

The Economy of Form: An Introduction

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It all goes back, perhaps, to Hegel's definition: *die moderne bürgerliche Epopee*, "the modern bourgeois epic" (452). Tied in this way to a class whose historical fate coincided with the rise of capitalism, the novel became for Hegel—"both the liberal and Marxist theories of the novel" (Jha 36)—the paradigmatic literary case of economy structuring, one that was also being structured by literary forms. George Steiner, accordingly, praised the ways in which "the novel . . . expressed and, in part, shaped the habits of feeling and language of the Western bourgeoisie from Richardson to Thomas Mann. In it, the dreams and nightmares of the mercantile ethic, of middle-class privacy, and of the monetary-sexual conflicts and delights of industrial society have their monument" (555). Georg Lukács, for his part less inclined to monumentalize the industrial and mercantile bourgeoisie, preferred instead to glean from the novel "the field of action of the demonic" (*Theory* 90), a fiendish spirit of rebellion pitted against a whole economic order; the "uncertain attitude," in short, "of romantic anti-capitalism" (19). For all intents and purposes external to the story itself, the nature and impact of whatever we mean by this attitude ought to elude the economic models and social institutions that intend to capture and codify "dreams and nightmares" as well as "the monetary-sexual conflict and delights of industrial society." With something like this in mind, the articles included in this special issue refocus our critical attention from that already codified material onto the elusive semiotic residues that often cloud key narrative events so that they resist rationalization as either pro- or anti-capitalist.

The last decade of the eighteenth century was marked by a disturbing discrepancy between the process that subsumed and limited cultural differences and the cultural system as a whole. Convinced that global economic expansion was eroding the national cultures of Western Europe, Immanuel Kant's "To Perpetual Peace: A Philosophical Sketch" enjoined the established governments of the world to adopt a universal law of hospitality in hopes of curbing what he saw as the rampant cultural hybridization of European nations brought on by their own inhospitable practices of primitive accumulation and land grabbing. Within five years of the publication of Kant's "Sketch," William Wordsworth and Samuel Coleridge's *Preface to the Lyrical Ballads* proposed a new poetics that in key respects resembled Kant's polemics.¹ Against Enlightenment wit and prosody, the authors of the *Preface* claimed that only poetry written in the cadences and featuring the local subject matter of spoken English could ward off the deracinating effects of a national

¹ "The Copernican revolution in epistemology—if we do not restrict this to Kant's specific doctrine that the mind imposes the forms of time, space, and the categories on the 'sensuous manifold,' but apply it to the general concept that the perceiving mind discovers what it has itself partly made—was effected in England by poets and critics before it informed academic philosophy. . . . Coleridge and Wordsworth do not employ Kant's abstract formulae. They revert, instead, to metaphors of mind which had largely fallen into disuse in the eighteenth century" (Abrams 58).

economy whose center had shifted decisively from country to city and from agriculture to industrialization. While Wordsworth and Coleridge addressed much the same economic dilemma as Kant, in other words, they eschewed a political solution in favor of a cultural one: the lyric vitality of a system of community relations long dormant in the culture of their present and revitalized by the poetic imagination.

They turned, in other words, to much the same repository of cultural material that Raymond Williams calls “the residual,” by which he means “some parts of [dominant culture], some version of it” that had “been effectively formed in the past, but [were] still active in the cultural process” (*Marxism* 122–23). As distinct, say, as religion is from the dominant components of a secular culture, his notion of the residual includes “experiences, meanings, and values” that cannot be codified and substantiated from a dominant perspective but which “are nevertheless lived and practiced on the basis of the residue—cultural as well as social—of some previous social and cultural formation.”² As a part or version of the dominant culture, residual culture earns its name by unsettling dominant narratives and calling for the stabilizing procedures of critical reading—“reinterpretation, dilution, projection, discriminating inclusion and exclusion” (123)—to validate the conventional forms of everyday experience in times of economic upheaval. In turning from philosophy and Romantic poetics to the novel, however, we encounter a narrative form that sometimes tempts us to dismiss or explain away the intrusions of this unsettling material, moments of narrative hesitation on which the essays in this special issue want to focus our attention.

That said, it is misreading the novel, we feel, to determine its formal relation to capitalism without first accounting for its special relation to specific modes of production—as Balzac knew well when he indulged in the descriptive digressions of “the Stanhope press and the ink-distributing roller” (3). Around machines such as the Stanhope, along railways and new means of transportation, a new mode of life was becoming dominant between the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries:³ the novel represented such a mode of life while being produced, distributed, and consumed in it.⁴ It is, after all, impossible to imagine that a literary form could become dominant in Europe “between the mid-sixteenth century and the beginning of the nineteenth” (Mazzoni 3) and still remain untouched by such a radically new mode of life. Nor is it possible to imagine its very language would remain extraneous to the coeval spread of the categories and concepts of the new dominant science: namely, political economy. From Hume’s philosophical meditation “Of Money” to

² With the exception of his chapters on the work of Charles Dickens, Williams relies heavily on poetry to make this case throughout *The Country and the City*, which spells out at length how the country continues to exert its presence after the city has pastoralized it.

³ “This mode of production must not be considered simply as being the reproduction of the physical existence of the individuals. Rather it is a definite form of activity of these individuals, a definite form of expressing their life, a definite mode of life on their part” (Marx and Engels 37).

⁴ The onset of this way of life generally proves disruptive, as did the novel’s claim on leisure time in *Northanger Abbey*, as Austen makes explicit, when her heroine fails to recognize that disruptive news “of expected horrors in London . . . could relate only to a circulating library” (Austen 82).

Adam Smith's dialectic of "the passions and the interests" in his *Theory of Moral Sentiments*; from the linguistic theories of Condillac and Turgot to the legal ones of Beccaria and Bentham, the economic jargon of "circulations," "debt," and "exchanges"—of words, money, interest, feelings, rights, or even ideas—formed the totalizing "style of reasoning" (Hacking 181) of an entire epoch.⁵ As Georg Simmel put it in *The Philosophy of Money*, "the fact that two people exchange their products is by no means simply an economic fact," which is to say that "the phenomena of valuation and purchase, of exchange and the means of exchange, of the forms of production and the values of possession, which economics views from one standpoint" (vii) can be viewed from any number of other ones as well. In short, as money intrudes as the mediation and form for all social relations, traditionally separate domains such as culture and economy or literature and capital become nothing more or less than different social translations articulated from different standpoints of the same logic—or philosophy—of money.

In a culture newly saturated with the language and discourse of political economy, it was the standpoint of the novel that arguably unfolded, in Marc Shell's words, "the deepest internalization of economic representation into a narrative" (124)—and for at least two reasons. The first was because the "transition from coinage to paper money" (Ferguson 142) that swept the whole of Western Europe in the eighteenth century (China had attended to it a few centuries before) was well on its way to replacing values with their representations (Keynes 7) and was doing so with a logic that literary fictions—also on paper—could analogize.⁶ The second was because the novel, striving to impose itself in the literary market and yet relegated by classicist ostracism to "an unofficial existence, outside 'high' literature" (Bakhtin 4), seized the language of political economy to claim that the reader's investment of time and money in purchasing and reading novels did return something in exchange: "a certain type of value" (Lamarque and Olsen 253); a "special function" (Poovey 2); an "interesting and instructive aspect [of history] that we can study" (Manzoni); or, at the very least, "exciting interest of any kind" (Scott 17). Such return on investment, which once responded to fantasies, needs, and desires that the novelist was able to detect in the subjects becoming part of the new mode of life, can be newly manufactured by today's algorithmically constituted markets—"a kind of spirit world . . . of 'magical thought' in which all manner of jumbled human and nonhuman forces constantly assemble, hunt and capture attention and haunt social interaction" (Thrift 3).

Assuming it was in good part because of its ability to respond to these fantasies, needs, and desires that the novel rose to dominate literary markets "wherever industrial capitalism becomes the dominant force in the economic structure" (Watt 64), we can also assume that the continuing viability of the novel as an expression of everyday experience depends on its capacity to renew its form even today. For the novel to retain its capacity to reduce the work of fiction and the

⁵ On the dominance of political economy in the linguistic sciences and arts, see Jean-Joseph Goux; Formigari; Pennisi (163); and Gray.

⁶ See Shermann (2); Poovey; Poirson and Citton; and Guillory.

quality of experience it captures to an allegorical account of the major transformations of its subject matter (namely, everyday experience), the novel's relation to economic discourse will have to fluctuate. Rather than reading fiction as thus economically scripted, the articles in this special issue call attention to just how a selection of novels over two centuries folded the economic discourse of their particular moments into the complex process of coming to terms with the conditions under which life must be lived and continue to seem worth that effort. To put it simply, these articles demonstrate that the novels in question have at least as much to tell us about the economic conditions of the time that could not be explained by contemporary and possibly future economic reasoning, as that reasoning can tell us about the quality of experience captured in novel form. With such a two-way relationship between that form and economic discourse in mind, we have organized these articles around two major shifts in the relationship between economic and social transactions that encourage us to pry apart the narrative that conflates the two and consider whether the novel might indeed incorporate other perspectives (in part or whole) than those we can reduce to an allegory for or against capitalism.

Hesitation

Of the articles that follow, the first four call attention to a pervasive sense that the very ground was in the process of shifting under the protagonists' feet, abandoning them in clouds of hesitation and doubt. A case in point: Anne Radcliffe's domestication of Gothic devices signaling the novel's formal incorporation of what Scott MacKenzie calls "the logic of generalized scarcity." To explain how the protagonists of late eighteenth-century Gothic rethink this principle, MacKenzie borrows Roland Barthes's concept of "the alibi" to recast the logic of scarcity as "a place which is full and one which is empty, linked by a relation of negative identity" (23). We can well imagine that the reader of Radcliffe's *Mysteries* would encounter property as just such a space—one moment substantiating lineage and the next worth only the paper necessary to transfer ownership. The same logic operates at the level of reading, according to MacKenzie, when the reader who experiences a "fantastic" event—one that does not make sense within the world he or she inhabits—must assume that the event "is a product of the imagination." In which case, in the words of Tzvetan Todorov, "the laws of the world . . . remain what they are"; otherwise, he says, the reader can assume that the event "has indeed taken place," and if the latter turns out to be true, then we must assume by default that "the world is controlled by laws unknown to us" (25). The duration of the uncertainty as to which laws govern the novel's subject matter offers a plausible way to approximate the lived experience of historical change. By confronting the possibility that the land that had been in the family for generations could suddenly become so much property to be traded provided a way of understanding what MacKenzie calls "emergent market economism as unlawful or libertine activity." As to why Radcliffe might have anachronistically ascribed the repugnant aspects of mercantile ambition "to the decaying feudal order, especially their artificial deprivations," he speculates that the conflation of such vastly different economic behaviors allowed

Radcliffe's readers to think of a self-sustaining household economy as the only antidote to the increasing precarity of land ownership and disastrous fluctuations in the price of grain.⁷

Sarah Comyn takes up the question of scarcity that haunts the major novels of Jane Austen, indelibly marking their style. Austen's most notable moments of sublime restraint can achieve the rhetorical power they do, claims D. A. Miller, only because the novelist counters those moments with prolonged passages in which verbosity "runs counter to her celebrated narrative style of restraint" (29). Thus, the chatter of Miss Bates, who lacks a stable social position within the provincial economy of *Emma*, succeeds in interrupting and derailing the decision-making plot in a novel designed to stabilize a traditional system of social relations. By letting Miss Bates's nervous chatter run on, however, Austen reproduces at the level of style the same discrepancy that turned the correspondence between Malthus and David Ricardo into a tug-of-war, as Comyn puts it, "concerning the metaphysics of political economy." Embedded in domestic settings and enacted in everyday experiences, she demonstrates, this theoretical dispute becomes "a critical account and . . . affective engagement with political economy's narrative strategies concerning the changing history of value." It is because Austen lets it run away with the plot, then, that the alternative interpretive value she locates only in Miss Bates's rambling monologue threatens to revise the relation of printed information to truth value. As Comyn also points out, Austen does so in much the same way that the Bank Restriction Act of 1797 did in suspending the convertibility of the banknote into specie and stimulating a culture-wide controversy over the value of money. The fact that Austen uses the social exchanges among families in a country village to make this point about the changing basis for economic value in no way diminished the power of an economic analytic that testifies to "her powerful recognition that such narratives served as just such a popular analytic."

To explain how members of diverse and often scattered national readerships came, during this period, pace Kant, to think of themselves as belonging to a single national community, Benedict Anderson asks us to rethink Watt's explanation for the coincidence of the novel's rise with that of industrial capitalism. Specifically, he asks us to rethink that coincidence in light of the novel's special relation to the mode of production: the mutual dependence of its rise on that of vernacular print capitalism (76). Jacques Rancière looks at the same coincidence from the perspective of the community of consumers constituted by "speech circulating outside any specific addressee and without a master to accompany it," writing that "makes its situations, characters, and expressions available to anyone who feels like grabbing hold of them." Rather than an "irresistible social influence," the power of such writing resides in "a new distribution of the perceptible." Such redistribution of what can be grasped by the senses establishes a new relationship "between the act of speech, the world that it configures, and the capacities of those who people that

⁷ Although these were manmade recipes for disaster, Thomas Malthus famously turned scarcity into a law of nature in his *Principle of Population*: "Population, when unchecked, increases in a geometrical ratio. Subsistence increases only in an arithmetical ratio. A slight acquaintance with numbers will shew the immensity of the first principle in comparison of the second" (4).

world" (11). Amanpal Garcha's essay examines this impact as it threatens to emerge in *Emma* and first prompted economic theorists from Malthus and Ricardo through to John Stuart Mill to correct their production-based models by factoring in the consumer's impact on the value of commodities.

Looking at the question of representation from Austen's perspective, Garcha asserts that a novelist could count on her readers not only to agree that producers will act "in ways that are socially useful and adhere to the widely shared value of profitability" but also to discount the kind of "individual decision-making" that "leads to consumption" as a variable "too small-scale and too opaque to be much of a factor in economic analysis." But looking at the decision-making process that led to similar choices just a few decades later, Charles Dickens could ask his readers to hold production responsible for breaking the bond between maker and consumer by shifting the location of value from productive labor to the object for sale. For the prominent neoclassical thinkers, Garcha reminds us, "choices—not labor, machinery, technology, or even supply and demand—are the drivers of economic prosperity." He blames the suspension of decision-making that threatens the marriage plot on the momentary emergence of free economic choice that disrupts the behavior of Austen's major characters. Thus, when Emma and her friend Harriet Smith decide to stop at Ford's shop on the way home from visiting Miss Bates, Austen offers a domesticated model of the theoretical transformation that is the novel's very purpose to make us understand. Once inside the shop, that is, Harriet suffers what Garcha calls "tortured internal deliberations" over which of many pieces of ribbon to buy for a dress, while Emma remains in the street outside daydreaming about the limitless possible everyday events that might take place in the empty street. "In viewing these actions as amusing possibilities," Garcha ventures, "Emma indulges in a form of modern shopping as she assesses the entertainment value of each exchange." In that the protagonist's proclivity for narrative production throughout the novel violates her otherwise conservative decision-making habits, the scene outside Ford's shop invites us to consider the possibility that they could very well go the way of Harriet's. In light of this possibility, the display of fictional choices that creates this pause in the narrative proper can be read as "Austen's reflection on her own role as novelist." This pause in turn allows the reader to consider the possibility "that an idiosyncratic consumerism may be coming to dominate literary production" even while such a basis for choice as yet had no status in provincial England.

Within two decades, novelists would confront an unprecedented increase in the production and circulation of novels. This boom in fiction testifies not only to the impact of the steam-powered printing press but also to the rapid expansion of a popular readership that gobbled up news and fiction in inexpensive weekly and monthly magazines. By the last two decades of that century, fictional form and print format had effectively become one and the same. To make a living as a novelist, Victorian authors were compelled to write in one of several weekly and monthly magazines in which their chapters appeared cheek by jowl with historical and scientific information, biography, political opinion pieces, reviews of exhibitions, true crime stories, and (of course) advertisements, any number of which might have been illustrated. The difficulty that Thomas Hardy consistently encountered when

it came to publishing his major novels (but not his poetry) testifies to the fact that a novelist with literary ambitions who hoped to be published in bound volumes first had to succeed in the periodical press. Nor was Hardy's difficulty exclusively his own: for Zola as well, the business of selling stories often "related more to the newspaper and periodical industry than to the book trade" (Paine 186); and Giovanni Verga too—irritated that "editors offer me 300 lire and pretend they are paying me with that!" (qtd. in Dainotto 18–19)—had to revert to publishing his stories of Mediterranean blood and passion in periodicals in order to earn a (quite comfortable) living by writing.

In contrast to book publishing, Dickens's production of often scandalous events in the serial format of the feuilleton provided fiction with a means of expanding a popular readership: as a medium, the periodical not only pulled together the various kinds of information that accompanied the appearance of each episode of the novel currently featured. By publishing these stories serially in weekly or monthly episodes, he also created a feedback loop whereby a scandalous secret proved irresistible to readers who demanded that the novel eventually punish the offenders and reward their victims. When Dickens's magazine *All the Year Round* was on the brink of financial collapse, the novelist turned to the daunting task of producing weekly segments of an ongoing narrative that regulated disclosure of its secret so skillfully that an increasing number of readers would want their fiction serialized. This deliberately addictive format never proposed an array of options that provided individual readers with a chance to exercise something like freedom of choice. Rather than the wishes of an idiosyncratic individual, Dickens responded to and fed the desires of a proto-algorithmically determined group, constituting a community of consumers who determined what products were desirable and therefore in demand. "When exchange value, profit, and money assume priority over social exchanges," Garcha concludes (following Marx), it means that economic exchange has become "the expression of [an] *abstract* relationship between goods and other goods, or goods and other money" (Marx, "Comments" 225).

Aviva Briefel's reconsideration of the death of Little Nell in Dickens's *The Old Curiosity Shop* demonstrates what goes terribly wrong in arguments that consider such moments of indecision the means by which novelists create new possibilities for expressing individual preferences. Like the French and English city novels before his, Dickens saw the inhabitants of London and Paris, by contrast to those of the new factory towns, as types that to a large degree do not undergo development but instead capture a single moment in the socioeconomic process with which we are concerned: the moment when economic relations had clearly assumed the upper hand. Dickens dramatizes this change by pairing a "handsome child" with her sole relative, an adoring grandfather addicted to gambling. To keep the depleted family unit afloat, Nell has no choice but to pursue what Henry Mayhew described as uncertain and casual income—often not enough to sustain those who performed the many forms of work so classified—which he held responsible for driving these laborers "to improvidence, recklessness, and pauperism" (2: 367). This puts Little Nell in the crosshairs of a double bind: she would certainly die if she could not work to support her grandfather but will also die if she does support him. The takeaway

from this static figuration of the economic contradictions of the early 1840s is twofold. First, the point of the novel is not to show that the new mode of production is bad—that is only too evident—but rather to focus readers' attention on the insidious system of work that understands certain forms of labor as something other than that (as it can occur in situations of generosity, freedom, or even kindness). Second, it is to suggest that the particular temporalities of Victorian casual labor provide a way of thinking through the ontogenesis and irreparable harm wrought by our contemporary gig economy and the general sense of economic uncertainty that characterizes the present.

What, if not reformatting the traditional triple-decker into this patched together serial form, was responsible for the simultaneous expansion of the novel to account for these supposedly peripheral forms of labor as well as the transformation of certain novelists into celebrities whose personal styles might serve as devices for marketing their work? We are of course talking about the rise of a culture industry that “integrates all the elements of production, from the original concept of the novel, shaped by its side-long glance at film, to the last sound effect” (Horkheimer and Adorno 98); the post-Fordist-economy restructuring of time that ushered in the present twenty-four-seven workday (Sweeney; Crary); the conglomeration of the publishing industry (Sinykin); the straightforward marketing of “literary experience as customer experience” (McGurl 455) in the Age of Amazon; and the convergence of an early twentieth-century service economy with the institutions promoting the arts and specialized knowledge-work to form an exponentially expanding “creative class” (Brouillette 20–33). But we are getting ahead of ourselves.

Abstraction

The restructuring of modes of production that swept Europe in the Sattelzeit (Koselleck) between the Classical Age and the Sturm und Drang of modernity necessitated for its functioning a total reorganization of social relations—it needed the creation, to use Marx and Engels's wording once more, of a new mode of life. As the first group of articles has suggested, this had the effect of disrupting traditional family and labor relations as well as customary notions of property ownership. As the new slowly but surely subsumed or replaced the old, nostalgia for what Peter Laslett calls “the world we have lost,” perhaps unsurprisingly, emerged in literary production as what Williams called a “[r]omantic structure of feeling—the assertion of nature against industry and of poetry against trade; the isolation of humanity and community into the idea of culture, against the real social pressures of the time” (*Country* 79). It also prompted the creation of new state apparatus—schooling (Bini), the police (Emsley 24–42), and bureaucracy (Groys)—whose function was both to manage the necessary social transformations and to contain their disruptive effects. Max Weber is generally taken to be the theorist of this new and “modern officialdom” (196)—namely, bureaucratic authority and administration. Before Weber, however, a theory of political economy—or, better, a how-to manual for the revolutionary restructuring of industrial production—first conjectured that the formation of a new bureaucratic class was underway. Now known as “Fordism” and remembered for its theorization of the assembly line—“[t]he

introduction of machinery for doing every element of the work which was formerly done by hand" (Taylor 16)—Frederick Taylor's *The Principles of Scientific Management* in fact proposed, along with a horizontal division of labor, the fragmentation of motor activities and the reduction of the worker's movement to minimal, fixed, and elementary parts, also a vertical division of labor. Taylor's *Principles* argued for the separation of intellectual from manual labor that distinguished the management who organize work from the labor who execute it (Montmollin). Taylor's *Principles* configures management as a "new class" (Rizzi 41)—in short, a veritable bureaucratic apparatus born out of economic rather than political necessities whose intellectual task is to mediate between capital and labor, the latter and the productive ensemble, and society as a whole. While Arthur Conan Doyle, even before Taylor, had already perfected the Taylorism of standardized production, the bureaucratization of intellectual labor remained unexplored in his serialized adventures of the manifestly eccentric omniscience of Sherlock Holmes.

The second group of articles collected here begins by looking at the impact of bureaucracy on the novel form—at the growth of bureaucracy as some sort of intellectual organizing principle and invisible government: "Just as the police in David Miller's seminal study of the Victorian novel largely remain invisible," writes Marius Hentea, "so too does bureaucracy." Invisible as it may be, bureaucracy nevertheless reorganizes the novel form in surprising ways. By looking at Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* against the background of the Victorian novel, Hentea challenges an easy—and quite wrong—assumption: that in the modernist novel, as in its predecessor, a spirit of anti-capitalism would keep revolting against bureaucracy in the name of free-thinking bohemian artistry. "One might think that the novel is moving from the horrors of modern bureaucratic government to the horrors of modern capitalism," Hentea writes in anticipation of this assumption, "but one searches in vain for a critique." The problem may indicate that precisely the intellectual function has now been quite literally subsumed by Fordism and Taylorism as, indeed, a managerial one. A more equivocal engagement with bureaucracy is therefore detectable in Hentea's essay in the form of two spectral intrusions of technology—an airplane spelling out an advertisement for toffee in the sky and a limousine lurching into a city street while whisking an invisible dignitary to an unknown destination—that suspend the concerns of all those bustling through the London street to their individual destinations. Transfixed by spectacle, they become a crowd. As the context for the protagonist's reveries, however, these scenes display, in Hentea's estimation, "an impoverished sociological and collective imagination indicative of a full-throttled liberal individualism." The crowd, as Woolf constitutes it, "is a no longer a sociological entity [à la] La Bon or Canetti but instead a surface description" to which the novel has "denied any social power or independent social reality" (18). Those who can see the narration "moving from the horrors of modern bureaucratic government to the horrors of modern capitalism" will find, instead of some manner of critique, "a liberal exaltation of the plane moving 'where it liked, swiftly, freely, like a skater'" (18). Woolf's decisive move to metaphor, in other words, is only superficially opposed to the dehumanizing language of bureaucracy, which accomplishes much the same thing. That is to say, the move to metaphor arbitrarily transfixes bodies to the street rather than in the

sanctuary of the Dalloway parlor, in either case stripping them of the capacity for a collective will. These everyday intrusions of technology simultaneously acknowledge and deny the ease and regularity with which the military industrial complex disrupts the business of the day. In both instances, an undecipherable pattern of movement transforms abstractions into forms of mass entertainment and, as displays of Woolf's artistic virtuosity, reveals "the original affinity between business and entertainment"—an affinity that Adorno considers "the meaning of entertainment itself: as society's apologia, to be entertained means to be in agreement" (95).

Our next two articles focus on peripheral works of modernism that reveal the pernicious effects of aestheticizing economic policy, calling out modernism's formal means of alienating the popular reader as the novelist's unwitting collusion with global capitalism. Insofar as Willa Cather's *The Professor's House* examines the consequences of capitalist development, Sarah Kimmet contends, this novel "can be read in much the same way as we read capitalism itself." Fiction and theory will, in this event, manifest possibilities for freedom that capitalism both opens up and circumscribes. To read *The Professor's House* as she suggests, one must read counter to Cather's tendency that confirms Fredric Jameson's observation that the techniques of "defamiliarization and renewal of perception" associated with modernism generally lead to "resignation, renunciation or compromise" (*Antinomies* 4). Given the degree to which US political geography differed in its vast spatial unevenness from that of Europe, there was room, as even Marx allowed, for experiments in self-government to flourish. When Cather's pair of protagonists try and fail to protect the remains of an alternative mode of production on the mysterious Blue Mesa, Kimmet declines to concede Jameson's point. Turning to Erik Olin Wright's distinction between progressive and regressive utopian communities, she insists that the failure to materialize an ideal alternative under present conditions does not eliminate the possibility of practical alternative or even makeshift communities that can coexist with capitalism. In making what Cather seems to consider the easy choice of a negative utopia, her protagonists reject the possibility of collective agency for solitary lives free of economic struggle. On the possibility that the tendency to grant total power to "the economy" may be "more psychological and ideological than economic," Kimmet concludes that Cather leaves open the possibility of progressive ways of being anti-capitalist; she would like us to think that local economic ecosystems might still survive in the United States—were their members only willing to undertake the messy project of shared decision-making (cf. Ostrom). This tenuous alternative in no way suggests that the novel can coexist peacefully with the immense growth of bureaucratic apparati. By limiting the free action of individuals and making the individual vanish in the uniformity of the crowd, the new mode of life certainly deprived the novel of its classic agent—as Lukács had already lamented in reference to the near impossibility of writing modern drama in the age of Fordism, when "the diverse forms of activity tend to become increasingly similar (bureaucracy, industrial machine labour)" ("Soziologie" 665; our translation).

The new and distinctively modern task of the novel became, increasingly, "to conjure up in perceptible form a society that has become abstract" (Adorno 122–23). If this is true for *Mrs Dalloway*, it is especially and malevolently so, as McGurk explains, for Samuel Beckett's *Watt*, selected for its corrosive relationship to the Irish

Big House novel, the “genre through which [for two centuries] the landed Anglo-Irish formulated their claim to autonomy from the British Empire.” If the Big House with its large estate had provided the novel and its reader with a model of the self-sufficient economic sustainability of Ireland vis-à-vis Britain, the question for McGurk is whether the “illusions of economic independence and local self-sufficiency that undergird the foundational Irish fictions of the nineteenth century” can enter into a mutually substantiating relationship with the novel of the following century. With Beckett, we are confronted yet again with a Fordist economy whose Taylorist goal is the organization of “more efficient technologies of production.” McGurk asks us to read *Watt* as an assault on the model that requires the protagonist, as manager of Mr. Knott’s so-called house, to think of economic production and consumption in terms of the processes of metabolism and anabolism that together compose a closed system. A Hegelian slave indeed, the protagonist spends his day preparing, administering, and cleaning up after Mr. Knott’s meals in the interests of maintaining this abstraction. As the agent of standardization, Watt is responsible for manipulating production each week so that it replicates the one before, thus maintaining the illusion of a steady state. This requires a constant state of induced scarcity outside the house to deal not only with the problem of overproduction—by way of a family malnourished for generations who keep a kennel of starving dogs—but also with the gradual disintegration of Watt’s “personal system” (Beckett 34). Insofar as his thoughts, feelings, and accumulated knowledge are at once inside and outside the formal limits of the novel, as McGurk observes, the novel gradually erodes its own generic limits, including those distinguishing the narrator from his subject matter, and it devolves into an achronological sequence of tacked-on sections that deal with the excess.

If the household, the country estate, and the Big House had been the traditional economic spaces of the novel written in English, there is no doubt that Paris—the city with its Benjaminian phantasmagorias—was the center of all economic activities registered in the French novel—since at least the times when Lucien had moved there from the provinces convinced that “Paris is Paris” (Balzac 34). Georges Perec’s strange little forty-seven-page novel, *An Attempt at Exhausting a Place in Paris*, initially appears to be waging a similar argument to Beckett’s against the novel’s drive for formal totality, an argument that succeeds best when it fails most conspicuously. Perec’s attempt reproduces on the page the accumulated events he observed in a well-known city square (often, like Watt, in the form of detailed lists) without the seeming discrimination or narrative eye (what Watt referred to as his “personal system”). Perec also does so in order to, as contributor Jacob Soule puts it, “capture the impact of apparently abstract social forms on the material configuration of social space.” But Perec’s effort to perform the literary service of revealing what Soule calls “the secret writing of the functioning of society” distinguishes itself as written thirty years after Beckett’s novel of the 1940s. Indeed, Soule uses *Exhausting a Place* “to mark the moment in which, on a global scale, the ‘city’ as the primary geographical metonym for capitalist modernization is replaced or superseded by the ‘urban.’” In contrast to the city, the urban is “an amorphous geographical category no longer rooted in the development of densely populated locales, but in the dispersal of people, goods, and things” into expanding networks.

While the function of both, as this comparison makes clear, is circulation, the pattern of circulation, as demonstrated by the spectacle performances of technology in *Mrs Dalloway*, is centripetal. The pattern distinguishing the urban is, by contrast, centrifugal. Buses identified by their numbers arrive and depart, each detail acquiring significance not by virtue of its singularity but in signaling its regular recurrence. As Soule points out, the same can be said of the Paris Hausmann designed to promote visibility and circulation among groups as well as individuals. But while “the city appears as a circulatory space long before the 1970s,” he continues, it is only during the period when Perec wrote his account of writing in Place Saint-Sulpice “that ‘circulation’ appears as the defining logic of urban space in its more literary form: that is, as the physical movement of things from one place to another, otherwise known as logistics.” Logistics, according to Jasper Berne, does more than extend the world market in space and speed up the process by which people and materials move—are circulated—from place to place. The power to move things, people, and information is the active power to synchronize movement, to bring the elements of a commodity together or slow them down, altering the form of the commodity produced as well as its destination. So transformed, the mode of production is also a means “of collecting and distributing knowledge about the production, movement and sale of commodities as they stream across the grid” (Berne 2). In pursuit of pathways advantageous to capital, logistics runs roughshod over boundaries of any kind and transforms our maps of some major city as it pushes beyond them in search of mappable territory. Territory classified as underdeveloped and/or idealized as natural in the manner of Cather’s *Blue Mesa* is especially vulnerable to the development of technology that incorporates the useful components of earlier maps to increase the flexibility and speed of an expanding world information system. That underdeveloped terrain includes the natural terrain itself that, like the *Blue Mesa*, simultaneously presents an obstacle to and offers opportunities for further extractivism. Now clearly in charge of the social forcefield that is its job to make intelligible by subjecting it to the shaping force of the human imagination, logistics, in Berne’s sense of the term, affords more recent novelists with the means of doing just that: reimagining the mode of production in terms opposed to the constraints that confine the characters within that links ideology to a regressive ideology of progress. Here, again, we are getting ahead of ourselves.

Logistics

Perec’s novel may resemble Beckett’s in capturing a pattern of unceasing movement so intent on regulating itself that it appears to capture the circulation of goods, money, and people as a closed system. At the same time, *Exhausting a Place* leaves no doubt that much like a bus schedule, when put into practice, its pattern is no failed abstraction but one that the movement of people and things successfully materializes each day. This is to say that the difference between production and consumption—the obsession of neoclassical economics—is no longer at issue in the world Perec observes. The purpose of everyday life in whatever capacity is to move the right components to the right place at the right time—“right” in each instance considered a way of both cutting costs on labor and material and compiling a

reservoir of potential customers. For the novelist, logistics involve the procedures that Sinykin enumerates in *The Conglomerate Era*: an assembly line that moves the novel commodity through “the agent, the editor, the publisher” each of which revises it to “demonstrate its potential profitability” (472). During the postwar period that gave us Disneyland, the conversion of military logistics into the project of rebuilding what had been destroyed went Taylorism one better; it quite self-consciously transformed the mode of production into a mode of circulation that would bring people (both producers and consumers) and materials together at sites advantageous to capital.⁸ Perec’s 1974 novel appears midway through this transformation and before the general readership was as aware as it is today of the increasing dependence of business as usual on communication technology and what might loosely be classified as entertainment (Illouz 1–30).

Focusing on the instrumental role of colonial capital and infrastructure as obstacles in the way of reconstituting two former African colonies as postcolonial nations, Christine Okoth explains how those opposed to European modernity became tragically aware of this dependency. The novels that unfold the logic of her argument—Peter Abrahams’s *A Wreath for Udomo* and Namwali Serpell’s *The Old Drift*—cover the period from the novel’s (postmodern) break from modernism to novels that enjoy taking advantage of capital’s logistics dependency. Dealing with the impact of colonial hydroelectric plants in Ghana and Zambia, respectively, both novels confront the question of what happens to the revolutionary impulse once a colony takes the leap to modernization. To the question of why it is all but impossible to free themselves from the machinery that steals Africa’s resources for the enrichment of foreigners, each novel offers the easy answer, namely, that their protagonists are captive to the ideology that equates such machinery with independent nationhood. But they do so in order to pose the more difficult question of whether the novel form is adequate to the task of formulating an alternative. The problem, as Okoth describes it, is that “the implementation of extractive infrastructures and their attendant economic models produce abstractions that constrain what political forms can be imagined.” The new national government’s commitment to that idea divides the revolutionary leadership on this issue, leaves white owners in command of black labor, and leads to the death of the protagonist for betraying the revolution he instigated.

Serpell’s 2019 novel, by contrast, provides an intergenerational and multi-generic account of the Zambian nation-state that also singles out the Kariba Dam as

⁸ The opening scene of *Gomorrhah* alerts the reader to the importance of such sites in the narrative to come as well as the need for a logistical overseer. Roberto Saviano’s narrator describes the Port of Naples as a global sorting center where commodities and human beings (there is no difference here) should flow without interruption. Here, in the very opening, the novelist reveals himself by engineering the momentary failure of logistics, exposing the purely economic basis on which it transports people and things to sites advantageous to capital: “The container swayed as the crane hoisted it onto the ship. The spreader, which hooks the container to the crane, was unable to control its movement, so it seemed to float in the air. The hatches, which had been improperly closed, suddenly sprang open, and dozens of bodies started raining down. They looked like mannequins. But when they hit the ground, their heads split open, as if their skulls were real. And they were. Men, women, even a few children, came tumbling out of the container” (3–4).

what Okoth describes as an “almost insurmountable obstacle to the pursuit of revolutionary politics.” The dam that seems to hold Zambian society together and the collapse of which pulls the country apart provides Serpell, as it did Abrahams, with both “a physical frame” and a “symbol of an ideological commitment to accumulation.” “Acting as the larger epistemological mode of enclosure,” the dam as frame limits “the historical knowledge available to characters about the economic system from which they need to free themselves.” With the advantages of hindsight—what Lukács considered the necessary anachronism—Serpell’s novel can fold the dream of revolution as “a residual impulse” into the technological revolution responsible for the rapid movement of people, material, and information across national boundaries. What if anything does this accomplish? With the bursting of the Kariba Dam, the novel frees itself from the framework that equated nationhood with both a power grid and a plan for capturing that grid based on information derived from the original blueprints. With all efforts to control the Zambezi captivated by logistics, little wonder that it takes the river itself to displace a perspectival frame controlled by infrastructure. The river’s unleashed power takes over the narrative and replaces the human narrator with a mosquito chorus, leaving us to question if this, as the remaining conspirators claim, is just the catastrophe required to start a revolution. In turning against the novel’s own narrative infrastructure, Serpell indicates that an affirmative answer, though not ruled out, will require a new set of blueprints produced by a counter-logistical imagination.

Our final article puts this possibility on the table. In it, Ryan Trimm brings us back to the question of money—its philosophy and sociological impact—as a means of structuring not only social relations but the novelistic form. Looking at a recent crop of speculative fiction—Hari Kunzru’s 2011 *Gods Without Men*, Tom McCarthy’s 2005 *Remainder*, and Ian McEwan’s 2019 *The Cockroach*—Trimm asks us to consider the extent to which a substantialist theory of value can still provide the basis of consumer decision-making, real or fictional. Novels that “do not use money [as realism does] in its *traditional* role as social index for characters and the economic worlds they inhabit or as a contained topical problem” call for field theories of value that consider money something other than a legally guaranteed standard of exchange value—something more like derivatives and “fictitious securities” (Jameson, “Aesthetics” 117). As such, Trimm observes, “money in these novels becomes centrally integrated in speculative flights.” What allows it to do so is its lack of substance coupled with its value as a socially constructed abstraction—whether a claim on another, an obligation to be reciprocated, or a debt—to move from one financial instrument to another. In an age of “fictitious capital,” when, as Trimm says, “detachment from production fosters creative speculation . . . capital must forge ever new investment circuits for itself.” This need is answered by “special investment vehicles, devices that must innovate in looking for new permutations and ventures to generate returns.” Appearing to have a mind of their own, these vehicles and devices nevertheless operate solely in the interest of capital and, in doing so, have transformed money in much the same way that logistics transformed the mode of production.

Now folded into certain works of contemporary fiction, logistics takes the form of plot devices capable, in *Gods Without Men*, of generating feedback within the

stock market that enables the market to make its own reality. Thus manipulated, the financial system feeds off itself to produce what Trimm describes as “self-reflective loops of ‘social’ value.” In *Remainder*, the narrator’s investment in communications technology futures corresponds to and realizes his desire to “flow” into his own movements in staging a sequence of future-oriented “enactments” scripted by memory, newspaper accounts, a fatal accident, and the repeat performance of a bank heist, all of which are assembled according to the abstract plan of just-in-time production. McEwen’s satirical novella *The Cockroach* exploits the promissory note relation of matter to money (proposed by substance theory) by means of fictitious capital funded by the novel’s counter-logistical policy of monetary reversalism. A group of cockroaches metamorphosed into human form want money to run backward: rather than compensation for employment, money becomes that which necessitates future work, thereby estranging one’s efforts in the future. Rather than representing the value accrued from labor past, money dictates actions in the future. Much like financial instruments in their own right, these novels exploit the tension between substance and field theories of value—that is, between money as a store and measure of value versus money as the means of circulation and the means of hooking a readership. If value derives strictly from a social process unanchored to substance, then its value is, as Trimm says, “something inherently unstable,” the very tensions, in short, that characterize capital in the deindustrializing West as the new rent economy of financialization (money generates money) attempts to replace an economy based on production (money-commodity-money).

All three novels use the techniques of speculative fiction to produce what Sianne Ngai characterizes as “the gimmick.” “Like the comedy of procedure that puts it so ostentatiously on display,” she avers, the gimmick “emerges explicitly as a phenomenon of industrial capitalism, not just of a rationalized modernity” (468). Centuries in the making, “this mode of production continues to subtend and coexist with its postindustrial or deindustrialized aftermath, in which financial instruments like CDSs and CDOs, ways of dividing and moving values created in the immediate production process, give older gimmicks like the tontine and Ponzi scheme a new lease on life” (468). As these examples suggest, the gimmicks of speculative fiction, like those of postindustrial financial instruments, resemble the form of labor that Henry Mayhew once classified as no work at all because it was somehow cheating the clock. In an age where economic abstractions tend to materialize as logistics that become modes of production in their own right, however, the literary gimmick has arguably found its moment in history not only as essential to the classical critical task of demystification but also as encouragement for those inclined to produce otherwise unthinkable counter-logistics.⁹ Even critical readers willing to follow more convoluted paths through McEwen’s reversal of Kafka’s human-to-bug transformation are not likely to arrive at a convincing argument to the effect

⁹ Such “repurposing of elements of residual culture,” in Williams’s view, signals “either the emergence of a new class ethos, which necessarily excludes the full range of human practice,” and/or the stirring of the excluded material to formulate a more adequate alternative. “The relations between these two sources of the emergent—the class and the excluded social [human] area,” he observes, “are by no means necessarily contradictory” (*Marxism* 125–26).

that McEwen's cockroaches offer the fuller range of human experience that Williams would consider a more adequate alternative to logistics as usual (i.e., in the service of capital). As he himself suggested, it's hard to tell the difference.

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