

STATES OF SAVAGERY: CANNIBALISM AND THE POLITICAL  
IN POSTWAR FICTION

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## ABSTRACT

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*States of Savagery* argues that, more than just the consumption of individual bodies, cannibalism figures the political struggle to define the boundaries between self and other, as well as the dangers inherent in this struggle—the possible eradication of the personal and social body. Cannibalism thus registers the interrelationship of political incorporation and state violence. It marks the ways in which political entities are envisioned as body politics that consume and expel, that violently rend individuals in the making of “The People.”

Through analyses of John Hawkes’s *The Cannibal*, Thomas Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow*, and Leslie Marmon Silko’s *Almanac of the Dead*, this dissertation elucidates the nexus of political organicism, biopolitics, and state violence. It explicates how these novels utilize the cannibal trope to clarify the relationship between the “life” of the political body and the slaughter and consumption of “disposable” peoples. Cannibalism registers the unavoidable swing between biopolitical principles and necropolitical violence. It illuminates how the concept of the nation as a biological body entrusted with protecting its citizens’ bare life inevitably leads to the notion that the political body must consume in order to survive and to metonymically feed its citizens. While political organicism sanctions sacrifice and naturalizes the political aggregate’s

consumption, the trope of cannibalism acts to denaturalize this violence and detrivialize the death of the other.

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For Jenny, Sarah, and Jacob: your love made this possible

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## PART I: THE POLITICS OF CANNIBALISM

### Chapter 1

#### Colonialism, Consumption, and Political Bodies

Within twentieth century Western discourse, cannibalism has largely been understood as the territory of psychopaths and serial killers and thus wrongly perceived apolitically. What is forgotten in this context is that within the history of the West, cannibalism has traditionally been viewed as a group activity, indeed as the distinguishing factor in categorizing particular groups. The word “Cannibal” is in actuality a corruption of the word “Carib,” and thus marks a specific ethnic identity (Sanborn, *Sign* 179). As Merall Price claims, the term constitutes “a specific ethnic group, membership of which is dependent upon presumed social practices as much as upon national or territorial identity” (89). The Greek word “Anthropophagi” similarly equates social practice with identity: “‘Anthropophagi’ is, in its original Greek, a formation made up of two pre-existing words (‘eaters/ of human beings’) and bestowed by the Greeks on a nation presumed to live beyond the Black Sea” (Hulme, *Colonial* 15). In both cases, cultural identity is subsumed in the single practice of eating human flesh.

Within colonial discourse, cannibalism and political identity are concomitant, hence the identification of each anthropophagous group as a

“*nation of cannibals.*”<sup>1</sup> This appellation, employed by a diverse set of explorers from Walter Raleigh to Stanley Livingston, was bestowed on hundreds if not thousands of groups during the age of exploration.<sup>2</sup> As the defining mark of a political group, cannibalism is not seen simply as a cultural aberration: for Westerners it signifies the essence of the other’s being. Since in the Western mind the prescription against eating humans is regarded as the fundamental mark of civilization, cannibalism is used as the fundamental index for civility;<sup>3</sup> it stands in for a general sense of lawlessness and a lack of humanity.<sup>4</sup> Thus, for Herodotus, the Anthropophagi “have the most savage customs of all men; they

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<sup>1</sup> Interestingly, the idea of the solitary cannibal only exists in the present and the recent past. The historic cannibal was always part of a nation; the futuristic cannibal, the post-apocalyptic cannibal, is more often than not conceived as a member of a group, a group that is structured largely on cannibalism itself, such as in Cormac McCarthy’s novel *The Road*.

<sup>2</sup> Voltaire and others have used this term to categorize the Jews as well (see Voltaire 23). As in the colonial context, the point of using this term is to figure this group as radically alterity to European identity and as having absolute enmity towards European ways of life.

<sup>3</sup> I refer here to Freud’s notion of the “birth” of civilization in *Totem and Taboo*. For Freud, “[s]ocial organization” is created through the taboos that are established as a direct consequence of the band of brothers killing and eating the father of the primal horde (Freud 176). In Freud’s anthropology, the brothers’ actual consumption of the father’s flesh is inseparable from their imagined ingestion of the law of the father.

<sup>4</sup> Cannibalism has an aporetic relationship with the concept of humanity. The act, whether real or metaphoric, figures the actor as “inhuman”; however, for the act to constitute “cannibalism” the actor *must* be human. Thus, cannibalism at once establishes and erases the cannibal’s humanity.

pay no regard to justice, nor make use of any established law” (qtd. in King 108).<sup>5</sup>

What is important to realize in the examples above is that the cannibal is consistently figured as a political enemy rather than a personal enemy. The colonial explorer’s personal fear of the cannibal is understandable enough when one considers Christian beliefs at the time on the importance of bodily integrity for future resurrection, but his fear does not explain why cannibalism grips the national imaginary to the extent that it does throughout Europe and why the cannibal is depicted as such a virulent public enemy. To fully comprehend the meaning of cannibalism and the reasons why this practice has haunted Western consciousness for so long, one must understand that what the cannibal threatens is more than the death and destruction of the individual, but the death and destruction of the political order.

On the most basic level, the cannibal serves as a political threat because he is viewed as an irrational political being, a figure of unredeemable savagery. Thus, more than any other figure, the cannibal embodies what Immanuel Kant calls the unjust enemy, an enemy whose “will, whether expressed in word or deed, displays a maxim which would make peace among nations impossible and would lead to a perpetual state of nature if it were made into a general rule” (qtd. in Baucom 185). In Ian Baucom’s words, this figure functions “not merely as

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<sup>5</sup> Such a claim, of course, presupposes a universal “established law” across cultural groups. In the Greek world, this law is understood primarily in terms of hospitality. Cannibalism thus goes hand and hand with a lack of hospitality; the archetypal representation of this fact is Odysseus’s experience with the Cyclops Polyphemus in *The Odyssey*.

enemy,” but as one who is “resolutely inimical to the existence of the social order” (176). For Baucom, “the legal figure of the bandit, brigand, or outlaw” is the embodiment of the unjust enemy during the colonial period (184). However, I would argue for the primacy of the cannibal as the archetype of inimical life. As a being whose defining practice embodies the state of nature and the primal horde, he is the true “specter of the man who is wolf to other men” (Baucom 184). The brigand and the bandit are only inimical to the extent that they resemble the primitive savage, to the extent that they embody the savage’s barbarity and refusal of justice. Moreover, these figures exist in a certain relationship to the law that the cannibal does not. They possess an understanding of justice and the law that is often thought of as beyond the cannibal savage’s innate capacities. The bandit and the brigand enjoy a greater capacity for personhood, a capacity for reform that the cannibal does not. Thus, to employ Carl Schmitt’s term, it is the cannibal who is the true “outlaw of humanity” (*Concept 54*): with him alone is peace truly impossible.

The annals of colonialism are laden with these truths. Within these texts, cannibalism consistently stands for an opposition to European rule. As Peter Hulme points out, there is a direct correlation in Columbus’s accounts between “those who eat men” and “a capacity for resistance” (*Colonial 41*). Invariably, the response to such resistance is the elimination of the threat. As early as 1494, Columbus is drawing a link between cannibalism and the right to enslave. He speaks of paying debts “in cannibal slaves, fierce but wellmade fellows . . . which

men, wrested from their inhumanity, will be, we believe, the best slaves that ever were" (Columbus qtd. in Price 88).

Cannibalism is thus viewed as justification for subjection; it announces that the practitioner is only quasi-human and undeserving of humane treatment. Nowhere are these facts more evident than Queen Isabella's famous edict of 1503. Of the Carib Indians, she states:

If such Cannibals continue to resist and do not wish to admit and receive my Captains and men who may be on such voyages by my orders nor to hear them in order to be taught our Sacred Catholic Faith and to be in my service and obedience, they may be captured and are to be taken to these my Kingdoms and Domains and to other parts and places and be sold. (qtd. in Price 89)

Unsurprisingly, once this edict was in effect, "islands once thought to be inhabited by Arawak upon closer investigation turned out to be overrun with hostile cannibals" who were then enslaved (Arens 51). Such treatment is, in fact, in line with the church, as the *Romanus Pontifex* of 1454 stated that natives' "failure to convert and pledge submission to Christian sovereignty meant that they could lawfully be killed" (Price 89). Indeed, the history of colonialism shows that the response to the so-called cannibal quickly moves from enslavement to outright extermination.

In the colonial context, cannibalism is a practice that seems to justify the use of any form of violence. Nowhere is this clearer than in Vasco Nunes de Balboa's response to the natives of Panama. Balboa writes, "These Indians of

the Caribana well deserved death a thousand times, because they are very bad people...I do not say make them slaves according to their evil breed but even order them burnt to the last, young and old, so that no memory remains of such evil people" (qtd. in Kiernan 81).<sup>6</sup> In a form of pseudo-cannibalism, Balboa reportedly fed these offending Indians to his dogs (Kiernan 81). The cannibal thus comes to be seen as an existence that cannot be tolerated. The only solution for this enemy seems to be total obliteration.

While on the surface such a response to native peoples seems to be an unnecessary and unwarranted show of violence, it is in fact totally in keeping with Western political logic. To fully comprehend this fact, one must understand that within the early modern period, Western nations conceived their political structures explicitly along the lines of the human body. Colonialism therefore must be understood as a struggle between political bodies—bodies, that like the human body, incorporate and can be incorporated. What cannibalism registers, then, is the possible annihilation not only of the individual body but also the political body that inscribes the personal body and gives it meaning. What cannibalism symbolizes, then, is a "complete loss of ontological being" (Joomba 73); this explains why within Western logic the cannibal is seen as the most virulent threat and why his existence must be liquidated at all costs.

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<sup>6</sup> Notably, a doctor involved in the Trent ritual murder case employs the same language against the "cannibalistic" Jews: "that the ancient infestation of the Jews may be wiped out from the Christian orbit and *the living memory of them may completely disappear from the earth*" (qtd. in Phillips 201, my emphasis).

The primary European conception of the nation in the early modern period is that of the body politic. In its classical formulation, the body politic is the corporate entity composed of ruler and subjects. In the words of one Elizabethan legal scholar:

The king has two Capacities, for he has two Bodies, the one whereof is a Body natural, consisting of natural Members as every other Man has . . . the other is a Body politic, and the Members thereof are his subjects, and he and his Subjects together compose the Corporation . . . and he is incorporated with them, and they with him, and he is the Head, and they are the Members, and he has the sole Government of them . . . (qtd. in Kantorowicz 13)

The paradigmatic example of the body politic in Western politics, and the place where the analogies between human body and political structure are taken to their fullest, is Thomas Hobbes's idealized political body, the Leviathan. Hobbes's prosthetic state acts to "extend, mime, imitate, even reproduce down to the details the living creature that produces it" (Derrida, *Beast* 28). In all possible ways, this "Artificiall Man maintains his resemblance with the Naturall" (Hobbes 175). Hobbes details the bodily correspondences of the social order down to the finest minutia:

The *Soveraignty* is an Artificiall *Soul*, as giving life and motion to the whole body; The *Magistrates*, and other *Officers* of Judicature and Execution, artificiall *Joynts*; *Reward and Punishment* (by which fastned to the seate of the Soveraignty, every joynt and member is

moved to performe his duty) are the *Nerves*, that do the same in the Body Naturall; The *Wealth* and *Riches* of all the particular members, are the *Strength*; *Salus Populi* (*the peoples safety*) its *Businesse*; *Counsellors*, by whom all things needful for it to know, are suggested unto it, are the *Memory*; *Equity* and *Lawes*, an artificiall *Reason* and *Will*; . . . (Hobbes 9)

The nation, like the human body, is thus understood as “a harmonious hierarchy of diverse parts” in which “every limb has its proper function” (Harris 42; Kantorowicz 225).

Such a formulation naturalizes the composition of the given social order. Each group is assigned a natural social role that must be executed in order to ensure the proper functioning of the nation. This fact is best illustrated through Livy’s story of Menaenius Agrippa’s role in counteracting the uprising of the Plebeians (which is repeated in Shakespeare’s *Coriolanus*). In order to assuage the plebeians, Menaenius tells them:

Long ago when the members of the human body did not, as now they do, agree together, but had each its own thoughts and the words to express them in, the others resented the fact that they should have to worry and trouble of providing everything for the belly, which remained idle, surrounded by its ministers, with nothing to do but enjoy the pleasant things they gave it. So the discontented members plotted together that the hand should carry no food to the mouth, and that the mouth should take nothing that was offered it,



and that the teeth should accept nothing to chew. But alas! While they sought in their resentment to subdue the belly by starvation, they themselves and the whole body wasted away to nothing. By this it was apparent that the belly, too, has no mean service to perform: it receives food, indeed; but it also nourishes in its turn the other members, giving back to all parts of the body, through all its veins, the blood it has made by the process of digestion; and upon this blood our life and our health depend. (qtd. in Santner 37-38, n. 3)

Any opposition to the prescribed social strata is equated here with bodily disorder that threatens the health of the body politic. This fetishization of order is particularly apparent in Hobbes's writing, where he states of the Leviathan, "Concord" is "Heath," "Sedition" is "Sickness," and "Civill war" is "Death" (9). Under this logic, regicide becomes a form of suicide. Employing this view, James I of England argued, "It may very well fall out that the head will be forced to garre off some rotten members . . . to keep the rest of the body in integritie but what state the body can be in, if the head . . . be cut off" (qtd. in Kastan 163).

For the purposes of this dissertation, what is significant in the preceding passages is the extent to which these analogies between nation and human body lead to certain types of political violence and the naturalization of this violence. In particular, these analogies open up certain possibilities for the consumption of humans by the state. As in the story of the Plebeians, the organicist understanding of the political body prepares the way for certain people to be

“served up” for the benefit of others. Thus, in a very real sense, the prosthetic or artificial man that embodies the nation is cannibalistic.

Given the European conception of the nation as a political body, a body that resembles the human body down to the finest details, the political understanding of cannibalism is now more evident. Through the concept of the body politic, what Hulme refers to as “the ideological role of cannibalism” can now be grasped: the fact that while cannibalism is “figured as the devouring of human flesh,” the “threat” it presents “is in fact addressed to the body politic itself” (*Colonial* 86-87).

Cannibalism arguably becomes a central issue in Western politics during the colonial era because this is the period in which the relationship between self and other becomes focalized. What changes under colonialism is that the political body is increasingly understood through its relationship with the outside world, with all of the “foreign bodies” that lie outside of the nation (Harris 142). What cannibalism registers is that within the Western logic of domination, the relationship between self and other is ultimately a question of consumption and incorporation. Colonialism should be viewed, then, as a tale of expanding and contracting political bodies and the colonial encounter as a contest between political bodies in which one body will inevitably consume another. Symbolically, the colonial explorer embodies the larger body politic that he serves: like the traditional hero, he is the “vessel of the whole culture’s collective consciousness and the agent of their will to survive or their aspiration to power” (Slotkin 28-29). His successes mark not only the aggrandizement of his personal body, but the

expansion of the political body; conversely, his death and consumption at the hands of “cannibals” signals the fragility of the social order itself and the actual possibility of its negation.

What is ultimately apparent is a direct link between cannibalism—the physical incorporation of humans—and imperialism—the political incorporation of humans. As C. Richard King argues, for Western nations “[t]he presence of cannibalism, real or imagined, demands that social orders and subjectivities be remade in the image of the West” (109). The “cannibal” is quite simply the body that the social order fears cannot be contained. Because of its refusal to be incorporated into the political body, the cannibal body is understood as “resolutely inimical” to the political body itself and must be masticated through violence. The charge of cannibalism therefore marks the West’s future relationship with “the savage”: if he gives up anthropophagy, then the savage is tamable and can be incorporated as a pseudo-subject; if not, he must be exterminated. In either case, his culture is overwritten, swallowed up by the European order; his body and the culture that gave it meaning are digested by the victor’s political body.

But what the European fails to grasp in this scenario is the extent to which he defines the cannibal other by disavowing his own desires to kill and consume. Through a process of projection, he assigns his own “cannibal” desires onto the other that he imagines wants nothing else than to negate his own existence (Hulme 85). This projection explains the “general European predisposition for finding cannibalism in all non-European parts of the world” (Hulme, *Colonial* 80);

wherever the European goes, he is confronted with his own desire to consume.<sup>7</sup> Moreover, it is through this work of projection that the European political system accomplishes the ideological work of constructing a civilized self, an identity established through the opposition to cannibalism. As Geoffrey Sanborn claims, cannibalism functions as “the limit that humanity requires in order to know itself as itself,” for it is through “its abhorrence of all forms of ‘savagery’” that humanity defines itself as such (“Missed” 194, 189).

The supreme irony, however, is that within the colonial context, Western political bodies—the supposed bastions of civilization—perpetuate the same violence they attribute to the “savages” they seek to stamp out. In the early modern period, nowhere is this irony clearer than in the chief emblem of both sovereign and savage violence: the severed human head. Disarticulated human body parts found among native peoples were consistently interpreted by Westerners as evidence of cannibalism. In particular, severed human heads preserved as trophies were considered unequivocal evidence of anthropophagy. The equation of “head-hunting” and cannibalism is exceptionally notable in the case of Pacific Islanders. The Maori practice of preserving heads led to the belief that all groups in the region consumed human flesh. Sanborn notes that by the nineteenth century “cannibal” in fact became a “common racial epithet” for all peoples of Pacific Islands (*Sign* 129). Ironically, this “proof” of cannibalism was also the chief marker of sovereign power at the time. In England it was common

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<sup>7</sup> On another level, cannibalism registers the European’s desire to secret his violence, to hide his crimes within the deepest recesses of the self, just as the cannibal “buries” the evidence of his crime—the victim’s flesh—within his own body.

practice to exhibit the decapitated heads of traitors on London's Tower Bridge; these heads were, in fact, "a major tourist attraction" (Greenblatt 173). The resemblance to headhunting is even more astounding when one considers that these heads were often "thrown into the kettle for parboiling" in order to preserve the flesh (Covington 80).

The similarities between sovereign violence and native "savagery" did not go unnoticed by certain critics of the day. For instance, Sir John Burrows points out the similarity in his critique of John Anderson's *Mission to the East Coast of Sumatra*. Anderson claims that the Battas are cannibalistic based on their display of victims' heads; however, Burrows points out that a "Batta, who had seen the human heads which no long time ago were stuck upon Temple Bar, would have just as good proof for saying that the people of London were cannibals" (qtd. in Sanborn, *Sign* 178). The "spectacle of savagery" that supposedly defines the other in actuality resides in the heart of the European political order (Sanborn, *Sign* 127); the violence of European civilization is ultimately indistinguishable from that of the primitive savage.

## Chapter 2

### From Body Politic, to Biopolitics, to Necropolitics

Some will argue that the preceding points are evident in colonialism but that such “barbarism” has since been removed from Western politics. One could argue that the associations that I have been tracing between cannibalism and the political in the early modern period do not speak to the operation of the political in the twentieth century. What this chapter seeks to articulate, however, is that these forms of political violence do continue in the modern era, that the nation today is still understood through the guise of the human body and its bodily processes, and that such a logic legitimates the most grotesque forms of political violence.

The continuation of political “savagery” into the modern era is best illustrated by the French Revolution, the so-called birth of modern politics. The Revolution certainly continues the spectacular display of violence that characterized sovereign power in the early modern period.<sup>8</sup> Besides the fact that an estimated 16,000 to 40,000 were executed during the Revolution, the movement also evidenced the “cannibalistic” violence apparent in earlier forms of European sovereignty (Ballard 159). “[I]n the eyes of defenders and opponents alike,” the Revolution came to be “associated...with the detached body part” (Landes 148). Specifically, “heads bobbing on pikes through the streets” were the first instances of revolutionary violence that greeted the people of Paris and “the

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<sup>8</sup> As Michel Foucault shows throughout *Discipline and Punish*, the early modern European juridical system was heavily invested in “punishment-as-spectacle” (9). See for instance his description of the execution of Damians (3).

taking of heads [became] a prime rhetorical metaphor for Revolutionary justice” (Sagan 348).

Some will write off this violence as the residue of early modern politics; they will interpret the French Revolution as a middle ground between the naked violence of European monarchies and the peacefulness of enlightened Western democracies. I would argue, however, that the violence of the Revolution, particularly of the regicide, signifies the continuation of the same structure of sovereignty and the same modes of sovereign violence in the modern nation-state. The sovereignty of the king is only replaced by the sovereignty of the people, and the notion of the political body and its attending violence do not vanish, they simply mutate. Eric Santner explains:

The complex symbolic structures and dynamics of sovereignty described by Kantorowicz in the context of medieval and early modern European monarchies do not simply disappear from the space of politics once the body of the king is no longer available as the primary incarnation of the principle and functions of sovereignty; rather, these structures and dynamics—along with their attendant paradoxes and impasses—“migrate” into a new location that thereby assumes a turbulent and disorienting semiotic density previously concentrated in the “strange material and physical presence” of the king. (33)

This transfer of bodily power is evident in the almost cannibalistic acts that follow the regicide. For instance, the newspaper *La Revolution de 92* reported, "Right

away volunteers stained their lances, other their handkerchiefs, and then their hands, in the blood of Louis XVI" (Baecque 106). Prudhomme even claimed that one witness shouted that the French people "were thirsty for the blood of a despot" (qtd. in Hunt 59). What should be apparent in these acts is that the new "body of the people" that replaces the sovereign "head" of the king retains the same potential for "savagery." The transfer of sovereign power to the body of the people does not lessen the potential for violence; it increases it since what is at stake in this violence is now the "life" of the people itself.

To understand these points, it is necessary to first delve into Michel Foucault's notions of the transformations that take place in modern politics, what he identifies as the move from the traditional sovereign right of death to a "biopolitics of population" (Foucault, *Society* 253). Foucault first refers to biopolitics in *The History of Sexuality* where he explicitly positions it as a shift in the sovereign "right to decide life and death" (135). According to Foucault, in the classical and early modern formulations of political power, "[t]he sovereign . . . evinced his power over life only through the death he was capable of requiring" (*History* 136). His power was "the right of the sword", "the right to *take* life or *let* live" (*Society* 240; *History* 136). In the modern era, Foucault believes that this power of "deduction" is receding, that "power is decreasingly the power of the right to take life and increasingly the right to intervene and make live" (*History* 136; *Society* 248). This new "life-administering power" is what he refers to as biopolitics (*History* 136).



For Foucault, biopolitics signifies two trends that began to take shape in the latter years of the eighteenth century: the shift in political focus towards the protection of the citizen's biological life and the development and utilization of technologies that aid in the management and reproduction of a population. Biopolitics, then, is a "power that guarantees life" accomplished through "an entire series of interventions and *regulatory controls*" such as public hygiene, inoculation, and public safety campaigns (*Society* 253, 244; *History* 139).

In theory, biopolitics is constituted by measures that attempt to bolster the living without the concurrent production of human death elsewhere. In Foucault's thinking, "The old power of death that symbolized sovereign power was . . . supplanted by the administration of bodies and the calculated management of life" (*History* 139-40). This new "power [was] bent on generating forces, making them grow, and ordering them, rather than one dedicated to impeding them, making them submit, or destroying them" (*History* 136). In practice, however, I argue that such a focus on the biological life of the citizen and the concomitant understanding of the nation as a storehouse of bodily resources leads to the naturalization of political violence in the name of the continued "life" of the body politic.

Strangely enough, at times Foucault seems to acknowledge these points. Even as he sets up what appears to be a strict opposition between the old sovereign power "to make die" and the new biopolitical "power to make live," he too is forced to admit the interpenetration of each, albeit in an obfuscated way (*Society* 247). Foucault recognizes that the modern era which gives rise to

biopolitics is marked by extreme violence, that “wars were never as bloody as they have been since the nineteenth century” (*History* 136). More importantly, he acknowledges that this uptick in violence is “the counterpart” of biopolitical practices—“entire populations are mobilized for the purpose of wholesale slaughter in the name of life necessity: massacres have become vital. It is as managers of life and survival, of bodies and the race, that so many regimes have been able to wage so many wars, causing so many men to be killed” (*History* 137).

Here, Foucault begins to articulate the point on which this dissertation will build: the naturalization of a politics of death through the ideology of a politics of life, the idea that “[i]f you want to live, the other must die” (*Society* 255). This concept, I argue, is what has made total war possible and what serves as the matrix for state violence today. However, just as Foucault establishes these insights in *The History of Sexuality*, he retreats from his position and returns to his exploration of the disciplining of sexuality.<sup>9</sup> Indeed, in this work he persistently uses semantic acrobatics to undercut the links he has established

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<sup>9</sup> His study of biopolitics becomes subordinate to his larger argument on the historical shift “from a symbolics of blood to an analytics of sexuality” (*History* 148). His foray into contemporary political violence is abandoned in favor of his larger project: “counter[ing] the grips of power with the claims of bodies, pleasures, and knowledges, in their multiplicity and their possibility of resistance” (*History* 157). In other words, I believe Foucault’s focus on sexuality and pleasure leads him away from a true analysis of how sovereignty and blood continue to make “claims of bodies” and negate the possibility of bodily pleasure. I would simply echo Giorgio Agamben’s critique of Foucault on this point: “the concept of the ‘body’ too is always already caught in a deployment of power... and nothing in it or the economy of its pleasure seems to allow us to find solid ground on which to oppose the demands of sovereign power” (*Homo* 187).

between biopolitics and killing. For instance, in the passage above he downplays the bloodiness of modern biopolitical regimes through the use of passive voice: he does not speak of these regimes as murdering an outlandish number of men, but instead of “causing so many men to be killed.” His labors to dissociate biopolitics from killing are perhaps most evident—and most ridiculous—when he refers to it as a power to “disallow” life “to the point of death” (*History* 138). In Foucault’s schema, “deaths are never ‘caused’ as such; officially, they are merely ‘allowed’” (Murray 204). The biopolitical power to “let die,” which Foucault posits as part of the so-called “gradual disqualification of death” in the Western world, masks an entire field of the political, of the sovereign decision that continues to “make die” (*Society* 241, 247). By covering up the horrors of state violence, Foucault expresses an undue complicity with the powers and technologies of death.

While Foucault’s obfuscating proves troublesome, several scholars who have come in his wake have provided greater insight into the relationship between biopolitics and the unprecedented political violence of the twentieth century. It is from this area of study variously termed “necropolitics” or “thanatopolitics” that this dissertation takes its cue. These theorists explicate the reliance of a politics of life on “the work of death” (Mbembe 16); they explain the ways in which biopolitics’ supposed protection of life is always predicated on the killing of an imagined other that threatens this particular life.

The first scholar to discuss these matters, and still the most recognized, is Giorgio Agamben.<sup>10</sup> Agamben offers his book *Homo Sacer* explicitly as a “correct[ion]” or “complet[ion]” of Foucault’s work on biopolitics (*Homo* 9). Specifically, what Agamben’s work clarifies is the “intersection between the juridico-institutional and the biopolitical models of power” (*Homo* 6). Unlike Foucault, he does not shy away from the connections between the powers of life and the powers of death under the sovereign right, the “point[s] at which the decision of life becomes a decision on death, and biopolitics . . . turn[s] into thanatopolitics” (*Homo* 122).

Building on Foucault, Agamben traces Western politics’ shift in focus from *bios*, “a qualified life or a particular way of life,” to *zoe*, “nature life” or “the simple fact of living” (*Homo* 4). This shift is the basis for his central claim, that “the entry of *zoe* into the sphere of the polis—the politization of bare life as such—constitutes the decisive event of modernity” (*Homo* 4). By bare life Agamben means more than *zoe*, more than simple biological life; bare life is rather biological life in a certain relationship to sovereign power. It is best explained through Agamben’s description of the concentration camp prisoner: “lacking almost all the rights and expectations that we customarily attribute to human existence, and yet . . . still biologically alive” (*Homo* 159). Bare life thus refers to “a being exposed to an unconditional capacity to be killed,” a body that is

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<sup>10</sup> Other scholars who are currently working on necropolitics or thanatopolitics are Achilles Mbembe, Ian Baucom, Eric Santner, and Stuart Murray.

“separated from its normal political status and abandoned, in a state of exception, to the most extreme misfortunes” (*Homo* 85, 159).<sup>11</sup>

Agamben argues that “[t]he production of bare life is the originary act of sovereignty” (83). In one sense, then, “the modern State . . . does nothing other than bring to light the secret tie uniting power and bare life” (*Homo* 6). Following Hobbes, Agamben argues that in constructing the commonwealth, man “renunciat[es]” the state of nature, “a condition in which everyone is bare life and a homo sacer for everyone else” (*Homo* 106).<sup>12</sup> Within the commonwealth, life remains bare only to the sovereign since he maintains “his natural right to do

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<sup>11</sup> Eric Santner points out the similarity between bare life and Hannah Arendt’s notion of the “merely human,” meaning “something less than human and yet not simply animal” (qtd. in Santner 48). Santner himself alters the notion of bare life slightly, focusing instead on what he calls “creaturely life.” By creaturely, Santner means “a mode of *exposure* that distinguishes human beings from other kinds of life” (5). It is “a dimension not so much of biological as of *ontological vulnerability*, a vulnerability that permeates the human being as that being whose essence it is to exist in forms of life that are, in turn, contingent, fragile, susceptible to breakdown” (6). Such ontological vulnerability is what I argue is fundamentally at stake in the issue of cannibalism.

<sup>12</sup> Agamben has a tendency to use the terms “bare life” and “homo sacer” interchangeably. The latter term refers to “[a]n obscure figure of archaic Roman law” (*Homo* 4). In the words of Pompeius Festus, “It is not permitted to sacrifice this man, yet he who kills him will not be condemned for homicide” (qtd. in *Homo* 71). The homo sacer is thus a “person whom anyone could kill with impunity” but who cannot “be put to death by ritual practices” (*Homo* 72). To me, Agamben’s attempt to conflate this figure with the more generalized notion of bare life that has been stripped of political protections implicitly banishes the issue of sacrifice from the political sphere. It fails to take into account the operation of “political theology” in the modern era and ignores the fact that, in Derrida’s words, Western culture has yet to “sacrifice sacrifice” (“Eating” 113). I will thus avoid the term *homo sacer* throughout this work and employ *bare life* instead as this term indicates an unrelenting exposure to death without necessarily expelling this death from the realm of the sacrificial. I will also employ Derrida’s idea of “a place left open...for a non-criminal putting to death” interchangeably with the term *bare life* as both concepts indicate an exposure “to an unconditional capacity to be killed” (Derrida, “Eating” 112).

anything to anyone, which now appears as the right to punish" (*Homo* 106). The sovereign is thus able to execute any violence, to do "as he should think fit, for the preservation of . . . all" (Hobbes 214).

The sovereign, the guarantor of civilization, paradoxically utilizes the violence of the state of nature that his rule is supposed to banish. "Sovereign violence" is thus "an inclusive exclusion"; it reveals "the survival of the state of nature at the very heart of the state" (*Homo* 106). This is why the sovereign and the primitive "savage" come to look like one and the same as in the case of displaying severed heads. Both figures signal not only an exposure to death but also the possibility of bodily annihilation.<sup>13</sup> It is the unbounded nature of sovereignty that makes it appear monstrous; indeed, this is arguably why Hobbes figures his commonwealth as a leviathan, a beast that is defined by its extraordinary mouth and its extraordinary consumption.

While sovereign power has always involved the production of bare life, the relationship of this power to biological life is fundamentally altered in the modern era. As both Foucault and Agamben agree, a monumental shift in the notion of the political body and the sovereign's control of life and death occurs during the French Revolution. The decapitation of Louis XVI leads to "a reconfiguration of the flesh" of the political body as the "*somatic distinction* or *dignitas*" that once marked the body of the king now passes over into the body of the People (Santner 89, 30). The dispersal of the king's power to the people means that his

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<sup>13</sup> This fact is evident in the idea of the sovereign ban. Agamben notes that in the original Hebrew usage the ban referred to the "utter destruction" of "enemies of the community" as well as their property (Smith qtd. in *Homo* 76).

corporality no longer unites the nation; instead, unity is now achieved through “the fact of birth” (Santner 30). This is apparent in the French Declaration of the Rights of Man and Citizen, which officially marks the entry of “natural life in the juridico-political order of the nation-state” (Agamben, *Homo* 127). Agamben explains, “The principle of nativity and the principle of sovereignty, which were separated in the *ancien regime* (where birth marked only the emergence of a *sujet*, a subject), are now irrevocably united in the body of the ‘sovereign subject’” (*Homo* 128).

Such a shift does not do away with political organicism; it instead produces “a new body” (Foucault, *Society* 245).<sup>14</sup> The new understanding of the citizen’s importance leads to the biopolitical measures that Foucault explains, and, in turn, this new understanding of the nation as the storehouse of bodily

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<sup>14</sup> As with the role of death in biopolitics, Foucault obfuscates the importance of the body politic. His descriptions of biopower as “massifying,” of the nation as “a unitary living plurality,” and of “the biopolitical or biosociological processes characteristic of human masses” suggest that the nation operates along the same lines as a human body (*Society* 243, 258, 250). Yet, Foucault altogether avoids using the term *body politic* and seems to assign the political body a secondary role in his understanding of biopolitics. This can be explained through his desire to refigure the issue of killing under biopolitics at the level of species instead of at the level of nation. He argues that in the sphere of biopolitics, racism establishes “the break between what must live and what must die” (*Society* 254). He claims, “killing or the imperative to kill is acceptable only if it results not in a victory over political adversaries, but in the elimination of the biological threat to and the improvement of the species or race” (*Society* 256). While there is no doubt that such an argument is true in many cases, it is a mistake to assume that racism is the “precondition that makes killing acceptable” (*Society* 256). Such an argument ignores the fact that biopolitics emerged in a nationalist field where the object was ensuring the life/safety of a particular populace. In the era of nationalism, the citizen acts primarily in the name of the political body that protects his physical existence; the issue of racial purity, although related, is secondary to immediate survival.

matter, I argue, reifies the notion of the nation as a political body. More than ever, the nation is understood as a motherland, since its life-giving measures are recognized as birthing the citizen: nation and natality truly come together as one.

In another sense, the paradox of the “sovereign subject” inaugurates a confusion of bodies, a conflation of the citizen’s individual body with the political body of the nation. Since the protection of the citizen’s biological life is now linked more directly to the protection of the biologicalized life of the nation, the two bodies are bound together as never before. In the classical schema of the body politic, the subject’s protection from danger was limited. Wars were waged in order to protect the body of the King, the sovereign head that was integral to the stability of the political body. The body of the individual subject was considered expendable; in James I’s words, the subject is corporeal matter that could be cut off to “keep the rest of the body in integritie.” In the modern formulation, since every citizen is understood as possessing the *dignitas* of the king’s body, any threat to the national body is metonymically a threat to the citizen’s body itself and vice versa.

The dispersal of sovereign power to the body of the people has therefore made the sovereign right of death easier to exercise since an attack on any citizen is in a sense a threat to the life of the body politic. Wars are now “waged on the behalf of the existence of everyone” (Foucault, *History* 137). The result of such a shift is a politics “increasingly informed by the naked fact of survival” (Foucault, *History* 137). And it is this focus on survival at all costs that has authorized an unprecedented encroachment into the (political) body of the other.



Perhaps the most pertinent illustration of these points in recent thought is Garrett Hardin's notion of "lifeboat ethics." Hardin developed this theory in 1976 as a lens through which to view the "problems of overpopulation and hunger" (Hardin). In his metaphor, "each rich nation can be seen as a lifeboat" while "[i]n the ocean outside each lifeboat swim the poor of the world, who would like to get in" (Hardin). Since the ultimate goal is the protection of every individual on the "lifeboat"—the sovereign citizens with inalienable rights—immigration and humanitarian aid to those in the water must be limited because of "the limited capacity of any lifeboat" and its limited resources (Hardin). Humanitarianism towards the other is conceptualized as suicide because "complete justice" for this other would result in "complete catastrophe" for everyone (Hardin). Moreover, the situation leads to a perpetual state of defense as those in the lifeboat "have to be constantly on guard against boarding parties" (Hardin). Ultimately, by appealing to the paradigmatic example of survivalism, the lifeboat metaphor implies that the question is more than "who gets into the lifeboat," but "who will . . . be 'eaten' so that others may live" (Scheper Hughes, "Rotten Trade" 206).

Above all, the lifeboat metaphor suggests that political decisions today always involve extreme situations that call for desperate measures.<sup>15</sup> The metaphor reveals the truth of Walter Benjamin's claim that "the 'state of emergency' in which we live is not the exception but the rule" (*Illuminations* 257). In other words, it points to the ways in which politics is increasingly marked by

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<sup>15</sup> For Carl Schmitt, this is politics in its purest form, a politics based on "the real possibility of physical killing," a politics where "the entire life of a human being is a struggle and every human being symbolically a combatant" (*Concept* 33).

the normalization of what Carl Schmitt refers to as the state of exception. Schmitt defines this term as a condition where “[t]he state suspends the law . . . on the basis of its right of self-preservation,” where “the state remains” and the “law recedes” (Schmitt, *Political* 12). In such a state, where “the *force* of law . . . consumes the *rule* of law”, “it is impossible to distinguish transgression of the law from execution of the law” (Santner 22; Agamben, *Homo* 57).<sup>16</sup> By definition, the state of exception is a temporary state. However, in the twentieth century, the “exceptional measure” is “transform[ed] . . . into a technique of government” and the “provisional state of factual danger . . . comes to be confused with juridical rule itself” (Agamben, *State* 2; *Homo* 168). This fact can be explained through the notion of sovereign citizenry. Because the state’s avowed purpose is to protect the citizen’s *zoe*, a threat to any citizen now constitutes emergency.

The contemporary politics of emergency perpetuates the ruse that every political decision today ultimately relates back to the question of bare survival. But what should be apparent here is the purposeful confusion of *bios* and *zoe*. The lifeboat analogy suggests that the group’s way of life is not even an issue, that what lies before them are decisions that effect the survival of the citizen’s very body. The end result is that maintaining the status quo, a particular way of

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<sup>16</sup> Significantly, Agamben continually figures the issue of exception through the language of consumption. For instance, he states that in the state of exception “[l]aw is made of nothing but what it manages to capture inside itself through the inclusion exclusion of the *exceptio*: it *nourishes* itself on this exception (*Homo* 27, my emphasis).

life based on economic consumption and the exploitation of the other, takes on quality of emergency, of the struggle for life itself.<sup>17</sup>

What is evident in these ideological mystifications is Foucault's central insight, that in the era of biopolitics the "death that was based on the right of the sovereign is now manifested as simply the reverse of the right of the social body to ensure, maintain, or develop its life" (*History* 136). Given the belief that the health of this political body is linked directly to the health of the citizen's own body, the sovereign right of death is now executed in the name of protecting the individual's bare life. Like never before, the preservation of one's own life is understood as predicated on the production of death. The other is now perceived "as an attempt on my life, as a mortal threat or absolute danger whose biophysical elimination would strengthen my potential to life and security" (Mbembe 18). Biopolitics is thus a technology of death as much as it is a technology of life; its unstated principle is that if "'we' may live, live well and live fully, 'they' must die" (Murray 204).

Sovereign power in the traditional sense, the power of "deduction" and "seizure," is not reduced under biopolitics as Foucault claims (*History* 136). Rather, the rights of seizure and preserving the biological life of the population go hand in hand. It is thus no coincidence that the most explicitly biopolitical regime of the twentieth century, the Nazis, was also the most explicitly necropolitical. And it is no coincidence that "the administration of bodies and the calculated

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<sup>17</sup> This fact is what I believe Santner has in mind when he posits "a deep connection between the state of exception and the culture of enjoyment/consumption" (20, n. 22).

management of life” that are the hallmarks of biopolitics are most evident in the concentration camps (Foucault, *History* 139-40).

At this hinge between biopolitics and necropolitics, I argue the state’s actions take on the air of cannibalism. For one, in its mission to protect the biological life of the citizen, no measure is impermissible. The state can employ any “savagery” in order to ensure the life of the people.<sup>18</sup> But more than this, the state now appears cannibalistic as the killing of the other is conceptualized as “nutritive.” In an era of limited resources, the death that is enacted in one political body is more and more understood as strengthening another political body’s potential for life. The organicized political body of the nation state, like the living human body, is understood as needing to consume an external life source in order to live. Whereas such biological concordance was present in Hobbes’s *Leviathan*, in that case consumption referred to the products of trade.<sup>19</sup> Today, consumption is understood more clearly as the product of seizure. And, as the following discussions of Nazi genocide and the contemporary black market organ trade will reveal, this is not just a seizure of labor and resources, but of bodies.

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<sup>18</sup> While the various declarations of human rights existing in most nations today and international agreements such as the Geneva Accords supposedly invalidate certain violence as “cruel and unusual,” the recent practices of United States in its “War on Terror,” such as waterboarding and the “exporting” of torture to other regimes, reveal that even today sovereign violence is in essence unbounded.

<sup>19</sup> Hobbes states, “The NUTRITION of a Common-wealth consisteth, in the Plenty, and Distribution of Matierials conducing to Life” that are put to “Publique use” (169). These materials that provide “Nutriment” are “Animals, Vegetals, and Minerals,” material “commonly called Commodities” (170).

Ultimately, the contemporary politics of bare survival feeds on the human body itself.

The most insidious aspect of this politics of survival does not reveal itself in the international sphere, but rather in the domestic. Here, both sides of the state's relationship to the citizen's biological life are apparent: its protection of the citizen's *zoe* and its exposure of this *zoe* to the powers of death. This is the fundamental paradox of biopolitics: that the state may "kill those whose lives it had, by definition to protect, manage, and multiply" (Foucault, *Society* 258). This is what Agamben calls the "double-sided" nature of modern political rights (*Homo* 121), the fact that the "entitlements of citizenship" also means "expos[ure]" to the "arbitrariness" of the law (Santner 54). The reality of citizenship is that "the *shelter* of the rule of law" can and does pass over into "exposure to the pure force of law" (Santner 24).

Such a contradiction can be explained through the paradox of "sovereign citizenship" itself. This concept opens an aporia between the biological life of the nation and the biological life of the citizen. In the international sphere, the state's mission is quite clear: to protect the sacred life of the citizenry at all costs. In this case, the "health" of the politic body and the citizen's body are largely conjoined. However, in the domestic sphere, the wellbeing of these bodies is often at odds. Here, the life of the individual may hinder the growth of the national body. What develops, then, is a continuous indecision between the life of the individual citizen and the life of the nation. On one hand, the biological life of the citizen is absolutely sacred because it embodies the *dignitas* once held in the sovereign

body of the king; it is the essence of the nation, its life force, and its protection is absolutely vital. On the other hand, this life is a mere speck of biological matter, and thus expendable in the name of national “health.” The result of these contradictory views is a perpetual confusion of bodies and a continual vacillation in the mission of the state.

These facts register what Agamben has identified as a fracture within the notion of “the people.” Agamben claims this term “names both the constitutive political subject and the class that is, *de facto* if not *de jure*, excluded from politics” (*Homo* 176). He explains:

It is as if what we call ‘people’ were in reality not a unitary subject but a dialectical oscillation between two opposite poles: on the one hand, the set of the People as a whole political body, and on the other, the subset of the people as a fragmentary multiplicity of needy and excluded bodies; or again, on the one hand, an inclusion that claims to be total, and on the other, an exclusion that is clearly hopeless . . . (*Homo* 177)

This fracture identifies the logic that calls for the biological life of certain individuals to be sacrificed in the name of the national body. This is one of the central issues that will be explored in this dissertation: the ways in which the life (*zoe*) of “the people” is made bare to ensure the life (*bios*) of “The People”; or, in other words, the ways in which “the people” are consumed so that “The People” may live more fully.

Agamben's other key insight in *Homo Sacer* is the increased modalities by which sovereign violence can now render the life of "the people" bare, or the more and more insidious ways in which the state consumes life. As Foucault has so well documented, from the eighteenth century on, Western nations have been less and less inclined to employ naked violence against their own people, resulting in the waning of "the great public ritualization of death" (*Society* 247). While this is certainly true, such a fact does not equate to the lessening of sovereign violence. Rather, such violence appears in increasingly mediated and secret forms. Among these could be included Foucault's own notion of "letting die"; namely, all the ways in which the state passively allows death to take place. Of such behavior, Derrida rightly asks:

[D]oes killing necessarily mean putting to death? Isn't it also "letting die"? Can't "letting die," "not wanting to know that one is letting others die"—hundreds of millions of human beings, from hunger, AIDS, lack of medical treatment, and so on—also be part of a "more or less" conscious and deliberate terrorist strategy? ("Autoimmunity" 108)

While there is no doubt that willful passivity has been adopted as a political strategy, this does not suggest that the state no longer causes death in a more direct manner. In modernity, abandonment takes on a more sinister tone. What essentially takes place is a mutation in the structure of the sovereign ban; in addition to outright death or simple ejection from the social order, sovereign authority now threatens to hold the subject in perpetual suspension, in "indefinite

detention” in a secret prison or the no-man’s land of the camp. Thus, to be “captured in the sovereign ban” means to be swallowed up by state violence (Agamben, *Homo* 83). But rather than being masticated and metabolized by the political body, the victim is instead encrypted within its darkest regions. While such a person, “a legally unnamable and unclassifiable being,” is technically alive, his or her existence has effectively been obliterated (Agamben, *State* 3).

Now that I have situated my arguments in terms of previous work on the political, and more specifically on biopolitics and necropolitics, it is necessary to explain in further detail why this dissertation takes up these issues through the lens of cannibalism. At the most basic level, the authors discussed below—John Hawkes, Thomas Pynchon, and Leslie Marmon Silko—utilize the trope of cannibalism to articulate the horrors of sovereign violence. This strategy can be explained by the fact that cannibalism still retains a privileged place within the discourse of death and atrocity. Even today it is largely understood as the most extreme bodily violation, the most “savage” of all behaviors. Cannibalism acts as a reminder that the ancient power over death that marks sovereignty is more than a right to kill, but a right to do whatever one wishes to the body of the murdered. In cannibalism one finds the essence of sovereign power and its relationship to bare life. By rendering the victim’s flesh fit for consumption, sovereign power makes the life of the victim absolutely bare. While murder objectifies the body by transforming it into a corpse, this corpse can be sanctified through the rites of burial and mourning. By reducing the human to consumable flesh, sovereign power constitutes this body as pure *zoe* devoid of any *bios*.



Cannibalism thus speaks the true impact of the force of law, its potentiality to negate existence and meaning in the most violent ways.

More importantly, these authors utilize the trope of cannibalism to clarify the relationship between the life of the People and the slaughter and consumption of those that are deemed “disposable.” Cannibalism marks the place where the biopolitical and the necropolitical meet: the ways in which the aggregated national body relies on the disarticulation and consumption of physical bodies to maintain its “life.” It expresses the extremes of contemporary politics, the fact that *any* act may be committed in the name of preserving this “life.” The trope makes explicit that within the contemporary politics of survival, every individual is in essence cannibalistic, since each person garners strength from the death of the other. Thus, while political organicism sanctions sacrifice and naturalizes the political aggregate’s consumption, cannibalism denaturalizes this violence; it works to “interrupt the banalization of evil,” to unmediate and detrivialize the death of the other (Murray 208).

By registering the horrific operations of the political, the trope of cannibalism offers a powerful counter-discourse to the machinations of nationalism. The trope’s force ideally rends the subject from the ideological interpolations of the nation-state as violently as cannibalism itself rends the victim from the social order. Moreover, the trope offers subaltern writers an effective

means for speaking back against the forces that have subjected them.<sup>20</sup> The accusation of cannibalism against the political powers of the West reverses the claims of colonialism and exposes the transference that operated in colonial allegations. By charging the state with cannibalism, the subaltern reestablishes a voice and in some sense undoes the state's violent swallowing of her being, dislodging herself from the (non)spaces where she has been encrypted and abandoned.<sup>21</sup>

Ultimately, by demystifying this “cannibalism” at the heart of civilization, the novelists examined here register the crises of modernity, the ontological fracturing of Enlightenment thinking and the Western telos itself. While these fractures and the truths they reveal have in many ways been repressed by the West's collective consciousness and digested into historical narratives that prove less troublesome for the Western telos, these postwar writers utilize cannibalism to highlight this fracture, to ensure that the violence of the political cannot be papered over by postwar ideologies.

Hawkes's novel, *The Cannibal*, was inspired by the ruins of Germany that he witnessed with his own eyes in 1944 and 1945. Tracing Germany's romantic notions of nationhood from World War I to the fallout of World War II, the novel illustrates the cannibalizing violence inherent in traditional nationalistic ideology

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<sup>20</sup> I use the term subaltern here in Ranajit Guha's sense of the word. Guha essentially figures this category as a “left over”; it is “the difference, or remainder, when all forms of elite identity (national or regional) are subtracted from the totality of ‘the people’” (qtd. in Cherniavsky 123, n. 1).

<sup>21</sup> In Zita Nunes's words, subalterns establish themselves as “resistant remainders,” subjects who “make themselves difficult to digest” (24, 84).

and the inevitable wars this ideology produces. The book is above all a meditation on what must be secreted in order for a nation to form and to function: the “lawmaking” and “law-preserving” violence that must be repressed.<sup>22</sup> But this repression is revealed as self-destructive as the increasing mutilation of the body politic leads not to the renunciation of political violence but to continued romanticization and militancy. In Hawkes’s view, the nation is predicated on the serial repetition of carnage, an unregenerative self-cannibalization that is forever devouring futurity. In his vision of the political as endless nightmare, the drive for mastery consumes all.

Pynchon’s *Gravity’s Rainbow* presents a similar cannibalistic political nightmare centered on the violence of World War II; however, this novel also delves into the technological turn of political violence evident at this time as well as the postwar digestion of this violence by a nascent military-industrial complex. In *Gravity’s Rainbow*, the techno-primitive<sup>23</sup> nature of the political is most clearly expressed through the symbol of “the Oven.” As witch’s oven, this serves as a political reification of fairy tale, exposing the sacrificial structure of the nation and its reliance on burnt offerings. As Nazi crematoria, the Oven serves as the prosthetic mouth of the body politic itself and figures the perverse consumption and disposal of peoples that come to define the “Oven-state” of Nazi Germany.

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<sup>22</sup> The terms “lawmaking” and “law-preserving” violence are taken from Walter Benjamin’s “Critique of Violence.” See especially 241 of this text.

<sup>23</sup> This term is borrowed from Mark Seltzer, who defines “techno-primitivism” as a “strange and violent coupling of the atavistic or primitivist, on the one side, and the machinal or technological, on the other” (213).

The conjunction of witch's oven and crematoria in this single abysmal figure collapses the distance between primitive oral aggression and technologized atrocity. Ultimately, through the figure of oven/incinerator and its successor, the rocket, Pynchon reveals the march of technology not as historical progress, but as a political nightmare where the machinic threatens to swallow the organic itself.

In Silko's encyclopedic *Almanac of the Dead*, the various applications of the cannibal metaphor to Western exploitation coalesce. Through its genealogy of political consumption, the novel reveals that the exploitation of the subaltern body has been fundamental in all stages of capitalism and nationalism and that these two forces have worked in tandem to "harvest" its resources for hundreds of years. The novel's true insight, however, is its explication of the ways in which this logic of extraction comes to a head under late capitalism, how the logic of colonial expansionism and primitive accumulation have been refined into the strategic extraction of bodily resources and bodily matter. The apogee of such violence is the cannibalistic consumption of body parts evident in the black market organ trade. Here, the results of political organicism and survivalist politics become absolutely clear. Here one sees that the abysmal spaces of death have penetrated the heart of the *polis* in unimaginable ways and one comes to feel the ultimate truth of the political: that all life is potentially bare.

## PART II: NAZISM AND THE POST-WAR NATION-STATE

When Thomas Harris was compelled to create a back-story for Hannibal Lecter, to identify and localize the source of America's greatest contemporary monster, rather than simply appeal to psychopathology, to some innate defect within Lecter that would allow him to explain away his sickness through medical discourse, Harris instead appealed to the political. Lecter's back-story forms the plot of both the novel and film *Hannibal Rising*, with the screenplay for the latter written by Harris himself. In both works, the adult Lecter's cannibal desires are revealed to be the result of a traumatic childhood event: the cannibalization of his younger sister Mischa. The setting for this cannibal scene is the Lithuanian countryside in 1944 amidst the chaos of Operation Barbarossa. The story begins with the aristocratic Lecter family fleeing their hereditary castle in order to avoid the approaching Nazi soldiers, themselves fleeing the eastern front and the advancing Soviet army. The Lecters retreat to their hunting lodge to wait out the turmoil, but a nearby firefight kills the adult Lecters, leaving Hannibal and Mischa to fend for themselves. The children are later discovered by a group of Lithuanian militiamen seeking refuge from the Soviets because of their collaboration with the Nazis. All is fine until food runs low and the men determine that they must eat one of the children if they hope to survive. The young Hannibal, starving himself, is powerless to stop them. On the verge of death, the barely conscious child drinks the broth these men give him, too weary to realize that it was prepared with his sister's flesh.

Thus, Harris suggests that the contemporary figure for inhumanity, the serial killer, is rooted in political violence; specifically, Lecter's pathology is born from Nazi violence. Personal sociopathology here is the outcome of political sociopathology, the realities of total war and the state of exception they produce. Individual monstrosity is revealed as the product of social monstrosity; the psychopath is the uncanny residue of the violence necessary to make and remake the nation-state.

Significantly, it appears that Harris draws this point from actual history. His explanation for Lecter's cannibalism is most likely based on the serial killer Andre Chikatilo's explanation for his own cannibalism. In his trial testimony, Chikatilo claimed that his desire for human flesh was rooted in the awful demise of his brother, Stepan, who he said was eaten in 1936 by a band of starving townspeople in the rural Ukrainian village where they were raised (Brottman 43). Like Lecter, Chikatilo grounds his insanity in the trauma of political violence, in this case the horrific results of Stalin's collectivism. While it is unclear if this event ever occurred, as no record of his brother's name was ever found, what is clear is that similar cannibal scenes did exist. Indeed, the Ukraine of the 1930s is perhaps the site of the most wide-scale survival cannibalism in modern history.

While the ends tie up a little too neatly in Harris's texts and in Chikatilo's testimony, the point is true enough: cannibals, both real and imagined, are produced by the violence of the political. Indeed, unlike any other practice or discourse, cannibalism registers the horrors of the political and demystifies the violence inherent in the production of "civilization." Nowhere is this clearer than in

the 1930s and 1940s. From the years leading up to the Second World War through the war's immediate aftermath, "cannibalism" took on pertinence in the West that it had not enjoyed since the conquest of the Americas. And, as with the colonial cannibal scene, the rhetoric and practice of cannibalism was employed in the midst of wide-scale political and economic reorganization, in a "zone of indistinction," where the borders of the body politic changed on a daily basis, where the subject was subjected to a seemingly endless procession of political incorporations, and where physical and political incorporation came to look like one and the same.<sup>24</sup>

It is my suggestion that the figure of the white cannibal owes his prevalence from midcentury on to the political violence of the European theater and that this figure registers the unique horrors of this moment. It is my contention that while a breakdown of the civilized/savage binary had been suggested at various moments in history, the reality of this breakdown took on unique clarity in the aftermath of total war and the spectacle of the concentration camps. In Agamben's words, these sights/sites became "the sign of the system's inability to function without being transformed into a lethal machine" (*Homo* 174-75). These vertiginous conjunctions of machinic military power and bestial savagery gave the lie to the promises of technologized modernity and affirmed the worst suspicions raised by the violence of The First World War.

More than this, these abysmal spaces had a derealizing effect: in a space where any life could become bare, where any person could become cannibal or

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<sup>24</sup> The term "zone of indistinction" is taken from Agamben's *Homo Sacer*.

cannibalized, reality itself took on the appearance of horror, and all forms of power became monstrous. This is nowhere more apparent than in the camps themselves, which resembled an uncanny “cannibal” scene. As in the colonial forbearer, the sights of charred human flesh and indiscriminate piles of human bones were taken as the unmistakable signs of utter savagery, proof that flesh had been consumed by inhuman perpetrators. It is this uncanny fact with which Hawkes and Pynchon’s novels seek to grapple.



### Chapter 3

#### State Secrets: Consumption and the (Bio)political Body in *The Cannibal*

Men kill in order to lie to others and to themselves on the subject of violence and death. They must kill and continue to kill, strange as it may seem, in order not to know that they are killing.

--Rene Girard, *Things Hidden Since the Foundation of the World*

The world that Hawkes presents in *The Cannibal* is one of utter horror, a world where starving nobles dine on the flesh of slaughtered children. But for all its symbolism and surrealism, the point of the novel is that this world is utterly real. More than anything else, *The Cannibal* is a relentless look at the real effects of war on physical bodies. The horror of the novel is meant to convey the actual horrors that state violence inflicts. The characters' bodies are in some sense understood as a political effect: their starvation marks the degradation of the body politic, and their individual acts of violence mirror those of the state.

This twinning of individual and national body is of even greater significance when considered in relation to Nazi political philosophy, where the concept of the body politic underwent a renaissance and a frightening transformation. In the Nazi's thoroughly biopolitical state, the health of the citizen's body and the growth and purity of the national body are concomitant. In Nazi rhetoric and practice, this communal health is predicated on the slaughter of the other; the physical expansion of one body is always seen as the contraction of another. Understood in this context, the novel's equation of grotesque, starving bodies with the German body politic is a commentary on the necropolitical aspects of the Nazi's biopolitical regime. Through the trope of self-

cannibalization, the novel demystifies the ideological feint of the biopolitical national body—its supposedly “natural” need to kill and consume the other in the name of the citizen’s survival. Ultimately, Hawkes’s text reveals that rather than protecting the citizen’s body, the state apparatus engulfs it.

But perhaps the book’s most poignant point on the nature of political violence comes from its examination of the psychological and ideological processes necessary to enact and continue this violence. The novel explores the cultural procedure whereby murder is rewritten as “a non-criminal putting to death” and reveals how this process is predicated on both a disavowal and a commemoration of homicide. It suggests that this dual movement is what allows for the digestion of political massacre into the national narrative. Whereas earlier philosophies of nationalism have intimated that such a process is an inevitable part of the formation of group consciousness, the novel insists that it is the root of group psychosis. Hawkes’s work is ultimately an exegesis on how this ideological transformation of madness into glory insures the insane continuation of mass slaughter, and how this culminates in the concentration camps.

In the end, *The Cannibal* is not a book that offers answers, but rather one that relentlessly dwells on the problem: primitive violence and its serial repetition in the name of culture. Through its unrelenting horror, the novel ultimately denatures this violence that would claim its basis in “natural” survival. *The Cannibal* speaks to the lie of war as a means to biopolitical health and reveals how the state violence supposedly necessary for the foundation of the community is in fact the originary fracture of community itself.

## A History of Violence

Despite the fact that the novel is set during the Second World War, criticism has tended to brush its historicity aside. This is somewhat understandable given the novel's surrealism. As Hawkes's friend and mentor Albert Guerdard claims, the narrative is "radically out of focus" and depicts a world of "waking nightmare" (xi, xviii), but nightmare and history are not necessarily mutually exclusive categories. Hawkes's comments on the war are instructive on this fact: "The war was a kind of shocking acting-out of internal nightmare, as if all of our nightmares had become literally real" (qtd. in Greiner 29). This statement offers a useful framework for understanding the novel. While the book is very much about fantasy and nightmare, it is also an investigation of the relationship of these terms to history. In other words, the book reflects on how the unconscious produces history and how certain historical conditions create actual worlds of nightmare. For instance, cannibalism—one of the novel's most pervasive metaphors—is usually read as a fantastic element. However, the book's portrayal of cannibalism is very much historical, and the connection of this practice with the trope of the consuming nation forms a commentary on the historical reality of wartime cannibalism: the conjunction of state power and literal anthropophagy.

The historical discourse on survival cannibalism and its links to the political are presented early in the book. A single passage sets up the nexus of war, predation, butchery, cannibalism, and nation that define the novel:

A man followed, swinging a cane, craning in the darkness. The child passed a wall spattered with holes and the fingers of a dead defender, and behind him, the man coughed.

A butcher shop was closing and a few cold strands of flesh hung unsold from hooks, the plucked skin and crawling veins uninspected, hanging but without official sanction. Wire caught the child's knee.

The town, roosted on charred earth, no longer ancient, the legs and head lopped from its only horse statue, gorged itself on straggling beggars and remained gaunt beneath an evil cloaked moon. (Hawkes, *The Cannibal* 7)

The first paragraph introduces the Duke's cannibalistic pursuit of Jutta's son, while the presentation of the butcher shop in the second paragraph sheds light on the nature of the chase. The image of meat, particularly "uninspected" meat, is rather suspect given that everyone in the town is starving. Moreover, the juxtaposition of "cold strands of flesh hung unsold from hooks" with a "wire" catching "the child's knee" equates the boy with meat (Greiner 38); the interplay between boy on a wire and meat on a hook suggests that the child is reduced to the level of animal, but also that the butcher's meat may be human.<sup>25</sup> This association between butcher shop and cannibalism is confirmed by the fact that the only depiction of butchering in the novel is the Duke's later attempt to dress

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<sup>25</sup> There is possibly an echo of a real wartime atrocity here. Mihail Sebastian notes, "The Jews butchered at Straulesti abattoir were hanged by the neck on hooks normally used for beef carcasses. A sheet of paper was stuck to each corpse: 'Kosher Meat'" (qtd. in Friedlander 166).

this same boy's flesh for consumption. The third paragraph, with its imagery of limbless horse and town "roost[ing] on charred earth," points to the dismemberment and cooking of animal bodies and thus continues the themes of butchery and consumption. Finally, the town, "gorg[ing] itself on straggling beggars" connects these themes back to human bodies and forms a synecdoche for the anthropophagous nation. The explicit imagery of the consuming town sheds light on the implied cannibal imagery of the first paragraph. The "wall spattered with holes and the fingers of a dead defender" is now a clear image of Germany's cannibalistic self-consumption, of the land devouring its own people.

Before discussing the connection of individual and collective cannibalism in more detail, it is necessary to establish the historicalness of this surreal scene. Hawkes subtly points to the contemporary discourse on survival cannibal in the above passages through the issue of danger to children, the evocation of the butcher shop, and the reference to uninspected meat. Coupled with the imagery of a starving population and the breakdown of social structure, this odd mix of imagery points to the reality of cannibalism in Germany and the Ukraine from World War I through the aftermath of World War II.

The descriptions of *Spitzen* throughout the novel bear more than a little resemblance to the Ukraine of the 1930s. Both are defined by isolation, utter starvation, lawlessness, and cannibalism. In the case of the Ukraine, this outcome was the result of Stalin's forced collectivization of farm land, which developed into an orchestrated starvation of the peasantry that took over 3 million lives in 1932-1933 alone (Snyder 53). Left in a complete state of

abandonment, all food taken by force to meet insane grain quotas, these peasants either died outright from starvation or turned to cannibalism. In the words of historian Timothy Snyder, this was a place where “the only meat was human” and “[t]hose who refused to eat corpses died” (Snyder 51, 50).

In this space of absolute danger, children were particularly vulnerable. “[P]eople trapping and eating the children of others” was an actual practice (Vardy and Vardy 232). Children were literally locked indoors “to keep them safe from roving bands of cannibals” (Snyder 49). Even the records of the Soviet state police, the OGPU, claim that “families kill their weakest members, usually children, and use the meat for eating” (qtd. in Snyder 50).

In this context, anyone who handled or possessed meat was held suspect. Snyder explains:

A black market arose in human flesh; human meat may even have entered the official economy. The police investigated anyone selling meat, and state authorities kept a close eye on slaughterhouses and butcher shops. A young communist in the Kharkiv region reported to his superiors that he could make a meat quota, but only by using human beings. (51)<sup>26</sup>

Likewise, the subject of black-market human flesh was particularly a German issue after The First World War. It is of note that three cannibal serial killers

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<sup>26</sup> Given the sensational nature of these accounts and the large number of purportedly scholarly works on cannibalism that facilely reprint every unsubstantiated story, it should be noted that the source in which they appear, Snyder’s book *Bloodlands*, is legitimate historicism that provides translations for Ukrainian sources hitherto unavailable in English.

emerged in Germany at this time: Fritz Haarmann (arrested 1924), Karl Denske (arrested 1924), and Karl Grossman (arrested 1921). All three sold meat at market, and it is believed each peddled human flesh. Haarmann in particular was known as a “butcher and meat trader” and had a thriving black market business in “horse” meat (Brottman 26).<sup>27</sup>

The novel expresses a generalized anxiety about the butcher shop. Its illicit nature is clearest in the statement “[e]ven when the butcher shop door slammed shut, it seemed to say, ‘Quiet. I am not really closed’” (14). And the fact that Jutta’s son “ran all the faster when the light went out of the butcher shop” suggests that he sees a link between this space and the predator who stalks him (13). Even more telling are the enigmatic references to meat as “uninspected” and “without official sanction” in the above passages, which on the surface make no sense since the town has “no government” (16). A similar focus on government sanction unexpectedly appears when the Duke is preparing his cannibal meal as well. As he “put the pieces” of the boy’s body “in the bucket to soak,” he also “put a few bones that he had been able to carry away, *uninspected and unstamped*, before the shop closed, on a closet shelf” (181, my emphasis). This certainly functions as a “black joke” (Greiner 38), but given the historical anxiety surrounding the slaughter of children, cannibalism, and

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<sup>27</sup> It is not clear to what degree, if any, these killers inspired Hawkes. However, both Grossman and Haarmann were fairly well known at the time. Both preyed on children and were the main cause of a new public hysteria about child safety in Germany as reflected in Fritz Lang’s *M*. Both killers in fact served as inspiration for the film’s serial killer. The song about “the man in black” from the film’s opening credits was actually about Haarmann (Kaes 9-10).

butchers, such references are more significant. In Hawkes's words, they elucidate how nightmare has become reality.

Rather than simply evoking these historical anxieties, the passages quoted above make a specific argument about the relationship between realized cannibal nightmare and the political. While the final image of the cannibal town foreshadows the later cannibalization of the boy from the first image, the order also establishes the wider pattern of consumption, its economic and national forms. As throughout the novel, the sequence of these images tells the story. The individual act of predation that begins the passage (the Duke's pursuit of Jutta's son) is followed by an economic act of predation (the suspect meat of the butcher shop), and culminates in a political act of predation (the town/nation consuming human life). The point here is that the literal consumption of the individual in an act of survival cannibalism is the effect of a larger systemization of predatory consumption, more specifically a cannibalistic political body whose institutionalized violence determines the lesser acts of consumption (and this is absolutely clear in the historical instances that Hawkes draws upon). The statement "without official sanction" takes on an ironic tinge, as the state of exception created by political violence here makes cannibalism the *de facto* rule.

#### (Bio)Political Bodies

The links established above between horrific individual violence and larger structures of power exist throughout the novel. No character in the novel exists as an individual as such; singular bodies always signal the collective body in



some way. The people and the space they inhabit are clearly employed as figures of the body politic, and one is continually the sign of the other's health or decay. The Duke's cannibalism and Stella's unwitting participation are not simply commentaries on these individuals, but also microcosms of the larger political violence and a commentary on its brutality and self-destructive nature.

As others have commented, Stella Snow serves in the novel as the prototypical "Teutonic female," an "earth mother" (Guerard xi), but her representational status is political as well. Balamir thinks of her as "the Queen Mother" and her apartment as "the royal room" (179); Zizendorf sees her as "the greatest leader of us all" (131). She becomes an actual leader when she "take[s] command...in the attack" on the institution (154).<sup>28</sup> As earth mother, the embodiment of blood and soil, Stella's body is used as an index of the nation's health. In 1914 she appears as the archetypal Aryan, the best of the "Nordic women, straight, blonde, strong and unsupple" (41). In 1945, her "frail" body marks the decay of the nation itself, "her half-white, half-gold hair" figuring its partial death (149, 17).

Similarly, Balamir and Zizendorf are presented as embodiments of the nation. Zizendorf conceives himself as a Hitleresque Fuhrer. A sociopath who wants to reestablish Germany's power through crushing violence, he envisions himself as "the new Leader," Germany's "new salvation," and his writings as "the new word" (183, 194, 176). Like Hitler, he seeks to establish a Fuhrer cult, where he will be head of state in the most literal sense, where "his every word is

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<sup>28</sup> As this is the only scene focalized in the novel that resembles a battle, Stella ironically appears more like a military commander than any of the male figures.

immediate law” (Agamben, *Homo* 184). This is clear in his megalomaniacal fantasies of power. Zizendorf imagines the German people, “every single one of them incorporated by a mere word” (175); he sees his “order . . . spreading, conception and detail, to the borders of the land” and his “decree” “restor[ing]” the nation in a single day (169, 194). Zizendorf believes his physical body is the very wellspring of the nation, his words the source of the body politic itself. He is a Fuhrer in Schmitt’s sense of the term: he presumes his “word is law” because he thinks he speaks directly for the German people, that he himself is an embodiment of their will (Agamben, *Homo* 184).

Balamir, too, conflates his body and that of the nation in his own illusions of power and prestige. As “Prince of *Spitzen-on-the-Dein*” (18), he appears in the novel as “the leader of a national return to royalism that parodies Zizendorf’s national socialism” (O’Donnell 28). He fancies himself the Kaiser’s son, “the first man of Germany,” and believes that “[a]ll Germany revolved around [him]” (12, 179, 18). As with Zizendorf, he imagines his body as co-terminus with Germany, calling himself “Honor *in the land he had become*” (18, my emphasis).

In the novel, the body politic of the German state is figured by two locales: the village of *Spitzen-on-the-Dein* and the mental institution at its edge. The town’s bodily status is primarily expressed through its bodily functions: eating and digestion. The personified town “gorged itself” on the living and dead alike, “absorbed [them], whole corps at a time, into the yawning walls” (8, 3). And the town’s canal, filled with corpses, acts as its digestive tract, slowly breaking down its bodily waste. The connection between nation and body is further emphasized

in the significance that Zizendorf places on the town's "only horse statue," which he regards as the "the statue of Germany" itself (9, 183). As with Stella's body, the state of the horse's body is a direct indication of the nation's health. Its wartime dismemberment—"the legs and head lopped" off—figures Germany's mutilation (9). For Zizendorf, the nation's revivification is symbolized by getting "the old horse statue back on its feet" (183).

Imagery of animal bodies connects *Spitzen* with the other spatial figure for the body politic, the mental institution on the town's outskirts. A "kingdom of . . . roosting birds" marked by its "overbearing size" and "great felled wings"<sup>29</sup> that seem to move, the institution in one sense is the *Reichstadler*, or imperial eagle, national symbol of Germany under Nazi rule (36, 29, 30). Like the other figures of the body politic, the institution's status mirrors that of Germany itself. The breakdown of the asylum, marked by the mental patients "turned out to wander" in the novel's opening passage, figures the breakdown of the state (3). Its resurgence is figured as the direct result of the national rebirth: "the Nation was restored, its great operations and institutions were once more in order" (194). The revitalized "health" of this site—marked by the "long lines" of patients "filing back into the institution" in the novel's penultimate scene—is the product of the revived "public spirit" under the new regime (195).

This continued emphasis on individual bodies figuring the political body and the prominence of bodily processes in both can only be appreciated through an understanding of how these concepts were employed in contemporary

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<sup>29</sup> References to the institutions' wings appear on 150 and 155.

political rhetoric. From such an understanding one begins to glean the novel's specifically political commentary, and one comes to understand the true import of the cannibal metaphor in the book as the conjunction of biopolitics and necropolitics.

In the Nazi regime, the concept of the body politic enjoys a prominence unmatched since Hobbes. Hitler frequently referred to the Reich as a "body politic"; he claimed the NSDAP's goal was to merge the people into "a single body," "a 'volkic' organism" (Hitler 445, 85). In his mind, nationalism is always embodied; he claims that "to be 'national' means above everything to act with a boundless and all-embracing love for the people" (Hitler 15). And this "love" consists of protecting the physical bodies of the citizens themselves: "That which abides is the substance in itself—a substance of flesh and blood—our people. That truly exists, that remains, and only to that should one feel oneself responsible" (Hitler 855). In Hitler's formulation, as in the novel, the individual citizen's body is a microcosm of the nation, and its health is a sign of national health.

For Hitler, the state's function is fundamentally biopolitical. He sees a direct link between the health of the citizen's "flesh and blood"—their bare life—and the health and purity of the larger body politic that these bodies form as an aggregate. The function of the state thus becomes nourishing these bodies to ensure the health of the larger political body. In an early speech, Hitler proclaims, "The purpose, the aim of the State is to provide the people with its food-supply" (85). This sentiment is echoed again in one of the four tasks espoused by the

party on coming to power in 1933: “ii. To secure to this people through work its daily bread” (Hitler 120). In decrees such as these that locate the State’s function as “preserving” the people’s bare life above all else, Agamben correctly sees the “most rigorous biopolitical formulation” of “National Socialist ideology” (*Homo* 147).

In the Nazi’s thoroughly biopolitical state apparatus, eating becomes paramount. In Hitler’s formulation, the greatest threat to the citizens’ bodies, and thus to the state, is starvation. In one of his early speeches, he speaks of “thirty million human beings [in the ‘East’] . . . being slowly martyred—done to death . . . millions upon millions through starvation” (31-32). Later, his focus becomes national as he speaks of “more than eight hundred thousand *children of the nation* [that] had died of hunger and undernourishment at the close of the War” (738-39, my emphasis).

The national body is figured as a consuming body whose very life is dependent on consumption, as evinced by statement number three in The Programme of the Party: “We demand land and territory (colonies) *for the nourishment of our people* and for the settling of our surplus populations” (Hitler 103, my emphasis). This refers specifically to Hitler’s plans to capture and colonize the eastern frontier and turn it into a German agricultural utopia (Snyder 19). The unstated assumption in this formulation is that without external “nourishment” the biological national body will waste away: it will consume its own strength in a type of self-cannibalism. The very survival of the nation—and

the individual bodies that it encompasses—depends upon the expansion of political borders in a process figured as consumption.

In essence, Nazi war making reached its zenith in perpetrating the Germans' worst fear—national starvation—on the enemy. As Snyder states, with the Nazis, “hunger” becomes “a policy” (177). This applies specifically to “the Hunger Plan” executed in 1941 against the Soviets. Under this plan, which was viewed as key to German success on the Eastern front, 30 million Russians would be starved to death (Snyder 163). A Nazi statement declared, “Many tens of millions of people in this territory will become superfluous and will die or must emigrate to Siberia . . . With regard to this, absolute clarity must reign” (qtd. in Snyder 163). Ironically, the Nazi strategy here was a page taken directly from Stalin's playbook. The Germans would manipulate the collective farms in the Ukraine to feed their own population, while simultaneously eliminating “superfluous populations” through starvation as the Russians had done in the 1930s.

Starvation would become the means of redrawing the lines of the body politic. As the Soviet Union withered away, Germany would expand. The rise and fall of empires is reconfigured as the expansion and contraction of bodies. Starvation and cannibalism become one and the same: the starvation of the enemy's body politic is figured as a bounty of food for the German body politic. As in the myths of primitive cannibal rituals, the victor will acquire the enemy's strength through his consumption. The relationship between nations becomes that of predator and prey.

But eating and starvation are not conceptualized solely in terms of external bodies. Rather, in Hitler's words, Germany faced internal "ferments of decomposition" (821). This refers, of course, to the Nazi conception of the Jew as a type of internal parasite within the body politic. As in the other rhetoric of the body politic, consumption and starvation figure heavily here. The nation's decomposition is labeled as the direct result of the "gigantic harvest" of the Jewish "war market" (Hitler 48). This, along with the "gluttony" of postwar Jewish speculation, results in the "bloat[ing]" of the Jew's physical body "while a nation of millions is a prey to starvation" (Hitler 52, 7, 728). In this rhetoric of expanding and contracting bodies, of fat war profiteer and starving citizen, the Jew becomes a vampire, draining bodies through his capitalist exploitation. And in this conception, the Jew is imagined as a direct threat to the mission of the state, to provide the citizen with his "daily bread," to protect his bare life.

As in the case of the external enemy, the Nazi "solution" for the internal enemy was largely predicated on starvation. At its most fundamental level, Nazi strategies for Jewish "containment"—the ghetto and later the camp—were envisioned as a systematic redistribution of calories (i.e. a biopolitics of the population). The Jews were above all "the people from whom calories could be spared" (Snyder 188). The Nazis would give calories to productive bodies and take them from the "useless eaters," allowing only the bare minimum necessary

to sustain life so that physical labor could be extracted from these bodies.<sup>30</sup> This meant the physical enlargement of Aryan bodies and the shrinkage of “parasitic” bodies, a reversal of the Jew’s “bloating” and the worker’s starvation. The nation’s “decomposition” would itself decompose.

What becomes apparent in the conceptions of both external and internal threats is the thoroughly biologized notion of the body politic and its explicit relationship to killing and consumption. The static image of the medieval body politic focused solely on the relationship between bodily parts; it was a body unto itself. The Nazi corpus, however, is defined by its relationship to “foreign” bodies, specifically through alimentary processes that neutralize them: consumption, digestion, and the expulsion of waste. In one sense, these formulations are nothing new. As Jonathan Gil Harris has shown, as early as the sixteenth century a “proto-microbiological conception of disease” was applied to the English body politic (15). Moreover, the Nazi rhetoric of a national body threatened by internal consumption owes much to Victorian discourse. Hitler’s figuration of a German body politic comprised of starving workers and fattened Jews is almost an exact copy of reformer Henry Mayhew’s notion of the social body of Victorian England as comprised of “the enfeebled bodies of productive workers...and the excessively hardy bodies of the nomads (people explicitly associated with the circulation and exchange . . . of commodities)” (Gallagher 91). Where the Nazi formulation proves novel is the ways it deals with foreign bodies. In the Victorian

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<sup>30</sup> Nancy Scheper-Hughes states, “Tests and measurements of the survivors of the Warsaw ghetto indicated that most adults there had been subsisting on a diet . . . that provided only 600 to 800 calories per day.” This was similar to the diet at Belsen as well (*Death* 157).



case, the “disease” to be destroyed was viewed as a social ill and the means to heal the body were the disciplinary and biopolitical measures that Foucault has detailed at such great lengths.<sup>31</sup> But with the Nazis, initial disciplinary measures give way to extermination. While the nineteenth century discourse of national purification made use of the rhetoric of excision and purgation, it is only in the twentieth century that the violence inherent in these notions become realized as the liquidation of entire groups.

To put it another way, the change that takes place is biopolitical, or rather necropolitical. The Nazi view of death is the direct result of a shift to biopolitics; as Foucault claims, death “is now manifested as simply the reverse of the right of the social body to ensure, maintain, or develop its life” (*History* 136). But Foucault’s language undercuts the severity of this shift, which is not simply a transition from the sovereign right “to make die” to the more benign sounding biopolitical right “to let die” (*Society* 247). Rather, the ideology of the social body’s fundamental biopolitical “right” to life justifies the most extreme forms of violence; it leads to an unprecedented amount of killing in the name of the nation’s continuity—a killing that is figured as necessary for survival itself. With the explicitly biopolitical notion of the state comes an implicitly necropolitical register that resembles survival cannibalism. The state’s mission of ensuring the people’s bare life through food brings with it the ever-present specter of starvation, a threat from both internal and external sources. Thus, the body is in a constant state of danger and what is at stake is life itself, the *zoe* that is the

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<sup>31</sup> For a detailed account of the rhetoric of the diseased social body in Victorian England, see Poovey.

necessary foundation for any *bios*. The result is the permanent state of exception; in constant mortal danger, this body knows no bounds in the protection of its own life.

What develops with the Nazis is an explicit relationship between the killing of the other and the maintenance of the political body's "health." What is novel here is the explicit statement of a need for genocide, the state's avowal of the need for mass slaughter. Whereas in earlier forms of political intervention killing is seen as a byproduct, with the Nazis it becomes the state's *raison d'être*. Destroying the enemy, seizing territory, and providing the worker with his daily bread become one and the same.

No possibility for the other's political incorporation into the nation exists here. The death of the other is now *required* in order to ensure life. The other's very existence is figured as absolute enmity and her "bio-physical elimination" the only solution. And, as is clear in the above examples, this bio-physical elimination is explicitly tied to issues of consumption. The other's death becomes nutritive, the means for one's very existence. In the era of biopolitical calculation, the killing of the other means calories for oneself. This is completely clear in the Nazis explanation of the Hunger Plan to their own soldiers: "If German soldiers wanted to eat, they were told, they would have to starve the surrounding population. They should imagine that any food that entered the mouth of a Soviet citizen was taken from the mouth of a German child" (Snyder 170). In a kind of radical implosion, nationalism returns the citizen to the state of nature, to the

struggle of all (aggregate) bodies against all, and life again becomes an ongoing battle for bare sustenance that necessitates continual killing.

Given this context, the novel's starving bodies take on new meaning. The individual bodies that Hawkes uses to figure the nation—Stella, Zizendorf, and Balamir—are all portrayed as physically shrinking, as “gaunt for the great land” (129). In Stella's and Jutta's case, the fall is particularly evident. In 1915 their appetites are portrayed as excessive (and excessively refined): Stella feasts on “a hybrid kind of giant pear” and “crave[s] candies imported from France and Holland” while Jutta “gorged herself on nuts, cream, shanks of meat and chocolate” (12, 16). In 1945 Stella is reduced to brewing her little remaining tea with water from the town's shit-filled canal while Jutta, “starved for food . . . now filled herself” by performing fellatio for money (16-17).

This pattern is mirrored in the body politic that these characters represent. The war results not in the expansion of the body politic, but in its shrinkage and dismemberment. The heroic world of 1915 Germany, marked by consumption and camaraderie, is reduced to the town of *Spitzen*, a space that is above all defined by starvation. This latter point is clear in the first mention of the town's name: “There was nowhere to eat in *Spitzen-on-the-Dein*” (11). The personified town itself becomes emaciated and “gaunt” (7)—the narrative specifically states that “the town shrank,” that it is “shriveled” and “decomposed” (9, 8). And like its desperate inhabitants, the town will consume anything, reduced even to cannibalism, to “gorging itself on straggling beggars” (7). The suggestion here is that the Nazis' attempts to externalize violence, to consume the other, have

resulted in the breakdown of the self. The Germans' fear of starvation, the action that they perpetrated on so many others, has now been perpetrated on them. The fantasy of a nutritive political consumption of the other becomes the reality of starving bodies.

But the irony of the novel (and what is at issue in its larger point) is that Zizendorf and the others fail to learn from this reality. Like the Nazis, Zizendorf continues to understand the enemy in terms of consumption. For him, the threats of decomposition are "the fat men" and the foreign invader, the fattened Jew Leevey (141).<sup>32</sup> Just as in prewar rhetoric, the enemy is defined by his girth because this is the unmistakable sign of his predation, of the fact that he is stealing calories from the German worker. Thus, Leevey's body is "heavy" because "[t]hey feed the Americans well" (160). For Zizendorf, Leevey's overfed body is the sign of the disgusting excess that marks the Americans and the Jews, a vitality supposedly extracted from German bodies. In his new declaration of independence, America appears as a cannibal body, "fed with a constant supply from the increasingly despairing masses" (176). The threat Zizendorf faces is still in a sense the vampiric Jew<sup>33</sup> and what is threatened is still the citizen's bare life, his bodily integrity. As with the Nazis, for Zizendorf war remains a biopolitical

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<sup>32</sup> Hawkes makes Leevey's Jewishness absolutely clear through the stereotypical depiction of him as a delicatessen worker with a "long nose" (145). His Jewishness is reiterated in Zizendorf's thought that "Leevey had gone on to his native sons who sat by the thousands amid fields of gold, nodding their black curly heads" (158).

<sup>33</sup> As in prewar rhetoric, the Jew controls technology (in this case the motorcycle) and is in control of exchange (in this case, the exchange of information).

necessity, the struggle for one's very existence in which the enemy must be eliminated wholesale. In his words, it is the "hour of *extermination* of our natural foe" (177, my emphasis).

In the theme of cannibalism, the novel suggests the connections between eliminating the enemy and the health of the national body, the contraction of one body in the name of the expansion of the other. This is clearest in the penultimate scene, where the murder of the enemy, the "birth" of Zizendorf's nation, the cannibal meal, and the issue of public "health" are tightly interwoven:

The decree worked, was carried remarkably well, and before the day had begun the Nation was restored, its great operations and institutions were once more in order . . . At precisely ten o'clock, when the Queen Mother went to dine, the dark man with the papers walked down the street and stopped at the boarding house. As Balamir left the castle with the shabby man, he heard the faraway scraping of knives and forks. At the top of the hill he saw the long lines there were already filing back into the institution, revived already with the public spirit. They started down the slope and passed, without noticing, the pool of trodden thistles where the carrion lay. (194-95)<sup>34</sup>

Each of the circumstances here that mark the revival of the nation—the decree that announces the murder of the enemy, the reopening of the institution, and the

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<sup>34</sup> The "dark man" coming to take Balamir may refer to the song about serial killer Fritz Haarmann employed in *M* (see note 27): "Wait, wait just a little while/ The man in black will soon come to you too" (qtd. in Kaes 10).

cannibal meal—are instances of killing and consumption. In the case of the decree, biopolitics and necropolitics are coupled. The birth of the nation is only possible through the killing of the enemy, the neutralization of the foreign body. The document proclaims, “*People of Germany*: We joyfully announce that tonight the Third Allied Commander, overseer of Germany, was killed. The Allies are no longer in power, but you, the Teutons, are once more in control of your futures” (177). The solution is not the expulsion of the invader from the land but his murder and ingestion. By placing Leevey’s body in the swamp, Zizendorf in a sense ensures that it will be digested, that Leevey’s rotting corpse will fertilize the German soil. The strength that the parasitic Jewish invader extracted from Germany will be reintegrated and the national body will return to health through this quasi-consumption.

Likewise, the revival of the institution marks the elimination of another enemy, the social “disease” of the mentally ill—the “useless eaters” that threaten national “health.” What is ostensibly an expulsion, a forced incarceration, is actually figured as another form of consumption since it coincides exactly with the cannibal meal. Balamir is in a sense cannibalized, his ejection from the community marked by the “scraping of knives and forks” and his return to the institution marred by the sight of human “carrion,” the leftovers from the Duke’s butchery. The suggestion is that his body too must be reduced, that he must be massacred for the body politic to expand and return to health (and, as I will explain in a moment, this point is underscored by the equation of the institution with the concentration camp).

Ultimately, the conditions for national life here are predicated on the destruction of certain bodies, of their reduction to carrion. The life of the People is ostensibly dependent on the slaughter and consumption of an other, which is made into foodstuffs. In one sense, then, the novel repeats the Nazi political rhetoric of consumption and expanding and contracting bodies. However, it turns the formula on its head. The novel dramatizes the other side of the heroic national narrative: the slaughter of war and the grotesque bodies of privation that are the war's aftermath.

The novel is clear that the "rebirth" of the nation is not based on the state's role as bread giver, but rather on an insidious Thyestean feast. In this case, Stella is nourished on her own flesh and blood since she literally eats her nephew, Jutta's son. And since she is figured as Teutonic earth mother, the message is clear: Germany is devouring itself. Blood and soil are brought together but in a grotesque parody of Nazi ideology. The result is not the enlargement of the national body (and the supposedly concomitant health of the citizen's body), but an empty circularity that maims everyone involved.<sup>35</sup> The symbol of land and motherhood consumes the symbol of German youth, violently reabsorbing the vitality she supposedly passes on, extinguishing natality and thus the nation that inscribes it.

By problematizing the act of cannibalism, the novel challenges the biopolitical assumptions involved in Nazi political ideology. The killing and consumption of Jutta's son is in one sense presented as an act of survival

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<sup>35</sup> And this, of course, is the empty circularity of the blood feud that marked the cannibal motif in the original Thyestean feast and again in *Titus Andronicus*.

cannibalism—there is no doubt that the Duke and Stella are starving. But the gory description of the Duke's butchery ensures that the violence of the act is not undercut. One cannot forget "the slippery carcass" that is so "hard to dissect"; the unidentifiable organ that "burst[s]" in the Duke's hand; and the "slender stripped tendon" that "slapped back, like elastic" (181-182). Furthermore, this is an act performed by the strong against the weak. The Duke plots a calculated attack against a boy who is defenseless and goes to extreme lengths to carry it out. This scenario calls attention to the similar inequalities of power present in the national show of force. It reminds the reader that the personified town/nation also feeds on the weak, "gorging itself on straggling beggars" and "absorb[ing]" mental patients, "whole corps at a time, into the yawning walls" (3).

The cannibal meal is ultimately revealed as more than an act of survival: it is a reinscription of ideology. It is no coincidence that this meal is shared by the two remaining aristocrats in the novel. More than the survival of bare life, what is at stake (and what is being commemorated) is the survival of aristocratic right and class privilege. The meal is not the daily bread of the people but "full courses and wine" partaken by the "Chancellor" of the new state and the "Queen Mother" (193). The birth of nation celebrated in the cannibal meal therefore marks the continuation of a hierarchy of eater and eaten, of the continued reduction of certain bodies to objects. Hence, it is no surprise that the Duke carries the boy's body parts in a "shopping bag" (191).

In the end, the cannibal feast gives the lie to the (re)construction of nation. The novel states explicitly what is implicit in Nazi policy: nationalism and its



attending political expansionism is a form of cannibalism in that it consumes actual bodies. The sanitized ritual of national liberation, the supposed constitution of nation through the word, is revealed as the result of murder; the foundation of the political community is revealed as built on the mutilated corpses of enemy and citizen alike. The supposed biopolitical necessity that grounds these deaths is called into question as well. *The Cannibal* suggests that it is not so much survival that necessitates this killing and consumption but the survival of the status quo.

Yet the characters seem genuinely not to grasp these points. Stella can weep real “tears of joy” for the reunification of the nation and the murder of the enemy (193). She and others do not see that the will to power expressed as the need to destroy the other is a violence that is inevitably turned back onto the self. They do not comprehend that the doctrines of expansionism and purification have led to the decimated body politic, one in which German citizens themselves become the victims of literal cannibalism, in which “the People” have become “the people,” where the ostensible protection of bare (biological) life has reduced them all to bare (abandoned) life.

### State Secrets

In “What is a Nation?” Ernest Renan famously proclaims, “The essence of a nation is that all individuals have many things in common, and also that they have forgotten many things” (11). He goes so far as to argue that “[f]orgetting,” even “historical error, is a crucial factor in the creation of a nation” (11). For

Renan, what must be forgotten is the “deeds of violence which took place at the origin of all political formations” (11). He claims, “[E]very French citizen has to have forgotten the massacre of Saint Bartholomew, or the massacres that took place in the Midi in the thirteenth century” (11). However, as Benedict Anderson notes, Renan’s examples create a paradox: “In effect, Renan’s readers were being told to ‘have already forgotten’ what Renan’s own words assumed that they naturally remembered!” (200). As Anderson’s comments intimate, the event itself is not forgotten. Indeed, it is commemorated since one is continually “reminded” of it through “a systematic historiographical campaign” (Anderson 201). Rather, what one must forget is the “deeds of violence” as such. “Massacre” must be transformed into a historical event within a larger national teleology. Carnage must be rewritten as overcoming a danger to “our” way of life, as the grounds for “our” continued existence as such.

Perhaps more than anything else, Hawkes’s novel is an exploration of nationalism’s dual obligation to commemorate and to forget, but the dimension that the novel adds to this theory is the consequences on actual bodies. Indeed, the novel insists that massacre lies at the foundations of national life. In Hawkes’s account, the incorporation of this violence into a national narrative is not the means for communal life as it is for Renan. Rather, it is a form of insanity that ensures a never-ending cycle of violence.

These points are dramatized through the relationship of primitive violence and heroic nationalism; these connections are clearest in Stella, particularly her thoughts on her heritage. The narrator states:

Her ancestors had *run berserk*, cloaked themselves in animal skins, carved valorous battles on their shields, and several old men, related thinly in blood from a distant past, had jumped from a rock in Norway to their death in the sea. Stella, with such a *history* running through her veins, caught her breath and flung herself at her horned and helmeted kinsmen while the Bavarians schnitzled back and forth in a drunken trio. (43, my emphasis)

As in Renan's examples, Stella's thoughts enact a tangle of remembering and forgetting. She does not necessarily forget the primitive and suicidal nature of her ancestor's violence; rather, she forgets the importance of these facts when she places their actions into an ideology of bravery and valor. The result is the mindless repetition of self-destruction (albeit comic in this case) as she flings "herself at her horned and helmeted kinsmen."

Moreover, the passage suggests this same pattern within German culture. The word "berserk," as well as the evocation of Norway and "animal skins," points squarely to the Berserkers, ancient Norse warriors known for excessive destruction (and self-destruction). The Berserker is a figure of animality and uncontrollable violence. Known as the "bear shirts" for their practice of wearing animal skins instead of armor, these men worked themselves into an uncommon frenzy before battle, probably with the aid of hallucinogens (Turner and Coulter 98). As one historian notes, "The inherited fury sometimes reached such dimensions that they would slay their own men, not recognizing them through madness . . . They would yell and bite with their teeth like wolves . . . demolishing

everything in reach of their hands. Their downfall was brought about by their own madness" (McClintock 460).

Despite the Berserker's suicidal violence, for Stella he is an emblem of cultural heritage. He is the "history running thickly through her veins," the symbol of valor and sacrifice, the essence of the Germanic character that Cromwell identifies as "a beautiful capacity for ideals of conquest, a traditional heroism" (49). The Berserker thus serves as a bridge for the primitive violence of the past and the violence of the present—and the ludicrousness of such a repetition. Stella's thoughts suggest this connection when she juxtaposes ancient Norse and modern European warfare: "strange men embarking in ice-covered ships. Machine guns slowly rattled in the raked forest" (12-13). This comment grounds the current insanity of the war in a history of primitive violence. Significantly, the Nazis themselves made such connections. Associated with quick siege, the berserker was the conscious forbearer of the Nazi's *blitzkrieg*, or lightening warfare. In both cases, violence is co-opted as cultural heritage despite its suicidal nature. Both Stella and the German people she represents fail to see that this primitive madness cannot be kept in check and that it will ultimately become self-destructive.

The great irony of the novel—and its lesson about the functions of nationalism—is that none of the characters will let themselves see the true nature of the violence that has left its mark on the landscape and on their very bodies. Ideology blinds them from the self-destructive nature of the war machine that should be so clear to them. This is most apparent with Stella. Her thoughts

suggest the connections between the Germans and primitive violence, even cannibalism, yet she fails to perceive the links. During the oppressive heat of summer, she thinks of “the strange wild cannibals on tropical islands or on the dark continent, running with white bones in their hair . . . in only their feathers . . . She saw those men, carrying victims high over their heads, as tall, vengeful creatures who sang madly on their secret rock” (74). Through this last image, of singing “madly on their secret rock,” her thoughts reveal the affinity between the native cannibals and the berserk warriors who “jumped from a rock in Norway.” The dark cannibal is thus presented as nothing more than the tropical version of the mad Norseman. The savage wearing only “feathers” and the German soldier in his “feathered helmet” are in reality but two guises of mindless, animalistic violence (83).

Stella’s failure to see the berserker and the cannibal as twinned forms of primitive violence is doubly ironic in that she herself encompasses both categories. Interestingly, more than any other character, she appears as a crazed warrior, leading the other “violent hags” of *Spitzen* in the comic battle to suppress the riot at the institution (154). Stella literally goes berserk, running into battle “as fast as she could” and “brandish[ing]” a stave (154-155). In an uncontrollable frenzy, she and the women “shouted and tore and pelted everything in sight” (156). Pathetic, grotesque violence is co-opted here into a discourse of national defense, but the civilized appear more violent and insane than the supposed threat they seek to contain.

Stella's participation in the cannibal meal is based in a similar denial of violence. Most obviously, Stella never considers where the meat for this meal has come from. Despite the fact that no one in the town has food, she does not bother to ask questions, thinking only of the "honor" of the invitation (193). She mindlessly accepts the call to rejoin a chivalric and aristocratic economy where she will be the receiver of sacrifice even though such an economy is antithetical to the reality of the burned-out city in which she lives. She is ultimately complicit with the ideological cover of the feast, its finery ("full courses and wine") secreting the violent reality of its production, the Duke's horrible butchery of her nephew.<sup>36</sup>

In the Duke's case, the cannibal meal is not the result of outright denial, but of willful misrecognition and ideological rewriting. The only titled noble in the book, he is also the most savage character since he is the only one who self-consciously commits cannibalism. While his full motivations are unclear, what is apparent is that he views this act as shoring up the aristocratic order. In his mind, the meal is a courting ritual meant to convey that "he recognized with *taste* and profound respect the clear high and stable character of Madame Snow" (24, my emphasis).

It is important to note that the deception of the cannibal meal is made possible only through an existing discourse of carnivorousness. At the most basic level, the Duke and Stella are complicit with what Derrida calls the "carnivorous sacrifice" so "fundamental" to "our culture" ("Force" 247). In this carnivorous logic,

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<sup>36</sup> This cannibal meal resembles the monstrosity of Lecter's refined cannibal meal in *Hannibal*, as it is another instance of self-consumption that ends in the perpetrator's self-mutilation.

the subject knowingly kills the animal, but this killing is rewritten as a “non-criminal putting to death.” As in political massacre, a disavowal is necessary, in this case the denial of an affinity with the animal that lies at the base of the human. Derrida is emphatic that this violence is only made possible through its repudiation: “Men do all they can in order to dissimulate this cruelty or to hide it from themselves”; they orchestrate “on a global scale the forgetting or misunderstanding of this violence” (*The Animal* 26). Thus, both political and carnivorous structures are founded on an act of forgetting, but in both cases what is forgotten is also commemorated, in national myth and in the feast, respectively. Violence is apparent in both but its meaning and affective qualities are veiled.

The novel presses this point through its presentation of violence toward animals. Stella is explicitly associated with animal slaughter throughout the text—the “Queen Mother” is ironically portrayed “pulling the heads from small fowl” while sitting in her “large gilt chair” (6). The novel problematizes this violence through its excessive and grotesque detail. Indeed, the specificity used to describe Stella’s decapitation of a chicken is surpassed only by the Duke’s slaughter of the child—and the chicken’s death is strangely no less disturbing; the fleshiness of its slaughtered body is as unsettling as the boy’s:

The old woman watched the fowl twisting its head, blinking the pink-lidded eyes, and carefully she straddled the convulsing neck with two fingers, tightened them across the mud-caked chest, and with the other hand seized the head that felt as if it were all bone

and moving bits of scale. The pale yellow feet paddled silently backwards and forwards, slits breathed against her palm. Madame Snow clenched her fists and quickly flung them apart so that the fowl's head spurted across the room, hit the wall and fell into a heap of shavings, its beak clicking open and shut, eyes staring upward at the growing light. She dropped the body with its torn neck and squeezed with fingermarks into a bucket of water. (153-54)

Stella's lack of disturbance here (heightened by the deadpan narrative) is perhaps what is most disturbing. She exhibits neither disgust nor compassion; she remains unmoved by "the frightened eyes of the chicken," her pulse beating "slowly" and "steadily" (153). Violence here is not forgotten: it has just lost all affective value. But at the metadiegetic level, the point is clear: carnivorous violence is troubling. Hawkes will not allow the reader to forget the horror of bodily slaughter, whether the body is human or animal.<sup>37</sup>

Moreover, the novel suggests that violence against animals is problematic because it also contributes to violence against humans. Within the structures of humanism, the symbolic substitution of animal for human is supposed to be sublimating: the killing and eating of animals is supposed to satiate man's apparent need for violence and flesh. What Hawkes intimates is that carnivorous

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<sup>37</sup> The connection between the consumption of human flesh and the carnivorous slaughter of animals is further underscored by the similar preparation of these bodies. The chicken's "body with its torn neck" placed "into a bucket of water" is later echoed in the preparation of Jutta's son when the Duke "put[s] the pieces into the bucket to soak" (191).



speciesism does not reliably sublimate a seemingly primitive need to kill and consume. Rather, as the conflation of the butcher shop and the Duke's cannibal butchery intimates, "animal sacrifice" can function "not as a symbolic injunction against the killing and eating of humans (as the law of Enlightenment culture would have it) but rather as an invitation to it" (Wolf and Elmer 161). For instance, the Duke eases his disgust while slaughtering the boy by continually imagining him as a fox. The disavowal of violence in carnivorism helps him to disavow his violence against humans, to transfer the concept of a "non-criminal putting to death" into the human realm. Similarly, Stella's slaughter of the chicken does not quench her thirst for violence. It is clear in the next scene as she charges into battle with her hands "still covered with the blood of the chicken" that animal slaughter has only whetted her appetite for human blood (154).

This issue is extended to the national level through the continual equation of animal and national body. In perhaps the most comic aspect of the book, the nation is persistently associated with chickens. Both *Spitzen* and the institution are connected with "roosting"—the former "roosting on charred earth" and the latter a "kingdom...of roosting birds" (7, 36).<sup>38</sup> And even more nakedly, the "birth" of Zizendorf's new nation takes place in a chicken coop where the "the new

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<sup>38</sup> In a similar vein, Leevey, the representation of America, falls in death "as easy as a duck." (169)

word” falls “like feathers” onto the egg “delivery table” (176, 177).<sup>39</sup> This connection with chickens also places the national squarely within the novel’s discourse on violence and (self)sacrifice since the chicken is the animal that is most repeatedly slaughtered in the text. Besides Stella rushing to the defense of the nation with her hands covered in chicken blood, the link with the national is also apparent in the decapitation scene when the Kaiser’s ghost appears at her window just as she is about to slaughter the bird (154). Animal, nation, and sacrifice come together here to form a picture of the national body as a decapitated animal body. The nation essentially becomes a chicken with its head cut off—a grotesque animality gone berserk, moving in violent convulsions towards an inevitable death. The end result is not sublimation or even an orderly regime of sacrifice but rather mindless violence.

With Stella’s symbolic decapitation of the national body, the novel suggests both the willful production of mindlessness and its self-destructive consequences. In one sense, there is no doubt that Stella remains mystified to the end. Even after the war, she is “puzzled,” unable to ascertain “where it had all begun” (17-18). She never comes to understand the links that she herself makes between primitive violence and the current wars, but the novel is equally clear

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<sup>39</sup> The nation birthed in the chicken coop may have additional symbolism when one considers that cannibalism is a major problem in laying hens. This is why chickens have their beaks cut, to prevent them from pecking each other and drinking the blood. Thus, in a very real sense, the chicken coop is a cannibal scene.

that this failure of cognition is based on her active refusal to see.<sup>40</sup> For instance, she refuses to look at her son after his leg is amputated because she “could not bear the mutilation of any part of her” (18). She will not gaze upon the real outcome of her nationalistic fervor; she will not recognize massacre as such and thus ensures that the massacre will be repeated.

The forgetting that Renan posits as necessary for national “health” is revealed in the novel as the root of group pathology. Thus, the town and the mental institution come to look the same just as noble becomes psychopath. Everyone here is mentally ill, and this illness is complicity with his or her own destruction in the name of the “order” that is supposed to prevent this destruction. The characters insanely repress the true nature of this violence in the expectation that its repetition will lead to transcendence rather than more horror.

These points are a commentary on the contemporary historical scene from which the novel emerged. On one level, Zizendorf and Balamir, insane men who believe they are the embodiment of the national will and the nation’s salvation, obviously stand in for Adolph Hitler. Even Balamir’s status as mental patient points to Hitler, since immediately after the end of the First World War Hitler was institutionalized for hysterical blindness and underwent a course of psychotherapy.<sup>41</sup> It was at this time that his megalomaniacal plans were formulated. Hitler later stated, “[B]linded. That was when I began to see . . . As I

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<sup>40</sup> The characters exhibit what Russ Castronova has labeled as the goal of nationalism, a “will-to-amnesia” (114).

<sup>41</sup> On Hitler’s hysterical blindness, see Koepf and Soyka.

lay there, it came over me that I would liberate the German people and make Germany great” (qtd. in Rhodes 33). Hitler’s version of German greatness was predicated on a repetition and expansion of the violence of World War I. As with Hawkes’s characters, his insanity is that he can stand in the wreckage of war and believe in the power of more violence to undo the trauma. In all of these cases, willful blindness insures a repetition of past carnage.

### The Camps and the Spread of Bare Life

This is not to say that Hawkes treats this pattern as transhistoric. On one hand, there is no doubt that he is drawing attention to the blind repetition of violence in the name of culture that in its broad sense could be traced to time immemorial. On the other hand, his depiction of this pattern is far more nuanced. Through the specter of the concentration camps that continuously haunts the novel, he offers a commentary on the Nazis’ necropolitical violence. Specifically, by portraying the mental institution as a double exposure of the camps, Hawkes highlights the conjunction of state violence and insanity.<sup>42</sup>

The conflation of mental institution and concentration camp in the novel is elucidated by Hawkes’s conflation of these two spaces in his own thoughts on the war. On his experience in the European theater, he states, “One time we were billeted in a still partially occupied mental institution in Louvain, Belgium; outside our village near Bremen, Germany, were mile-long lines of pajamaed inmates who had just been liberated from Belsen concentration camp” (*Humors*

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<sup>42</sup> I am drawing here on Brian McHale’s use of the term “double exposure” in *Postmodernist Fiction*. See pages 46-47 of this text.

53). These experiences are presented as evidence for the “bizarre” nature of the war (*Humors* 53), but also apparent in his train of thought is the melding of mental institution and concentration camp, the slippage from the “pajamaed inmate” of Belsen to the “the long lines of inmates” in “unironed hospital gowns” that characterize the institution (31, 32).

Indeed, throughout the dance scene Hawkes describes these “inmates” in terms that are evocative of the camps. Their “small white bodies” have “pocketed cheeks and shaven heads” (31). “[U]nhealthy in confinement,” they lie “sprawled on the bunks overcome with an inexcusable exhaustion, weak and helpless” (32, 33). As in the camps, they are separated by sex, “women dancing with women, and men with men”<sup>43</sup> (30); they appear as eerie automatons, moving “in block-like groups” to “the stiff waltz whispered out of the machine” (33, 31). These former inmates are described as “the rest of Europe,” of “mixed nationality,” and more specifically as “[t]he Czechs, Poles and Belgians” as well as “Russian ex-soldiers” (32, 35, 31). In other words, they are comprised of the same nationalities that inhabited the camps.

The institution itself is similarly evocative of the camps. In the dance scene, it is literally a “storehouse” for people, and its “gates of iron” and “barbed wire” mark it as a place of incarceration (30, 150, 180). Furthermore, the institution is space marked by incineration, more so than any other space in the novel. On his approach to the complex, Zizendorf notes, “We, walking towards

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<sup>43</sup> On another level, I would argue that this statement marks them as Jewish, as in traditional Jewish custom people were allowed to dance only with others of the same sex.

the building, smelled the odor of damp cinders” (30). More images of actual burning appear here than anywhere else. In a clear reference to Nazi practice, the narrative states that in the institution “all reading material went to the furnaces” (149); and in the statement “all poisons, orange crystals of cyanide and colorless acids, were thrown into the incinerator” (152), the narrative integrates the method of killing at the camps—cyanide—with the method of corpse disposal—the incinerator.<sup>44</sup> But perhaps the best indication is the “thick smudge [that] poured from the smokestack” of the institution (150). Besides the fact that a smokestack is a suspicious image for a mental institution, the image of black smudge is the prototypical description given by witnesses of the crematoria.

The conflation with concentration camp becomes unmistakable through the imagery of the institution’s secret experimental laboratories. As with the smokestack, this is suspicious imagery for a mental asylum: “Underneath the ordered town-like group of brick buildings, there were magnificent tile and steel tunnels connecting them to underground laboratories . . . and ventilated rooms that housed monkeys and rats for experimentation” (150-51). More than just an element of Hawkes’s fantastic landscape, this is an evocation of actual camp architecture. Several camps such as Buchenwald and Berga contained extensive underground tunnels, and the description of the institution’s steel tunnels and “lines of gleaming rails” are also indicative of Dora (151). Many of the crematoria, including Auschwitz, were housed in underground rooms. Laboratories existed at the major killing centers: Auschwitz/Birkenau, Buchenwald, Dachau,

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<sup>44</sup> The scientific name for Zyklon B, the chief chemical used for gassing in the camps, is hydrogen cyanide.

Ravensbruck, Sachsenhausen, Natzweiler, and others (Kogon 147). Not necessarily underground, these were hidden nonetheless: one female prisoner, a doctor who lived in Auschwitz's infamous Block 10, notes that the windows were completely "boarded up" (*Nazi Medicine* 90). Significantly, she describes this place as a "mixture of hell and a lunatic asylum" (*Nazi Medicine* 81).

In the figures of monkeys and rats, one hears the Nazi's reduction of the Jews and other undesirables to the status of animal life, a *zoe* devoid of *bios*.<sup>45</sup> Indeed, in Ravensbruck, experimental subjects were called "*Kaninchen*"—guinea pigs—by staff and prisoners alike (qtd. in *Nazi Medicine* 133). This slippage between human and animal life becomes even clearer in the riot scenes, where the monkey cadavers resemble the human victims of the camps: "heaps of small black corpses," the "mutilated carcasses of little men" whose "bodies were strewn over the main grounds" (152, 157, 151). Once again the novel is pointing to the continuum from the slaughter of animals to the slaughter of humans. But more than this, the inclusion of the laboratory marks the institution as a necropolitical space, a place where the life of the people is furthered through the sacrifice of the other, a sacrifice that is veiled in secret.

In one sense, there is historical validity in conflating institution and camp. The first German killing centers were not set up for the extermination of Jews, but

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<sup>45</sup> Hawkes's choice of animals here may be historically motivated, as Buchenwald contained a zoo with monkeys (Jacobson 11). This strange fact again points to the unreal reality of the camps, their heterotopic qualities as a space where ontologies collide, where anything is possible. Other details in the novel possibly point to actual camps as well. The only part of the institution given a name, "building 41" (155), suggests block 41, the locale where medical experimentation took place in Birkenau (Lifton and Hackett 305).

for the mentally ill. By the time this euthanasia program was halted in 1941, the Nazis had killed 70,000 people with mental illnesses, almost all German citizens (Snyder 257). Furthermore, documentation indicates a clear progression in exterminatory practices, from “the incurably mentally ill” to the Jews and other political undesirables in the Nazi regime (Agamben, *Homo* 141). To what degree the euthanasia program was planned as a “rehearsal for subsequent destruction,” as one historian phrases it, is not entirely clear (Procter 24). What is clear, however, is that this program provided experienced personnel, equipment, and technical knowledge for the gassing of the Jews (Snyder 257). As Robert Proctor notes:

The ultimate decision to *gas* the Jews emerged from the fact that the technical apparatus already existed for the destruction of the mentally ill . . . the gas chambers at psychiatric hospitals were dismantled and shipped east, where they were reinstalled at Majdanek, Auschwitz, and Treblinka. The same doctors, technicians, and nurses often followed the equipment. (25)

The mental institution is in a very real sense a crossroads in the Nazi killing machine. It is the place where racial “hygiene” becomes murder, the space where the “transformation” is made from “a theoretically humanitarian program into a work of mass extermination” (Agamben, *Homo* 140). But more than this, the mental institution serves as a laboratory of death, a place to work out the techniques of mass murder; it is the space where murder is technologized and bureaucratized, where killing truly comes to function like a machine.



Within an explicit medical discourse, the Nazis sought to expand this machinery of death on a massive scale. New camps were to figure in the project to starve 30 million Russians in the name of national “health.” Even more unbelievable, the Nazis planned to use a discourse of national health to spread exterminatory practices to the German populace itself. This is clear in the instructions concerning a future national health bill:

After national X-ray examination, the Fuehrer is to be given a list of sick persons, particularly those with lung and heart diseases. On the basis of the new Reich Health Law . . . these families will no longer be able to remain among the public and can no longer be allowed to produce children. What will happen to these families will be the subject of further orders of the Fuehrer. (qtd. in Arendt 416)

Of course, the earlier fate of the mentally ill and the Jews—the progression from forced segregation, to eugenic tampering, to liquidation—points to these “sick” persons’ probable fate. Here, biopolitics folds back onto itself to become necropolitics. The state eliminates German citizens of Aryan blood; it consumes the very bodies it was formed to protect. Here lies the truth of Nazi ideology, its basis in “a biological body that must be infinitely purified” (Agamben, *Homo* 180): a body that must kill to live.

In the slippage from institution to camp, the novel points to the expansion of the category of “life unworthy of being lived” and to the disturbing move from the system’s apparent protection of life to the production of death. The primary purpose of the institution/camp in the novel is to signal this spread of death, to

highlight the state's voracious consumption of bodies. Significantly, the character that makes this connection most openly is Zizendorf. More importantly, he comes to understand this relationship when faced with the reality of the institution. As he is about to enter the ruined building, he thinks:

Each of us walking through this liberated and lonely sanctum, past its now quiet rooms, heard fragments of recognition in the bare trees. For once it had been both awesome and yet holy, having caused in each of us, silent marchers, at one time or another, a doubt for his own welfare and also a momentary wonder at the way they could handle all those patients. (29-30)

These comments express the feelings of those who witness the camps in their aftermath: the “liberated” space takes on a “holy” quality becoming a “sanctum” where one must pass silently, reverentially. Yet, the mind drifts to the practical: “a momentary wonder at the way they could handle all those patients,” or rather, all those bodies. The key is how this space reflects on one's own wellbeing.

Zizendorf is clear: it causes “a doubt for his own welfare.” The mad German recognizes this as a space of death, a place where consumption becomes indiscriminating. The institution/camp is the absolute abyss, the place where even Zizendorf's notions of order fall apart. The wreckage of the asylum, the “maze” of “twisted walls,” is the gorgon knot of civilization itself (30, 29).

The threat is that the violence of the “ordered institution” will not be contained, and the novel continually insists that this space of death does spread. The first sentence of the book is clear on this fact, stating that the institution “sent

its delicate and isolated buildings trembling over the gravel and cinder floor of the valley” (3). The supposedly contained otherness of the institution comes to infect all space. Even in the outside world, the mental patients “did not realize they were beyond the institution’s high walls” because “disorder accumulated, both inside and outside the high walls” (5, 149). In every instance, the distinction between pure and polluted bodies has broken down. In the institution itself, “several unrecognized, unwashed doctors wandered without memory in the pack of patients” (152). Even more candidly, the town itself is marked as a polluted space, a place defined by waste and death. For instance, section three opens with a long description of the townspeople “burning out pits of excrement” (125). Besides signaling the national body’s inability to purge itself of waste, the language suggests the incineration of bodies: the “odor of *burned flesh and hair* and biddy, and this strange odor of gas and black cheese” (125, my emphasis). This smell spreads everywhere, even reaching “the embankment of the Autobahn” (125). The insane violence of the camp has become ubiquitous and the town/nation has become an incinerator.

Zizendorf’s fears in the face of the institution are apropos, but the irony is that he himself becomes the agent of this spreading death. Rather than simply eliminating the foreign enemy in the name of peace, Zizendorf turns his violence against the German people. Even after “liberating” the country, he feels the need to kill his own citizenry. In his words, “The old must go”; “the disloyal would be taken care of”; and “the fat men, the orators, must be struck down” (130, 168, 141). All are expendable to “the man of youth” in the name of the “nation of

certainty" (130). Ultimately, Zizendorf cannot imagine working "for the greatest good" without also killing German citizens (129). Taking care of his people means that people must be "taken care of." In the classic paradox of the political, he must exert violence in order to contain it. But the biopolitical nature of his regime heightens the paradox since Zizendorf massacres the same bodies he is ostensibly working to protect. As with his Nazi predecessors, this politics of death in the name of life cannot sustain the weight of its own contradictions.

The novel demonstrates that, as with the berserker, the state cannot control its violence and it inevitably becomes self-destructive. The suicidal nature of Zizendorf's political order is clearly ascertained in killing of German citizens. The body counts make this fact obvious: while Zizendorf kills only a single American, he murders three Germans. Indeed, he and the Duke are the only ones in the novel shown killing Germans, and the violence that they inflict on these Aryans far outweighs what Zizendorf inflicts on the American invader. Significantly, these men only cannibalize and incinerate German bodies. Zizendorf dispenses with both of his political "enemies" in this latter way: Stintz, the town schoolteacher who threatens to expose the murder of Leevey, and the mayor, whom he views as a traitor. With a liberal dose of gasoline, Zizendorf burns down the mayor's house with Stintz's corpse and the sleeping mayor inside (189).

As in the Duke's cannibalism, in this conflagration Zizendorf enacts the dual movement of commemoration and disavowal. He creates an overt spectacle of violence and death that also conceals the evidence of his crime, ensuring that

his violence will be recognized but that its true import will be misrecognized. In his burnt offering, he confirms the sacrificial structure of the nation while obscuring the real relationship between politics and death. He keeps the state's secret: that at its base is an uncontrollable, self-consuming violence. And in keeping this secret, he ensures that the cycle of death will continue.

The depiction of Zizendorf's incineration equates this act with cannibalism, the other method for hiding violence in the novel, which is apparent in the mayor's dream. When the sleeping man smelled Stintz's corpse burning in his home, he mistakenly "thought that the nurse was preparing cups of hot broth" (189). The cannibalistic overtones accumulate as his dream progresses. The town's citizens are conflated with sacrificial animals as the mayor implores Miller to eat, declaring, "The bird's from my own flock. I have hundreds, you know" (190).<sup>46</sup>

This linkage of incineration and cannibalism takes on even greater significance when one considers the relationship between the portrayal of the mayor's death and the novel's historical inspiration. On the latter, Hawkes comments, "*The Cannibal* had its immediate source in H.R. Trevor-Roper's *The Last Days of Hitler*, . . . [it was] Trevor-Roper's description of Hitler committing suicide in his bunker that suddenly made me think of trying to render my own version of total destruction, total nightmare" (*Humors* 55). Trevor-Roper's book devotes relatively little space to the actual act of suicide; however, it gives quite a bit of attention to the disposal of Hitler's corpse, the efforts to completely

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<sup>46</sup> This scene is also connected with Stella's slaughter of the chicken through the mayor's image of a "chicken, whose head [the nurse] flung in the corner" (189).

incinerate the Fuhrer's body.<sup>47</sup> This is no doubt what Hawkes refers to when he speaks of "total destruction": Hitler's desire that his corpse be burned "until nothing remained" (Trevor Roper, *Last Days* 234). In cooking the mayor to death, Zizendorf enacts an equally self-destructive circularity. As in the war itself, the head of state is devoured by the flames. I would argue that Hawkes gestures here towards the irony of Hitler's fate—the irony that the German Fuhrer's body, the embodiment of the nation itself, was ultimately incinerated, treated to the same fate as the undesirables that the Germans sought to remove forever from the body politic. The regime that sought above all the health and expansion of the citizen's physical body ends in a pile of charred human flesh.<sup>48</sup>

Despite sensing the insane truth in the wreckage of the institution/camp, Zizendorf denies it and goes on to enact his new revolution. His response to the horror of the camp is to burn more bodies, to "handle" his enemies as his Nazi predecessors have done. The reason for this becomes clear when one examines what Zizendorf and the others cannot bear. At the base of their insane continuation of violence is a denial of their own exposure to death. The characters turn away from the unbearable truth of their own susceptibility in the name of false security, a security that is ultimately verified through the killing of the other.

This is clear in Zizendorf's experience at the dance held inside the institution. In this unlikely place, he glimpses the true status of the German

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<sup>47</sup> See pages 229-34 of Trevor Roper's text.

<sup>48</sup> The eyewitness accounts in Trevor-Roper's book insist that Hitler's body was not successfully cremated and was eventually buried (*Last Days* 233-34).

people. As he compares Jutta to the other dancers, he realizes that “[t]he Czechs, Poles and Belgians danced just as she” (31). The formerly aristocratic Jutta “looked just like the others . . . her face, ribboned with long hair, was just as unkempt and unpleasant as the other tottering faces” (33). Unlike the Duke, who recognizes with “taste” his beloved Stella’s superiority, Zizendorf experiences the lowliness of his future first lady.

More than this, Zizendorf recognizes that the “true Germans” here, himself included, are indistinguishable from the refuse of Europe (32). He thinks, “If I had left her [Jutta] for a moment and then returned, she would not know who her partner was” (33). Zizendorf articulates quite clearly that what equates him with these men is more than their disheveled appearance: it is their shared exposure to danger. In a moment of revelation, he thinks, “I, Zizendorf, like all men, was similar to her husband who had been captured” (33). While this in one sense indicates the Hobbsian state of nature, where all men are equally exposed to the possibility of death, the novel locates this thought historically as well, for the book indicates that Jutta’s husband is in a Russian gulag, “lost among thousands in Siberia,” “imprisoned among Mongolians” (15, 186). The possibility of capture in the literal sense equates all men for Zizendorf, and more specifically here, the possibility of abandonment in the camps. When faced with the institution, the shudder that overcomes him, the “doubt for his own welfare,” is the very real possibility of being swallowed into the abyss of political power, of his own body being “lost.”

The tragedy of the novel—and Hawkes would argue of the political—is that this insight is only a momentary spark of truth that is quickly repressed. Zizendorf's revelation and its denial are presented in the same paragraph. He is able to consider his real exposure (and consequently his relatedness to the other) for only a moment before he tells himself, "But I was different from them all, and was better for her than her husband" (33). Rather than recognizing the madness of the violence in which they are all equally engulfed, Zizendorf will repeat it. Rather than allowing "the vast honored ideal" to be "swept under," Zizendorf determines to rebuild it (32).

The error is ultimately in holding to a nationalistic discourse of exceptionalism. The dance opens up a space where some sort of alternate politics could be formed—one that recognizes the abandonment of all those nationalities present, that identifies their shared status as "the people" rather than "The People." But Zizendorf turns away from this potentially revolutionary insight that they are all bare life. Instead, as he stands in the fallout of nationalism, he holds to the illusion that he is different, and that his revolution will thus produce different results. As with Hitler at the end of World War I, he views the body count and insanely believes that more death will heal the wound. And so the cycle of carnage begins anew. Hawkes leaves the reader with the disturbing picture of the "insane" marching calmly back into the institution/ concentration camp, oblivious to signs of cannibal butchery that lay at their feet, and the German people celebrating their "liberation" with a new sacrificial offering, oblivious to the fact that they dine on their own flesh.



If hope can be gleaned from Hawkes's novel, it is that each enactment of this violence becomes more insane, more recognizable as cannibalistic, and thus perhaps less easily co-opted. While there is no question of the cyclical nature of the violence and repression Hawkes describes, what is also apparent in his black humor is the ludicrousness of a heroic national discourse in the face of the current violence. In the midst of butchering the boy, even the Duke must admit the inadequacy of this discourse to transform the carnage before him, labeling his "old sword cane" as "impractical" (180). But the question—a very real question in 1944—is what new discourse will manifest to incorporate this violence. The novel, through its unending horror, aims to disrupt this process, to open a revolutionary space where this violence will remain too hard to swallow.

## Chapter 4

### From Cannibalism to Crematoria: The Oven State and the Technologies of Death in *Gravity's Rainbow*

What characterizes the Cannibals is that most of them are born Christians, think of Jesus as Love, and get an erection from the thought of whippings, blood, burning crosses, burning bodies, and screams in mass graves.

—Norman Mailer, *Cannibals and Christians*

For the most part, critics have not recognized the parallels between *The Cannibal* and Thomas Pynchon's *Gravity's Rainbow*.<sup>49</sup> Like *The Cannibal*, Pynchon's opus is set during the final days of World War II and deals with the fallout of heroic nationalism in the ambiguous European "zone." Like Hawkes, Pynchon focuses on the repetition of primitive violence in modern nationalism and the role of repression in this repetition. Both authors employ the example of Nazism to demonstrate how the desire for biopolitical health devolves into madness, how the attempts to shore up the body politic lead to cannibalistic violence and eventually to self-consumption.

Pynchon's encyclopedic novel, however, provides a greater scope and offers a more detailed account of the elements that contributed to the formation of the Nazis' biopolitical/necropolitical state. Most importantly, the luxury of twenty years of hindsight allows Pynchon to answer the question posed by *The*

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<sup>49</sup> The exception to this tendency is Patrick O'Donnell, who notes that both novels present "the ominous vision of continued violence as the past reasserts itself" (40). Tony Tanner also makes a comparison between the two authors' use of setting. He notes that Hawkes's "landscapes of desolation and decline . . . point to the progress of entropy quite as graphically as the landscapes of Burroughs and Pynchon" (203).

*Cannibal*: namely, will the barbarity evinced in World War II lead to an end of the violence of nationalism, or will these necropolitical elements be swallowed up by another order? Pynchon's novel suggests that the sacrificial violence inherent in Nazism is not abandoned but covertly intensified by the military-industrial complex of the postwar era. In short, this chapter is an examination of this process, of the transformation of the Nazis' biopolitical/necropolitical program into the final specter of nuclear holocaust under American imperialism. In Pynchon's words, it traces the refinement in technologies "favoring death" from the Nazi "Oven-state" to the American "Rocket State."

Taking Pynchon's enigmatic figure of "the Oven" as its focus, this study seeks to fill a major gap in Pynchon criticism as well as to offer an in-depth appraisal of political violence in *Gravity's Rainbow*.<sup>50</sup> Through the dual nature of the Oven—both the witch's cannibal oven from "Hansel and Gretel" and the Nazi crematoria—Pynchon highlights the role of primordial fear and fantasy in the production of state violence. Moreover, once one considers the cultural meaning of "Hansel and Gretel" in contemporary Germany and the story's resemblance to claims of Jewish ritual murder, it becomes apparent, as Pynchon implies, that the Holocaust is in some sense a reification of fairy tale/folklore, since in both cases the Germans use an oven to incinerate a perceived threat.

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<sup>50</sup> Interestingly, the few authors who deal with the novel's portrayal of the Holocaust have little to say about the figure of the Oven. Luc Herman correctly states that "Dora and the Holocaust are most fully anticipated in the famous Hansel and Gretel game directed by Weissmann-Blicero" but ends the discussion here (111). Similarly, Katalin Orban's chapter on *Gravity's Rainbow's* treatment of the Holocaust features the phrase "Oven-Games" in the title but does not delve into the subject of the oven in the novel.

By placing the Oven/crematoria at the center of Lieutenant Weissmann's "Oven-state," Pynchon suggests that primitive violence resides at the heart of Western politics. As the uncanny version of the hearth from the Nazis' ideological doctrine of "Hearth and Home," the Oven also points to the *unheimlich* elements of the Nazis' political organicism. It shows how the desire to reinvigorate the organic body politic by revitalizing the agrarian *Volk* is eventually swallowed up by the Nazis' killing machine, how their biopolitical program is subsumed by the necropolitical atrocity of the concentration camp.

*Gravity's Rainbow* intimates that technologies of death, such as the Oven/crematoria, do not lead to biopolitical health, to a reinvigoration of the people's body; rather, they signal the takeover of the mechanical order. While Pynchon is clear that each mode of political organization in the West (from Puritanism, to Nazism, to US imperialism) is based on the same primitive desires and the same economies of sacrifice, he also registers how high technology strengthens these murderous elements.<sup>51</sup> In Pynchon's schema, instead of producing a more "nutritive" form of political consumption, technological expansion only leads to empty destruction. Through his genealogy of Oven, Rocket, and atom bomb, Pynchon discloses that technological progress actually

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<sup>51</sup> Although the negative effects of technology have been a pervasive subject within Pynchon scholarship, this chapter goes beyond the extant readings to demonstrate the relationship between technological advancement and the biopolitical/necropolitical order. For an overview of the approaches to science and technology in Pynchon criticism, see Dalsgaard, "Science." On the negative implications of technology in Pynchon's work, see Carter, Tabbi, Nagano, Fitzpatrick, Schachterle, Cowart, and Dalsgaard, "Terrifying." Also see Pynchon's essay, "Is it O.K. to be a Luddite?"

means more efficient ways to burn human flesh. Ultimately, Pynchon's technological nightmare reveals that the desire for transcendence results in an inverse teleology. Humanity achieves its desired totality only through its own annihilation, through a nuclear apocalypse that will reduce the organic world to ash.

### The Cannibal Scene

[N]othing could prevent the sweetish odor, whose meaning was all too evident.

—Concentration camp prisoner on the smell of the crematoria<sup>52</sup>

While it would be easy to dismiss Pynchon's association of Nazis with cannibals as a facile way to dehumanize an ideological other, something more is at work here. The connection of the Nazi crematorium with cannibalism is logical when one takes into account traditional proofs of anthropophagy. As several scholars have discussed, anthropology has relied on eyewitness accounts of the so-called "cannibal scene" as evidence, since in most cases no visual account of the act of cannibalism exists. As Peter Hulme states, "The primal scene of 'cannibalism' as 'witnessed' by Westerners is of its aftermath rather than its performance. At the centre of the scene is the large cooking pot . . . and surrounding it is the 'evidence' of cannibalism: the discarded human bones" ("Intro" 2). The presence of a large cooking pot, a dismembered human body, and pieces of roasted flesh—each of these elements has been employed as

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<sup>52</sup> Quoted in Rhodes 170.

“evidence” that a particular ethnic group practiced cannibalism.<sup>53</sup> Such thinking is apparent in a host of contact narratives, most notably the accounts of Columbus’s voyages. In his relation of Columbus’s second voyage, Dr. Chanca exclaims, “He brought away four or five bones of the arms and legs of men. When we saw this, we suspected that the islands were those islands of Caribe, which are inhabited by people who eat human flesh” (qtd. in Hulme, “Intro” 16). This scene is repeated in a number of preeminent Western tales, such as *Robinson Crusoe* and *Tarzan of the Apes*. For Crusoe, the presence of body parts and the remains of a fire are incontrovertible proof of cannibalism:

The Horror of my Mind, at seeing the Shore spread with Skulls,  
Hands, Feet, and other Bones of humane [sic] Bodies; and  
particularly I observ’d a Place where there had been a Fire made,  
and a Circle dug in the Earth, like a Cockpit, where it is suppos’d  
the Savage Wretches had sat down to their inhuman Feasting upon  
the Bodies of their Fellow-Creatures. (Defoe 119-20)

This scene is repeated almost verbatim in *Tarzan of the Apes*: “Weapons hung against the walls . . . In the center of the room was a cooking pot . . . Several

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<sup>53</sup> Gananath Obeyeskere argues convincingly that Polynesian peoples also viewed dismembered bodies as a sign of European cannibalism: “From the native point of view, why on earth would anyone quarter a human being, if not to eat him? This native dread of cannibalism, the cannibal as Other, was now foisted on the European, and this was confirmed by the Spanish act of quartering, occurring in the troubled context of deadly first contact. It seems, then, that both were bound together by the dark fantasy that united the savage and the civilized, the idea that the Other will eat us” (235). Olaudah Equiano’s narrative of his enslavement proves telling of this “dark fantasy” even outside of Western culture. Upon being taken aboard a slave ship, the sight of the large tripots convinces him that his captors are cannibals and that they will soon cook and eat him (39).

human skulls lay upon the floor” (Burroughs 84). When Tarzan in short order views the king of this tribe, with his “necklace of dried human hands,” there is no doubt in his mind that these men are cannibals (Burroughs 85).

But these standards go beyond the colonial encounter; in the modern era, they are grafted onto a number of “domestic” scenes. As illustrated by the tale of “Hansel and Gretel” and the related tales of Jewish ritual murder, anyone on the margins of society (physically and metaphorically) involved in cooking is considered suspect. This is evident in the mistrust shown towards the urban poor in *Martin Chuzzlewit* and *Sweeney Todd*.<sup>54</sup> In the former, the poor are suspected of secretly using human flesh to produce meat pies; in the latter, this practice is confirmed in gruesome detail. In these more modern instances, the cooking pot of colonial fiction has given way to the bake oven.<sup>55</sup>

Given these standards for judging the existence of cannibalism, it is not such a far cry to think of Nazis burning human flesh in large ovens as “proof” that they are a cannibalistic group. Western cultural logic in many ways demands that human corpses in ovens be viewed this way. And, as is clear from surviving photos, the Nazi crematoria (Figure 1) actually resemble ovens used for cooking. This connection was recognized by contemporaries. A stoker at one of the early crematoria at Hartheim commented that a “body was laid on a pan, ‘pushed in

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<sup>54</sup> A Sweenyish moment occurs in *Gravity’s Rainbow* when the barber Eddy Pensiero, “hold[s] his scissors in a way barbers aren’t supposed to” against a colonel’s “expose[d] jugular” (655).

<sup>55</sup> The idea of baking someone in an oven dates back at least to Shakespeare’s *Titus Andronicus*, where the eponymous character turns his victims into meat pies.

and left there just like with a baking oven” (Van Pelt and Dwork 125). A 1945 *New York Times* article on the liberation of the camps even stated mistakenly that the maker of the crematoria, Topf and Son, “customarily manufactures baking ovens” (Currivan 8).

In at least one instance, a concentration camp explicitly bore the traditional signs of the cannibal savage. Three shrunken heads were recovered from a Nazi collection of curios at Buchenwald. As Lawrence Douglas shows, these heads played a large role in cementing the case of Nazi crimes against humanity at Nuremberg (42). In other words, these heads, along with the evidence that they had burned human flesh, proved beyond a reasonable doubt that the Nazis were inhuman savages that had devolved to a state of quasi-cannibalism.



Figure 1: Crematoria at Auschwitz-Birkenau (Source: Pimke). For interpretation of the references to color in this and all other figures, the reader is referred to the electronic version of this dissertation.



Perhaps the chief irony in equating Nazism with cannibal-like savagery is that within Nazi culture, the charge of cooking humans in ovens is explicitly leveled against the Jews. After World War I, the age-old charge of blood libel, or ritual murder, was revived, most noticeably in the Nazi paper *Der Stürmer* (The Stormer), “the most popular of Nazi publications and Hitler’s personal favorite” (Michael 170):

Between 1923 and 1933 nineteen issues of *Der Stürmer* featured articles on the subject. The paper often listed names of missing children and concluded that they were undoubtedly kidnapped by Jews, who kept them chained in dungeons while they sharpened their torture instruments in preparation for their Passover slaughter. A notorious special issue of May 1, 1934, was devoted entirely to the theme. (Perry and Schweitzer 68-69)<sup>56</sup>

This issue “carried a front-page article titled ‘Jewish Plan of Murder against non-Jewish Humanity unmasked,’ with an illustration showing two Jews . . . catching the blood of Christian children in a large platter” (Patai and Patai 177).

International outrage caused the editor, Julius Streicher, to pull the issue (Biale 174); however, Hitler was later alleged to say, “One must never forget the services rendered by the Stürmer . . . Now that Jews are known for what they are, nobody any longer thinks that Streicher libeled them” (Trevor-Roper, *Table*

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<sup>56</sup> This renewed anti-Semitism goes beyond Nazi ideology, however. One historian claims, “Between 1880 and 1945, there were as many instances of the ritual-murder defamation against Jews as during the entire Middle Ages” (Michael 170).

331-332). Hitler reportedly expressed his belief in the continued practice of ritual murder among the Jews “until recently” (Michael 170); he inserted subtle references to it into his speeches, most notably his pronouncement that “we will not let the Jews slit our gullets” (Hitler 39). His repeated references to the Jews as the “leaven of decomposition” seem to play on the supposed practice of adding Christian blood in place of leavening in the Passover matzo (Hitler 1372).<sup>57</sup>

The blood libel accusation carried over into official Nazi policies as well. Michael notes that “[p]resumably with Hitler’s knowledge, in 1943, Himmler ordered Ernst Kaltenbrunner, his chief subordinate in the SS . . . to discover cases of Jewish ritual murder ‘wherever Jews have not yet been evacuated’ . . . and publicize them” (170). Himmler even proposed that Nazi officials “investigate English police reports and court records for instances of missing children, ‘so that we can report in our broadcasts to England that . . . a child is missing and is probably another case of Jewish ritual murder’” (Perry and Schweitzer 2). The belief in blood libel was so pronounced that even the Holocaust was not enough to put an end to this form of anti-Semitism. Notably, a blood libel accusation led to a pogrom in Kielce, Poland, on July 4, 1946, in which forty-two Jews, some

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<sup>57</sup> Biale explains, “the matzo, of course, contains no leavening: the Jews thus turn the life giving leaven of blood into something dead” (172).

survivors of concentration camps, were killed (Perry and Schweitzer 69).<sup>58</sup>

### Hansel and Gretel

[W]hat do you think, it's a children's story? There aren't any.

—Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*

Given the uncanny resemblance between baking oven and crematoria, as well as the renewed fears of cannibalism in Germany, it is not surprising that Pynchon would utilize the oven as his figure for Nazi atrocity. His decision to blend this figure of oven/crematoria with the story of “Hansel and Gretel” is understandable when one considers the importance of the Grimms’ fairy tales for German cultural identity and the fact that in the German mind “Hansel and Gretel” formed the chief association between oven and cannibalism. But most importantly, Pynchon marries the fairy-tale oven to the crematoria in order to demonstrate that in both “Hansel and Gretel” and the Nazi state, the *Volks* reinscribes its power by incinerating a cultural other in an oven. For Pynchon, these links are essential in demonstrating the power of social conditioning and the role of fantasy in producing reality.

Pynchon establishes the link between “Hansel and Gretel” and the crematoria with Colonel Weissmann’s “Oven-game” (*Gravity's* 102). While commanding a V-2 rocket troop in The Hague, Weissmann (also known as Blicero) institutes this sado-masochistic variant of the fairy tale with Gottfried, a

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<sup>58</sup> Ironically, the concentration camp system “confirmed” Nazi beliefs about cannibalism among the inferior races. Instances of survival cannibalism were reported at Dora, Birkenau, Treblinka, and Belsen (Sellier 212-13, Petrinovich 193, Reilly 25). See Perry and Schweitzer, 69-72, for a summary of post-WW II blood libel accusations.

young German soldier, and Katje, a Dutch double agent: “Katje, Gottfried, and Captain Blicero have agreed that this Northern and ancient form . . . — the strayed children, the wood-wife in the edible house, the captivity, the fattening, the Oven—shall be their preserving routine” (96). Weissmann acts as “the Witch, cannibal, and sorcerer,” Katje as “the maidservant,” and Gottfried as the “fattening goose” (98, 96). The “black indomitable Oven” takes center stage in the story, with Katje believing that she “belongs” to it and Weissmann figuring it as his “Destiny” (99, 94, 98). While the connections to the crematoria are largely implicit, the link is most apparent in Weissmann’s thoughts on being put in the oven: he imagines his incineration as “gases and cinders, his chimney departure” (99).

Despite the oddity of setting this Hansel and Gretel story in 1944 Holland, the choice is more historically related than one would suppose.<sup>59</sup> For instance, the traditional architecture of The Hague does, in fact, resemble the standard renderings of fairy-tale, gingerbread cottages. This style is evident in particular at the Clingendael Estate, directly west of the Duindigt Racecourse (Figure 2), the exact location described by Weissmann for his “house in the forest” (96, 99). Like the fairy tale, the Oven Game takes place during a time of famine. The people of The Hague faced mass starvation in the winter of 1944 because supply lines

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<sup>59</sup> Even the association of Nazi officers with sado-masochistic games could be considered historically accurate if one takes into account the case of Ilse Koch. The wife of Karl Koch, head of the Buchenwald concentration camp, Ilse was “known alternately as ‘the bitch,’ ‘the witch,’ and ‘the beast of Buchenwald.’” She apparently “had men flogged for the pleasure it gave her” (Przyrembel 389).

were cut off by the Allies.<sup>60</sup> For the Dutch, this time has since “come to be known as ‘De Hongerwinter’, the Hunger Winter” (Van Der Zee 15).



Figure 2: Porter's House, Clingendael Estate (Source: Abridgeu). This estate in The Hague was the seat of the Nazi Occupation Government and the home of its leader, Arthur Seyss-Inquart. Clingendael is also the original locale for the racecourse that was later moved to Duindigt.

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<sup>60</sup> Weissmann imagines the “wounding” and “breaking” of his “Oven-state” in late December, 1944 (102). However, the actual rocket teams did not retreat from The Hague until “Thursday, March 28, 1945” (Weisenburger 231). The novel seems to corroborate the historical chronology when it describes Slothrop as “among the scavengers now following industriously the fallback routes of A4 batteries from the Hook of Holland and across Lower Saxony” in “Mid-July,” 1945 (391). The Duindigt area was not heavily bombed by the Allies until early March, 1945 (Dungan 186-87). It was the success of the Duindigt missile sites in February that provoked the bombing in March, after which Germans ceased rocket operations in the area (Zaloga 56). In addition to the famine in The Hague, the choice of December 1944 could be based on the fact that this time period coincides with actual “breaking” of the Nazi ovens at the largest crematoria, Auschwitz/Birkenau: “At the end of November, on a verbal order from Himmler, the gassings were halted. A demolition commando, formed at the beginning of December, then dismantled crematoria II and III . . . By mid-January 1945, nothing was left of crematoria II and III . . . The camp complex was evacuated on January 18” (Pressec and Van Pelt 239).

To understand the utility of Pynchon's metaphor, it is necessary to look at the cultural meaning of fairy tales within Nazi Germany. As Jack Zipes notes, "the classic fairy tales were the most widespread stories known to children and adults in Weimar and Nazi Germany" (*Fairy Tales* 146). Chief among these were the Grimms' *Kinder-und Hausmarchen* (*Household Tales*). First collected by Jacob and Wilhelm Grimm in 1812, by the twentieth century they were regarded as the paradigmatic example of the genre within Germany and much of the world. Through their book, the Brothers Grimm sought to "capture the 'pure' voice of the German people" and thus to "consolidate national identity by identifying a common cultural heritage" (Tatar, *Annotated* xxxii, xxxviii). Today, it is generally agreed that their works "played a significant role in establishing the shared cultural tradition and sense of national identity that were critical to the process of nation building" (Haase, *Greenwood* 663). Indeed, by the twentieth century "the Grimms' collection . . . had become identical with a German national tradition and character" (Zipes, "Struggle" 167-68). The tale of "Hansel und Gretel" enjoys a particularly important place in German national history. This is in large part due to Engelbert Humperdinck's dramatic adaptation of the story in 1893. One scholar notes, "The success of *Hansel und Gretel* was celebrated not as a musical triumph but as a nationalist victory," as it solidified the sense of the *Volk* as the national character (Kravitt 111).<sup>61</sup>

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<sup>61</sup> Humperdinck's version was often performed at Christmastime (Zipes, "Struggle" 175). This fact is no doubt what Pynchon had in mind when he has Roger Mexico attend a Christmas pantomime of "Hansel and Gretel" in the novel (174).

As the perceived embodiment of the national character, fairy tales formed an important part of elementary education in Germany throughout the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and were used to “reinforce belief in solid Germanic qualities” (Zipes, *Fairy Tales* 152). Their role was particularly important under the Third Reich: “In 1934, the Minister of Science, Education, and Folk Culture decreed school teachers focus on Nordic-Germanic folklore and organize the school curriculum around ‘a unified worldview’ that reflected the old Germanic peasant culture and Nordic-Germanic roots” (Haase, *Greenwood* 409). The Grimms’ book in particular received a hallowed place in Nazi education. As Ruth Bottigheimer states, the Nazis supplied it “to all German schoolchildren during the war years” (93-94). Hitler even “chose a special edition as prizes for the younger children of the Hitler *Jugend*” (Waite 263). The Nazis believed that the Grimms’ tales supported their goals in several ways. At the most basic level, they viewed them as promoting Aryan racial essence and the superiority of the *Volk*. In more practical terms, the Nazis saw the tales as inculcating proper notions of the social order: this meant “paternal dominance . . . family adherence to state policies,” and a “readiness for sacrifice” (Zipes, *Fairy Tales* 153, 147).

Fairy tales and folktales also had an important place in the cultural inculcation of anti-Semitism. *Kinder-und Hausmarchen* included the anti-Semitic story “The Jew in the Thornbush,” and the Grimms’ other work contained two anti-Semitic tales involving blood libel: “The Girl Who was Killed by Jews” and “The Jews’ Stone.” A 1937 report details how fairy tale anti-Semitism was exacerbated by the Nazis: “A young Kindergarten teacher . . . recently brought

out a new Nazi fairy-tale book, with twenty-one brightly colored pictures showing horrible-visaged 'non-Aryans,' cheating, seducing and poisoning handsome 'Aryans'" (Nicosia and Scrase 206). The "correct" social response to these figures is instilled by "the section depicting German children pointing a finger of scorn at these Jewish monsters and laughing joyously at their discomfiture" (Nicosia and Scrase 206).

There are several reasons why Germans would specifically identify "Hansel and Gretel" with anti-Semitism. The primary reason is the association between the fairy-tale witch and the Jews.<sup>62</sup> For one, the Jew and the witch were linked in the popular mind as practitioners of magic and servants of the devil. The witch existed outside of the social order, just as the Nazis portrayed the "wandering Jew" as incapable of assimilating into the *Volk*. It was also common practice for twentieth-century illustrations of fairy-tale witches to employ stereotypical Jewish traits, such as an extremely exaggerated nose (Figure 3) (Tatar, *Annotated* 84).

Even more specifically, the witch of "Hansel and Gretel" resonates with the portrayal of the Jew under the Third Reich, that of gluttoned cannibal who starves the *Volk*. The tale explicitly takes place at a time when "every square inch of the country was stricken by famine" (Grimms 186). Yet, the witch is portrayed as living in abundance, with a house made of bread and "chests filled with pearls and jewels" (Grimms 187, 189). This woman, "old as the hills" yet living in luxury,

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<sup>62</sup> Notably, nineteenth-century Serbian folk tales included a version of "Hansel and Gretel" called "The Yids" (Civuti), where the "wicked witch" is explicitly portrayed as a Jew (MacDonald 145-46).



would be identified by the contemporary audience as an “unproductive eater” (Grimms 187). The association of the witch with Jewish gluttony is perhaps most evident in the overlap of the fairy tale with the mythological details of Jewish ritual murder. Like the story of “Hansel and Gretel,” the blood libel involves the imprisonment, murder, and cannibalization of children by a cultural outsider. Both tales also involve an oven that will transform the child’s corpse (or blood) into a meal. Thus, the German people were doubly socialized through “Hansel and Gretel” and the blood libel legend to fear an “other” that will cook them in an oven and eat them.



Figure 3: Anti-Semitic depiction of the witch from “Hansel and Gretel” (Source: Jacobs).

For the average German citizen under Nazi rule, the story of “Hansel and Gretel” becomes a national parable about the threat of starvation, the danger of the gluttoned outsider, and heroic redemption through the destruction of this other. Thus, as Pynchon claims, “the culture of childhood” proves “invaluable” in serving the needs of the state (419). By conflating fairy tales and the Holocaust, Pynchon is suggesting that socialization prepared German citizens for the violence required for the Final Solution.<sup>63</sup> Besides domesticating the idea of eliminating monsters and demonstrating the possibility of a “non-criminal putting to death,” fairy tales conditioned Germans towards murderous rage in the face of a “dangerous” outsider.

Interestingly, the Allied forces came to a similar conclusion about the damaging effects of fairy tales. Jack Zipes notes, “The occupation forces, led by the British, banned the publication of fairy tales in 1945. According to the military authorities, the brutality in the fairy tales was partially responsible for generating attitudes that led to the acceptance of the Nazis and their monstrous crimes” (“Struggle” 167).<sup>64</sup> In particular, “Volumes of the *Kinder- und Hausmarchen* were summarily removed from schools and libraries all over Germany” (Bottigheimer 92).

While the Allies recognized the connection between fairy tales and political violence in the abstract, Pynchon’s novel suggests that this connection is much

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<sup>63</sup> It is no surprise, therefore, that Pynchon places his conjunction of fairy tale and the Holocaust in the midst of section one with its focus on Pavlov and classic conditioning.

<sup>64</sup> Bottigheimer notes that the Grimms’ work “regained its pre-World War II bestseller status relatively quickly” after the ban was removed (93).

more concrete. Through his evocation of “Hansel and Gretel,” Pynchon highlights the ways in which the Holocaust was actually a reification of fairy tale. At the heart of his Oven analogy is the fact that the Jews’ treatment in the Holocaust is in some sense a repetition of the Grimms’ story, since the Nazis eliminate the perceived cannibal others by pushing them into ovens.<sup>65</sup> While the cannibal oven of “Hansel and Gretel” and the Nazi crematoria may on the surface seem far different, they share a characteristic that proves crucial for Pynchon’s larger point: they both ultimately serve as incinerators. A fact that is usually neglected in discussions of the fairy tale is that despite the intended use of the oven to prepare a cannibal feast, it ultimately serves as a crematorium that presumably burns the witch to ash. Here, as in the Holocaust, the incinerator will supposedly bring an end to starvation and a return to fecundity.

Through the Oven, *Gravity’s Rainbow* suggests the extent to which the Nazi ideology of sacrifice is based on repression. The Germans fail to see that, like Hansel and Gretel, their solution requires that they perform the activity that defines the “other” as other: in this case pushing someone into an oven. In their attempt to eliminate the perceived threat of barbarity, they become barbarous. In their attempt to squelch the threat of cannibalism, they perform a barely displaced form of anthropophagy and consume the other through a mechanical

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<sup>65</sup> The power of narrative and fantasy is, of course, a major theme in the novel. From Gerhard von Goll’s belief that his film incarnated the *schwarzcommando*, to the role of Fritz Lang films in determining the German *zeitgeist*, narrative is recognized as a key agent in the production of reality.

proxy.<sup>66</sup> In a complete reversal of the German accusation of blood libel against the Jews, it is now the ritualistic spilling of Jewish blood and the cooking of their bodies in ovens that will supposedly renew the German community.

#### From “Hearth and Home” to The Oven State

[A]gainst the Jewish pestilence we must hold aloft a flaming ideal. And if others speak of the World of Humanity we say The Fatherland—and only the Fatherland.

—Adolph Hitler

Pynchon's union of fairy tale and the Holocaust goes beyond simply marking social conditioning gone awry or the development of a cultural aberration. Rather, he presents the cannibalistic violence of the story in political terms by placing it at the heart of an “Oven-state” (102). Specifically, Weissmann labels the Oven as the “base” for “their Little State” (99).<sup>67</sup> By making the Oven the center of the perverse reification of “Hansel and Gretel,” as well as the center of Weissmann's microcosmic Nazi state, Pynchon implicitly draws a connection with Nazi beliefs in organic community based on “blood and soil” and “hearth and home,” as well as the descent of this ideology into the madness of the

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<sup>66</sup> Weissmann seems to own this fact, referring to himself as a “witch” and as a “cannibal” (98). The desire to consume the Jews is also evident in Countess Bibesque's fantasy of “the bodies of Jews and leftists hung on the hooks of the city slaughterhouse, dripping on the boards smelling of meat and hide” (491).

<sup>67</sup> The word “little” probably plays on the formation of the modern German nation from a multitude of small principalities, “the proliferation of little states that's prevailed in Germany for a thousand years” (265). In his letter to Hirsch, Pynchon explicitly connects “the whole Kleinstaaterei hangup,” or this system of little states, to a Western need to fracture cosmic unity (qtd. in Seed 241).

concentration camp. The Oven thus depicts the real outcome of an ideology of blood and soil, the overshadowing of the organic unity of the body politic by the mechanized atrocity of the crematoria. It registers the inevitable shift under Nazi rule from biopolitical health to necropolitical killing machine.

Nazi ideology was heavily invested in the concept of the body politic. The chief goal of the Nazi system was to agglomerate the people into “a single body,” a “living organism” (Hitler 445, 188). In this form of political organicism, the body of the people and the land became coterminous. This is most evident in the Nazis’ frequent use of the term “blood and soil,” which expressed the supposed mythic connections between the people and the land. The prominence of this phrase in Nazi politics is the result of Richard Walther Darré. In his 1930 book, *Neuadel aus Blut und Boden (A New Nobility from Blood and Soil)*, Darré claimed “that the Nordic race had been the true creators of European culture (in contrast to the ‘nomadic’ Jews), [and] that the German peasantry was the driving force of history . . . the ultimate custodian of national uniqueness” (Wistrich 36). Hitler was so impressed by this work that he enlisted Darré to secure the peasant vote for the National Socialist ticket. For his service, Hitler named him Reich Minister for Food and Agriculture, as well as Chief of the SS Central Office for Race and Resettlement (Wistrich 37).

In the pre-war years, Darré’s doctrine of blood and soil was touted as the core of the Nazis’ political program. Hitler himself referred to the “eternal values of blood and soil” as “the supreme laws of our lives” (121); for him, “the people is chained to its soil. Is tied to its homeland, tied to the possibilities of life of its State

[sic], its nation” (1140). In similar fashion, the SS Chief of Construction, Hans Kammler, declared:

The policies of National Socialism are now dedicated to the firm connection of man to the soil through hearth and home as the basic foundation of the people [*Vo/k*] and the state. The German man’s hereditary health and the hereditary health given by the German soil therefore stand at the focal point of the German Reich’s program of renewal. (qtd. in Allan 54-55)

This “program of renewal” was an agrarian policy devised by Darré that aimed to protect the peasant farmer and revitalize the countryside. In this line of thinking, the farmer was the essence of the *Vo/k* and his success was integral to shoring up the body politic. The health of the traditional farmstead—the “hearth and home”—indicates the health of the German people, as well as the health of the German soil.

But the insertion of the word “hereditary” in Kammler’s statement points to the Nazis’ alteration of earlier doctrines of blood and soil. In previous formulations, the mystical tie between people and land was understood as temporal. The people were a part of the land because it was a part of their history: they had lived on it for generations, they had buried their ancestors there, or they had literally given their blood in defending it. Beginning with the Nazis, however, blood comes “to be understood [specifically] as ‘race’” (Gerhard 131). Hitler explicitly referred to the German “community” as “conditioned by the fact of a blood-relationship” (1438). Incorporation into the body politic is thus predicated

on racial background alone: there is no room for acculturating the “nomadic” peoples.

For the Nazis, the health of the blood *and* the health of the soil are dependent on the elimination of the Jews, which is clear in their portrayal of the Jew as the enemy of the peasant. In an early propaganda speech given in East Prussia, a Nazi figure proclaimed, “[T]he farmer sinks day by day into deeper debt and misery and in the end will be driven from his hearth and home while international money and Jewish capital take possession of his land” (qtd. in Denny 48). Given that “hearth and home” acts “as the basic foundation of the people and the state,” Jewish consumption of land threatens the existence of the *Volk* itself.

In the “mirror metaphysics” that Pynchon attributes to the Germans, the solution to Jewish consumption is the consumption of the Jew (101). The vitality of home and hearth is thus dependent on their infernal doubles, camp and oven. Through the latter, the “fattened Jews” of Nazi rhetoric supposedly “feed” the German economy and sustain the biopolitical health of the nation. As in literal cannibalism, maximum value is extracted from these Jewish bodies—hence the removal of gold fillings, hair, and even the use of ashes as fertilizer, which ironically connects Jewish blood to the German soil in the most literal way.<sup>68</sup> However, in the end, the cannibalistic camp and oven do not offer a return to the

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<sup>68</sup> The novel acknowledges this perverse economization of the Jewish body when a little girl tells Slothrop that the doll’s hair he is burning for warmth “belonged to a Russian Jewess” (282). Slothrop’s pronouncement that “[t]he smell of it burning is horrible” serves as a metonymy of the horrors of incinerating Jewish bodies in the camps (282).

sanctity of the hearth, just as the “Oven-game” does not offer its participants a return to their pre-war certainties. Rather, as Pynchon articulates, the mechanization of killing in the “Oven-state” leads to the development of the rocket, a further descent into the culture of technology and death.

Pynchon indicates these political shifts most succinctly through Weissmann’s character. The “Oven-game” scenes in particular dramatize Weissmann’s shift from the romantic ideals of the pre-war era to the routinization and ritualization of death that typify the Nazi war machine. Besides the obvious romanticism behind Weissmann’s love for Rilke’s lyrical poetry, he is tied specifically to romantic conceptions of organic nationalism through his self-identification as a “Wandervogel” (99).<sup>69</sup> A collection of youth groups, the Wandervogel (Wandering Birds) was a highly romantic youth movement that “put the highest premium on organic wholeness, usually expressed as a pantheistic love of nature with an emphasis on the formation of mystical bonds with the fatherland” (Weisenburger 78).<sup>70</sup> Members sought to rediscover the primeval aspects of German culture by wandering in nature and through “old folk songs and folklore” (Laqueur 6). The links of this movement to the later ideology of “blood and soil” are best articulated in the introduction to the Wandervogel songbook: “Our search and striving is the sincere German way of life deeply rooted in our native soil” (qtd. in Laqueur 7).

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<sup>69</sup> Although Rilke’s work was not a particular favorite of members of the Nazi party, it was a favorite among members of the Wandervogel movement (Laqueur 48).

<sup>70</sup> The novel also connects Pokler’s and Gottfried’s idealism with the Wandervogel (162, 670).



Through Weissmann, the novel binds the Wandervogel's desire for adventure and romanticism to pre-war German colonialism.<sup>71</sup> Clearly, Weissmann's romantic wanderlust drives him to Sudwest with "his copy of *Duino Elegies*" in search of his "night flower" (99).<sup>72</sup> He associates himself specifically with "der Wanderer" of Rilke's poetry, who brings home "a pure word" of gentian, or "*Enzian*" (101).

Like the Wandervogel itself, Weissmann's romanticism is co-opted by National Socialism.<sup>73</sup> His poetic temperament predisposes him to be influenced by totalitarian rhetoric. Rilke's command to "Want the Change / O Be Inspired by the Flame" translates into Weissmann "embrac[ing] the Reich's flame" (97).<sup>74</sup> The message here is that the romantic longings for traditional heroism and conquest that defined Germany in the pre-war era fanned the flames of Nazism. The novel's juxtaposition of Rilke's "flame" with the Oven suggests that the flames of romanticism in essence lit the fires of the crematoria.

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<sup>71</sup> Laqueur notes, "after the First World War every self-respecting group went abroad at least once a year, and the more adventurous . . . toured the African deserts and the Himalayas" (27).

<sup>72</sup> The connection with the Wandervogel is reinforced by Weissmann's homosexuality since "a powerful air of homoeroticism surrounded the group" and the movement eventually became associated with homosexuality (Weisenburger 78; Laqueur 50, 55).

<sup>73</sup> Of the Wandervogel, Laqueur claims, "its leaders were inevitably swept up in the gigantic mass movement of National Socialism" and that "The Hitler Youth . . . adopted many of its outward trappings" (xviii, xxvi).

<sup>74</sup> In Weissmann's case, the result of embracing Nazism is not the transcendence of the quotidian that is described in the poem, but rather the end of enchantment. His reality in The Hague is the bureaucratic routinization of killing, the "paper impotence" of a "Dying Reich" (97).

The German extermination of the Herero in Sudwest confirms that the annihilatory principles of the Holocaust were already operating in the midst of romantic colonialism. Pynchon confirms this fact in his letter to Hirsch. He states, “I was thinking of the 1904 campaign [against the Herero] as a sort of dress rehearsal for what later happened to the Jews in the ‘30’s and ‘40’s” (qtd. in Seed 240). The novel suggests this relationship as well by juxtaposing the Herero extermination (and Franz Van der Grooz’s extermination of the dodo) with the Oven, which also implies the cannibalistic nature of each. The narrator’s subsequent statement on the function of colonies confirms this tendency: “Colonies are the outhouses of the European soul . . . Where [a fellow] can fall on his slender prey roaring as loud as he feels like, and guzzle her blood with open joy” (317).

The Oven is therefore presented as the next iteration of European desires for extermination and consumption. The difference is that colonialism exported its cannibalistic violence, whereas the Nazis return it to Europe’s shores. This “homecoming” is even more literal when one considers the resemblance of the Oven to the family hearth, and the immolation of the Jews to the events of fairy tale and childhood fantasy. The Holocaust thus turns the *heimlich* into the *unheimlich*.

Katje’s thoughts on the Oven perfectly demonstrate this devolution of the domestic into cannibalistic nightmare and the devolution of Germany’s heroic nationalism into monstrosity. At the sight of an oven in Pirate Prentice’s flat, she begins to reflect on the “Oven-state”:

[S]he is corruption and ashes, she belongs in a way none of them can guess cruelly to the Oven . . . to *Der Kinderofen* . . . remembering now his teeth, long terrible, veined with bright brown rot . . . in the dark oven of himself, always the coiled whispers of decay . . . She recalls his teeth before any other feature: teeth were to benefit most directly from the Oven: from what is planned for her, and for Gottfried. (94)

In the logic of political organicism and the Fuhrer cult, Weissmann, as the “head” of this “little state,” is the representative of the body politic and also body politic itself, the corporality that defines the People’s body.<sup>75</sup> Like Hitler, “his person . . . coincides with the life of the German people” (Agamben, *Homo* 184).<sup>76</sup> In this logic, Hitler is not only the one who orders the Jews to the ovens; he is also the one who consumes them. Likewise, Weissmann is not only the witch, keeper of the oven; he is the oven himself—“the dark oven of himself.” The reduction of Weissmann’s body in this passage to abject orality thus points to the truth of the Nazi body politic: its descent into cannibalistic monstrosity.

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<sup>75</sup> The relationship to political organicism is further underscored when one considers Weissmann’s resemblance here to the biblical leviathan, the model for Hobbes’s political body: “[H]is teeth are terrible round about. . . . His breath kindleth coals, and a flame goeth out of his mouth” (Job 41:10-33).

<sup>76</sup> Weissmann’s perverse sexual practices also link him with Hitler, who was reported to have a penchant for the unusual. While definitive evidence of this claim is lacking, Hitler’s perversion was regarded as fact even before the end of the war. Most notable in this regard is a 1943 OSS report entitled “The Mind of Adolf Hitler.” Here, through his analysis of statements by German refugees, psychiatrist Walter C. Langer concludes that Hitler is a sado-masochistic deviant. He even claims that Hitler takes “great pleasure from having young ladies defecate on his head” (Langer 217-218).

The monstrous nature of the German political body is particularly evident in another scene where Slothrop encounters the burned-out remains of the Reichstag building (the former seat of the German Parliament) and mistakes them for “King Kong, or some creature closely allied” (368). He imagines that this creature will feast on the human corpses nearby that he mistakes for bread: “[H]ere, laid side by side on the pavement, are these enormous loaves of bread dough left to rise under clean white cloths—boy, is everybody hungry: the same thought hits them all at once, wow! *Raw dough!* loaves of bread for that *monster* back there . . . oh, no that’s right, that was a building, the Reichstag . . .” (368).<sup>77</sup>

This imagery of corpse/bread that is to be baked to feed a monstrous state hearkens back to the Oven once again. The imagery also suggests the truth behind Nazi rhetoric: while Hitler argued emphatically that the purpose of the state was to provide the populace with “its daily bread,” the war instead turned the citizen into breadstuffs and made him/her fit for ingestion (Hitler 120).<sup>78</sup>

Thus, like *The Cannibal*, *Gravity’s Rainbow* suggests that the Nazis’ policies of extermination eventually led to self-consumption. This is “the civil paradox” of Weissmann’s “little state”: the fact that its “base is the same Oven which must destroy it” (99). In Weissmann’s thinking, the ideology of an organic body politic and the attending Fuhrer cult transform the German citizenry into

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<sup>77</sup> While the term *doughboy* was not frequently used to describe WWII servicemen, the reference to soldiers as “bread dough” seems to play with this terminology.

<sup>78</sup> The novel also satirizes the notion of the state as bread giver in the scene featuring Brigadier Pudding’s coprophagy. Here, the Firm perversely uses “bread” baked in Katje’s “intestinal Oven” in order to keep Pudding under control (236).

mindless bodily matter that is manipulated by the head of state: “Their reflexes are only being used, hundreds of thousands at a time, by others—by royal moths the Flame has inspired” (98). The result of this is not the consolidation and renewal of the *Volks*; rather, the citizen is reduced to “raw material” and “cannon fodder” (or “raw dough” in Slothrop’s thinking) (98). Moreover, the moth and flame analogy suggests the suicidal nature of the state founded on the Oven. The death-drive becomes all consuming here, with the “royal moths” themselves destined for the flames. The “flaming ideal” that Hitler proposed as the solution to “the Jewish pestilence” is therefore his fate as well: his corpse is burned in the same manner as the Jews.<sup>79</sup> This end is suggested by Weissmann’s own belief that the Oven is his “Destiny” and his desire to be “inside the Oven’s warmth” (99). Ultimately, the biopolitical technologies of “elimination” in the name of health are swallowed by thanatopolitical desires. The flames of nationalism give way to the incinerator.

Perhaps what Pynchon highlights most through his figure of the Oven is the relationship between the shift to thanatopolitics and the march of technology, what Mark Seltzer refers to as the “intricate rapport between murder and machine culture” (7). As a technology put into place in the name of restoring the *Volks* to its agrarian roots, the Oven mediates the relationship between political organicism and mechanization. However, as the *unheimlich* version of the “hearth,” the center of the Nazis’ romanticized version of the *Volks*, it reveals the

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<sup>79</sup> Along similar lines, Karl Koch, the commander of Buchenwald, was burned in the same ovens where he ordered so many Jews to be cremated (Douglas 59, n. 17).

mechanical basis of the Nazis' program of renewal. The Oven thus represents the slippage from the doctrines of political organicism to mechanization.

The ideology of the Third Reich in general is known for constantly teetering between the organic and the mechanistic, between the ancient and the modern. Besides the omnipresent beliefs in the organic unity of "blood and soil," a strong aura of mysticism and the occult pervaded the upper echelons of the SS.<sup>80</sup> Such antiquated doctrines sat uneasily next to the expansive scientific programs designed to rationally reformulate the population. The concentration camps highlight the ideological incongruity most, however. The "death factories" of the camp system were dependent on the consolidation and expansion of pre-war technology and the implementation of a massive bureaucracy;<sup>81</sup> yet, this was done in the name of racist beliefs dependent on medieval superstitions such as blood libel. This blending of the primitive and the technological is even more

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<sup>80</sup> On this topic, see Nicholas Goodrick-Clarke, *The Occult Roots of Nazism*.

<sup>81</sup> It is important to note the similarities between the implementation and refinement of the crematoria and Pynchon's portrayal of the rocket's development. In both cases, the instrumentation of death involved the collusion of civilian industries and their engineers with the Nazi party. Kurt Prufer of the firm Topf and Sons was the chief engineer responsible for designing the ovens. He established a relationship with SS officials early in the war in an attempt to expand Topf's business, which had been primarily "industrial blast furnaces" (Pressec and Van Pelt 184). From 1935 until the end of the war, Prufer developed several new designs for crematoria for the concentration camps, including Dachau, Buchenwald, and most importantly, Auschwitz/Birkenau. Like Pokler, he had direct knowledge that his technological advances were being used in the service of death. He made numerous visits to Auschwitz/Birkenau and personally oversaw modifications to the ovens. Critics have gone so far as to credit Prufer alone with the Nazis' choice to implement large-scale crematoria in the final solution (Pressec and Van Pelt 216).

pronounced at Mittelwerk/Dora, where slave labor produced high-tech rocketry, such as the V-2.

The machinery of extermination itself evinces these contradictions. It is true that gassing and cremation owe much to scientific discourse on sanitation: Zyklon B<sup>82</sup> was initially used at the camps as a disinfectant, and the crematoria were first envisioned as a way of preventing diseases from being spread by corpses. But it is a mistake to assume, as Agamben does, that the Jews were simply “exterminated . . . as ‘lice,’” devoid of sacrificial trappings (114). An older discourse of religious sacrifice is apparent, for instance, in Himmler’s visit to Sobibor, where officials “selected some three hundred young and comely Jewesses . . . as a special offering for the *Reichsfuhrer*” (Rhodes 264).

While historians continually quibble about the social ingredients that led to this jumble of contradictory doctrines, Pynchon quite astutely points to the role of popular culture. One of the novel’s chief intertexts—Fritz Lang’s 1927 film *Metropolis*—evinces the same conglomeration of incongruous discourses. As in the Third Reich, the chief doctrines competing in the film are the organic unity of the body politic and the mechanical cult of power. This is clear in Pokler’s thoughts on *Metropolis*: “a Corporate City-state where technology was the source of power, the engineer worked closely with the administrator . . . and ultimate power lay with a single leader at the top . . .” (578).

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<sup>82</sup> Notably, Degesch, a subsidiary of I.G. Farben, was one of the chief producers of Zyklon B (Spector 459).

The importance of the body politic in the film is apparent in its epigram: “The mediator between head and hands must be the heart.” Employing the traditional conception of the body politic, the movie explicitly figures Joh Fredersen, the corporate leader of Metropolis, as the city’s “head,” and the workers as the city’s “hands.” The heart is embodied by Fredersen’s son, Freder, and the saintly Maria, who, out of sympathy for the oppressed masses seek to bring head and hand together. The language and symbolism throughout is heavily steeped in messianic Marxism and the medieval body politic, which form an uneasy mix with the forces of rationalization and mechanization in the film.

What is clear by the film’s end, perhaps despite its intended ideological message, is that the doctrine of a harmonious body politic is an illusion. This is underscored by the fact that Hitler employed the same language as the film’s epigram in his propaganda against the Jews. He stated, “They realize quite accurately that the people is beaten so long as Brain and Hand can be kept apart. For alone neither Brain nor Hand can oppose them” (Hitler 10). As in the Nazi regime, the film’s rhetoric of organic unity ultimately rings hollow. What is evident in both cases is that organic unity is subsumed by an industrialized state. The truth of *Metropolis* and of Nazism is the takeover of the mechanical order. Freder’s first thoughts on the city’s machinery are thus correct: the heart of the city is the “Moloch” machine, a cannibalistic technology that consumes the masses. In Maria’s words, the people are “the living food for the machines in Metropolis”: they “feed the machines with their own flesh.”



In both the novel and the film, this mechanical, cannibalistic consumption is ostensibly enacted in the name of biopolitical principles. However, both texts reveal that the sacrifice of the masses does not shore up the health of the body politic, it only ensures the survival of the elect. *Gravity's Rainbow* evinces these points through Webley Silvernail's explanation of a world ruled by the Elite:

All the animals, the plants, the minerals, *even other kinds of men*, are being broken and reassembled every day, to preserve an elite few . . . I can't even give you hope that it will be different someday—that They'll come out, and forget death, and lose Their technology's elaborate terror, and stop using every other form of life without mercy to keep what haunts men down to a tolerable level—and be like you instead, simply here, simply alive . . . (230, my emphasis)

Unlike animal life (or bare life), which is “simply alive,” the Elite use “Their technology's elaborate terror” to ward off death at the expense of the masses. They break down or masticate “every other form of life without mercy” in order to secure their own preservation. In Father Rapier's words, “They need our terror for their survival. We are their harvests” (539).

Such a cannibalistic doctrine is rationalized and naturalized by notions of social Darwinism and linear conceptions of history. This is evident in Prentice's dream, where Rapier explains the rationale of “Their” system: “If we are here once, only once, then clearly we are here to take what we can while we may. If they have taken much more, and taken not only from Earth but also from us—

well, why begrudge Them, when they're just as doomed to die as we are? All in the same boat . . ." (539). The last phrase is telling in this instance as it evokes the image of shipboard cannibalism and "lifeboat ethics." Such comments aim to inject the urgency of starvation into all forms of social relation, to suggest that the position of every man for himself is always justified. In Agamben's terms, "They" wish to create the illusion of a permanent state of exception. As Rapier points out, this may be "the best, and the most carefully propagated, of all Their lies" (539). The falsity of their survivalist rationale is evident, however, in the behavior of the elite themselves. In the novel, the perverse exploitation enacted by these "human sultans" is most clearly evinced by Clayton "Bloody" Chiclitz, the American industrialist (521). Chiclitz "dreams of the generations of cannon fodder, struggling forward on their knees, one by one, to kiss his stomach while he gobbles turkey legs and ice-cream cones and wipes his fingers off in the polliwogs' hair" (558).

Pynchon suggests that, in reality, consumption in the name of the body politic does not lead to biopolitical health; rather, it fosters a culture of death. Technologies such as the Oven or the "Moloch" machine are not prosthetic means for securing more life; they are simply more effective killing machines. And, as Pynchon insinuates by placing the Oven/incinerator at the heart of Weissmann's state, the development and implementation of such technologies of death increasingly defines the state's role.

Ironically, organic politics feeds this takeover of the natural by the mechanical, thanatopolitical order. The novel continually indicates that the notion

of the organic body politic is in reality a product of political engineering that is used to extend the reaches of political machinery. For instance, the narrator claims, “The War does not appear to want a folk-consciousness, not even of the sort the Germans have *engineered*, ein Volk ein Fuhrer—it wants a machine of many separate parts, not oneness, but a complexity” (130-31, my emphasis). In other words, the state claims to integrate, while in reality it *disintegrates*. This is the same irony that Pynchon highlights with the nomenclature of the A rockets: the tools of disintegration are named “aggregate . . . a fellowship of interests” (164).

Ultimately, the novel reveals that the state is not a “volkic organism” as the Nazis claimed, but an “impersonation of life” (166). This false organicism is explained by the spirit of Walter Rathenau, who claims that the “organic Kartell” is not organic at all: “[I]t’s only another illusion. A very clever robot. The more dynamic it seems to you, the more deep and dead, in reality, it grows” (167). “[T]he cartelized state” that he engineered as the model for the postwar world is thus a machine (164). While the state appears to be agglomerating the people, in reality it is subsuming the organic into a mechanical structure. And, as is clear with the Oven and the “Moloch” machine, the state threatens to swallow organic life itself. While the Nazis believe they are killing for biopolitical purposes, “[t]he real movement is not from death to any rebirth. It is from death to death-transfigured” (166). The result of political organicism is the development of mechanical “structures favoring death” (167). Thus, with every rocket, death “further legitimizes his State” (139).

### From Oven State to Rocket State

Oh, a State begins to take form in the stateless German night, a State that spans oceans and surface politics, sovereign as the International or the Church of Rome, and the Rocket is its soul.

—Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*

While this chapter has focused on the mechanisms of death in the Nazi regime, these in fact are not Pynchon's primary concern. Rather, what interests him most is the transmogrification of the techno-primitive machinery of National Socialism into the foundation of the postwar military-industrial complex. As Dale Carter claims, what Pynchon traces is "the movement from 'Oven State' to 'Rocket State'" (8). In Carter's thinking, this movement is "a process of absorption [or ingestion] facilitating the survival, transformation, and reproduction of a partly obsolete imperial power structure in the form of its incipient totalitarian replacement" (8). While this is certainly true, Carter's description fails to account for what are perhaps the most important aspects of this change: the carryover of sacrificial technologies of death into the postwar era and their new apocalyptic potential. Through the figure of the Oven and its connections with the V-2 rocket and the atomic bomb, Pynchon suggests that the techno-primitivism of Nazism is not an aberration; rather, he presents "structures favoring death" as the West's guiding principles in the twentieth century and "progress" as nothing more than transformations in the machinery of death (167).

While Weissmann represents the shift from the romantic nationalism of the colonial era to the mechanization of death under the Nazis, he also signifies the shift from the concentration camp to the military-industrial complex. In this

regard, Weissmann is a fictional analogue of Hans Kammler.<sup>83</sup> A civil engineer and SS Officer, Kammler was put in charge of designing and constructing the death camps, most notably Auschwitz/ Birkenau, where he personally ordered the five crematoria to be built (Piper 164). Later in the war, he would wrest control of the V-2 rocket program from Walter Dornberger. In this role, he oversaw the Enzian project, the move from Penemunde to the Mittelwerk, and the production of V rockets through the slave labor of Dora (Allan 267, Hoss). Like Weissmann, he spans the transformation in the Nazi structures of death from fixity (oven) to mobility (rocket). Both men epitomize the figure that will dominate the military-industrial complex: “All things to all men, a brand-new military type, part salesman, part scientist” (401). Weissmann and Kammler thus characterize the plasticity of the structures of death.

The transformation from Oven to Rocket and Weissmann’s role in this shift are most clearly indicated by his tarot. The cards suggest that what lies behind him are the tenets of the Oven-state. As Steven Weisenburger points out, the card in Weissmann’s tarot that “represent[s] events already past, is the Ace of Swords, signifying ‘conquest, triumph of force’” (374). Moreover, Weissmann is dealt the Four of Pentacles, which shows “a figure of modest property desperately clutching on to what he owns” (748). This card traditionally represents “surety of possession,” and Pynchon interestingly associates it with “the stationary witch trying to hold her candy house against the host of nibblers out there in the dark” (Weisenburger 374; *Gravity’s* 748). This picture resonates

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<sup>83</sup> This connection is perhaps suggested in the novel when the orders given at Bliza, a project led by Kammler, are attributed to Weissmann (424).

with Weissmann's vision of his Oven-state's decay: "the waste and senseless image of what was a house in the forest, reduced now to crumbs and sugar-smears" (99). Since this card was dealt in the "Behind" position, it signifies that which is "moving out of his life as an influence" (748). Thus, the card represents the fragmentation of the Oven-state and the decline of heroic nationalism with its focus on fixed borders and territorial conquest.

This move away from fixity is evident in Weissmann's thoughts on the "breaking" of his state. After Katje's departure puts an end to his "Oven-game," Weissmann ponders, "But after the act of wounding, breaking, what's to become of the little Oven-state? Can't it be fixed? Perhaps a new form, one more appropriate . . . the archer and his son, and the shooting of the apple . . . yes and the War itself as tyrant king . . . it can still be salvaged can't it, patched up, roles reassigned . . ." (102). The change in metanarrative here indicates the swing from the stationary Oven to the flight of the rocket (99). Moreover, the evocation of "the archer" William Tell slyly points to Operation Crossbow, the Anglo-American plan to combat the V-Weapons program, and Rossini's "William Tell Overture," the theme song for the American radio and television program *The Lone Ranger*. Rossini, on one hand, suggests conformity,<sup>84</sup> while *The Lone Ranger*, on the other, suggests righteous violence on the frontier. In other words,

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<sup>84</sup> There is an ongoing debate in the novel on the qualities of Rossini's music versus those of Beethoven. Rossini is belittled as "some medley of predictable little tunes," the music of the unthinking masses who never question the status quo (441). Beethoven, however, represents "musical freedom" and true democracy, "where all notes get equal hearing" (440). Interestingly, it is the U.S. that puts an end to this "expansion of music's polymorphous perversity," when an American soldier kills composer Anton Webern (440).

the replacement of “Hansel and Gretel” with William Tell indicates the emergence of postwar U.S. dominance and the sanitized violence of the military-industrial complex.

The remainder of Weissmann’s tarot suggests the transfer to American supremacy, as well as the appearance of peaceful conformity. The card that represents Weissmann’s “Hopes and Fears” is The Two of Swords, signifying “a slide into conformity, equipoise, and business” (Weisenburger 374).<sup>85</sup> The card that “crowns” Weissmann’s tarot and “represents the best he can expect to achieve,” is the King of Cups, which also “foretells equanimity and success in business” (Weisenburger 374). Therefore, the narrator suggests, “[l]ook high, not low,” for Weissmann is “among the successful academics, the Presidential advisors, the token intellectuals who sit on boards of directors” (749). This is clearly a reference to former Nazi rocket-scientists, such as Wernher Von Braun and Walter Dornberger, who immigrated to the U.S. and flourished in non-military roles. Von Braun headed NASA, and Walter Dornberger was appointed to Bell Helicopter’s board of directors (Weisenburger 374). The suggestion to “look high, not low” is possibly a reference to Von Braun’s work on the space program. Weissmann’s own move to the American scene is evident in his culminating card, the World, which represents “What Will Come” (747). The card is “a sign of emigration . . . of voyages, new beginnings” but also “an apocalyptic sign” (Weisenburger 375).

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<sup>85</sup> The narrator states that this card “is usually taken as ‘concord in a state of arms,’” a phrase he associates with the Zone, but which also describes the Cold War (748).

Weissmann's tarot thus presages the truth of the postwar era: the barbaric violence of the concentration camp and the crematoria appear to be receding, while in reality holocaust and apocalypse are drawing ever nearer. This paradox is because, as Weissmann points out, the move from Oven to Rocket is in many ways a continuation of the principles of the Nazi Oven-state. In essence, the Americans have only "patched up" the Nazi structure and "reassigned roles."<sup>86</sup> Nazi technocrats who were complicit with the machinery of death are reborn as aerospace engineers,<sup>87</sup> and Dominus Blicero, the lord of death, becomes a "presidential advisor" or corporate bureaucrat.<sup>88</sup>

The War thus maintains its place as "tyrant king"; it continues "its glutton, ever-nibbling intake" but now under the guise of business (119). Rather than

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<sup>86</sup> In this regard, it is perhaps not coincidental that the word "America" appears in the only sentence in the novel where the "crematoriums" are named outright (432). The continuation of the wartime structures of mechanization and death (the death factory and the crematoria) into the postwar period are also alluded to by the spirit of Rathenau when he proclaims that "a smokestack can survive any explosion—even the shock wave from one of the new cosmic bombs" (167).

<sup>87</sup> The novel acknowledges the grotesque link between the death camps and the space program with the "Space Helmets" at Dora that "appear to be fashioned from human skulls" (296).

<sup>88</sup> The resemblance between the Nazi, English, and American bureaucrats is perhaps most apparent in the figure of Clive Mossmoon. A "plastics expert" employed by Imperial Chemicals, Mossmoon is the only character in the novel besides Weissmann who successfully bucks the changes in the political structure from the 1920s through the post-WWII era (35). His connection with primitive sacrifice is clear in the description of his office with its "gigantic oak door, carved like the stone doorways of certain temples" (635-36). Once inside, Roger Mexico imagines Mossmoon holding a "thighbone scepter" (636). Perhaps most telling, however, is the location of this office. The narrator states specifically that it sits on top of a "gigantic furnace" room, which seems to imply that the Allies' power structure is ultimately built upon a foundation of Nazi atrocity (637).



operating under the overt principle of “making die,” as the Nazis did, the American military-industrial complex employs the covert principle of “letting die”:

The real War is always there. The dying tapers off now and then, but the War is still killing lots and lots of people. Only right now it is killing them in more subtle ways. Often in ways that are too complicated, even for us, at this level, to trace. But right now people are dying, just as they do when armies fight . . . These are the ones the War cannot use, and so they die. The right ones survive. (645)

In other words, the Cold War produces a permanent war economy that silently sacrifices the masses in the name of security. This *de facto* abandonment is the reality behind Foucault’s notion of “letting die.” What appears as the dominance of business is in reality the dominance of the war machine.<sup>89</sup> The interpenetration of militarism and capitalism has led to a structure that makes the state of exception permanent. And, as Pynchon notes, the end result of this permanent state of exception is the vampiric draining of lifeblood from the expandable portions of the population, who are “picked at by the needle mouths of death-by-government” (176). The political cry of the military-industrial

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<sup>89</sup> As Jeffrey Baker points out, the views expressed by Pynchon on the birth of the American military-industrial complex are almost exactly those expressed by pragmatist C. Wright Mills in “Culture and Politics”: “The power structure of this society is based on *a privately incorporated economy that is also a permanent war economy*. Its most important relations with the state now rest upon the coincidence of military and corporate interests—as defined by generals and businessmen, and accepted by politicians and publics. It is an economy dominated by a few hundred corporations, economically and politically interrelated, which together hold the keys to economic decision. These dominating corporation-hierarchies probably represent the highest concentration of the greatest economic power in human history . . .” (qtd. in Baker 336-37, my emphasis).

complex—"Money be damned, the very life of [insert name of Nation] is at stake"—in reality means "*dawn is nearly here, I need my night's blood, my funding, funding, ahh more, more . . .*" (521).

Underneath the surface of business and government allocation exists the same logic of consumption and sacrifice that was the "base" of the Oven-state. The technology of this new "Rocket state" hides this fact under a glossier sheen, but the novel continues to insist on the sacrificial nature of the new regime and its totem, the Rocket (566). This connection is most evident in the continual associations between the Oven and the Rocket. Besides the fact that Weissmann's reenactment of the fairy tale takes place at a rocket site, the link is apparent in the launching of the 00000 rocket itself.<sup>90</sup> Here, the *schwarzgerät*, or "black device," encapsulates the "black" Oven and launches it into the postwar era. The Rocket is explicitly connected to the fairy tale when Weissmann tells Gottfried that the 00000 is "the Oven we fattened you for": cannibal oven thus morphs into cannibal rocket (751).<sup>91</sup> As in the logic of biopolitics and of primitive sacrifice, Weissmann believes that he is killing in the name of life. He hopes that the oven/rocket, this mechanical "womb into which Gottfried returns," will hearken

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<sup>90</sup> The link between Oven and Rocket is also established in the Boxing-Day pantomime of "Hansel and Gretel" in the final scene of Part 1. Here, as in the Oven-game, the diversion of fairy tale is overshadowed by the terror of rocket blasts outside. The connection with Weissmann's game is also indicated by the capitalization of "Oven" in this scene and by the fact that Hansel is played by a girl in drag (176).

<sup>91</sup> The links to the fairy tale and the Oven-game are reiterated when Greta Erdman, now referred to as "Gretel," appears at the launch site and the delusional Weissmann mistakes her for Katje (486).

some sort of rebirth (750).<sup>92</sup> Like the fairytale witch, he believes that “baking” a human being will prove nutritive. But the launch scene instead dramatizes the swallowing of the organic by the mechanical. As with the Oven/crematorium, the Rocket incinerates the offering placed inside and thus halts any cycle of renewal.

Like the rituals of the Oven and the “Moloch machine,” the techno-primitive ritual of the *schwarzgerat* ultimately serves death. The reversal of the fairy tale here is telling. While Weissmann originally thinks that “the strayed children . . . will survive and prosper long beyond . . . his chimney departure,” this is not the case (94, 98-99). The launch of the 00000 inverts the story: the child is sacrificed while the cannibalistic witch lives on.<sup>93</sup> The young Gottfried, representative of German futurity and renewal, is immolated, while death (Lord Blicero) solidifies its position in the new world, the “Deathkingdom” of America (723).

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<sup>92</sup> The reference to the “womb” here highlights the characters’ tendency to graft the bodily onto the mechanical. In such a view, the uterine oven represents the female body while the phallic rocket represents the male. What is interesting is that both sides are associated with death and violence. Even Weissmann’s pseudo-mythical union of uterus and phallus in the hollowed-out rocket does not lead to new life, but only more death. As with Pynchon’s point on the body politic, the message here seems to be that any concordance between the man-made and the natural is simply an illusion. Despite any similarities to the female body, the oven is not feminine. More than anything else, the characters’ desire to interpret it this way speaks to the gynophobic assumptions of the patriarchal order. Along these same lines, phallogocentric assumptions about male power seem to naturalize the destructiveness of the rocket in these characters’ minds.

<sup>93</sup> The potential for child sacrifice is also suggested in the tale of William Tell.

## Holocaust(s)

[A]nd who ever said the end could not be this brutal?

—Thomas Pynchon, *Gravity's Rainbow*

The novel underscores the connection between American and Nazi thanatopolitics in the final scenes, where the Oven and the Rocket give way to the nuclear warhead and the true reach of the technologies of death becomes apparent. As the *schwarzgerat* is about to launch, the book prolepses to 1970s Los Angeles. Immediately, the focus is turned to Richard M. Zhubb, the “night manager of the Orpheus Theater,” who is an obvious stand-in for Richard M. Nixon (754). Besides his physical description—“fiftyish and jowled”—his “habit of throwing his arms up into an inverted ‘peace sign,’ . . . exposing in the act uncounted yards of white French cuff” points directly to Nixon’s most famous photographic pose (755). Moreover, several references link Zhubb/Nixon with Nazism and its monstrous politics of consumption. For one, his “black Managerial Volkswagen” associates him with one of Hitler’s “pet project[s]” (755; “Volkswagen”).<sup>94</sup> More telling, perhaps, is the fact that Zhubb is known as “the Adenoid” because of his “chronic adenoidal condition” (754); he is therefore equated with the “*Giant Adenoid*” of Pirate Prentice’s dream (14). As “a giant, organlike form” that puts “London, perhaps all England . . . in mortal peril,” this “monster” is in some sense a representation of the Nazi body politic (14). The

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<sup>94</sup> Volkswagen, which translates as “the people’s car,” was a National Socialist enterprise. Created at Hitler’s behest, the automaker was “a key player in Nazi armaments” during the war, even producing parts for the V weapons (“Volkswagen”; Weisenburger 382). Like many other German companies, Volkswagen utilized Jewish slave labor (“Volkswagen”).

adenoid also alludes to Charlie Chaplain's character, "Adenoid Hynkel," in *The Great Dictator*, "a thinly veiled Adolph Hitler" (Weisenburger 25). Zhubb/Nixon thus represents the continuation of Nazi principles in 1970s America.

The association between America and Nazi Germany is logical when one considers Nixon's dogmatic militarism and his expansion of the military-industrial complex. Pynchon directly acknowledges the connection between German exterminatory practices and the Vietnam War in his letter to Hirsch: "I don't like to use the word but I think what went on back in Sudwest is archtypical [sic] of every clash between the west and non-west, clashes that are still going on right now in South East Asia" (qtd. in Seed 241-42). The links to German extermination are even more pronounced when one considers the unprecedented use of napalm by the Nixon administration in Vietnam. This tactic was not only a continuation of Owen-state ideology, but also a refinement of the Nazis' techniques for incinerating human flesh. Essentially a jellied version of gasoline, napalm "sticks to clothing and flesh and continues to burn into the bone" (Franklin 72); it creates "a tidal wave of fire" so hot that it is capable of "melting asphalt . . . and metal" (Franklin 73). America dropped "nearly 400,000 tons" of this on Southeast Asia during the Vietnam War, almost all of it at Nixon's command (Hall 789).

Although napalm was developed by the U.S. during World War II and employed against the Japanese and later the Koreans, it was not until the Vietnam War that the chemical received significant press (Franklin 72). A 1967 *Ladies Home Journal* article horrified readers with its description of the effects of

napalm on Vietnamese children: “The chemical reaction . . . does melt the flesh, and flesh runs right down their faces onto their chests” (qtd. in Wells 84). The issue had come into the spotlight the year before, when boycotts began against Dow Chemical for producing an improved version of the incendiary, Napalm B, for the U.S. army.<sup>95</sup> A fact that would not be lost on Pynchon is that this new version was composed primarily of polystyrene, which made the agent impossible to wash off (Franklin 74-75).<sup>96</sup> As with the Nazis and I.G. Farben, the chemical cartel and the war machine are brought together once again in the service of death.

Despite the immediate horrors of Vietnam, the main suggestion made by including Zhubb/Nixon is the possibility of nuclear holocaust.<sup>97</sup> As manager of the Orpheus Theater, Zhubb presides over the site of the imminent nuclear apocalypse in the novel’s final scene. Only here does the genealogy of violence

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<sup>95</sup> There is little doubt that Pynchon was aware of the use of Napalm in Vietnam. Dow produced the chemicals for Napalm B at its facility in Torrance, California (Franklin 74-75). Pynchon was reportedly living in neighboring Manhattan Beach at this time and working on *Gravity’s Rainbow* (“The Straight Dope”). In all likelihood he was aware of the anti-napalm campaign, since this area was its epicenter, and activists were picketing and blanketing the area with leaflets (see Franklin on the anti-napalm campaign).

<sup>96</sup> There is perhaps a veiled reference to napalm in the text when Greta Erdmann thinks of her experience in the plastics factory that serves as Blicero’s castle: “Great curtains of styrene . . . They flared like the northern lights” (487).

<sup>97</sup> The link between Nixon and nuclear holocaust is logical when one considers that Nixon himself was courting this association. At the time of the novel’s publication, the president was pursuing what he called the “madman theory” in his diplomatic relations. As Nixon chief of staff H.R. Haldeman states, “He believed conceptually that it was important that the enemy have . . . a concern that he might be pushed to the point where he might do something totally irrational” (qtd. in Bundy 73). In Nixon’s thinking, his adversaries’ fear that he would employ nuclear weapons would bring a swift end to the Vietnam War.

that Pynchon has been tracing become completely evident. The nuclear warhead is revealed as the apex of the technologies of incineration. The V-2, the “Oven” that Gottfried is “fattened” for, morphs into the nuclear missile, the Oven that threatens to swallow entire populations. Thus, in the final scene, the reasoning behind Pynchon’s ambiguous use of the word *holocaust* throughout the novel becomes clear. His ambiguity conveys how the possibilities of *the* Holocaust and the cannibalistic Oven-state are carried over into the postwar era as the threat of nuclear holocaust, a complete consumption of human flesh.<sup>98</sup>

In Pynchon’s genealogy, the last days of World War II are the moment of transformation in these technologies of death. While the Rocket takes center stage in the novel, the horrors of nuclear war are articulated through the continual references to Hiroshima. The imagery associated with this atomic blast is perhaps the most grotesque in the entire book. Pynchon describes Truman

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<sup>98</sup> Considering the breadth of scholarship on *Gravity’s Rainbow*, relatively little has been said about the text’s treatment of the Holocaust. One reason for this is its seeming marginality within the novel. Luc Herman correctly labels it as a latent theme (109-111). Similarly, Katalin Orban reads the marginalization of the Holocaust as one of the “narrative events of disappearance” (116). She argues, “Their marginality and sporadic appearance should be read as intrinsic to the possibilities, marginalities and disappearances they trace, and any more central and exhaustive treatment would be a betrayal of their status as traces” (117). In contrast, Orban notes, “represented extermination, panoptically visible systematic killing off is reserved for the 17<sup>th</sup> century dodoes of Mauritius, for the Hereros of the African Sudwest, and for the Indians of the Argentinean pampas, and the words *exterminate*, *systematic*, and *killing off* are used in reference to them” (162). Orban does not explain why these other instances of genocide are not marginalized like the Holocaust in order to avoid “betray[ing] their status as traces.” What her argument fails to consider is that the Holocaust is only marginalized in the novel because it is already so central within Western discourses of atrocity and genocide.

“making ready to tickle 100,000 little yellow folks into what will come down as a *fine vapor-deposit of fat cracklings* wrinkled into the fused rubble of their city on the inland sea . . . ” (588, my emphasis).<sup>99</sup> American war making—the reduction of Japanese civilians to ash—is revealed not as a panacea for Nazism, but as an expansion of the Oven-state. The bomb is nothing more than the technological refinement of the crematoria, an Oven unbound. The symmetry of American and Nazi violence is even more apparent when one considers that Nazi scientists and their V rocketry bring the American atom bomb to its final apotheosis: the guided nuclear missile.<sup>100</sup>

Hiroshima, however, is the moment when large-scale immolation becomes possible. In Pynchon’s words, it is the moment when “the fireburst” becomes “sovereign” (694). The novel registers this monumental shift in the technologies of death when the grotesque cloud of incinerated Japanese reemerges later in the novel. An unnamed American colonel ponders:

But these sunsets, out here, I don’t know. Do you suppose something has exploded somewhere? Really—somewhere in the East? Another Krakatoa [sic]? Another name at least that exotic . . . The colors are so different now. Volcanic ash, or any finely-divided

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<sup>99</sup> Pynchon links Hiroshima to Cold War politics and nuclear apocalypse by surrounding his grotesque imagery of the incinerated Japanese with the story of Lyle Bland. The name “Bland” is a reference to “the Bland Corporation which financed research into the feasibility of a ‘Doomsday machine’ in Stanley Kubrick’s 1963 film *Dr. Strangelove*” (Carter 65, n. 67).

<sup>100</sup> Pynchon perhaps suggests the connection between the V-2 and the atom bomb by having Slothrop learn of the attack on Hiroshima while in Griefswald, the birthplace of Magnus von Braun (692-693). Wernher Von Braun grew up nearby at the family’s Crenzow estate.



substance, suspended in the atmosphere, can diffract the colors strangely. (642)

The colonel wonders if “this unknown debris in the prevailing winds,” the “fine vapor-deposit of fat cracklings,” contains “information for us” (642). He rightly senses something “disturbing” about it (642). What the “prevailing winds” carry in this instance are the sign of the “disturbing” world to come. By “modulat[ing]” “the sun’s everyday spectrum,” the atomic bomb has altered nature itself (642).

The “transformation” of the Japanese here signals the same warning as Gottfried’s “transformation” in the rocket or Hitler’s “transformation” of the German body politic. In all of these instances, the desire for purification and renewal results only in immolated flesh. From the Oven, to the Rocket, to the atomic bomb, technology only brings about a negative transcendence. Humanity stakes its hopes on “a dialectic of word made flesh, flesh moving towards something else,” but this is “one of the worst traps of all” (321). As in the case of Hiroshima, the only way humanity transcends flesh and rises above the force of gravity is through its own annihilation, through its reduction to a vapor of human fat that will dance temporarily among the clouds. This is the truth that Pynchon suggests should have been obvious with the Oven, the truth that now threatens to swallow the world in its entirety. The apocalyptic desires that fueled the Oven-state—Weissmann’s desire for a “chimney departure,” for a reduction of bodily matter to “gases and cinders” (99)—now engulf the planet with the threat of nuclear winter. This is the outcome of technology in the service of the death; this is humanity’s grotesque version of transcendence.

### PART III: THE CONTEMPORARY CANNIBAL SCENE

#### Chapter 5

##### Organs of the State: Late Capitalism and the Disarticulation of the Body in *Almanac of the Dead*

Of all the texts examined, *Almanac of the Dead* employs the most wide-ranging use of the cannibal trope. In many ways, the novel forms a compendium of contemporary critical discourses on cannibalism, since it figures virtually every form of exploitation in the Western world as a form of anthropophagy. At the most basic level, such a strategy is envisioned as a counter-narrative against the West's continual portrayal of Native Americans as inveterate savages. Through its encyclopedic depiction of colonial atrocity, Silko's novel reveals that the practices of European colonialism were themselves cannibalistic.

More importantly, through its genealogy of Western exploitation, *Almanac of the Dead* reveals the imbrications of colonialism and capitalism. These ideologies are fundamentally linked by their shared view of the expendability of the native body and the necessity of its transformation into object, a fact that Silko makes clear in her grotesque portrayal of lamps made from human skin. The novel articulates the ways in which capitalism has always formed an economy of legitimized sacrifice, where bodies can be torn apart and the pieces traded under the ideological cover of progress. In illustrating this point, Silko relies heavily on Marx's metaphors of vampiric capital. Through this trope, she elucidates the "primitive" nature of capitalism and illuminates how capitalist extraction is in fact a mediated form of cannibalism.

The novel's greatest insight, however, is its explication of the ways in which the atrocities of colonialism and industrial capitalism have morphed into the grotesque practices of late capitalism. Chief among these is the extraction and sale of biomaterials (i.e., organs and other bodily tissue), practices that the novel portrays as cannibalistic. Inherent in this claim is a pun on capitalist terminology—capitalists can be figured as cannibals because they are now in reality “consumers” of body parts. By juxtaposing the trope of organ theft as cannibalism with Marx's accounts of vampiric capital, Silko positions biomaterials as an extension of earlier forms of exploitation: it is an unmediated version of a practice that has existed in mediated form for hundreds of years—the destruction and consumption of marginalized bodies to feed the machines of nation and capital. Her focus on biomaterials highlights how the savagery of late capitalism is the logical outcome of earlier modes of capitalist exploitation. It reveals how capitalism's logic of absolute objectification and commodification of everything beyond the self is at base a form of cannibalism. Organ markets elucidate the extent to which capitalist consumption—always predicated on the extraction of value from the other's body—now borders on the consumption of the other's body itself.

More than simply exposing the barbarities of late capitalism, *Almanac of the Dead* offers a nuanced account of how globalization produces such atrocities. The novel explicates the ways in which deregulation and transnationalism have led to the perverse machinations of contemporary capitalism. Silko shows that in the so-called “post-national era,” the forces of state and capital are colluding to

produce surplus populations that can be “harvested” for profit. For the state, such manipulations are employed to bolster the health of one’s own body politic at the expense of another. Therefore, the so-called “post-national” world still operates on the same biopolitical paradigm as Nazi Germany, a bodily and national health that is predicated on the destruction of the other. Through its genealogy of murder, Silko’s novel desublimates the West’s teleological narrative of progress and desanitizes the current postmodern, positivistic notions of flow. Ultimately, *Almanac of the Dead* reveals that the body of the other, flayed and cannibalized, is the reality that haunts the current celebrations of globalization and the supposed waning of the nation-state.

The novel is an assemblage of stories, containing 208 “vignettes” in all (Holland 69). The scope of these stories is truly enormous, encompassing over seventy characters, three continents, and five hundred years of history. Within this wider framework, a narrower network does emerge, however. The majority of the novel’s events take place in the recent present and are set in the American Southwest and several locations in Mexico. Tucson, Arizona forms the center of the action and functions as a “cross-roads” where the diverse story lines intersect (Stanford 24).

The book’s distinct cast of characters is a blend of criminals and social outcasts: smugglers, addicts, gunrunners, homeless veterans, communist revolutionaries, and mafia men to name a few. For the most part, the actors can be divided into two camps: socially and culturally marginalized people who seek to rectify the injustices visited upon them, and “destroyers” who exploit the

downtrodden in the name of profit and pleasure. The two categories are not mutually exclusive, however. In many senses, “*Almanac of the Dead* is the Destroyer’s story” (Olmsted 466). Its primary focus is the indiscriminate and sadistic violence evident in the Americas since the time of European contact. As such, the novel incessantly dwells on a number of unsettling subjects such as bestiality, child abduction, suicide, organ theft, serial killing, and torture porn.

The trope of cannibalism is utilized in the novel primarily to figure these types of brutality, particularly as they relate to capitalist and (neo)colonial exploitation. At the most basic level, Silko figures widespread “cannibalism” as a symptom of the era of European colonialism, a period she labels “the epoch of Death-Eye Dog” (Silko, *Almanac* 252).<sup>101</sup> During this time, “human beings, especially alien invaders . . . become obsessed with hungers and impulses commonly seen in wild dogs” (251).<sup>102</sup> This is not to suggest, however, that cannibalism is strictly a European disease. The novel portrays “Human sacrificers” as “part of the worldwide network of Destroyers who fed off energy released by destruction” (336). The problem is not solely “the ‘blood worshipers’

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<sup>101</sup> Coincidentally, the opening shot of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, another work that centers on the cannibalistic nature of capitalism, was originally scripted as an extreme close up of a dead dog’s eye (*Texas Chainsaw Massacre: The Shocking Truth*).

<sup>102</sup> This usage directly echoes the Columbian discourse on cannibalism in which the Arawaks describe their enemies as “men with one eye, and others with dogs’ noses who ate men” (Columbus qtd. in Hulme, *Colonial* 27). This conflation of cannibalism and animality is continued throughout the text: the enemy is dehumanized with names such as “Trigg the Pig” or “pig-anus De Guzman,” both of whom are depicted as cannibals (444, 234).

of Europe” but “the ‘blood worshipers’ of the Americas” as well (570). In Silko’s words, “Montezuma and Cortes had been meant for one another” (570).<sup>103</sup>

Cannibalism functions as a particularly fluid signifier in the novel. Colonialism is depicted as “the blood-drinking Beast,” the Catholic church as “a cannibal monster,” capitalists as “vampires,” and CEOs as “fat cats glutted with blood” (223, 718, 312, 393). For Clinton, a black Vietnam veteran, leaders in Washington are “white toads . . . smacking their lips at all the splattered brains and guts of black and brown men” (407).

In this fluid use of the cannibal signifier, Silko’s novel mirrors another Native American text, Jack Forbes’s *Columbus and Other Cannibals*, which returned to print about the same time that *Almanac of the Dead* was published. Here, Forbes casts as wide a net with the cannibal metaphor as Silko. He figures cannibalism as “wetiko psychosis”: “the [largely Western] disease of consuming other creatures’ lives and possessions” (xvi). Forbes claims, “Imperialism and exploitation are forms of cannibalism and, in fact, are precisely those forms of cannibalism which are most diabolical and evil” (24). The category of cannibalism thus encompasses a wide variety of acts, ranging from slavery and genocide to

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<sup>103</sup> Similarly, in his novel *Chancers*, Native American author Gerald Vizenor does not portray cannibalism along racial lines. He suggests that some Native Americans are cannibalistic, that those “possessed by the ideologies of victimry” have become the “new wiindigoo”, the cannibal monster of Native American legend (9).

consumerism and pornography (25).<sup>104</sup>

In both Silko's and Forbes's work, the discourse of cannibalism enables Native Americans to speak back against their oppressors. As these examples suggest, marginalized peoples are increasingly utilizing the trope of cannibalism "to critique dominant sociocultural formations" (King 112). C. Richard King correctly states that today, more often than not, "cannibalism" refers "not to the eating of human flesh, but an asymmetrical system of cultural appropriation and consumption" (King 112). In Kristen Guest's words, this "discourse of cannibalism . . . gives voices to the diverse marginal groups it is supposed to silence and questions the dominant ideologies it is evoked to support" (3).

The use of such a strategy by Native American authors is perhaps more understandable when one takes into account the West's long history of depicting Indians as cannibals. As anthropologist Peggy Reaves Sanday notes, most accusations of ritual cannibalism "come from North America and the Pacific Islands" (4). For instance, the 1913 *Handbook of the Indian of Canada*, published

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<sup>104</sup> Forbes's book suffers from some serious faults. In his attempt to set up sweeping binaries, pre-conquest Indians become a utopian and pacific people. Such manipulation of history is exactly what he would rightly critique in Western historiography. In the end, Forbes's claim that "Civilization means not killing people" is far too simplistic and would in fact disqualify many of the cultures that he is arguing are civilized (7). In contrast, *Almanac of the Dead*, like Silko's earlier novel, *Ceremony*, does not give in to the tendency to create absolute binaries or to paint the Indian as an absolutely pure figure. The book notes that "even some tribal cultures had kept slaves" and that "[u]ntil the white man came, they [Yaquis and Apaches] had been enemies; sometimes they had raided one another" (424, 232). Yet, the novel also points out that these "raids and the scattered deaths were not at all the same as the slaughters by U.S. or Mexican soldiers" (232).

by the Bureau of American Ethnology, claims that at least thirty-nine American tribes were cannibalistic:

Among the tribes which practiced it, in one or another of these forms, may be mentioned the Montagnais, and some of the tribes of Maine; the Algonkin, Armouchiquois, Micmac, and Iroquois; farther w. the Assiniboin, Cree, Foxes, Miami, Ottawa, Chippewa, Illinois, Kickapoo, Sioux, and Winnebago; in the S. the people who built the mounds in Florida, and the Tonkawa, Attacapa, Karankawa, Kiowa, Caddo, and Comanche (?) [sic]; in the N. W. and W, portions of the continent, the Thlingchadinnah and other Athapascan tribes, the Tlingit, Heiltsuk, Kwakiutl, Tsimshian, Nootka, Siksika, some of the Californian tribes, and the Ute. There is also a tradition of the practice among the Hopi, and allusions to the custom among other tribes of Arizona and New Mexico. The Mohawk, and the Attacapa, Tonkawa, and other Texas tribes were known to their neighbours as "man-eaters." (J. White 77-78)

Even in the latter-half of the twentieth century, scholars have unfortunately taken such claims at face value. For example, Sanday states that evidence is "deemed sufficient enough" to classify eleven North American tribes as having practiced cannibalism (4-5). In her book, *Divine Hunger*, she offers elaborate Freudian and Jungian interpretations of Iroquois cannibalism without ever questioning the legitimacy of her sources, which are primarily accounts from Jesuit



missionaries.<sup>105</sup> She revives the Jesuits' portrayal of the Iroquois as utter savages, beings who, in her words, were "indiscriminant in their search for torture victims to appease their war god and their own rage" (127).<sup>106</sup>

Physical anthropologists have recently refueled these debates on Native American cannibalism, claiming that its existence can now be proven through new scientific methodologies. Most notably, Christy and Jacqueline Turner have stirred controversy through their attempts to prove that the Anasazi, the group

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<sup>105</sup> Sanday's primary evidence for Iroquois cannibalism is *The Jesuit Relations*, a text that she claims exhibits the Jesuits' "devotion to scholarship" (126). She appears to accept the idea that "The Iroquois were . . . eating war victims as late as 1756" (125). Anthropologist Marvin Harris repeats similar unsubstantiated claims against the Iroquois as well. See *Cannibals and Kings* page 86.

<sup>106</sup> Anthropologists' facile acceptance of unreliable source material is evident in their treatment of the Aztecs as well. Arens notes that "[b]y the twentieth century, Aztec cannibalism had become ethnohistorical fact" even though only a single instance of cannibalism can be found in Cortes and his officers' accounts (58, 60). Even in this case, no cannibalism is witnessed; rather, one officer believes that he saw "roasted babies" among the Indians supplies (Arens 60). Former conquistadors only added the more graphic details about Aztec cannibalism in their accounts written fifty years later (Arens 61). In 1977, Michael Harner brought the issue of Aztec cannibalism back into the anthropological spotlight with his creative thesis that a lack of protein among this group produced "[l]arge-scale cannibalism, disguised as sacrifice" (118). He claims, "For the necessary satisfaction of essential protein requirements, cannibalism was the only possible solution . . . it is possible to understand and respect the Aztec emphasis on human sacrifice as the natural and rational response to the material conditions of their existence" (Harner 132). Marvin Harris, Harner's mentor, expands on his student's thesis, arguing that the "state-sponsored system" of sacrifice was "geared to the production and distribution of substantial amounts of animal protein in the form of human flesh" (164). While Sanday disagrees with Harner and Harris's interpretations of Aztec cannibalism (16-17), she too accepts the conquistadors' accounts without question, claiming that the Aztecs "ate parts of the offered victims . . . and donned their skins in order to become the god represented by the victim" (172).

from which the Pueblo are descended, practiced widespread cannibalism.<sup>107</sup> In 2001, a group of researchers added to the controversy by reporting biochemical evidence from an Anasazi site that appears to support the cannibalism hypothesis: “They analyzed the fossilized remains of human excrement from a site containing butchered human bones and found evidence of myoglobin, a human enzyme that is found in muscle tissue but not in the digestive tract” (Salisbury).

The contemporary use of the cannibal trope must be understood then as a counter-narrative against the West’s need to label Native peoples as inveterate savages, a need that some would argue is still present in current anthropology. The trope of cannibalism can ultimately be understood along the lines of a subaltern strategy that John Beverly has labeled “writing in reverse.” Through this process, “the subaltern represents the dominant subject to itself, and thus

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<sup>107</sup> Silko acknowledges herself as a descendent of the Anasazi (*Yellow Woman* 206, n. 6). See McGuire and Van Dyke 11-19 for a summary of the cannibal accusations against the Pueblo and their descendents. In *Man Corn*, Christy and Jacqueline Turner argue that cannibalism was committed among the ancient Anasazi not out of necessity, but “as a regular practice” (McGuire and Van Dyke 18). Most troubling is the Turners’ suggestion that the practice was indicative of “social pathology” (qtd. in Berglund 4). As Jeff Berglund claims, Christy Turner’s comments in the documentary *Cannibals of the Canyon* call the scientific objectivity of their project into question. Commenting on Chaco Canyon, Turner states, “If you were to infer what happened here, and you follow the inferences and their logical tracks, you come to a very, very . . . very, very emotional set of events going on. The history indicates that people are screaming, the women are begging not to be killed, the men who tried to help them get mutilated; they mutilate the people while they are alive, they’re cutting their arms off while they’re alive, and some of these things are horrible. And if you let yourself see these things, it becomes very difficult to be objective about what you’re dealing with” (qtd. in Berglund 5). The irony is that the scenario that Turner lays out is obviously a colonial fantasy of the savage other that predated his research rather than an objective conclusion obtained from viewing ancient bone fragments. See Berglund 4-7 for a more in-depth discussion of the Turners’ work.

unsettles that subject in the form of a negation or displacement” (Beverly qtd. in Shackelford).<sup>108</sup> In the Native American context, such a rewriting is critical for undoing Western cooption of Native lands and the erasure of tribal epistemologies since European colonists employed the discourses of cannibalism and savagery as justifications for their exterminatory practices against the Indians. Whereas in the past, “[t]he presence of cannibalism, real or imagined, demand[ed] that social orders and subjectivities be remade in the image of the West” (King 109), today the identification of the West’s cannibalistic activities is aimed at undoing Western hegemony.

This tactic is quite evident in recent Native American texts. In particular, the representation of bone collecting as cannibalism has gained popularity. In Ann Lee Walter’s *Ghost Singer*, the “trope of cannibalism runs parallel to the trade in human parts” (Berglund 138), and the Smithsonian’s large collection of Indian bones is equated with state-sanctioned cannibalism. The narrator’s comments on bone collecting match Silko’s on organ theft almost exactly: “our people are still being bought and sold, even though they are dead . . . Even worse, some of the people are not whole, they remain bits and pieces, and yet these pieces are also being traded, bought and sold, like so many sheep” (Walters 207). In Gerald Vizenor’s *Chancers*, Native American body parts are similarly exploited by American capitalism when a character “propose[s] that a museum be established at a casino to display the skeletal remains of natives and

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<sup>108</sup> Significantly, cannibalism and vampirism are often the terms used by the oppressed today to express the horrific process of their objectification by the state and neo-colonial capitalism. See note 121 for a discussion of “vampire” accusations against state forces in the developing world.

the preserved brain of Ishi” (7). In Sherman Alexie’s “Sin Eaters,” the illegal internment of Native Americans and extraction of their bone marrow for a secret program is equated both with sin eating and with being swallowed by the leviathan of the U.S. government.<sup>109</sup>

### Body Parts Fetish

The people were cautioned about disturbing the bodies of the dead. Those who touched the dead were easily seduced by the Gunadeeyahs, who craved more death and more dead bodies to open and consume.

—Leslie Marmon Silko, *Almanac of the Dead*

What the works above elucidate is the supreme irony of the Euro-American discourse on native savagery—the fact that the colonists were engaged in the “primitive” activities that they so frequently ascribed to the Indians. Merrall Price notes, for Europeans in the age of exploration, “the harvesting of Indian bodily resources seems to have [been] . . . frequent and acceptable” (104). For instance, “Bernal Diaz reports the killing of an Indian in order to make use of his fat for healing . . . and de Lery reports the use of human unguents” (Price 104). Throughout the nineteenth century, Native American bodies were similarly objectified and commodified to serve the white hegemony. Indian body parts were the vehicle for medical and scientific knowledge production and in some instances were reduced to trophies or knick-knacks.

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<sup>109</sup> The recent popularity of everything “osteo” in Native American literature is due in part to the passage of the Native American Graves Protection and Repatriation Act (NAGPRA) in 1990, which provided a means for tribes to reclaim stolen remains.

While such issues may seem separate from the topic of cannibalism, the two are intertwined. Although cannibalism is ostensibly the consumption of human flesh, in reality eating is only one aspect of the cannibal discourse. This discourse has consistently focused on the fragmentation of the body and the treatment of body parts; these parts are viewed as precursors and post-cursors, the evidence that cannibalism is about to occur or the evidence that it has already taken place. Thus, severed heads and flayed and quartered bodies have generally been recognized as “proof” of cannibalism.<sup>110</sup> The preservation and display of body parts has been associated with cannibalism from the earliest representations of America to contemporary true crime accounts of cannibal serial killers. The American trade in Indian body parts is therefore part and parcel to Silko’s argument that American society is cannibalistic, even by its own standards.

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<sup>110</sup> The historical associations between cannibalism and skinning/flaying are numerous. According to Herodotus, the cannibal Scythians “make their clothes and even the quivers for their arrows from their enemies’ skins” (Avramescu 10). The Bible links the practices in the book of Micah, where the eponymous narrator addresses “the rulers of the house of Israel: you who hate good and love evil; / who tear the skin from my people / and the flesh from their bones; / who eat my people’s flesh, / strip off their skin / and break their bones in pieces; / who chop them up like meat for the pan, / like flesh for the pot?” (3:2-3). For Tzvetan Todorov, the Aztecs supposed practice of wearing their victims’ skins goes hand in hand with their cannibalism since both are based in their inability to fully grasp the symbolic (158). Along the same lines, Obeyeskere argues that the European practice of quartering probably was enough “proof” to confirm Polynesian suspicions that the Spaniards were cannibals (233). In his 1624 *General History*, John Smith claims that Powhatan punished his enemies by having their skin scraped from their “head and face with clam shells” (16-17). Avramescu claims that “the Canadians . . . wear the skins of those they have eaten” (100). In his “Modest Proposal,” Swift argues that the skin of cannibalized children will make “admirable gloves for ladies, and summer boots for fine gentlemen” (505).

During the course of the nineteenth century, the collection of Native American bones became an increasingly common practice. This is due in large part to an increase in ethnological studies. For example, “Samuel George Morton, the ‘father’ of ethnology in the United States, . . . put out a call to physicians practicing in the West to send him all the Indian skulls they could find” (Nudelman 49).<sup>111</sup> His goal was to complete a phrenological report that would “demonstrate the inferiority of American Indians” (Nudelman 49). Robbing Indian graves became a state-sanctioned activity when, “[i]n 1859, the surgeon general asked the United States army to collect Native American remains in the West. Hundreds of skeletons were later sent to the Army Medical Museum in Washington, D.C., and then moved to the Smithsonian” (Nudelman 191, n. 29). Silko’s novel points to the aftermath of these practices through its portrayal of “the poor shriveled skin and bones of some ancestor taken from her grave” that are displayed in “[t]he museum of the Laboratory of Anthropology” (33).<sup>112</sup>

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<sup>111</sup> Much of this pseudo-science was nothing more than a grotesque fetishization of the other’s body. This is apparent in the fate of Chief Osceola’s head, kept by Dr. Frederick Weedon, a white who befriended him while he was imprisoned: “He displayed it in the window of his pharmacy and used it, on occasion, to frighten his disobedient sons into submission” (Nudelman 52). As in the case of Maori headhunting, Americans were ironically decrying the other’s savagery at the same time they were transforming his body parts into curiosities. Such objectification continued well into the twentieth century. For instance, in 1918 Prescott Bush and other members of Yale’s Skull and Bones society reportedly robbed Geronimo’s grave. His skull is supposedly still on display in the Skull and Bones “crypt” (See Feyerick and Vitagliano).

<sup>112</sup> It should be noted that some scholarship today claims that the practice of preserving body parts as trophies was common in several American tribes. See Chacon and Dye on this matter.

The traditional mistreatment of the native's body went beyond simple grave robbing. Silko's take on organ theft has many similarities to the nineteenth century discourse on dissection, a practice that was also deemed a form of "medical cannibalism" and that also preyed on the dispossessed.<sup>113</sup> Medical dissection was, in fact, used as a form of state power that went hand in hand with extermination and slavery.<sup>114</sup> During the nineteenth century "a disproportionate number of anatomical subjects were black, Indian, or Irish" (Sappol 5). As Fanny Nudelman explains, "The bodies of African and Native American insurrectionaries were routinely subjected to postmortem dissection" and the "body parts of famed insurrectionaries became prized possessions" (42). Like cannibalism, these practices functioned as forms of "over-kill" (Sappol 91).

*Almanac of the Dead* suggests this historical context of mutilation and the grotesque fetishization of the native body with the image of the human skin lamp. Through this image, one can trace a genealogy of atrocity in the novel that links conquistadors, Nazis, and the current political terror in the Americas. This genealogy is established most poignantly by the character Calabasas, who

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<sup>113</sup> In England, the Anatomy Act of 1832 established the institutionalized difference in the treatment of the bodies of rich and poor. The dissection of poor bodies was often referred to as a form of cannibalism, and the two could become confused in the public mind (see Richardson 221-22). It should be noted that the nineteenth century version of "medical cannibalism" is actually more mediated than the cannibalistic organ theft of today. In the former, the poor are dissected so that doctors can gain the knowledge they need to save the rich. In the latter, the connection between the bodies of the rich and poor actually becomes corporeal, with organs being extracted rather than knowledge.

<sup>114</sup> Nudelman claims, "dissection is a significant, if under-examined, form of racial violence used during the antebellum period to terrorize African and Native Americans and justify their continued subjugation" (41).

claims, “Hitler got all he knew from the Spanish and Portuguese invaders. De Guzman was the first to make lamp shades [sic] out of human skin. They just weren’t electric lamps, that’s all” (216).<sup>115</sup>

Nuño de Guzmán, the Spanish conquistador referred to here, was known to his contemporaries as “Bloody Guzman” and is often characterized as the cruelest of the Spaniards. (His name ironically translates as “good man.”) Bartolome de Las Casas calls him “a butcher” and accuses him of “the depopulation of the entire province” of Panuco (65, 67). Historians paint him in a similar light. Donald Chipman claims, “As governor [of Panuco] he violated all agreements and conventions with the natives; in defiance of royal ordinances he hunted, branded, and shipped slaves to the West Indies; so intensive and efficient were his slaving operations that the province was virtually depopulated” (142). Silko refers to him in an essay as “the Portuguese monster de Guzman, the slave catcher in the 1500s” (*Yellow Woman* 139).<sup>116</sup> By detailing the cruelties of “Grandpa Guzman,” who is presumably Nuño’s descendent, and “Dr. Guzman,” who is involved in the Mexican police chief’s torture program (342), the novel highlights the continuation of the original de Guzman’s practices: slavery,

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<sup>115</sup> Silko repeats this claim almost verbatim in one of her essays: “Hundreds of years before the German Nazis fashioned lamp shades out of Jewish skin, the Portuguese slave hunter, de Guzman, made lamp shades from the skins of Native Americans” (*Yellow Woman* 147).

<sup>116</sup> While Silko’s depiction of Nuno de Guzman seems historically accurate, I have been unable to locate any source stating that he or his relative Diego de Guzman made lampshades out of human skin.



exploitative mining, and corporeal punishment (116).<sup>117</sup> But de Guzman is known in the text primarily as someone who skins others, and, as such, he is figured as the progenitor of a barbaric genealogy: flayers of human skin who mutilate the other's body beyond recognition for pleasure and profit. In this sense, Hitler and Trigg are de Guzman's disciples.

If one considers the meaning of skin in the contact(s) between European colonists and Native Americans, the skin lamp takes on additional meaning. For the European, Indians were continually identified by their skin alone, as "redskins." And, for the French especially, it was the fur trade, or "skin trade," that necessitated continued contact with them. The whites saw the Native Americans' practice of scalping as their defining quality and played upon this practice to categorize them as savages. To paint de Guzman as the creator of skin lamps therefore accomplishes a discursive removal: the European becomes the scalper, the barbarian who collects human body parts as trophies, the savage who shows no respect or mercy for the enemy.

### Blood, Guts, and Capitalism

Of all contemporary Native American novels that deal with the cannibalistic nature of European practices in the Americas, *Almanac of the Dead* offers the most far-reaching account. Through its genealogy of atrocity, the book reveals the interrelationship of colonialism and capitalism and their continual

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<sup>117</sup> Coincidentally enough, a reign of terror continues in this region today thanks to another Guzman, the drug kingpin Joaquín "Chapo" Guzmán, whose forces have turned Ciudad Juárez into a bloodbath.

consumption of marginalized bodies through various “skin trades.” In the novel’s present, this consumption is exemplified by Beaufrey and Trigg, sexual sadists whose business practices are equated with cannibalism. The homosexual Beaufrey is presented as a complete narcissus, secure in the belief that “others did not fully exist” (533).<sup>118</sup> As a boy, he was obsessed with “the Long Island cannibal, Albert Fish,” a serial killer from the 1930s (534). Beaufrey thought of Fish as a “kindred spirit because they shared . . . [a] complete indifference about the life or death of other human beings” (534). According to Beaufrey, Fish represents the “connection between human cannibals and the aristocracy” because he “belonged to a wealthy family”—“blue bloods directly off the Mayflower” (535).<sup>119</sup> He thus sees Fish’s cannibalism as the embodiment of “*le droit du seigneur*,” the lord’s right (535). Beaufrey transfers these classist ideas into his business practices. While he never commits cannibalism outright, he makes his living by consuming others in a mediated fashion. His business

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<sup>118</sup> While beyond the scope of this chapter, it should be noted that *Almanac of the Dead*’s treatment of homosexuality is problematic to say the least. The most pathological and cannibalistic characters in the novel—Beaufrey, Serlo, and Trigg—are homosexual or bisexual. What is so odd about this depiction of gays is that homosexuality is accepted in the traditional system of Native American beliefs to which Silko claims to adhere. See, for instance, her comments on page 67 of *Yellow Woman and a Beauty of the Spirit* on Pueblo tolerance of homosexuality. For a sustained discussion of the novel’s representation of homosexuality, see St. Claire. On the traditional associations between cannibalism and homosexuality in the West, see Bergman and Crain.

<sup>119</sup> The irony of Beaufrey’s explanation is that Albert Fish was not descended from a wealthy family that could trace its roots back to the Mayflower. He grew up in a poor household and was sent to live in an orphanage at a young age. See Schechter for information on Fish’s actual background. It should be noted that Silko links Fish’s cannibalism to capitalism and consumerism by adding the fictional detail that “police had captured him carrying a human arm in his shopping bag” (534).

primarily consists of selling videos of various bodily violations: he offers footage of abortions and sex-change operations, “a complete line of dissection films,” and “videos of sodomy rapes and strangulations” (102). Beaufrey is therefore cannibalistic because he lives off of dead flesh that others consume through the sadistic, pornographic gaze.

Cannibalism and exploitive capitalism are linked together even more directly in the case of Trigg, a handicapped real estate investor who has branched off into the “biomaterials” business. Biomaterials are explicitly tied to cannibalism through Trigg’s manner of procuring blood and organs.<sup>120</sup> His method of choice is picking up a homeless man and giving “him a blow job while his blood filled pint bags”; he “nibble[s]” the vagrant’s foreskin while he is “slowly bled to death pint by pint” (444). In Trigg’s grotesque ritual, the extraction of blood by the phlebotomy equipment is equated with the pseudo-consumption of the victim’s flesh in the act of fellatio. The medical equipment acts as a prosthetic, draining the victim’s strength, which is transferred to Trigg through the exchange value of the blood. He then collects the victim’s organs and skin, which

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<sup>120</sup> It should be noted that Silko is by no means the first to refer to the organ trade as a form of cannibalism. The organ business has been variously referred to as “the new cannibalism,” “neo-cannibalism,” and “medical cannibalism.” Perhaps the most respected, and most prolific, author on the subject is Nancy Scheper-Hughes, a Berkeley anthropologist and director of Organ Watch, a non-for-profit that tracks the black market organ trade. She has published several peer-reviewed articles that compare organ theft and capitalist organ exchanges to cannibalism, most notably “Neo-Cannibalism: The Global Trade in Human Organs.” “I call it neo-cannibalism,” states Scheper-Hughes, “the notion that we can eye each other greedily as a source of spare body parts” (Scalise). Employing rhetoric reminiscent of Mailer, she claims that today “a politics of the belly” is “contributing to new forms of late modern cannibalism” (“Bodies for Sale” 1).

are “consumed” through the black market. Trigg thus resembles his colonial forbearers since he mutilates the bodies of the dispossessed for profit.<sup>121</sup>

More than simply critiquing these “destroyers” activities, the novel offers valuable insight into the psychology and ideology that motivates their actions. Through Trigg’s character in particular, the text elucidates the mindset that justifies the most monstrous exploitation. In the most basic sense, Trigg’s experience of self is one of lack. After the car accident that cripples him, he

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<sup>121</sup> What is perhaps most striking about Trigg’s medical cannibalism is its resemblance to subaltern narratives on cannibalism and vampirism in the developing world. Trigg’s practices relate directly to African stories about “blood suckers.” William Arens explains, “[T]he tales vividly described how a victim would be rendered unconscious and then hung head down in order to let the blood from the slit jugular drain into a bucket. The fluid was then transported by a fire engine to an urban hospital, where it was converted into red capsules. These pills were taken on a regular basis by Europeans who, I was informed, needed these potations to stay alive in Africa” (12). Luis White gives greater details on these blood-sucking tales, which she traces as far back as the 1910s (27). She notes, Kenyans believe that during “the mid 1940s, [a] Medical Department truck patrolled the streets ‘and, should it come upon a straggler, draws from his veins all his blood with a rubber pump, leaving his body in the gutter’” (L. White 32). Zambians believe that “in 1948 children were lured to trucks on the road at nighttime, made helpless and invisible with the banyama’s wands, and taken to towns across the border in Malawi where they were fattened on special foods while the European employers of banyama drank their blood; they returned home ‘very emaciated’” (L. White 32). Similar fantasies exist in the Latin world; perhaps most applicable to *Almanac of the Dead* is an incident that took place in Peru in late 1988. “In the shanty towns of Lima,” hundreds of women “demand[ed] that the local authorities protect their children from ‘sacaojos’ (eye-snatchers) who were kidnapping them so as to sell their eyes abroad. Other versions included the selling of body parts or blood and fat to the metropolis as fuel for factory machinery and computers . . . or to provide food for special restaurants frequented by members of the armed forces” (Kraniauskas 151-52). These “sacaojos” were identified as “white doctors” and “a group of medics was almost lynched” (Kraniauskas 152). Rumors emerged in “Mexico in 1986 and in Brazil in 1988” involving babies being abducted so that their organs could be sold to industrialized nations (Kraniauskas 152). As with Silko’s portrayal of contemporary cannibalism, the violation and consumption of the body in these stories is heavily mediated by technology and invariably serves the dominant race(s) and class.

dreams the words “*Helpless Baby*” over and over again (383). He feels that he is defined by his handicap, and must continually remind himself, “The chair is not me. The chair is not a part of me” (384). He hates the way that women look down on him, lamenting that they do not “accept me for who I am” or that they do not want to know “the person he was deep inside” (384, 381). Max Blue’s nickname for Trigg, “Steak-in-the-Basket,” suggests that Trigg is very much defined by his handicap and that he is viewed as nothing more than meat, a collection of parts (378). Indeed, the “one thing” that Trigg’s always has on his mind is his desensitized penis, “the meat dangling between his legs” (383). His obsession with money and power are thus compensating for his belief that the accident “made him a eunuch” (659). Behind his perpetual display of phallic power—a power that is expressed in his mutilation of others—is his ultimate desire, “to be erect” (662).

Trigg’s perverse business practices therefore cannot be separated from his extreme sense of lack. On one level, he aims to rob his victims of their bodily integrity because the accident has robbed him of his own.<sup>122</sup> On another level, his cannibalistic exploitation is an endeavor to reclaim his experience of self before the accident. As Leah Blue states, “Trigg’s desire had a sharp edge, as if he still *hungered* for all he had lost” (380, my emphasis). His perverse fellatio/blood sucking is an attempt to regain his phallic power by cannibalistically taking it from others.

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<sup>122</sup> Like his victims, he is in a sense disarticulated: after the accident, “[t]he scars across his lower back” made it appear “as if Trigg had been chopped in half and sewed back together” (382).

What Trigg's thoughts indicate are a radical belief in the rights and possibilities of self-fashioning. But what Silko highlights through Trigg's character is the ways in which such self-fashioning involves the objectification and disarticulation of the other. In Trigg's mind, remaking the self is only possible through murder. Like a serial killer, Trigg seeks to transcend his own flesh (or meat) by taking others apart;<sup>123</sup> he believes that only their pieces (or the exchange value of these pieces) will patch his physical and psychic wounds and make him whole.<sup>124</sup>

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<sup>123</sup> Indeed, Trigg is a literal serial killer and resembles iconic killers in several ways. He is a pansexual who picks up hitchhikers in his van, performs sexual acts on them, murders them, and cuts their bodies into pieces, which he then preserves. Like Ted Bundy—who would “fake a broken arm in order to make co-eds see him as less threatening” (Brottman 41)—Trigg uses his handicap to lure victims into his van. His “cold-storage inventory” of human body parts mirrors those of psychotics like Jeffrey Dahmer and Ed Gein (403). Even his feelings about his homosexual acts can be compared to those of John Wayne Gacy, who “insisted that he in not homosexual. . . . He thinks that a homosexual is a man who loves other men, and he had no such feelings for these people. They were the trash whom he picked up” (qtd. in Seltzer 190).

<sup>124</sup> This desire for impossible wholeness is also what leads to Menardo's obsession with his bulletproof vest. He believes that the vest will recreate the self as an impenetrable body. And, significantly, for him this impenetrable body is associated with whiteness since the vest shines “bright white against his skin” (497). Menardo's wish represents a literalization of ego formation as “the fantasy of the secured and ‘armored body’” (Seltzer 50). The vest is ostensibly the skin that cannot be flayed and thus marks the privileged body that cannot be consumed. But, Menardo's skin ego is already perforated: his increasing desire for impermeability leads to his further fear of being penetrated. He feels that in order to solidify his identity he must prove its reality by testing the vest. Of course, the desired proof only reveals his self-deception: in an Achillean allusion, the bullet penetrates the one vulnerable spot on the vest and he is instantly killed. Similarly, the Western subject seeks to prove his own reality through death and destruction; however, Silko argues, this continued reenactment of violence will ultimately consume him.

Perhaps the most perverse aspect of such fantasies is that his actions are sanctioned by both medicine and commerce. Trigg understands his killings as part of a larger narrative of progress. He believes that the money he earns through biomaterials “will more than finance all the costs of [a] breakthrough technology” (386). For Trigg, any action is justifiable in the name of the “miracle of medical science and high technology” (380). What his story ultimately reveals are the monstrous outcomes of ideological structures that posit the transcendence of the self through the objectification of the other.

It is above all this predatory logic of objectification that Silko takes aim. Through her genealogy of capitalist practices, she explicates the ways in which Trigg’s grotesque mutilations are in fact the logical outcome of capitalistic objectification. Trigg’s skin trade<sup>125</sup> is revealed as nothing more than the next phase in capitalism’s demand to extract all possible value from the worker, a demand that now borders on cannibalism.

Since critics have consistently chided Silko for her so-called anti-Western position,<sup>126</sup> it is ironic that her critique of capitalism is grounded in Western discourse. Specifically, Silko’s portrayal of blood-soaked capitalism is actually quite close to Marx’s own. In his view, capitalism “comes into the world dripping

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<sup>125</sup> Trigg’s dealings in cadaver skin are mentioned as much as his dealings in organs (see 387, 389, 398, 404).

<sup>126</sup> The publication of the novel was followed by a plethora of vitriolic reviews, mostly by white males, who feel that the book unfairly essentializes whiteness. John Skow claims, “Wherever it is shown, the white society is murderous, corrupt, mad with greed and hideously perverted.” Likewise, Malcolm Jones writes off the novel as “preposterous,” claiming that in Silko’s “cosmology there are good people and there are white people.”

from head to toe, from every pore, with blood and dirt" (*Capital* 926). Elsewhere, he labels "progress" under capitalism as a "hideous pagan idol who would not drink the nectar but from the skulls of the slain" (qtd. in Phillips 184). Like Marx, Silko repeatedly turns to traditional images of monstrosity to register the horror and excess of capitalist greed. Nowhere is this clearer than in the "Vampire Capitalists" section of the novel (312). By linking vampirism with capitalism here, Silko explicitly plays on Marx's famous portrayal of capital as "dead labor, which vampire-like, lives only by sucking living labour, and lives the more, the more labour it sucks" (*Capital* 342). The metaphor is specifically linked to Marx when Angelita La Escapia proclaims that he "was the first white man [she] had ever heard call his own people vampires and monsters" (312). Angelita, in fact, directly quotes Marx. Reflecting on Mexico City, she thinks, "Here was the place Marx had in mind as 'a place of human sacrifice, a shrine where thousands passed yearly through the fire as offerings to the Moloch of avarice'" (313).<sup>127</sup>

The novel owes much to Marx in terms of metaphor and style. What draws Angelita to Marx's writings, what she "could not get over," is "the brutality and all the details" of his work (312). This, of course, is the style of *Almanac of the Dead*: an encyclopedic chronicle of violence, full of gory detail, much of which is aimed at the abuses of capitalism. Like Marx's work, the novel is full of "gruesome stories . . . describing the tiny corpses of children" (312); like Marx, Silko wants to recapture the reader's horror in the face of capitalist nightmare; and like Marx, she envisions her novel as a narrative of praxis aimed at revolutionary change.

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<sup>127</sup> The passage that Angelita quotes appears in *Capital* 812, n. 50.



Yet, Silko's stories of "organ harvests of Caucasian infants" go beyond anything in Marx, and this is, in fact, the point (563). She is positioning her work as an extension of Marx's own to show that the atrocities of the current capitalist system are an inevitable expansion of earlier practices.

Silko's novel is more than a repetition of traditional Marxist accounts that employ traditional metaphors of monstrosity to critique the horrors of capital. Silko invokes Marx and his imagery not to show how the capitalist is *like* a vampire, but how he *is* a vampire or cannibal.<sup>128</sup> In Marx's stories of "giant spinning machines that *consumed* the limbs and the lives of the small children in factories," Silko sees more than a metaphor; she recognizes a mediated form of cannibalism, a process where human consumes human through mechanical prosthesis (312, my emphasis). This prosthetic consumption is the experience of countless Native Americans under European colonialism: "The Indians had seen generations of themselves ground into bloody pulp under the steel wheels of ore cars in crumbling tunnels of gold mines" (312). Through such imagery, Silko wishes for the reader to come to the same conclusion as Angelita: that "the raw materials of capitalism" are in fact "human flesh and blood" and that the capitalist is therefore a cannibal (315).

By connecting the horrors of industrial capitalism with the horrors of colonialism, Silko highlights the degree to which these systems are intertwined: as the novel points out, "the European colonials" were in fact "sent by their capitalist slave-masters" (315). Moreover, by juxtaposing colonial and industrial

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<sup>128</sup> In Marx, the vampire alone—not the cannibal—is the figure for capital. Silko, however, alternates between these figures.

atrocities, Silko elucidates the *necessity* of bodily destruction in all stages of capitalism. Along these lines, John Kraniauskas suggests that the vampire as a figure for industrial capital has always been more than “a mere Gothic literary figure with which Marx has endowed capital with ‘character.’” Rather, it is a “phantasmagoric trace” of “so-called primitive accumulation” (Kraniauskas 149). Marx used the latter term to designate in the strictest sense “an accumulation which is not the result of the capitalist mode of production but its point of departure” (*Capital* 873). At base, primitive accumulation is “the historical process of divorcing the producer from the means of production” (*Capital* 875). In the domestic sphere, this involves “[t]he expropriation of the agricultural producer, of the peasant, from the soil” (*Capital* 876). In colonies, however, accumulation involves “undisguised looting, enslavement and murder” (*Capital* 918). As Marx explains:

The discovery of gold and silver in America, the extirpation, enslavement and entombment in mines of the indigenous population of that continent, the beginnings of the conquest and plunder of India, and conversion of Africa into a preserve for the commercial hunting of blackskins, are all things which characterize the dawn of the era of capitalist production. These idyllic proceedings are the chief moments of primitive accumulation.  
(*Capital* 915)

While Marx ostensibly labeled this accumulation “primitive because it forms the pre-history of capital” (*Capital* 875), I would argue that this appellation also refers

to the “primitive” or “savage” aspects of capitalist modes of appropriation; in other words, the name highlights that capitalist resource extraction is tied to the literal disarticulation of bodies. As Jerry Phillips argues, the brutal extraction of resources and labor as well as a disregard for human costs is evident in all stages of capitalism; thus, primitive accumulation is “the permanent destination of capitalism” and capitalism always retains a savage character (Phillips 187).

More than this, Silko employs the traditional Marxist imagery of blood and guts capitalism to show how the horrific contemporary practices of organ theft and dissection videos are in fact on the same continuum as the colonial and industrial consumption of bodies. Nowhere is this more evident than in Trigg’s thoughts on organ theft: “‘Biomaterials,’ not new antibiotics or drugs, were going to be the *big bonanza* of the twenty-first century” (398, my emphasis). Moreover, he thinks of poor and non-white bodies as a “gold mine” (663). Organ theft thus continues the American pioneering tradition of violent resource extraction; however, it is the body of the other that is now “mined.” Supposedly “post-industrial” capitalism still enacts the bodily destruction of colonial and industrial capitalism, but instead of workers being “ground into bloody pulp,” they are now strategically harvested for organs. Whereas in the past the worker’s mutilation was an unintended consequence of extracting resources and extracting surplus value from the worker, today the worker is himself a resource fit for extraction, and mutilation becomes part and parcel of this extraction of value. Thus, in many ways, the novel posits these practices as the logical outcome of capitalist expansion. They are the product of capitalism’s drive to extract every last bit of

value from the bodies that fall within its domains, “to extract the maximum possible benefit” from the worker (Marx, *Capital* 342). As Marx claims, “the vampire will not let go ‘while there remains a single muscle, sinew or drop of blood to be exploited’” (*Capital* 416).

### Biomaterials and Late Capitalism

Every ounce of value, everything worth anything, was stripped away for sale, regardless; no mercy.

—Leslie Marmon Silko, *Almanac of the Dead*

Because of her genealogical treatment of capitalist exploitation, some may mistake Silko’s critique as transhistoric. This is not the case, however. The novel’s depiction of biomaterials is in fact a nuanced account of the ways in which the particularities of globalization have allowed contemporary capitalists to refine the atrocities of industrial capitalism. The point to be recognized is that Trigg’s perverse business practices are specific to the particularities of late capitalism and the ensuing relationships between the developed and the developing world, specifically an environment of deregulation and transnationalism.

In Trigg’s mind, the nature of his crimes is emblematic of the current business environment: they are “a story about the blood plasma and biomaterials

market worldwide” (443).<sup>129</sup> “Trigg’s ‘illegal’ sales to certain West German biomedical consortiums” speak to the global flow of organs in the actual black-market trade (443), a market that, according to Scheper Hughes, “is perpetrated by complicated, transnational networks of buyers, sellers, and brokers that span the globe” (“Report”).<sup>130</sup> Moreover, “the arrangement between Bio-Materials and the human organ transplant industry across the U.S.” echoes allegations from recent news (404).<sup>131</sup> And Trigg’s scheme to “draw transplant patients from all over the world to one location” by providing “luxury hospital accommodations to lure billionaires for organ transplants” is nothing more than an extension of the

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<sup>129</sup> The nature and scope of the illegal organ trade is widely misunderstood. Surprisingly, “the World Health Organization estimates that one fifth of the 70,000 kidneys transplanted worldwide every year come from the black market” (Interlandi). Sellers in developing nations typically garner “between \$2,000 to \$6,000 for a kidney,” but in certain places, such as Bagdad, the going rate has dropped to less than \$1,000 (Colia; Al Jibouri and Freeman). Wealthy buyers typically pay \$150,000 for these organs as part of transplant packages. After expenses, brokers “typically net \$50,000 per transplant” (Interlandi).

<sup>130</sup> While practices vary, Scheper-Hughes notes that one pattern is clear—“the flow of organs, tissues, and body parts follows the modern routes of capital: from South to North, from third to first world, from poor to rich, from black and brown to white, and from female to male bodies” (“Report”).

<sup>131</sup> A *Newsweek* piece claims that even “top surgeons” at “top hospitals” in the U.S. are suspected of performing illegal operations (Interlandi). Moreover, the existence of illegal organ rings in the United States was confirmed in 2009 with the FBI’s arrest of Levy Izhak Rosenbaum for organ trafficking. Forty-three other U.S. citizens—including numerous New Jersey public officials—were connected to the case and indicted on charges of money laundering and political corruption (“44 Arrested”).

current practices of transplant tourism (663).<sup>132</sup> Even the more gothic aspects of Trigg's business resemble those of a kidney racket operating in Gurgaon, India, until 2008. This group lured impoverished men to their clinic with promises of work only to then demand a kidney instead; if these men refused, they were drugged at gunpoint and operated on anyway (Ramesh).

In other words, Silko's presentation of organ harvesting suggests the real-world effects of deregulation and increased flows of capital. The interrelationship of these concepts is best explained through David Harvey's theory of flexible accumulation. In the broadest sense, "[F]lexible accumulation . . . is marked by the direct confrontation with the rigidities of Fordism. It rests on flexibility with respect to labour processes, labour markets, products, and patterns of consumption" (Harvey 147). Fordism was characterized in a number of ways by the fixity of bodies. In the most literal sense, the assembly-line worker was fixed in place. His work life was fixed as well, bolted to a manufacturing center that was envisioned as permanent. Moreover, as union member, lifetime corporate employee, and citizen, the worker was bound to three aggregated bodies that were imagined as stable.

Flexible accumulation can be understood as the dismantling of this fixity and of the aggregated bodies of union and, to a degree, corporation. As a result

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<sup>132</sup> Transplant tourism is the practice of traveling to another country to obtain an organ. The WHO estimates that in certain developing nations "60 to 70 percent of all transplant surgeries involved the transfer of organs from those countries' citizens to 'transplant tourists' who came from the developed world" (Interlandi). This practice is producing a recognizable impact in many of the world's poorest nations. For instance, estimates indicate that "one out of every five adult males in some of Moldova's poorest villages has had his kidney removed" (Mozgoyva).

of deregulation, flexible accumulation produces flows of capital “that seem almost oblivious of the constraints of time and space that normally pin down material activities of production and consumption” (Harvey 164). In terms of production, this has led to a marked increase in temporary labor arrangements, diminished job security, and the flight of manufacturing facilities from center to periphery. These trends have led to the “revival of the ‘sweat shop,’” “mafia-like labour systems,” and the “rapid growth of ‘black,’ ‘informal,’ or ‘underground’ economies” (Harvey 152).

The tendency toward “flows” in flexible accumulation does not mean the elimination of all borders. Global capitalism relies on the flexibility of borders rather than their all-out elimination. While deregulation produces greater flows of capital and commodities, workers are still restricted by physical and social borders. As Laura Shackelford claims, “[T]here is much evidence to suggest that global capitalism profits from precisely such a discrepancy between increasingly global flows of capital and unskilled labor forces that are ‘restricted by national barriers.’” This trend is what Harvey refers to as “the way in which capitalism is becoming ever more tightly organized *through* dispersal, geographical mobility, and flexible responses in labour markets” (159).

Silko echoes these points when she draws attention to the fact that it is now far easier for Mexican goods to enter the U.S. than Mexican bodies: “While politicians and multinational corporations extol the virtues of NAFTA and free trade (in goods, not flesh), the ominous curtain is already up in a six-mile section at the border crossing at Mexicali” (*Yellow Woman* 122). Fences ensure that

Mexican bodies cannot cross the border, while neo-liberal policies ensure the goods they manufacture pass with ease. Even more pointedly, as the novel makes clear, Mexican “flesh” is allowed to cross the border, but not in the totality of a person. Like the goods they produce, Mexican body parts cross the border only as extracted products.<sup>133</sup>

Thus, while much has been said about the waning importance of the nation-state in late capitalism, with some even calling this a “post-national” era, this is not entirely the case.<sup>134</sup> There is no doubt that in many cases multi-national capitalism has led to the “empowerment of finance capital *vis-à-vis* the nation state” (Harvey 165). However, as Harvey claims, the nation state “retains important powers of labour disciplining” and the regulation of trade, which become all the more important in a consumerist society (Harvey 194). The U.S. body politic in some sense retains the fixity of a closed body, while the Mexican body, both individual and collective, becomes radically open to consumption. The American body politic determines what kind of incorporation it will allow in the name of bodily health. The Mexican body, however, has no such luxury. Both the

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<sup>133</sup> Organ theft and exploitation has, in fact, become a new form of bodily inscription; like Kafka’s punishment machine, the surgical incisions “teach” the subalterns their place in the world and inscribe them into their location in the West’s epistemological order. As with the prisoner in Kafka’s “In the Penal Colony,” the subaltern “deciphers” the “script” of “his wounds” (qtd. in Grosz 136). Thus, the result of this mutilation is “[a] fine network which links together the inscription of bodies and the production of knowledges” (Grosz 136).

<sup>134</sup> For instance, Fredric Jameson claims that “not merely the older city but even the nation-state itself has ceased to play a central functional and formal role in a process that has in a new quantum leap of capital prodigiously expanded beyond them, leaving them behind as ruined and archaic remains of earlier stages in the development of this mode of production” (412).



political body and the physical body are reduced to a series of usable parts to be harvested for the benefit and health of another.

In one sense, this flow of body parts across the border points to the ways in which capitalism reinforces nationalistic biopolitics. Organ removal clearly signals biopolitics, as the purpose of this corporeal violation is always in the name of life. Indeed, Trigg's murders have a distinctly biopolitical edge. He thinks of the homeless men as "human refuse," meaning implicitly that each one of his murders helps purify the communal body (444). He believes that he "could do the world a favor each week and connect a few of the stinking ones up in the back room and drain them dry" (386).<sup>135</sup> Biopolitics becomes necropolitics here as unwanted populations are selectively killed off and their organs used to bolster the desired population. As under the Nazi regime, once the fate of a marginalized person is written into a narrative of national health, he becomes "a living dead man", "a *faux vivant* on which it is permitted to intervene without any reservations" (Agamben, *Homo* 131, 164).

### Disinvestment and the Production of Bare Life

Hereafter the aim of society is no longer to keep its members alive, but quite the contrary, the question is how to dispose of them.

—Norman Mailer, *Barbary Shore*

In late capitalism, new modes of flexible production and the unrestricted flow of capital supposedly *minimize* the loss of capital associated with changes in

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<sup>135</sup> Serlo echoes these comments as well: "Some are only fit as organ donors. That is the only useful function left for the common rabble" (560).

the means or location of production. But what are minimized in this celebratory version of flexible accumulation are the social costs. In other words, the forces of nation and capital are quite aware that under the current mode of globalism the flow of capital into a new location more often than not means pulling capital out of a previously privileged location. For instance, when American companies open new manufacturing centers in developing nations, this almost always leads to a reduction in manufacturing within the U.S. Investment in one location thus leads to “disinvestment” in another. Thus, along with its “flexibility of investment,” globalism produces “a wholly new flexibility in disinvestment and abandonment” (Smith qtd. in Brigham 312).

Moreover, because of capitalism’s natural desire to minimize loss, disinvestment is employed for strategic advantage. In true capitalist fashion, the wreckage left in the wake of relocating capital (both human and material) is translated into new industries that recycle this “waste.” In this sense, globalism produces “investment in disinvestment” (Brigham 312).<sup>136</sup> Silko herself gives insight into this process. In an interview, she pointedly states:

The purpose of the worker in the U.S. after they have been replaced with machines is to provide a new frontier. Now—they want people to be sick because they make money out of their sickness, and if it comes down to the bottom line, they better die.

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<sup>136</sup> Along these lines, it is interesting to note that cannibalism has become a popular term in contemporary American business jargon, referring to a situation in which a company’s expansion cuts into its former profit base (as in the overexpansion of Starbucks, where a new chain location “cannibalizes” business from a old location). Thus, misplacing investment is cannibalistic. See Bartolovich on this use of the term in business texts.

Also, we have about one million people in prisons; it is an industry now. Poor unemployed people take drugs and end up in prison.

They make laws to enforce these on them, a new industry. Drugs and prisons—we pull apart the body and break it down—for profit.

Then the organ transplants . . . (*Conversations* 159)

What Silko intimates here is the collusion of government and capital in disinvestment as a new form of industry. What *Almanac of the Dead* shows is a feedback loop between business and state that turns abandonment into profit. And what is most chilling in Silko's account is how under globalism flows of capital are used strategically to create surplus populations that can be harvested for spare parts.<sup>137</sup>

As with late capitalism as a whole, Trigg's business success is predicated on the manipulation of laws, regulations, and borders. His cannibalistic

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<sup>137</sup> Silko's discussion of cannibalistic organ and skin harvesting in the context of capitalism's disinvestment in certain markets fits with the cannibalism and skin harvesting of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, which are also products of capitalist disinvestment. In the case of *Almanac of the Dead*, the capitalists plan this harvesting in the name of further profit. In the case of *The Texas Chainsaw Massacre*, the harvesting is an unexpected backlash, a result of the characters losing their jobs when the local slaughterhouse closed down. The *Chainsaw Massacre* films portray a world where much is beyond the control of the state and capital. For instance, *Texas Chainsaw Massacre 2* makes it clear that Chop Top's sadism was refined in Vietnam; the clear message is that state-sanctioned violence abroad led to unintended violence at home. The fear of reverse colonization here is evident: the violence of the periphery spills into the metropole. The overall message is the inability to control violence—it cannot be relegated to the killing fields of Vietnam or the killing floors of the slaughterhouse; it leaks into the sanctity of the home, and indeed, it becomes its center. *Almanac of the Dead's* vision is actually much darker, since the forces of state and capital seem to pull all the strings. The horrific message of *The Chainsaw Massacre* films is that current policies will produce cannibals. The horrific message of *Almanac of the Dead* is that the current policies are themselves cannibalistic, devouring populations rather than individuals.

harvesting is dependent on his “specialty in zoning laws,” which he uses to have a Tucson neighborhood “rezoned to allow Blood Plasma International” (379). In terms of the “harvests” themselves, his assistant, Peaches, is quick to note that “everything was done legally. She had seen court papers signed by a judge authorizing everything” (444).

But what is perhaps most poignant in *Almanac of the Dead* is how such manipulations can so easily create an abandoned population out of formerly privileged white workers and how former industrial spaces can be transformed overnight into ghettos. Trigg preys on dispossessed U.S. citizens, “cast-off white men, former wage earners from the mills and factories” (461); in the true style of flexible accumulation, he strategically locates his businesses to take full advantage of those that he thinks of as “human refuse” (444).<sup>138</sup> Rambo Roy notes that “[t]he northwest locations had been intended to exploit areas where copper strikers were unemployed” (389). Silko’s commentary on organ harvesting could describe the state of the poor in almost any country in the world, but by focusing on the issue in terms of the U.S., and specifically white veterans and industrial workers, Silko proves one of Agamben’s central points—today, *anyone* can be reduced to bare life. Race and citizenship no longer guarantee exceptionality: like the Native American and the Jew, who were used to make

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<sup>138</sup> The necessity of white victims can be explained in part through Trigg’s business in “frozen cadaver skin,” a product that he cannot procure from Mexican bodies since he “had found no market for dark cadaver skin” (389, 404).

skin lamps, the white, American male can now be reduced to spare parts and commodified.<sup>139</sup>

The production and exploitation of bare life is perhaps most evident in Trigg's plan to expand his business. He notes that "[t]he secret" to building his enterprise "was how to obtain the enormous supply of biomaterials and organs which was necessary" (663). His solution is Mexico, "where recent unrest and civil strife had killed hundreds a week" (404). In this scenario, the fixity of national boundaries creates a surplus population in Mexico and conflict along the border. Rather than posing a problem for capitalism, this produces a solution. The surplus population of Mexicans, who are figured as a potential drain on American resources, are grotesquely converted into usable products that bolster American health. Mexican citizens remain fixed—as "[r]efugees . . . thick as flies in barbed wire camps all along the U.S. border" (461)—while their bodily material flows freely.<sup>140</sup>

This contemporary collusion of state violence and capitalist exploitation is clear in other instances in the novel as well. Much of the book's grossest violence

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<sup>139</sup> Clinton echoes these thoughts on the spreading nature of bare life: "Lampshades made out of Native Americans by the conquistadors; lampshades made out of Jews. Watch out African-Americans! The next lampshades could be you!" (415).

<sup>140</sup> Just as Fordism created a new worker and a new consumer, so too does late capitalism. According to capitalist logic, "Accelerated turnover time in production would have been useless unless the turnover time in consumption was also reduced" (Harvey 156). In terms of creating large populations of abandoned peoples, themselves now commodities, capitalism requires an equally large number of consumers: people of ailing health who need these body parts. Capitalism's investment in sickness is thus at odds with a strictly biopolitical nationalism.

is implicitly linked to the Argentine Dirty Wars. It is no coincidence that the videos which figure so largely in the Mexican Police Chief's torture program are directed by "The Argentine," who "brags about the movies he made while he was in the Argentine army" (343, 344). Moreover, the tortures of the Dirty War are directly referenced in the novel: "For years there had been no shortage of 'raw material' [for torture porn] in Argentina. But recently there had been a drastic interruption. A change in government, so to speak" (343). Judge Arne alludes to the Argentine torture program later in the novel as well: "Somewhere the judge had read about a South American country, maybe Brazil or Argentina, where the police force had started by using torture to interrogate political prisoners but had soon become so addicted to torture they no longer wanted to leave work" (649).<sup>141</sup> But what is truly significant in Silko's portrayal of the Dirty Wars and the related Mexican torture program is the ways in which she links state violence and capitalist

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<sup>141</sup> Significantly, Scheper-Hughes claims that "during the Argentine Dirty War (of the 1970s) and during the military state years of Brazil (1964–84)," organ theft was employed in addition to "the usual tortures" ("Rotten Trade" 217; "Global Traffic" 202). The bodies of subversives and the oppressed "were mined for their reproductive capacities and sometimes even for their organs to serve the needs of 'supercitizens,' especially elite military families" (Scheper-Hughes, "Global Traffic" 202). Similar events occurred in South Africa as well. Under apartheid, doctors and "state pathologists" removed organs from the dead without familial consent and colluded with police to cover up the murder and mutilation of political dissidents (Scheper-Hughes, "Global Traffic" 204-205). In the South African context, organ theft is considered particularly nefarious because it "bears an uncanny resemblance to traditional witchcraft practices, *muti* (magical) murders in which body parts—especially skulls, hearts, eyes, and genitals—are removed," and, in some instances, cannibalized (Scheper-Hughes, "Global Traffic" 204). Politically-motivated mutilation continues today in China, where organs are harvested without consent from the victims of capital punishment. One of Scheper-Hughes associates claims, "what lies behind [China's] draconian anticrime campaign is a 'thriving medical business' that relies on prisoners' organs" (Scheper-Hughes, "New Cannibalism").

exploitation. In these cases, the torture of political subversives produces not only political profit, but dollars as well since the video recordings of these events are sold “on the side” to an “Argentine pornographic film company” (344, 342). Even more significantly, the video cameras for these torture videos were “gifts of the United States government” (341). Through these points, the novel reveals a new kind of military-industrial complex, a conjunction of multi-national capitalism and state violence that breaches all ethical borders.

In the end, Silko divulges a state of exception where the state can perpetrate any bodily violation, including the body’s very disappearance, and where capitalism can sinisterly transform this violence into profit.<sup>142</sup> *Almanac of the Dead* reveals that the collusion of global capitalism with opportunistic state and military forces has led to unprecedented numbers of people who are politically abandoned to unprecedented zones of exception, to non-spaces where the law is “in place without signification.” The nation, which Benedict Anderson defines as the structure that the citizen is willing to die for, has now become the structure that demands the citizen’s death.

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<sup>142</sup> Membe makes a similar point on the confluence of capitalist exploitation and the deployment of state and military power in Africa: “Correlated to the new geography of resource extraction is the emergence of an unprecedented form of governmentality that consists in the management of the multitudes. The extraction and looting of natural resources by war machines goes hand in hand with brutal attempts to immobilize and spatially fix whole categories of people or, paradoxically, to unleash them, to force them to scatter over broad areas no longer contained by the boundaries of a territorial state. As a political category, populations are then disaggregated into rebels, child soldiers, victims or refugees, or civilians incapacitated by mutilation or simply massacred on the model of ancient sacrifices, while the ‘survivors,’ after a horrific exodus, are confined in camps and zones of exception” (34).

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