote that "[e]ven if it were a fact, it could not be the truth that Carnap and Mises are truer than Kant and Hegel" (*Negative* 385). Mises is famous for his influence in libertarianism; Carnap, more pertinently, was part of the Vienna Circle of logical positivism who mistakenly believed Wittgenstein to be one of their own²⁰⁶. Rather than Wittgenstein's Tolstoyan/Kierkegaardian mysticism, Carnap adopted materialism and humanism in a position not unlike Wiener's: "He himself gives meaning to his life if he sets tasks for himself, struggles to fulfil them to the best of his ability, and regards all the specific tasks of all individuals as parts of the great task of humanity" (Carnap 9). Another form of "tragic heroism", in other words, an approach that Adorno weighs and finds wanting. As Adorno goes on to write, "[t]hat no reforms within the world sufficed to do justice to the dead, that none of them touched upon the wrong of death—this is what moves Kantian reason to hope against reason" (385). What of the dead, of justice, then? Does one let the dead bury the dead, or is that a violence in itself? Or is there more violence in attempting to subsume every injustice under the limit case of the Shoah, or under an idea of generalized catastrophe²⁰⁷? Or, to paraphrase Adorno: even if it were a fact, can it be the truth that Gaddis is truer than Godard?

Fortunately, though the larger questions remain, this last is a false dichotomy. Gaddis' latter position could after all be described as an unfortunate mélange of Carnap and Plato, logical positivism and idealism, in which case a truer opposition would be that of Rancière and Godard. The former student of Althusser is perhaps the true heir of James and Bergson's pragmatism; the challenge of his work is not that of the identification of truth and false appearance, but, as Corcoran writes, of its "usefulness" (24). Rancière thus breaks down Godard's firm opposition between a sacred cinema of history, cinema as art, and a profane cinema of entertainment and lies, cinema as commodity. Indeed,

²⁰⁶ "Although the *Tractatus* provided the basic logical structure for the new positivism, the Vienna Circle philosophy was completed only when the logic of the *Tractatus* was dovetailed with Mach's sensationalist theory of knowledge" (Janik and Toulmin 212-3). See Carnap's "Intellectual Autobiography" for a first-hand account.

²⁰⁷ See Rancière on Lyotard, chapter six of *Disagreement* ("Politics in Its Nihilistic Age"), for example.

one benefit of the “distribution of the sensible” is that the commodity ceases to become a stumbling block; it might be said that the problem with Malraux’s Imaginary Museum is not that of class privilege, as claimed by Bourdieu, but that it goes to such lengths to exclude the commodity²⁰⁸. Here Godard would be guilty of ignoring the Romantic foundation of Marx’s formulation of the commodity, and thus the lesson of Balzac’s *Le Peau de chagrin* (*The Wild Ass’ Skin*)—the lesson that led Benjamin to the Arcades—that art becomes non-art and the commodity becomes art (see, for example, *Dissensus* 124-6, 132-3). It also directly opposes Gaddis’ ideal of a pure, autonomous artistic production that tends towards a desire for the One and the True (or at-one-ment), an ideal that had already set up a familiar equivalence in Gaddis’ first novel: “By prostitution, I seem to mean usefulness” (*Recognitions* 81). This attitude becomes ludicrous in the face of the necessity of an artistic practice that aims for disagreement, a practice that certainly has an appeal in contrast to the answers proffered by both artists: divine truth and elitism, absolute difference, passivity and refusal, negation, and perhaps most tellingly, the ultimate impotence of Romanticism already recognized by Blanchot:

neither in the world nor outside the world; master of everything, but on condition that the whole contain nothing; pure consciousness without content, a pure speech that can say nothing [...] By becoming everything poetry has also immediately lost everything.

(Blanchot, “Athenaeum” 356)²⁰⁹

Rancière’s aesthetics, built on a more thorough examination of Romanticism than both Godard and Gaddis’s own, and demanding neither autonomy nor heteronomy but rather oscillating between the two, succeeds in being an aesthetics of indeterminacy, of ambiguity, where Gaddis’ attempted ethics of indeterminacy failed. Examining the various “metapolitics” of art, Rancière concludes that “[a]esthetic art

²⁰⁸ In fact the demand by the workers for access to classical culture (for example Picasso, Prévert, Éluard, an astonishing claim in the age of the culture industry) provides some belated context for the maisons of Malraux: “We can’t fight exclusively on the union level or the political level, if we don’t fight at the same time on the cultural level, on the level of the development of one’s personality, of one’s intelligence” (qtd. in Stark 122); Rancière points out that “Militant workers of the 1840s break out of the circle of domination by reading and writing not popular and militant, but ‘high’ literature” (“Aesthetic Revolution” 134).

²⁰⁹ See particularly *Dissensus* page 127-8 for an alternate take on, and comment on, Baudrillard’s thesis in *The Conspiracy of Art*.

promises a political accomplishment that it cannot satisfy, and thrives on that ambiguity. That is why those who want to isolate it from politics are somewhat beside the point. It is also why those who want it to fulfil its political promise are condemned to a certain melancholy" (*Dissensus* 132-3).

And this, perhaps, is the key to the chronic melancholy and anger of both artists²¹⁰. Gaddis is unable to hold to his early endorsement of a life and art of ambiguity and compromise, lapsing into his own outraged melancholy over a perceived slighting of a pure art in the service of eternal truth, an art suffocated by the smoke of the phantasmagoric modern world of commerce and entertainment. He demands space for an elite, "dangerous" artist, perhaps in response to the artistic quietism espoused by Exley's *A Fan's Notes* and Melville's "The Fiddler", the former appearing on Gaddis' *Literature of Failure* syllabus:

I lay on the davenport wondering whatever was the matter with Watertownians that they could find no more dignified way to confront the hydrogen age than fretting about Plaid Stamps or the lustful appetites of neighbors' daughters. In those languidly optimistic days, I still owned the distasteful hauteur of one who believed the world could be shaken until the pieces fell together into the pattern of my own promised land, and had no idea what an exemplary world it would be if, like housewives, everyone sensed his inadequacy for Divine Missions and confined himself to worrying over grocery stamps. (Exley 190)

Yet, again, there is an excluded middle here. Artistic response to injustice is not limited solely to either Divine Missions or Plaid Stamps, at least not if one is willing to abandon the necessity of certainty: whether it be the certainty of salvation or the certainty of quietism. Given that he is unwilling to do just that, the dangers of Gaddis are more in line with Plato's original pejorative sense than with Gaddis' wishful *vates*: in this case the dangers, as Broch put it so well in another context of Joyce, "of increasing aloofness [...] to be found both in his pessimism and in the power of the artistic resources he has placed at the service of his pessimism" (*Geist* 94). The pessimistic artist offers not salvation and social

²¹⁰ See also the conclusion to Rancière's "The Saint and the Heiress" (119).

cohesion, as he would like, but only individual and social corrosion, and by *Agapē* Gaddis' pessimism contains multitudes: commodity pessimism, entropy pessimism, democracy pessimism, all based on models that are by no means inevitable.

Has Godard, on the other hand, moved beyond a desire to be the elite, Romantic, *avant garde* artist, as those who see in *Film Socialisme* a *Film Dissensus* would perhaps claim? Prone to his own commodity (or Hollywood) pessimism, his own fight against democracy pessimism calls to mind the words of the great German filmmaker Rainer Werner Fassbinder who, speaking in passing of Godard and Samuel Fuller, noted that "Sirk has made the tenderest films I know, they are the films of someone who loves people and doesn't despise them as we do" (Fassbinder, "Six Films" 88)²¹¹. Godard's consistent efforts to overcome his own pessimisms, his own pride (thinking particularly of the self-mortification of *Changer*), to love, are admirable, but their efficacy is questionable. After being the artist *engagé par excellence*, Godard attempts to escape the melancholy of political impotence via Malraux, Bergson and Shklovsky and a certain conception of artistic autonomy; but this is only the equally as impotent other side of the coin, or at the very least Godard's resulting turn towards Romanticism and an ethical conception of art appears to bring with it once again the sign of Benjamin's Saturn. As an artist creating in the vein of Adorno and Melville, Godard has made some of the most fascinating films of the last century. As an artist of dissensus, one would have to read Godard against himself; certainly a possibility given that Rancière has done so on a number of occasions. But forcing such a reading with no concern for the conflict between the Romantic and the dissensual does neither Godard nor his viewers and critics any favours.

In contrast, I would argue that Gaddis' final novel and Godard's most recent full-length film indicate the extent to which neither Gaddis nor Godard's idealist positions is ideal. On the one hand

²¹¹ A statement that one can compare to Truffaut's epistolary, bitter comments regarding Godard's love for the "masses", and indifference towards his friends, his crew, to individuals (*Letters* 387), "The notion that all men are equal is theoretical with you, it isn't deeply felt, which is why you have never succeeded in loving anyone or in helping anyone, other than by shoving a few banknotes at them" (389). It is certainly true that relative to filmmakers such as Pialat, Philippe Garrel to a certain extent, or even perhaps Miéville, Godard films couples in a certain abstract sense. The best example of this, however, would be the distance between Godard's *Le Mépris* and its use as a source text for Andrzej Zulawski's *L'important c'est d'aimer* (1975), complete with soundtrack by Georges Delerue.

there is neither love nor politics, and on the other, though love abounds, politics is again nowhere to be found. Somewhere between the two, in a world of compromise and the commodity, would appear to lie an art not of salvation/redemption, or of truth, but of democracy, of commerce, chance and fiction. Still, the question of history, the dead, remains the most obvious objection, and this is a matter that Rancière continues to investigate²¹². Most recently, in opposition to the idea of history as a “sacred thing” that “must be truthful [for] wherever truth is, there God is” (Cervantes 479), he has read the *Histoire(s), Drancy Avenir*, and the work of Chris Marker as a glimpse of history itself as reliant on fiction, as heterogeneous and anachronistic: “*Si l’histoire ne s’atteste pas sans la construction d’une fiction hétérogène, c’est qu’elle-même est faite de temps hétérogènes, faite d’anachronismes*” (*Figures de l’Histoire* 54)²¹³. Perhaps if history is indeed heterogeneous, anachronistic in and of itself, then the dead too are anachronisms, just as Derrida proposes; and the spectres of the past—fictional as any of us—can still see justice (as much as any of us can) in the present.

And if this is not the case [...], I say have patience and shuffle the deck. — Cervantes, 608

²¹² See also *The Emancipated Spectator* (129-132) and *Film Fables* Part IV, “Fables of the Cinema, (Hi)stories of a Century”.

²¹³ “If history cannot vouch for itself without the construction of a heterogeneous fiction, it is because history itself is made of heterogeneous time, made of anachronisms”.

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