enable trafficking (144). For instance, by tracing the dramatic economic changes taking place in Russia in the 1990s, Suchland notes that the privatizing of the Russian economy characterized the market as a masculinized space, segregating employment in ways it had not previously been under a socialist government. This change not only feminized and sexualized particular kinds of labor, but created new markets for sexuality; certain forms of feminine sexuality became a commodity (137–8). Thus “women … respond[ed] to these aforementioned constraints by pursuing a variety of entrepreneurial strategies” and such conditions precipitated migration (140). Yet, as Suchland points out, labor migration and its accompanying violence is often papered over by sex trafficking, resulting in the fact that “most legal cases that are processed [as trafficking] are related to sex trafficking” (156) despite the proliferation of “violence created by postsocialist transformations” (157).

Given the growth of carceral solutions to human rights violations like sex trafficking, Suchland’s attention to the erasure of capitalism’s violence provides a refreshing way to rethink the role of law, order, and the police in the context of human betterment. Carceral logics rely on notions of “bad choices,” victims and criminals, winners and losers. In its attention to various ways violence circulates to structure the conditions of life, Economies of Violence presents instead “a more critical approach to the economic and social dynamics of trafficking as a symptom of – not distinct from – our political and economic systems” (5). Contending that the post-socialist condition is constitutive to how sex trafficking discourses, and women’s human rights more broadly, take shape, Suchland’s book offers an innovative contribution to the emerging field of critical feminist trafficking studies.

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Fictions Inc.: The Corporation in Postmodern Fiction, Film, and Popular Culture
By Ralph Clare, New Brunswick, NJ: Rutgers University Press, 2014. 244pp. $26.95 (paper).
ISBN: 9780813565873

The discourse concerning the corporation’s role in American society has become heated in the wake of the Citizens United and Hobby Lobby rulings and social movements like Occupy Wall Street. The public is fascinated, confused, and (often) troubled about the extent of corporate power in America. A corporation possesses incredible legal traits (e.g., perpetual existence, limited liability, and a securitized structure), while also existing as a constitutional rights-bearing person under the law. In Fictions Inc., Ralph Clare engages in a fascinating cultural analysis of the corporation and the transformative role it plays in structuring human identity in modern global capitalism. Clare mines a wide array of postmodern texts to examine various representations of corporate bodies. He uses these representations as springboards to explain the larger structures and social ramifications of late capitalism. For Clare, the corporation is simultaneously a nexus for capital’s forces, the motor that propels the system, and capitalism’s crystalizing “face.” These attributes make the corporation the ideal site through which to comprehend the
social and cultural impact of modern capitalism. The book’s larger goal is to help us reach a new understanding of the corporation in order to grasp the political possibilities that exist beyond capitalism’s artificial boundaries.

Clare’s study sustains a tension between close examinations of specific postmodern corporations and larger critiques of late capitalism’s social consequences. Indeed, “There is always a tension, whether heightened or relaxed, when a corporation is figured in popular culture because, whether consciously or not, some kind of comment is being made about capitalism itself” (114). He enlists the theories of Marx, Jameson, Žižek, Baudrillard, and others in unearthing these conscious and unconscious socio-economic commentaries. The book’s six chapters engage an eclectic group of texts. In addition to canonical works like Pynchon’s The Crying of Lot 49 and DeLillo’s White Noise, Clare includes unexpected sources of highbrow corporate critique, including the film Tommy Boy, television’s The Office, and Matt Groening’s comic Work is Hell, to examine the corporate production of identity.

The tension between analyzing specific corporations and general critiques of capitalism works best in the final two chapters. Chapter 5 employs William Gaddis’s J R to show how the emerging multinational corporation and its “family” of subsidiaries has “the power to affect how the family is constructed discursively,” whereby the corporate “rhetoric of family merges with capital’s master narrative, and the ‘play to win’ capitalist ethic gives birth to a new kind of family and new kinds of social relations” (155). Juxtaposing increased corporate size and the disruption of the nuclear family in the 1970s offers an interesting analysis of how evolving corporate forms restructure both the capitalist system and social bodies within that system. Clare shows a sophisticated understanding of corporate branding during the multinational corporation’s nascent stages in the neoliberal era. The final chapter focuses on Richard Powers’s novel Gain and follows the Clare Soap and Chemical Company’s evolving corporate form throughout America’s history. Clare relies on the “long view” of corporate capitalism to provide a precise history of the corporate form’s various guises. This analysis follows the corporation’s growth from the colonial joint-stock company into a securitized corporation, a publicly-traded national corporation, and ultimately an international conglomerate. Clare tracks corporate evolution and explains its impact on the identity of Laura Bodey, a character who undergoes various identity changes due to her interactions with the corporation that caused her terminal cancer. These parallel stories of transformation allow Clare to observe that “such an endless succession of ‘selves’ underscores the fiction of the corporate self and personhood for what it is – an endlessly deferred identity contingent on an endless accumulation of capital” (169). As the corporation goes, so do we.

The balance between specificity and generality becomes somewhat precarious in areas of the book. This imbalance arises when the analysis conflates corporations with non-corporate entities and reiterates capitalist axioms that have little basis in corporate law. When this occurs, there is a danger that “corporations” or corporate truisms serve as perfunctory entry points for making sweeping claims about capitalism. For instance, while I admire Clare’s choice to include the film Ghostbusters in his analysis, his assertions are incorrect that “What the Ghostbusters are, of course, is a corporation. They are a private company that is highly paid to deal with certain ‘disturbances’” (95). The Ghostbusters’s business is more likely a general partnership. (Instead of
issuing securities to fund the venture, Drs. Spengler, Stantz, and Venkman borrow from a bank to start their business.) A partnership is a fundamentally different business association than a corporation. As a partnership, the Ghostbusters’s business would lack most of a corporation’s legal powers (e.g., general partnerships lack perpetual existence, limited liability, and securitization). The conflation of a business partnership with a corporation problematizes the subsequent analysis of the Ghostbusters’s “corporate” role in the neoliberal gentrification of an “increasingly corporatized” New York City (96). Indeed, the book’s claims about white corporate gentrification might be enriched through a recognition that the Ghostbuster partnership invites a black man, Winston Zeddemore, to join its ranks.

Similarly, the book relies on several unfounded assumptions about corporate law and governance that, if remedied, could make Clare’s astute observations even more incisive. The book repeatedly claims that corporations are legally bound to maximize profit (or, as corporate apologists say, to “maximize shareholder value”). This catchphrase is a myth that corporate actors perpetuate to rationalize unpopular executive decisions, like downsizing and outsourcing. The business judgment rule, which gives management tremendous leeway in directing the corporation, makes clear that maximizing corporate profit is not an enforceable legal dictate (Shlensky v. Wrigley, 237 NE 2d 776). Contrary to Clare’s position, there is no “legal corporate directive” to engage in antisocial corporate conduct to maximize profit. Consequently, he might consider reformulating his larger claims about capitalism that rest on this premise (79). The book likewise bases central claims regarding familial structures on observations about the “falling away, or impossibility, of continuing familial ownership of corporations as they grow” within the structures of global corporate capitalism (164). Massive, family-owned corporations like Walmart, Berkshire Hathaway, and Koch Industries certainly complicate this position. Similarly, I share the author’s distrust of corporate capitalism, but such a distrust seems insufficient grounds to claim that a “corporation is not a democratic entity.” Corporations actually operate very democratically: shareholders elect a board of directors through a majority vote, who then (as representatives of the shareholders) make major corporate decisions through another majority vote. Yes, this is a “pay-for-play” democracy, but this fact perhaps makes the corporation an even better metaphor for American “democracy.” Perpetuating such corporate fictions underscores the book’s repeated warning that misconceptions about the “basic structure of the corporation” tend to produce a myopic “morality play” within critiques of capitalism (107).

These minor points regarding the corporate form do not dampen the impact of Clare’s analysis of corporate capitalism at a higher theoretical level. His insights into the increasingly decentered nature of corporations and capital are compelling. Likewise, his analysis of the 1986 film Gung Ho in the context of American anxiety over the success of Japanese zaibatsu (corporate conglomerates) in the automobile industry raises excellent questions about our nation’s strained relationship with labor unions and our fear of a truly “free market” economy. Clare’s book serves as an interesting introduction to the general corporate form and provides an exciting glimpse of what society might become if the “global multitude” transcends corporate capitalism and channels corporate productivity toward more egalitarian ends. Clare’s recognition of the reciprocal and symbiotic relationship between evolving corporate forms and the “vast and ungraspable enterprise”
of late capitalism will certainly help shed light on both subjects for many readers. *Fictions Inc.* is a valuable addition to the growing discourse around the corporation’s role in America’s past, present, and future.

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**Sovereignty and Superheroes**


Comics, particularly superhero comics, have historically attracted something of a bad name: at best, they are denigrated as superficial, juvenile entertainment; at worst, they are treated as a real threat to the literacy and morality of children. (For an authoritative and detailed examination of comics’ history of censorship and denigration, see Amy Nyberg’s *Seal of Approval* (University Press of Mississippi, 1998) in the U.S. context and Martin Barker’s *A Haunt of Fears* (Pluto Press, 1984) in the U.K. context). Accordingly, until the past decade or so, comics have been woefully ignored as an object of critical study.

Now a movement to advance critical study of the comics medium is well under way, with recent works such as Thierry Groensteen’s *The System of Comics* (University Press of Mississippi, 2007), and Hannah Miodrag’s *Comics and Language* (University Press of Mississippi, 2013) pushing analysis forward. Neal Curtis’s critical engagement with the central legal and political theme of sovereignty in the superhero genre contributes to this broad movement, locating superheroes as an object of deep relevance to core jurisprudential questions.

Curtis’s premise is that we can read superheroes “as meditations on the problematic concept of sovereignty” (1), and thereby gain a better understanding of both sovereignty and superheroes. He works through case studies of various superheroes across the DC and Marvel universes, from a variety of different historical and contemporary periods. Analyses such as Curtis’s could always have used different materials and different examples, and since many superheroes have been narrated in continuity for decades, any engagement with this history is necessarily incomplete. But the specific examples chosen by Curtis are tactical, betraying an immense knowledge of the canon and reflecting not only core elements of these heroes’ characters and principles, but also their engagement with critical problems in sovereignty. Curtis does on occasion feel the need (as many comics scholars still do) to justify the seriousness of his study, with short remarks against traditional assumptions of comics’ simplicity. But these comments are rare, constituting mere decoration to the critical thrust of the work.

*Sovereignty and Superheroes* begins with an examination of Superman, highlighting his connection with the sun (it is our yellow sun that gives Superman his powers) that, in Plato, is symbolic of “the Good” (16–22). This plays into Superman’s embodiment of our aspiration to challenge and transform our given world for the better (22–31), from which derives his sovereign legitimacy. Curtis then moves on to Captain America – often