

# TITLES AND TOPOI

## *Narrative Structure and Organizational Devices in the Work of Thomas Pynchon*

Xavier Marcó del Pont

PhD  
Department of English  
Royal Holloway University of London

2013

## *Declaration of Authorship*

I, Xavier Marcó del Pont, hereby declare that this thesis and the work presented in it is entirely my own. Where I have consulted the work of others this is always clearly stated.

Signed:

Date:

## *Abstract*

This thesis will extend the critical supposition common in studies of Thomas Pynchon that the author's novels bear a direct structural correlation to their respective titles. Taking as a starting point Samuel Cohen's analysis of the importance of the ampersand in *Mason & Dixon* (1997), Joseph W. Slade and Tony Tanner's parabolic models for *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), and Harold Bloom's observations on the V-shape in *V.* (1963), I intend to apply an analogous logic to *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), *Vineland* (1990), *Against the Day* (2006) and *Inherent Vice* (2009), proceeding chronologically across Pynchon's entire novelistic oeuvre. With the exception of Cohen, who makes *Mason & Dixon's* titular ampersand the crux of his reading of the novel, critics have simply gestured towards a connection between Pynchon's titles and possible visuo-geometrical narrative structures, without delving into the broader implications of this approach or basing their readings of the novels on this titulo-structural correspondence. Recuperating this notion, this study will extract it from the realm of the passing remark and the interesting observation, both analyzing it and proposing it as a form of analysis in itself. By attending to the formal relationship between titles and topoi in Pynchon's novels, not only will this thesis offer new interpretations of this canonical author's body of work, but it will also heed to the thematic specificity of each individual text, encompassing the multiplicity of Pynchon's expansive fictions. This study will be the first to attempt a systematic, coherent analysis of the interrelation between the structuring devices of Pynchon's novels and their titles. In this way, this thesis constitutes a unique contribution to Pynchon scholarship and, more broadly, the field of American Studies.

# Contents

<i>Acknowledgements</i>	v
<i>Dedication</i>	vii
<i>Abbreviations</i>	viii
Introduction	1
1. The Early Novels I: <i>V.</i> 's Chevron	20
2. The Early Novels II: <i>Gravity's Rainbow's</i> Parabola	45
3. Oedipa, the Oracle, and the Riddle: Lost in the Semiopolis of <i>The Crying of Lot 49</i>	71
4. Zoyd in TV-Land, or, Through the Television Screen and What Prairie Found There: <i>Vineland's</i> Tendrillous Vines	100
5. The Shortest Distance from Here to There: Tangled Knots and Straight Lines in <i>Mason &amp; Dixon</i>	133
6. Damnable Stillness: An Anatomy of Counter-Photography in <i>Against the Day</i>	158
7. 'This little parenthesis of light, might close after all': The End of the Era in <i>Inherent Vice</i>	187
Epilogue. At the Bleeding Edge of Narrative	217
<i>Works Consulted</i>	221

## Acknowledgements

More people than I could possibly mention in the so-called *acknowledgements* page of this thesis have helped make the completion of this project possible. In the course of my doctoral studies I have relied on the help and support, academic and otherwise, of a number of people large enough to populate an imaginary novel by Thomas Pynchon. I first stumbled my way through the pages of Pynchon's 'gateway novel' *The Crying of Lot 49* on a Shimla-bound train from New Delhi. A year later –having reread it a number of times– I first discussed it within the context of a Master's course with Robert Eaglestone, to whom I am grateful. I also wish to thank Alejandro Marquínez, Martina Canessa, and Steve Morrison, who at different points in my life encouraged me to pursue my interest in literature.

As a PhD candidate I met and befriended a number of my contemporaries, among them Deborah Lilley, Daniel O'Gorman, Emilia Borowska, Matthew Sangster, and Jonathan Buckmaster at Royal Holloway, and Zara Dinnen, Tony Venezia, Bianca Legget, and Halvard Haug at Birkbeck, all of whom have proven to be outstanding conversationalists and avid coffee drinkers. The list would not be complete without my contemporaries in the field of Pynchon studies: Nina Engelhardt, Yorgos Maragos, Jesse Sherwood, Joanna Freer, Richard Moss, Matthias Mosch, Martin Eve, Ali Chetwynd, and Simon de Bourcier. I am grateful to Zofia Kolbuszewska, Andrzej Antoszek, Tomasz Basiuk, and Pawel Frelik, organizers of International Pynchon Week 2010 in Lublin, Poland, as I am to Samuel Thomas and Martin Eve, organizers of International Pynchon Week 2013 in Durham, England. No one I have ever met at these academic reunions has been any less than kind and generous. I also wish to thank my secondary supervisor Doug Cowie and the entire Department of English at Royal Holloway. Needless to say, my greatest debt is to my supervisor Tim Armstrong, without whose unyielding support, invaluable advice, keen eye, kind words, and indefatigable spirit I would not have written more than a few pages. Tim (you will no doubt cringe at the adjectival profusion of the previous sentence), thank you. For the strengths of this thesis I owe a debt of gratitude to a vast number of people, many of whom I have mentioned above; its weaknesses, on the other hand, are all my own.

On a personal level, my friends from the world outside of academia have always known how to keep me grounded and put a smile on my face, even after I coerced some of them to read Pynchon's novels: Greg, Mark, Nathan, Emma, Rosheen, Daniel, Leo, Katerina, Adam, Pablo, Alejandro, and – last but certainly not least – Ignacio. I also wish to extend my gratitude to the Sutherland-Seu and Lemoine-Gorgas families, who have always treated me as one of their own.

I must also thank Camilla Sutherland for her unending support and for the many weeks and copious amounts of sunlight she forewent when I needed advice, help, or simply a hug. Lastly, I cannot thank my family enough for their love and encouragement over the years: my uncle Vianney, my grandparents, Tata, Papé and Mamé; my parents, Horacio and Brigitte; and what is without a doubt the best set of siblings anyone could ever hope for, Agustina and Simón.

## *Dedication*

To Charles, Henriette, and Patrick, whom I miss every day.

## *Abbreviations*

The novels of Thomas Pynchon will be referenced within the body of the text throughout, utilizing the following abbreviations:

- V.*      *V.* London: Vintage, 2000.  
*CL49*   *Crying of Lot 49*. London: Vintage, 2000.  
*GR*     *Gravity's Rainbow*. London: Picador, 1973.  
*VL*     *Vineland*. London: Minerva, 1991.  
*M&D*   *Mason & Dixon*. New York: Henry Holt, 1997.  
*AD*     *Against the Day*. London: Vintage, 2007.  
*IV*     *Inherent Vice*. London: Jonathan Cape, 2009.

# Introduction

## *Titles and Topoi*

“Must a name mean something?” Alice asked doubtfully.

“Of course it must,” Humpty Dumpty said with a short laugh: “my name means the shape I am – and a good handsome shape it is, too. With a name like yours, you might be any shape, almost.”

Lewis Carroll, *Through the Looking Glass*

In *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years*, Brian Boyd quotes Ross Wetzsteon’s reminiscence of a trick Nabokov liked to play on his students at Cornell University. ‘I want you to copy this exactly as I draw it,’ he would begin, stating he would represent in graphic form the different motifs of Charles Dickens’ *Bleak House*. On a blackboard he would then chalk the themes of inheritance, generations, social consciousness, and so on, breaking only to reiterate his initial statement: ‘I want you to be sure to copy this exactly as I draw it.’<sup>1</sup> Finally, he would trace the last thematic diagram, by which point his students would come to the realisation that they had been fooled into drawing a smirking Cheshire cat, one that ‘smiled out of [their] notebooks in mockery of the didactic approach to literature.’<sup>2</sup> Knowing that Thomas Pynchon attended Cornell University whilst Nabokov was working at the institution and may have witnessed one such lecture,<sup>3</sup> and being aware of Pynchon’s predisposition towards mischief and his fondness of patterns, this study will attempt to shed light on the importance of the visuo-geometric organisational devices in the author’s novelistic *oeuvre*. As Samuel Cohen states, ‘Pynchon’s big novels have all had central geometric figures, which are even referred to in their titles: *V.* (1963) has the chevron, *Gravity’s Rainbow* (1973) has a parabola, and

---

<sup>1</sup> Ross Wetzsteon quoted in Brian Boyd, *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years* (New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993), 179.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 179-180.

<sup>3</sup> See Charles Hollander, ‘Pynchon’s Politics: The Presence of an Absence,’ *Pynchon Notes* 26-27 (1990): 12; Harold Bloom, ‘Biography of Thomas Pynchon,’ in *Bloom’s Major Novelists: Thomas Pynchon*, ed. Harold Bloom (Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2003), 12.

*Mason & Dixon* (1997) has the line.’<sup>4</sup> Salman Rushdie also acknowledges this relationship between titles and narrative structure in Pynchon’s work: ‘One could consider, for example, the significance of the letter V in Mr. Pynchon’s oeuvre. His novel “V.” was actually V-shaped, two narratives zeroing in on a point, and “Gravity’s Rainbow” was the flight path of a V-2 rocket, a deadly parabola that could also be described as an inverted V.’<sup>5</sup> Taking as a starting point Cohen’s analysis of the importance of the ampersand in *Mason & Dixon*, Joseph W. Slade and Tony Tanner’s parabolic models for *Gravity’s Rainbow*,<sup>6</sup> and Harold Bloom’s observations on the V-shape in *V*,<sup>7</sup> I intend to apply an analogous logic to *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), *Vineland* (1990), *Against the Day* (2006) and *Inherent Vice* (2009).

With the exception of Cohen, who makes *Mason & Dixon*’s titular ampersand the crux of his reading of the novel, critics have for the most part gestured towards a connection between Pynchon’s titles and possible visuo-geometrical narrative structures, without delving into the broader implications of this approach or basing their readings of the novels on this titulo-structural correspondence. This thesis will be the first to fully realise a systematic, coherent analysis of the interrelation between the structuring devices of Pynchon’s novels and their titles. Recuperating this notion, this study will extract it from the realm of the passing remark and the interesting observation and put it into practice. In this way it will contribute to existing Pynchon scholarship and the field of American Studies more broadly.

The thesis will proceed chronologically across Pynchon’s entire body of work, with the exception of *Gravity’s Rainbow* and *The Crying of Lot 49*, which will be transposed so as to facilitate a comparative reading of the former’s topoi with those of *V*. Through this synoptic approach I intend to develop a unifying theory regarding the connections between the novels’ narrative structures and the devices suggested by their titles. The thesis will endeavour to provide an all-encompassing, coherent reading of Pynchon’s *oeuvre*, focussing on his novels,

---

<sup>4</sup> Samuel Cohen, ‘*Mason & Dixon* & the Ampersand,’ *Twentieth Century Literature* 48, no. 3 (2002): 266-267.

<sup>5</sup> Salman Rushdie, ‘Still Crazy After All These Years,’ *The New York Times*, January 14, 1990.

<sup>6</sup> Joseph W. Slade, *Thomas Pynchon* (New York: Peter Lang, 1990). In particular Chapter 6, ‘The Physics of Heaven: History, Science, and Technology in *Gravity’s Rainbow*,’ 193-220; Tony Tanner, ‘V. and V-2,’ in *Pynchon: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Edward Mendelson, 16-55 (London: Prentice-Hall, 1978).

<sup>7</sup> Harold Bloom, ed., *Bloom’s Major Novelists: Thomas Pynchon* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House Publishing, 2003), 47.

whilst intermittently making reference to his early short fiction and drawing from his occasional incursions into non-fiction. Pynchon's novels inform and reinforce one another, each of them contributing to a common analeptic and proleptic context. Even though the novels may sometimes initially seem to be assemblies of apparently segregated events, they are not only coherent in themselves, but – more pertinently to this study – they are not each an isolated, impermeable episode: they share recognisable motifs, concerns, and patterns. In addition to this, Pynchon's novels share a common universe of characters, geographical locations, and even financial corporations. The Traverse family tree, for instance, is both a part of *Vineland* and *Against the Day*; Yoyodyne, a business conglomerate, appears in *V.* and *The Crying of Lot 49*; Kahuna Airlines in both *Vineland* and *Inherent Vice*; and the Bodine family is present in at least *V.*, *Mason & Dixon* and *Against the Day*, just as Wendell 'Mucho' Maas is in *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Vineland*. This final example suggests that the fictional city of San Narciso and the town of Vineland coexist in the amended California of Pynchon's fictional universe, allowing for a number of possible intertextual connections. Pynchon's fictions are both encyclopedic and expansive. Given the nature of the author's fiction, in this study each individual novel will be analysed within the context of his *oeuvre* as a whole, with comparative readings being offered where appropriate.

Throughout this thesis, critical and theoretical approaches are employed where they are most appropriate to the study of each individual novel, rather than a single critico-theoretical framework being arbitrarily and reductively applied to Pynchon's diverse, semi-centennial opus. Ideas posited by *titrologist* critics and thinkers have been central to my theoretical collocation of title and topoi. Gerard Genette's *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*<sup>8</sup> and Giancarlo Maiorino's *First Pages: A Poetics of Titles*<sup>9</sup> have proven to be indispensable. Similarly, sections from works whose focus lies elsewhere, such as Anne Ferry's *The Title to the Poem*,<sup>10</sup> and Hugh Haughton's 'The Purloined Title: Contemporary Irish Poems on Paintings,'<sup>11</sup> among others, have nonetheless contributed towards my thinking on

---

<sup>8</sup> Gérard Genette, *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*, trans. Jane E. Lewin (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

<sup>9</sup> Giancarlo Maiorino, *First Pages: A Poetics of Titles* (University Park, PA: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008).

<sup>10</sup> Anne Ferry, *The Title of the Poem* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996).

<sup>11</sup> Hugh Haughton, 'The Purloined Title: Contemporary Irish Poems on Paintings,' in *Seeing and Saying: Self-Referentiality in British and American Literature* eds. Detlev Gohrbandt and Bruno von Lutz (Frankfurt am Main: Peter Lang, 1998), 90.

the nature, history, and critical implications of titles more generally. My approach, particularly in what regards Pynchon's novels, has diverged from the aforementioned studies in one crucial aspect: this thesis will consider the important correlation between title and structure. It is my assertion that Pynchon constructs his novels as 'concrete prose', a term coined by Brian McHale, fashioned after the notion of concrete poetry.<sup>12</sup> Whilst concrete poems are those in which the typographical configuration of the constituent parts of the poem bears great importance, the poem's arrangement creating a distinct shape, in Pynchon's novels the structural emblem is a concept that is clearly discernible, yet not a visually perceivable design. Although I borrow McHale's term, I do nevertheless redefine it. The authors McHale discusses – Raymond Federman, Steve Katz, Christine Brooke-Rose, Ronald Sukenick, William H. Gass – and the samples he employs to illustrate the notion of concrete prose are just as easily definable as insertions of concrete poetry into a novelistic context. Concrete prose can be defined as an engineered narrative in which the structural emblem, although not a *visually* perceivable design, conjures up in the reader's mind a clearly discernible visual figure.

As I have stated above, from the field of Pynchon studies I draw predominantly from the observations made by Tanner, both in his short 1982 study on Pynchon and in his contribution to the foundational volume *Pynchon: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Edward Mendelson.<sup>13</sup> The four volumes on Pynchon's work edited by Harold Bloom have also provided me with a wide range of diverse scholarly voices, the first two volumes documenting the critical opinions on the author's output in the late 1970s to early 1980s, whilst the two more recent collections update their synoptic view of Pynchon scholarship.<sup>14</sup> Bloom's own remarks on the arc-like structure of *Gravity's Rainbow*, however fleeting, and Slade's thorough book-length study *Thomas Pynchon* (1990), one of the earliest to examine the author's concern with technology, have both informed my own

---

<sup>12</sup> Brian McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction* (London: Routledge, 2001), 179-196, in particular 184-193.

<sup>13</sup> See Tony Tanner, *Thomas Pynchon* (London: Methuen, 1982) and Tony Tanner, 'V. and V-2', in *Pynchon: A Collection of Critical Essays* ed. Edward Mendelson (Englewood Cliffs, NJ: Prentice-Hall, 1978); part of this latter paper was originally published as 'Caries and Cabals,' Chapter 7 of Tanner's *City of Words: American Fiction 1950-1970* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1971).

<sup>14</sup> Harold Bloom, ed., *Modern Critical Interpretations: Thomas Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow*, (New York: Chelsea House, 1986); Harold Bloom, ed., *Modern Critical Views: Thomas Pynchon* (New York: Chelsea House, 1986); Harold Bloom, ed., *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Thomas Pynchon* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2003); Harold Bloom, ed., *Bloom's Major Novelists: Thomas Pynchon* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2003).

reading of *Gravity's Rainbow*.<sup>15</sup> More recently, Cohen in his 2002 article '*Mason & Dixon & the Ampersand*,' the content of which was later expanded for inclusion in his 2009 study *After the End of History: American Fiction in the 1990s*, has drawn me into a dialogue on the importance of the symbol of the line and the emblem of the titular ampersand in Pynchon's 1997 novel.<sup>16</sup> I, thus, intend to investigate, in E.M. Forster's words, 'books with patterns so definite that a pictorial image sums them up.'<sup>17</sup>

Certain key themes and specific critical suppositions have dominated Pynchon scholarship and the reading of his work for decades. Among those most prevalent are: entropy, both literal and as metaphor; history, presented as purely a narrative, in conjunction with mythmaking and etiology; the counterculture and the downtrodden; the American project and the 'subjunctive America'; and, lastly, paranoia, which David Foster Wallace goes as far as to characterize as Pynchon's 'unifying topoi.'<sup>18</sup> Whilst my reading of these novels does not examine paranoia *per se* throughout, its critical approach both purposefully echoes and is analogous to the search for structures which lies at the heart of Pynchon's characters' paranoiac tendencies. Whilst this thesis undoubtedly intersects with all of the themes mentioned above, it will focus on bringing to the fore the matter of the relation between the work's titles and their organizational devices, which, as I have stated previously, is all too often granted but a few cursory remarks. Through this overlooked methodology, I will offer new interpretations of Pynchon's novels, highlighting further themes that are crucial to our understanding of the author's work. In this manner, this thesis will both breathe new life into Pynchon's canonical works, whilst contributing to the emerging field of analysis of his most recent texts.

### **A Title, by Any Other Name**

Along with other paratextual elements, titles are the entry point to the text: without even having read a novel or short story, one may still know it *by name*.

---

<sup>15</sup> Joseph W. Slade, *Thomas Pynchon*, 2nd Edition (New York: Peter Lang, 1990), originally published in New York by Warner Paperbacks in 1974, as part of the short-lived *Writers for the 70's* series.

<sup>16</sup> Samuel Cohen, *After the End of History: American Fiction in the 1990s* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2009).

<sup>17</sup> E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (New York: Harcourt, 1985), 149.

<sup>18</sup> David Foster Wallace, *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again* (New York: Little, Brown, 1997), 47.

Unlike many of a narrative's other paratexts, titles only rarely change over time, giving them a privileged position over cover designs, indexes, colophons, and logotypes. The titles of Pynchon's narratives will, therefore, constitute the entry point through which I will approach their analysis.

To state that the relationship between novels (and other works of art) and their titles is equivalent to that between people and their names would be simplistic and inaccurate. The naming of people and places is almost unavoidably speculative: it says more about the expectations and hopes of those naming them than it does about the trajectory of those being named. The nominal choice cannot be anything but tentative, for it is made before the newly-named person has even learned how to walk and his or her course through life still remains unknowable. In this respect, a person's name is the equivalent of a working title, and naming a person is tantamount to etching the title of a novel in stone before the text has even been written.

Artworks, on the other hand, may have tentative names attached to them from the earliest of drafts or sketches, but these titles remain subject to change until the very moment before they are made public. Therefore, the titles of works of art and, in particular, novels possess a certain epithetic quality, as the author may look paternally or maternally at their creation once it is complete and decide that the name bestowed upon them when the project consisted of but a few pages no longer rings true, no longer accurately describes the now finished whole. Pynchon's 1973 novel *Gravity's Rainbow*, for example, was originally entitled *Mindless Pleasures*,<sup>19</sup> a title under which it was never published. Provisional titles of works of art are, by their very nature, subject to alteration until the author declares the work finished and allows it to enter the public sphere. The drawing of an analogy with a person's name here may be beneficial. At the moment of our birth, we are given a tentative name by our parents, a name that does not encapsulate who we are nor who we will become. A name of such qualities will only be accessible to us in retrospect, once we (like the published text) are finished. Such 'names' take the 'name *and epithet*' form, in very much the same way in which our obituaries will encapsulate *some aspect* of our being that our names on their own never could. The title of a work of art is one such name: an epithetic name. Whilst the provisional title *Mindless Pleasures* would find its human nominal

---

<sup>19</sup> Steven Weisenburger, *A Gravity's Rainbow Companion: Sources and Contexts for Pynchon's Novel*, 2<sup>nd</sup> Revised Edition (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 120.

equivalent in the name 'Charles Lutwidge Dodgson,' the title *Gravity's Rainbow* is in itself an epithetic micro-narrative which is closer to 'Charles Lutwidge Dodgson (1832-1898): English writer and mathematician who, under the *nom-de-plume* Lewis Carroll authored *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*, its sequel *Through the Looking-Glass*, and – among other works – the poems "The Hunting of the Snark" and "Jabberwocky.'" In other words, a wealth of information regarding the finished novel is embedded in its title. In the case of Pynchon's work, it is the narrative's key topoi and organizational devices that are contained within their *titles*, in line with Theodor Adorno's characterization of this paratextual element:

The task of every title is paradoxical; it eludes rational generalization as much as self-contained specificity. This becomes evident in the impossibility of titles nowadays. Actually, the paradox of the work of art is recapitulated and condensed in the title. *The title is the microcosm of the work*, the scene of the aporia of literature itself.<sup>20</sup>

The *name* of a work of art is thus intrinsic to our understanding of it, in a manner in which other names – such as those of people, ships, etc. – never will be. Pynchon addresses this very issue of the nature of names, both tentative and definitive, in an evocative passage at the beginning of his 1997 novel *Mason & Dixon*:

seeking to become but the sleek Purity of Ink upon Paper, trusting in the large-scale behaviour of Destiny to bring him, even in this wretched Lull, a Ship, any Ship,-- until he saw the *Seahorse*, and amended this to, well, *almost* any Ship....

It had done his Hopes little good to see her so wounded, tho' he understood the Immortality of Ships,-- new masts stepp'd in and Yards set, Riggers all over her, new preventers and Swifeters and Futtock-Staves, one miserable reeving at a time,-- yet slow as Clock-hands, Wood, Hemp, and Canvas Resurrection would proceed. Three weeks and she was whole again, waiting in Sutton Pool. (*M&D* 50)

Here the reader encounters an unambiguous reference to the paradox of the Ship of Theseus and what Pynchon terms 'the Immortality of Ships.' This philosophical paradox was first delineated by Plutarch, who set it forth in his 'Life of Theseus':

The ship on which Theseus sailed with the youths and returned in safety, the thirty-oared galley, was preserved by the Athenians

---

<sup>20</sup> Theodor W. Adorno, 'Titles', in *Notes to Literature: Volume Two*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992), 4, emphasis added.

down to the time of Demetrius Phalereus. They took away the old timbers from time to time, and put new and sound ones in their places, so that the vessel became a standing illustration for the philosophers in the mooted question of growth, some declaring that it remained the same, others that it was not the same vessel.<sup>21</sup>

Since its original formulation, the paradox has been considered and reconfigured by a number of notable philosophers, including Thomas Hobbes and John Locke.<sup>22</sup> Conversely, the paradox of the Ship of Theseus can be seen as a reformulation of Heraclitus' dictum regarding the impossibility of stepping into the same river twice. Pynchon's 2009 novel *Inherent Vice* contains a playful subversion of the paradox of the Ship of Theseus, as the name of the antagonistic force in the novel is also the name of a ship, 'the Golden Fang', previously known as 'the Preserved.' The notions of permanence through time and nomenclative alteration, as well as the maritime setting of Plutarch's formulation of the paradox are all echoed in *Inherent Vice*, the very title of which relates to the fundamental tendency of certain physical objects to decay: canvas sails will tear, wooden planks will rot. In the passage from *Mason & Dixon* quoted above, the 'Immortality of Ships,' with their 'Wood, Hemp, and Canvas Resurrection' is juxtaposed with 'the sleek Purity of Ink upon Paper.' The names of ships, cities, and people are but provisional, as Pynchon himself acknowledges in *V.* where, in chapter eleven, 'The Confessions of Fausto Maijstral,' we are told that Fausto felt himself change at certain points in his life, to the point where his previous epithetic name would no longer denote who he now was. Therefore, he shifts from 'Fausto Maijstral the First' to 'Maijstral the Second,' then 'Fausto Maijstral III' (V. 306) and '[h]is successor, Fausto IV' (V. 307) highlighting the provisional nature of human names. The title of a work of art differs from the names of ships, cities, or people in that it is given to the work after its completion, after it has finished *evolving* for good and is, thus, epithetic<sup>23</sup> in addition to being nomenclative.

---

<sup>21</sup> Plutarch, *Lives: Volume I*, trans. Bernadotte Perrin (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1998), 49.

<sup>22</sup> See Michael Clark, *Paradoxes from A to Z*, 2<sup>nd</sup> edition (New York: Routledge, 2007), 207-211, for a brief explanation of the paradox and a cursory overview of some of the questions it raises. For a more comprehensive survey see Roderick M. Chisholm, *Person and Object: A Metaphysical Study* (London: Routledge, 2004), in particular Chapter 3, 'Identity through Time.'

<sup>23</sup> The importance of the epithet is made evident in Pynchon's novels even at a microcosmic level, as can be seen in the author's idiosyncratic approach at naming his characters: 'introduction by epithet.' See William Logan, 'Back to the Future: On Thomas Pynchon's *Against the Day*,' *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 83, no. 3 (2007): 226-247.

The importance of the titles of Pynchon's novels in particular can be seen both in the significance critics have placed on their interpretation as narrative emblems and in the specific case of French translations of his novels. *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow* were first translated into French in the mid-1970s by Michel Doury, who would also translate works by John Hawkes, Carlos Castaneda, and John Cheever, among others. The former was originally published in France by Plon under the puzzling title of *San Francisco cry*,<sup>24</sup> whilst the latter would be severed in half for no apparent reason, whilst also remaining in English: *Rainbow*.<sup>25</sup> Seuil would republish both novels – still Doury's translations – in the mid-to-late 1980s with their titles revised, reverted to their original meanings: *Vente à la criée du lot 49*<sup>26</sup> and *L'Arc-en-ciel de la gravité*.<sup>27</sup> The notability of the original titles of the French translations lies not only in their misprision of Pynchon's titles, but also in the fact that the titles themselves remained not merely untranslated, but rather untranslated *and* altered. One may see parallels between this titular disfiguration and Adorno's analysis of the changes undergone by the title of Heinrich Mann's novel *Professor Unrat*, which was retitled *Blue Angel*, after its 1959 film adaptation.<sup>28</sup> In 'A Title' (1952), Adorno ultimately characterizes the alteration of the original title as a disgraceful defacement.<sup>29</sup> As Nikolaus Stingl, who translated *Mason & Dixon* into German, states 'Pynchon has a clause in his contract saying that he has to approve his translators,'<sup>30</sup> a clause which would have been stipulated in or prior to the mid-1990s. One can only speculate as to whether these facts bear an etiological relationship to each other, yet their very existence is, nevertheless, telling. Ultimately, titles offer us information that may be invaluable for the interpretation of the text; mistranslating a title is, therefore, to deny the reader this irreplaceable element, since as John Hollander states, 'a title is, or contains implicitly, a kind of statement of literary intention.'<sup>31</sup>

---

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Pynchon, *San Francisco cry*, trans. Michel Doury (Paris: Plon, 1976).

<sup>25</sup> Thomas Pynchon, *Rainbow*, trans. Michel Doury (Paris: Plon, 1975).

<sup>26</sup> Thomas Pynchon, *Vente à la criée du lot 49*, trans. Michel Doury (Paris: Seuil, 1986).

<sup>27</sup> Thomas Pynchon, *L'Arc-en-ciel de la gravité*, trans. Michel Doury (Paris: Seuil, 1988).

<sup>28</sup> Adorno, 'A Title,' 299-302, see also 'Unrat and Angel,' in *Notes to Literature: Volume Two*, ed. Rolf Tiedemann, trans. Shierry Weber Nicholsen, 303-304 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1992).

<sup>29</sup> Adorno, 'A Title,' 302.

<sup>30</sup> Claus Phillipp, 'An Interview with Nikolaus Stingl, Translator of *Mason & Dixon*,' *Der Standard*, September 18, 1999, trans. Erik Katzan, accessed on 17 April 2013, [http://www.themodernword.com/pynchon/Pynchon\\_stingl.html](http://www.themodernword.com/pynchon/Pynchon_stingl.html)

<sup>31</sup> John Hollander, "'Haddocks' Eyes": A Note on the Theory of Titles,' in *Vision and Resonance* (Oxford, 1975).

## Organic and Engineered Structures

I feel it pertinent to briefly examine how structure and structuring devices can be perceived to function within the arts more broadly. The notion of structure this thesis proposes can, for example, be clearly evidenced in the field of music. In the 20th Century, with the growing influence and output of popular music, in particular when compared to traditional forms, such as Classical, Baroque, or Romantic music, a large shift in compositional technique can be clearly distinguished. Musicians such as Jimi Hendrix, Django Reinhardt, John Lennon, Stevie Ray Vaughan all succeeded in establishing themselves as not only well-respected performers, but also as highly regarded musical composers, in spite of being completely unable to read music.<sup>32</sup> This phenomenon would have been unthinkable during the Golden Age of chamber music, for instance, when notation, the very notes on the sheet itself, were a crucial part of the compositional process. The 20th Century, thus, sees the advent of 'jamming' and improvisation in music, hence bringing forth the notion of *creation through execution*.<sup>33</sup> In other words, the performer not only creates a piece of music on the instrument itself, but he or she creates the piece of music in the very act of *playing* it. This of course does not mean these pieces of music lack structure altogether, but rather that their structure is organic, created intuitively rather than through a thorough understanding of musical notation.<sup>34</sup> *Creation through execution*, thus, is the antithesis of the creation of a pre-conceptualised piece of music *on paper*, so to speak. I intend this longwinded analogy as a means to envisage the bifurcation of the compositional process of any given work of art: on the one hand there is the organic, unconscious structure that grows spontaneously from an improvisatory intuition, on the other the learned, self-consciously engineered structure that develops voluntarily from

---

<sup>32</sup> See Peter Lavezzoli, *The Dawn of Indian Music in the West* (London: Continuum, 2007), 166; for Hendrix see Miles Davis, *Miles, The Autobiography* (London: Simon & Schuster, 1989), 292, and James Edward Shearer, *Jazz basics: a brief overview with historical documents and recordings* (USA: Kendall Hunt, 2002), 160; for Reinhardt see 'A Ghanaian Folk Guitarist,' in John Collins, *Musicians of West Africa*, (Boulder, CO: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1985) 99, and Ralph Denyer, *The Guitar Handbook* (London: Pan Macmillan, 1992), 8; For Lennon see 'Singers: The New Madness,' *Time*, November 15, 1963, and David Sheff, '1980 Playboy Interview With John Lennon And Yoko Ono,' *Playboy*, January 1981; for Vaughan see Andy Aledort, 'The Heart of Texas: SRV Gets Out of Rehab and Gives a Clearer Perspective on His Work,' in *Guitar World Presents Stevie Ray Vaughan*, (Milwaukee: Hal Leonard, 1998), 37 (originally published in *Guitar World*, December 1986).

<sup>33</sup> Jackson, Pollock's 'action painting,' for instance, could be seen as a pictorial counterpart of this notion.

<sup>34</sup> Musicians who lack considerable knowledge in what regards music theory and notation could be seen as a modern day remnant of the oral tradition, to some extent, were it not for development of recording processes.

an acquired knowledge of the form. The latter instance emphasises a certain intent and tends to be contrived to some extent, whereas the former is 'simply writing,' and benefits from the directness inherent to its nature.<sup>35</sup> Symmetry and other structural forms can be found in the work of many a classical composer, illustrative examples of this can be taken from Béla Bartók's<sup>36</sup> use of the arch form or *Bogenform*,<sup>37</sup> or 'the key architecture, [...] strictly symmetrical'<sup>38</sup> of some of Johann Sebastian Bach's works, or even Steve Reich's instrumental pieces and the fact that 'starting in 1976, [he] began using harmonic cycles to outline the[ir] structure.'<sup>39</sup> The very notion of this structural device is directly referenced in *Gravity's Rainbow*: "A parabola! A trap! You were never immune over there from the simple-minded German symphonic arc, tonic to dominant, back again to tonic. Grandeur! Gesellschaft!" (GR 443). As Joseph Frank asserts in his study *The Idea of Spatial Form*, the structure of a novel can be turned 'into an instrument of [...] aesthetic intention.'<sup>40</sup> Here Frank emphasizes the importance of works that bring structure and form to the fore. The novel form after all, according to Bakhtin, is 'the only genre that was born and nourished in a new era of world history and therefore it is deeply akin to that era, whereas the other major genres entered that era as already fixed forms.'<sup>41</sup> It is this fluidity of the novel as a form that allows it to assimilate the notion of a self-conscious structure, which is very much self-evident in medieval acrostic poems or the *calligrammes* of Guillaume Apollinaire: the message within the message, that also serves the role of organisational device.<sup>42</sup> Cases of this sort of narrative construction abound in twentieth-century literature.

---

<sup>35</sup> A parallel can be drawn here between these two kinds of narrative and Adorno's idea of the differences between 'autonomous art' and 'so-called committed art,' although both sets of categories are by no means identical. They are, however, analogous in the *indirectness/directness* that opposes them. Theodor W. Adorno, *Aesthetic Theory*, trans. Robert Hullot-Kentor (London: Continuum, 2004), 23 and 304.

<sup>36</sup> James McCalla, *Twentieth-Century Chamber Music* (London: Routledge, 2003), 231.

<sup>37</sup> Don Michael Randel, *The Harvard Dictionary of Music* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2003), 106.

<sup>38</sup> Manfred F. Bukofzer, *Music in the Baroque Era: From Monteverdi to Bach* (US: Von Elterlein Press, 2008), 366. Again, the matter of notation surfaces again, even in what regards the *reading* of the music: 'It is a debatable question to what extent this symmetry can be realized by ear since it presupposes a vast orientation that comprises the work as a whole and actually transcends direct musical experience' (366).

<sup>39</sup> Steve Reich, *Writings On Music - 1965-2000*, Paul Hillier (Ed.) (New York: Oxford University Press, 2002), 218. In the case of Reich, some of his pieces – *Different Trains* (1988) and *It's Gonna Rain* (1967), for instance – alert the audience to their form specifically through their titles.

<sup>40</sup> Joseph Frank, *The Idea of Spatial Form* (Rutgers University Press, 1991), 19.

<sup>41</sup> Mikhail M. Bakhtin, 'Epic and the Novel,' in *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*, ed. Michael Holquist, trans. Caryl Emerson (Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982), 4.

<sup>42</sup> For examples, see Guillaume Apollinaire, *Calligrammes: Poems of Peace and War (1913-1916)*, trans. Anne Hyde Greet (London: University of California Press, 2004).

The example *par excellence* of engineered organizational devices in narrative remains, in my opinion, the work of the members of the Oulipo, the *Ouvroir de littérature potentielle*, a French collective dedicated to the production of experimental works of literature through constrained compositional techniques. Authors affiliated to the collective include Raymond Queneau, Georges Perec, and Italo Calvino, among others; yet, regardless of the brilliance and ingenuity of some of the works produced by its members, the Oulipo takes the idea of engineered structures to the extreme, at times at the expense of fluidity of prose, clarity of action, and narrative tension. Less drastic illustrative examples of engineered narratives can be taken from David Foster Wallace's work, as he himself states that his second novel *Infinite Jest* (1996) was constructed based on a pyramidal fractal,<sup>43</sup> namely the Sierpinski Gasket.<sup>44</sup> Likewise, 'John Barth, for instance, has said that he imagines writing a story with the form of a logarithmic spiral and then sets out to do that,'<sup>45</sup> employing 'the logarithmic spiral as [both] motif *and* structural principle.'<sup>46</sup>

It is my opinion that the organizational devices present in Pynchon's novels work in such a way: as both motif and structural principle. At times the overarching structure of Pynchon's novels can be seen as a whole 'from a distance,'<sup>47</sup> as it were, whilst at others it is in diminutive, seemingly divergent, narrative vignettes that the overall structure is revealed, in the form of a *mise en abyme*: the smallest component part synecdochically implying the whole. In his seminal study *Aspects of the Novel* (1927), Forster discusses the way in which themes and imagery create a remarkable sense of pattern and structure. On the symbiotic interaction between structure and atmosphere, Forster remarks that "[p]attern," which seems so rigid, is connected with atmosphere, which seems so

---

<sup>43</sup> Michael Silverblatt, 'Interview with David Foster Wallace,' *Bookworm*. KCRW 89.9FM, Santa Monica, CA. April 11, 1996. Full transcript available at:

<<http://web.archive.org/web/20040606041906/www.andbutso.com/~mark/bookworm96/>>, and full recording at <<http://www.kcrw.com/>>.

<sup>44</sup> Stephen J. Burn, "'Webs of Nerves Pulsing and Firing": *Infinite Jest* and the Science of Mind,' in *A Companion to David Foster Wallace Studies*, eds. Marshall Boswell and Stephen J. Burn (New York: Palgrave, 2013), 71.

<sup>45</sup> Joseph Francavilla, 'Disching It out: An Interview with Thomas Disch,' *Science Fiction Studies*, 12, no. 3 (1985): 243.

<sup>46</sup> Charles B. Harris, *Passionate Virtuosity: The Fiction of John Barth* (Baltimore: University of Illinois Press, 1983), 148, emphasis added.

<sup>47</sup> The phrase 'from a distance' recurs throughout Pynchon's *oeuvre*: *Gravity's Rainbow* (97, 77), *Vineland* (241), *Mason & Dixon* (169), and *Against the Day* (625). The notion of the aerial view will be explored in greater detail in Chapter 5, with specific reference to *Mason & Dixon*.

fluid.’<sup>48</sup> To discern pattern in literature, one must analyse a text in its synoptic entirety: ‘pattern appeals to our aesthetic sense, [and] it causes us to see the book as a whole.’<sup>49</sup> My approach to each of the novels will therefore consist of isolating key structural devices alluded to in the title before proceeding to offer an interpretation of the overarching, macrocosmic narrative design, as well as highlighting the manner in which this overarching structure is reinforced by recurring motifs and symbols throughout the texts at a microscopic level.

### **A Brief Taxonomy of Structural Devices**

For the purpose of my investigations I propose to organise narrative structure into chiefly four categories: *topomorph*, *chronomorph*, *logomorph*, and *mimikomorph*. I will now proceed to offer brief definitions of these terms, accompanied by illustrative examples:

***Topomorph*** would apply to narratives in which the structure of the novel would seem to chart, map out, or echo a space, place, or landscape, often the setting in which the action of the story is enacted. Examples of this can be taken from James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (1922) and its cartography of Dublin in 1904, Virginia Woolf’s *Mrs Dalloway* (1925) and its representation of London’s urban landscape, or Julio Cortázar’s *Hopscotch* (1963) and its mapping of both Paris and Buenos Aires. Likewise, Paul Auster’s *City of Glass* (1985) with the Situationist interaction with urban space of the novel’s antagonist, Peter Stillman Sr, and the novel’s focus on New York City, already present in the novel’s title, a concern shared by the remaining parts of Auster’s *New York Trilogy: Ghosts* (1986) and *The Locked Room* (1986).

By ***chronomorph*** structures I refer to both narratives built around a specific unit of time and those in which time is the quintessential organizational device pulling the story together. Examples of the first kind can be found in Umberto Eco’s *The Name of the Rose* (1980) with its use of the week as a compositional layout, representing an anti-Genesis, as the novel moves towards the Apocalypse, or Virginia Woolf’s *The Waves* (1931) with its structuring metaphor of the daily tidal cycle, and *To The Lighthouse* (1927) with its emphasis on the difference between Human Time and Universal Time. Structural inversions and the collapsing of time, as in the segmentation of tempo-spatial boundaries in

---

<sup>48</sup> E.M. Forster, *Aspects of the Novel* (New York: Harcourt, 1985), 151.

<sup>49</sup> Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, 150.

Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughterhouse 5* (1969) and the temporal reversal of Martin Amis' *Time's Arrow* (1991), can also be seen as *chronomorphic*. Other *chronomorphic* texts include Miguel Delibes' *Five Hours with Mario* (1966), David Peace's *Red Riding Quartet* (1999-2002), Stefan Zweig's *Twenty-Four Hours in the Life of a Woman* (1927), Martin Kohan's *Seconds Out* (2005), and Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn's *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich* (1962).

A **logomorph** narrative structure, by the same token, is one in which the text continually reproduces a specific symbol or concept, either a visuo-geometrical icon or a less tangible but equally distinct motif. Here the double meaning can be traced to the etymology of *logos*,<sup>50</sup> in that in the former case I employ it to indicate a word or symbol,<sup>51</sup> whilst in the latter it suggests a discourse or reason. This image must, however, be central to the narrative, usually duplicating itself throughout the text, thus constituting a *mise en abyme* of the narrative shape of the novel, sometimes simply providing a model or scaffolding upon which the text can develop. Examples of the first sub-category can be found in Pynchon's *V.* (1963) and its plethora of angles and v-signs, as well as the trajectory of both its protagonists, and Anatole France's *Thaïs* (1890) and Percy Lubbock's *Roman Pictures* (1923), which E.M. Forster describes respectively as 'a book the shape of an hour-glass and a book the shape of a grand chain in that old-time dance, the Lancers.'<sup>52</sup> Forster, furthermore, also ascribes the narrative shape of the hour-glass to Henry James' *The Ambassadors* (1903).<sup>53</sup> The second kind of *logomorphic* structure can be evidenced in Umberto Eco's *Baudolino* (2000) and the way in which the history of Literary Theory is employed as an exoskeleton for the story to grow, Vladimir Nabokov's *Pale Fire* (1962) and the formal structure of literary criticism, or Primo Levi's *The Periodic Table* (1975), and its use of chemical elements as a framework around which its brief narratives are then configured. Similarly, Lewis Carroll, seems to have had a predilection for ludic narrative structures of *logomorphic* nature.<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>50</sup> *OED*.

<sup>51</sup> Although I do not wish to imply necessarily here the meaning that religion gives to *logos* as the Word.

<sup>52</sup> Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, 149-150.

<sup>53</sup> *Ibid.*, 153.

<sup>54</sup> The deck of cards in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* (1865) and the game of chess in *Through the Looking-Glass, and What Alice Found There* (1871) are the organisational devices of each novel respectively. These texts also seem to further highlight the notion of textual structures through the use of visual poems, such as the Mouse's Tail / Tale in the former, and the mirrored 'Jabberwocky' poem in the latter.

**Mimikomorph** narrative structures constitute a minor form of innocuous plagiarism. Innocuous in that they do not necessarily harm the original narrative, but rather confirm its place within a canonical hierarchy; not, however, innocuous in what regards their potential for innovation. *Mimikomorph* structures are those that are traced, so to speak, from other works of art, either from the same genre and realm, or not. These structures, thus, *mimic* previous ones and can be seen therefore as a form of structural intertextuality, a metafictional retrospective of sorts.<sup>55</sup> Examples of this category can be found in Gabriel García Márquez's *One Hundred Years Of Solitude* (1967) and its use of the biblical Book of Genesis as a mirror to its narrative, and Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922) and its use of Homer's *Odyssey* as a structural blueprint. In this regard, narratives that offer retellings of prior tales tend to verge into this category: Zora Neale Hurston's *Moses, Man of the Mountain* (1939), and its retelling of the biblical Book of Exodus; V. S. Naipaul's *A Bend in the River* (1979) with its relation to Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899); J. M. Coetzee's *Foe* (1986) which reconfigures of Daniel Defoe's *Robinson Crusoe* (1719); the similarities between the structural model of Rachel Cusk's *Arlington Park* (2006) and that of Virginia Woolf's *Mrs Dalloway* (1925).<sup>56</sup> A peculiar case may be found in Italo Calvino's *If on a Winter's Night a Traveller* (1979), which is structured in such a self-reflexive manner that one could consider it to be *automimikomorph*.

The titles of these texts often hint at the organizational devices at work throughout their respective narratives, and oftentimes titles contain in them allusions to other works. Hugh Haughton refers to the intertextual nature of certain titles employing the term 'inter-titularity'.<sup>57</sup> Adorno sees inter-titularity *avant la lettre* as mere repetition and parasitic laziness;<sup>58</sup> in works that constitute engineered narratives, I envisage it in a less maligned light, as the result – and an

---

<sup>55</sup> I employ the word *mimikomorph* to denote a certain something that I think is not satisfactorily encompassed by the current usage of the term metafiction, which I believe to have suffered from overuse and misuse, and thus has undergone a process of semantic degradation. In addition to this, the word metafiction was never exclusively employed to refer to matters regarding narrative structure.

<sup>56</sup> See Nick Turner, *Post-War British Women Novelists and the Canon* (London: Continuum, 2010), 21-22: 'Virginia Woolf can be seen to be a writer by whom subsequent novelists, both male and female, have been influenced. *Mrs Dalloway* is a structural model for, among many, Margaret Drabble's *The Radiant Way*, Ian McEwan's *Saturday* and Rachel Cusk's *Arlington park*, while a longer genealogy can be found linking Austen's *Sense and Sensibility* to Forster's *Howards End* and Zadie Smith's *On Beauty*.'

<sup>57</sup> Haughton, 'The Purloined Title,' 90.

<sup>58</sup> Adorno, 'Titles,' 10.

acknowledgement – of influence. The title of Wallace’s magnum opus *Infinite Jest* (1996), besides hinting at its fractal, Sierpinski Gasket-like structure through its reference to infinity, for example, alludes in an unambiguous manner to William Shakespeare’s *Hamlet*: ‘Alas, poor Yorick. I knew him, Horatio – a fellow of infinite jest, of most excellent fancy.’<sup>59</sup> Thus, the novel’s title immediately allows the reader a number of possible avenues of investigation through which to pursue an interpretation of the novel. Cormac McCarthy’s *Cities of the Plain* (1998), for example, takes its title from the Book of Genesis: ‘Abram settled in the land of Canaan, while Lot settled among the cities of the Plain and moved his tent as far as Sodom’ (13:12). Similarly, William Butler Yeats’ poem ‘Sailing to Byzantium’ (1927) is the source from which McCarthy and Philip Roth took inspiration when titling *No Country for Old Men* (2005) and *The Dying Animal* (2001), respectively. In my opinion these works are, however, noteworthy regardless of their intertextuality. In these cases, titles, and the works to which they allude, may inform our interpretation of the novel, providing us with further texts and contexts within or against which to read the work.

Often, as in the case of *Ulysses*, these different structural models overlap, given that the novel could be seen as being simultaneously *chronomorph*, *topomorph*, *logomorph*, and *mimikomorph*, constituting thus a *polymorph* narrative structure. *Ulysses*, furthermore, serves as an unambiguous example of intertextuality, with its unconcealed reference to Homer’s epic poem *The Odyssey*. It is by no means a coincidence that the name of certain authors tend to appear often when dealing with engineered narrative structures, as certain authors would seem to have a closer affinity with the concept, as well as a keener eye and hand at the moment of composition.<sup>60</sup> Whilst the concepts of structure I formulate (*topomorph*, *chronomorph*, *logomorph*, *mimikomorph*) may be seen to bear certain similarities to the unities of action, time, and space, discussed by Aristotle in his treatise *Poetics*, they do not constitute a rigid structural blueprint designed to aid the

---

<sup>59</sup> William Shakespeare, *Hamlet*, in *The Norton Shakespeare*, eds. Stephen Greenblatt, et al. (New York: W. W. Norton, 1997), 1744.

<sup>60</sup> Here perhaps a note will be necessary to address the problematic notion of ‘the Author.’ A rather large part of the Academy remains adamant in its suspicion towards introducing notions of ‘authorial intention’ or ‘the author’s life,’ into their readings, citing Roland Barthes’ essay ‘The Death of the Author’ (1967). This is a misconception of Barthes’ ideas, since what he opposed most strongly was using authorial intention as a means to justify any sort of *pseudo-definitive* reading of a text. Misinterpreting Barthes has simply supplanted the role of the Author by that of the Critic, replacing one hierarchy with a new one. I will not make any claims as to my reading of Pynchon’s novels being final. On the other hand, I will make no apologies for invoking the Author where I see fit, or for any speculations on my part regarding intention and design.

composition of narratives, but rather a critical framework through which to enhance their interpretation. I suggest that the organizational devices suggested by the titles of Pynchon's novels are integral to our appreciation of the texts. In engineered narratives such as these, Forster states, were it not for the narrative shape, the 'geometrical simile,' the novel's pattern, then 'the story, the plot, and the characters [...] would none of them exert their full force, they would none of them breathe as they do.'<sup>61</sup>

### Thesis Structure

Whilst the thesis will proceed predominantly chronologically through Pynchon's novelistic *oeuvre*, the first section will read the titles and central topoi of *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow* in parallel.<sup>62</sup> Whilst the former has at its heart conceptions of the female – even if they are conceptions filtered through the male gaze – with the titular *V.* and her many iterations, the latter's focus is on all things phallocentric: the erection of the penis, the V-2 rocket, the sexual conquest, and so forth. In *V.* the reader encounters Herbert Stencil's search for *V.*, an enigmatic entity who may be his mother, thus arguably making the novel Stencil's quest for his origin, a pilgrimage back towards the womb. *Gravity's Rainbow*, conversely, places its emphasis not on creation, birth, and origins, as much as on destruction, death, and destiny. As previously noted, even the titles of these two novels share a certain symmetry, in that one explicitly announces the letter V (a chevron, an intersection, a crossing, an angle, and so on), whilst the other lyrically describes the flight path of a rocket (the parabola, the arc, the arch, the rainbow, and so forth). This chapter will explore the parallel topoi of both novels, reading them as having a convex/concave relationship, whilst proposing their titles be read as allusions to crude pictographs depicting the vagina and penis, respectively. At the end of this bipartite section, stemming from their structural particularities and thematic concerns, I will read these two texts as two halves of a structural chiasm.

*The Crying of Lot 49* will be examined in Chapter 3, in which I will question and reconsider the critical emphasis on the themes of 'circulation and

---

<sup>61</sup> Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, 150-151.

<sup>62</sup> Whilst these would normally be considered Pynchon's first and third novels, I believe there is – beyond their thematic parallels – extra justification for reading them one against the other, considering that the author viewed his second novel *The Crying of Lot 49* as simply 'a short story, but with gland trouble.' See Mel Gussow, 'Pynchon's Letters Nudge His Mask,' *New York Times*, March 4, 1998, 8.

communication’<sup>63</sup> in the novel. Stemming from its inter-titular connection to Arthur Conan Doyle’s short story ‘Lot No. 249’ (1892), I will engage with the tropes of circulation and communication through Egyptological themes and intertexts, both examining the notion of the inscrutable sign and reading of the novel as navigational text. Following from this, I will present a *topomorphic* reading of the theme of circulation and urban signs within the novel, positing the city itself as text. Finally, returning to the notion of the inscrutable sign, I will engage with notions of the singular and the infinite, which is fitting, since the title implies a (potentially unending) list of which lot 49 is merely one item among many. Reading Oedipa against the much-overlooked character of Mucho, I will propose their relationship and disparate worldviews as a *mise en abyme* of the structure of the novel as a whole.

The analysis of *Vineland* presented in Chapter 4 will broadly stem from two readings of its title. The first will focus on the notion of a mythical, alternative history of the American nation, as suggested by the titular allusion to Vinland, the name given to North America when discovered by the Vikings. The latter sections will follow the tendrilous lead suggested by the *vine*. I propose that this vine-like structure manifests itself within the novel in the form of the network. Entering into dialogue with the ideas posited by Brian McHale in his essay ‘Zapping, the Art of Switching Channels: On *Vineland*,’<sup>64</sup> this chapter will examine the network in terms of the insidious presence of television in the novel, as well as highlighting the televisual spectre of Ronald Reagan, who stalks its pages. I will conclude by interrogating the tension between competing official and familial networks.

In Chapter 5, considering the privileged titular position of the ampersand, I will examine the way in which the dialectic tension between the rigidity of the straight line and the seemingly freewheeling flexibility of the serpentine line shapes *Mason & Dixon*. This tension will be read as representing the opposition between the Classical idea of beauty and the baroque. The organizational device which I wish to illuminate in my analysis of *Mason & Dixon* is the ‘single shape’ to which Nikolas Stingl tacitly refers when he states that ‘[t]he effort to accumulate all this knowledge and then bring it together in a single shape [in *Mason & Dixon*]

---

<sup>63</sup> See Frank Kermode, ‘The Use of the Codes.’ In *The Art of Telling: Essays on Fiction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 85, and Tony Tanner, ‘The Crying of Lot 49,’ in *Modern Critical Views: Thomas Pynchon*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1986), 181.

<sup>64</sup> Brian McHale, *Constructing Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 2001), 115-141.

must have been considerable'<sup>65</sup>: the ampersand. After exploring the many aesthetic implications of the trope of the line, I will move on to address its political ramifications examining the notion of a subjunctive America proposed by the text. Finally, I will combine these two approaches attending to the predominant themes of mapping and the aerial view.

*Against the Day* will be the focus of Chapter 6, in which I will read the novel through a photographic lens, stemming from its titular reference to the *contre-jour* technique. Photography manifests itself at both thematic and conceptual levels within the text. I will open by examining the notion of photographic stillness that recurs throughout the novel, one that is at odds with the speed and dynamism of modernity. I argue that, through the theme of photography and related metaphors of the photographic, the novel articulates its central concerns with doubling, parallel worlds and time travel.

In the final chapter, I will interpret *Inherent Vice* through the master motif of the bracket, a shape suggested by three readings of the novel's title: the symbol of the egg (the quintessential illustrative example of inherent vice<sup>66</sup>), the circles of hell (vice as sin), and the mechanical vise (homophone of vice). The visual motif suggested by the title is textually re-enforced by a series of bracket-shaped images throughout the text: parentheses, waves, and the Golden Fang, among others. These recurrences of the bracket can be read as representative of an apprehensive feeling regarding the end of the 1960s (and of eras in general) and a mistrust in the subdivisions imposed by historical narratives, what Fredric Jameson sees as the problematical conception of historical periodization.<sup>67</sup>

---

<sup>65</sup> Phillipp, 'An Interview with Nikolaus Stingl', n.p.

<sup>66</sup> Many reviewers of the novel reiterated the example of the egg to clarify the term, see Louis Menand, 'Soft-Boiled,' *New Yorker*, August 3, 2009.

<sup>67</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 3-4.

## *The Early Novels I: V.'s Chevron*

'And you never hear the one that gets you.'  
(V. 23)

'You know that. You never hear the one that gets you.'  
(GR 23)

"Ah . . . yes, I know." She laughs. "Poor mortal Brigadier, I know. It is my last mystery," stroking with fingernails her labia, "you cannot ask a woman to reveal her last mystery, now, can you?"  
(GR 235)

Not only do the narrative emblems of both *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow* (chevron and parabola) evince a remarkable symmetry, but at a thematic level the novels' central concerns with the journey back to the womb, origins, and the female (*V.*) and the journey to the grave, destinations, and the male (*GR*) reveal an exceptional complementarity, perhaps only comparable within the Pynchon canon to the tempo-geographical supplementarity of the California novels. Whilst many critics, including Harold Bloom, Tony Tanner, and Joseph W. Slade, have made direct reference to the chevron and the parabola as the master motifs of *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow*, respectively, this notion has often been relegated to the position of curious detail. In accordance with readings of the former as V-shaped and the latter as parabolic, in this chapter I propose that these symbols be read as ribald pictographs of the female and male genitals, aligning Pynchon's first novel with ideas of the female and *Gravity's Rainbow* with ideas of the male. To conclude my *logomorphic* reading, I will suggest that these novels' narrative emblems are interrelated, positing them conceptually as mirror images to each other, acting each as halves of a structural chiasmus.

Whilst in *V.* Stencil's quest is for a female character, perhaps a goddess, and her many iterations, the narrative emblem of *Gravity's Rainbow* is none other than the V-2 rocket, phallic and destructive, which finds echoes of itself in Slothrop's penis and its activities throughout London during the Blitz. For an author with

such a predilection for sexual innuendo, bawdy humour, and the pictographic, we could imagine these two geometric symbols scrawled on a latrine wall. After all, graffiti and in particular latrinalia, in both their verbal and pictorial forms, recur throughout Pynchon's work. 'It is [...] clear that the peculiar sociology of graffiti,' Samuel Thomas states, 'an activity embraced by troops, vandals, hippies, perverts and revolutionaries alike, is given sustained treatment by Pynchon – both directly and indirectly'<sup>1</sup>. Even one of the few autobiographical glimpses that the author allows us in the introduction to *Slow Learner* involves an image of a graffitied toilet cubicle. In 1959 the young Pynchon was enrolled in a writing seminar led by Baxter Hathaway at Cornell University and after a number of months, having failed to submit any work, he grew anxious. 'Finally, about halfway through the semester there arrived in the mail one of those cartoon cards, showing a toilet stall covered with graffiti,' Pynchon reminisces, "'You've practiced long enough," it said – open the card – "Now write!" It was signed "Baxter Hathaway"' (SL 17). There appears to be a certain amount of consensus amongst critics regarding Pynchon's predilection for toilets and their cultural implications. Paul D. Morris asserts that 'Pynchon's language is replete with vocabulary literally of the gutter,'<sup>2</sup> whilst Joseph W. Slade states that 'Pynchon is certainly not above latrine humor,'<sup>3</sup> acknowledging the author's impartial treatment of both high and low culture. Pynchon's interest in both the mechanics and the linguistics of toilets, at both literal and metaphoric levels, extends to the point where even, to use Joseph Tabbi's formulation, 'the intractable flow of history'<sup>4</sup> is conceptually equated by the author to the idiosyncrasies of toilet plumbing:

This Toiletspace here's a wind tunnel's all it is. If tensor analysis is good enough for turbulence, it ought to be good enough for history. There ought to be nodes, critical points . . . there ought to be super-derivatives of the crowded and insatiate flow that can be set equal to zero and these critical points found . . . (GR 451).

Whilst the parabola is mirrored in the 'hasty pictures of penises' that Slothrop finds 'on the wall of a public shithouse stinking and ripe with typhoid' (GR 623-

---

<sup>1</sup> Samuel Thomas, *Pynchon and the Political* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 45.

<sup>2</sup> Paul D. Morris, *Representation and the Twentieth-Century Novel: Studies in Gorky, Joyce and Pynchon* (Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2005), 165.

<sup>3</sup> Joseph W. Slade, *Thomas Pynchon* (1990), 221.

<sup>4</sup> Joseph Tabbi, *Postmodern Sublime: Technology and American Writing from Mailer to Cyberpunk* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996), 101.

624) and foreshadowed in *V.* in 'the picture of [Neil's] sexual organ. Actual size,' drawn '[i]n the men's room of the Port Authority terminal, third stall in the . . . ' (*V.* 392), the *V* as vaginal chevron is echoed in *Gravity's Rainbow* in the form of a flower 'shaped like the cunt of a young girl' drawn 'on the damp arch of [a] wall' (*GR* 733). In Pynchon's work, the latrine wall becomes both a channel for cultural production and a means of interpersonal communication. In Pynchon's use of the Kilroy graffiti, which the author speculates must have been first drawn 'on a fence or latrine wall' (*V.* 436), we may find a case of the former, whilst in the latrinograms of *The Crying of Lot 49* the reader will encounter the latter. It is, after all, on a 'latrine wall, among lipsticked obscenities' that Oedipa finds 'neatly indited in engineering lettering' (*CL49* 34) one of the many clues possibly connected to the mystery she attempts to solve throughout the novel. Latrinalia is given such relevancy that the blank walls in the ladies' room at the Tank make Oedipa feel 'threatened by this absence of even the marginal try at communication latrines are known for' (*CL49* 47). From the fact that 'Listening to the Toilet' (*GR* 694) may be fruitful, seeing as 'here you are trapped inside Their frame' (*GR* 694), to 'latrine-orientated (or Freudian) psychology' (*V.* 436), toilets and their messages are given a privileged position in Pynchon's early work. Stemming from the emphasis *Gravity's Rainbow* makes throughout on 'ideas of the opposite' (*GR* 48-50, 89-90, 144, &c.) and the prominent role of gender misunderstanding in *V.*, *V.* will be read as a vaginal text, finding its complementary narrative in the phallic textuality of *Gravity's Rainbow*.

### ***V.* before it was *V.***

In an April 1964 letter to Candida Donadio, Pynchon's agent from 1960 until 1982, the author wrote, in reference to the four novels he was writing at the time, that '[i]f they come out on paper anything like they are inside my head then it will be the literary event of the millennium.'<sup>5</sup> Besides hinting at both the ambition and the promise of the young Pynchon, this statement offers an indication, however nebulous, as to the author's compositional process. These – and I dare include *V.*, which had been published the previous year – are engineered narratives, not merely organic. In Pynchon's novels the reader who is so inclined may discern the organizational devices around which the narratives are structured.

---

<sup>5</sup> Mel Gussow, 'Pynchon's Letters Nudge His Mask,' *New York Times*, March 4, 1998, 1 and 8.

Leading up to their arrival at the bookstands, *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow* underwent a series of titular metamorphoses. According to Mel Gussow, there exist 'some twenty editorial letters between Cork [Smith] and Pynchon about the novel that would eventually come to be called *V.*'<sup>6</sup> A number of alternative titles were contemplated in this epistolary exchange, including among others Pynchon's editor Corlies 'Cork' Smith's suggestions – *The Yo-Yo World of Benny Profane*, *The Quest of Herbert Stencil*, *World on a String* – and the author's own recommendations: *Blood's a Rover*, *Down Paradise Street*, *And His Ass Falls Off*, *Footsteps of the Gone*, *Dream Tonight of Peacock Tails*, and *The Republican Party Is a Machine*. Considering the epithetic –and to some extent synoptic – role that the titles of Pynchon's novels play in relation to each text, a brief survey of *V.*'s tentative titles, in particular the author's own, may be useful, as they all hint at some of the central topoi in the novel. *Blood's a Rover* is most likely a reference to the final stanza in A. E. Housman's poem 'Reveille,' an impassionate plea to seize the day: 'Clay lies still, but blood's a rover; / Breath's a ware that will not keep. / Up, lad; when the journey's over / There'll be time enough for sleep.'<sup>7</sup> The reference also emphasizes the tension between the animate and the inanimate that is so prevalent in *V.*, as does *The Republican Party Is a Machine*. The provisional title *The Republican Party Is a Machine* finds its genesis in New York Republican leader Roscoe Conkling's campaign speech in September 1876: 'We are told that the Republican party is a machine. Yes. A government is a machine; the common-school system of the state of New York is a machine; a political party is a machine. Every organization which binds men together for a common cause is a machine.'<sup>8</sup> The connection between politics and machines also is further emphasized in the novel: 'Others –politicians and machines– carried on wars' (*V.* 101). *Footsteps of the Gone* can be read as a reference to Herbert Stencil's retracing of his late father Sidney's path, whilst both *And His Ass Falls Off* and *Dream Tonight of Peacock Tails* are part of the tale of the boy with the screw in his navel (Chapter 1, Section V) and Mondaugen's story (Chapter 9, Section II), respectively. Ultimately, *V.* would be chosen, and it is the correlation between this title and the novel's thematic and structural qualities that this chapter will examine.

---

<sup>6</sup> Gerald Howard, 'Rocket Redux - Gerald Howard on *Gravity's Rainbow*: Remembered, Reread, Reconsidered,' *Bookforum* 12, no. 2 (2005): 36.

<sup>7</sup> A. E. Housman, 'Reveille,' in *A Shropshire Lad* (Boston: International Pocket Library, 1989), 15.

<sup>8</sup> Roscoe Conkling quoted in Morton Keller, *America's Three Regimes: A New Political History* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2009), 139.

## V-Trajectory

In his reading of Franz Kafka's short story 'Before the Law' (1915), Jacques Derrida makes a crucial distinction between the phrase 'before the law' as it appears in the body of the text and as the text's title, stating that 'they are homonyms rather than synonyms, for they do not name the same thing.'<sup>9</sup> Derrida's comment applies in a wider sense to all titles which consist of a phrase contained within the texts they name, a comment which illuminates our reading of Pynchon's *V.* Therefore, the title of the novel, *V.*, and the metaphorical grail to which the narrative's quest points, Lady V., are not one and the same. Whilst *V.* names the novel, *V.* names the ever-elusive character that serves the purpose of narrative drive *within* the novel. The only *V* into contact with which Profane and Stencil will come, however, is the chevron of their V-trajectory. When Duke Wedge gives Profane his 'step-by-step account of how he almost made it but not quite' (*V.* 27), the reader cannot help but see in this asymptotic journey a parallel to the overall narrative structure of the novel, in which the quest's objective is forever deferred. From the very outset of the novel, this notion is hinted at with certain fatalistic overtones, as when Profane asks Pig Bodine 'Where we going,' only for the latter to respond plainly: 'The way we're heading' (*V.* 17). Likewise, old Godolphin, in one of the many analeptic divergences in the text, echoes this sentiment, as he 'saw his fate complete, pre-assembled, inescapable' (*V.* 184). 'No matter how he tacked, yawed or dodged about,' we are told, 'he'd only be standing still while that treacherous reef loomed closer with every shift in course' (*V.* 184), stressing the tension between an inescapable fate and an unattainable goal that riddles the text.

As Irving Malin rightly asserts regarding *V.*, its 'title is a letter'<sup>10</sup>; just like *The Crying of Lot 49* would begin with a letter – albeit one epistolary in nature – so does *V.* begin in this manner. This letter, however, is exceptionally ambiguous, as its likeness proliferates throughout the text in the form of places, characters, and concepts.<sup>11</sup> As David Seed states, Pynchon's 'first novel has as its title *V. A Novel*, an

---

<sup>9</sup> Jacques Derrida, 'Before the Law,' in *Acts of Literature*, ed. Derek Attridge, (New York: Routledge, 1992), 189.

<sup>10</sup> Irving Malin, 'Foreshadowing the Text,' in *Pynchon and Mason & Dixon*, eds. Brooke Horvarth and Irving Malin (London: Associated University Presses, 2000), 27.

<sup>11</sup> The V-locations include 'The V-Note' taproom, Venezuela, Vheissu, Vesuvius, Valletta, and the Vatican; the V-personas include Victoria Wren, a rodent named Veronica, Hedwig Vogelsang, Vera Meroving, Lady V. ('No one knew her name in Paris,' *V.* 406); the V-notions include Vengeance, the

initial that teasingly suggests a name behind it. As many critics have noted, however, the various meanings of the title multiply, partly through names.<sup>12</sup> The fact that *V.*'s title consists of merely an initial not only hints at the fact that *V.*'s full identity is never recovered, never unveiled, but it also points at Stencil's ambivalent search for his origins, his journey back to the womb, as the word *initial* itself suggests both the idea of a beginning (*initium*) and 'going in' (*inire*). Furthermore, naming the whole text after a character that throughout the novel remains elusive and to some extent indefinable also brings to mind the evasive 'E' of George Perec's novelistic lipogram *La Disparition* (1969).

The novel's title can be read as a reference to an individual letter, an initial, an abbreviation for 'versus,' a roman numeral, an A both inverted and truncated, a geometrical gradient, and has the potential to be interpreted in any number of different ways.<sup>13</sup> Seed even draws attention to the fact that "v" is also the logical symbol for "or."<sup>14</sup> As Dudley Eigenvalue asks in Chapter Seven, 'Who then is V.?' (*V.* 153). Whether fictitious or real, it is ultimately Stencil's obsessive mission that brings *V.* to life, as if – in searching for her – he were in fact creating her or, at least, a *version* of her. In Pynchon's first novel, 'no matter what *V.* stands for, the *V. position* is always feminized.'<sup>15</sup> The very 'V.' at the novel's frontispiece, formed of forty-two smaller Vs, immediately establishes the themes of paranoia, recursion, the semiotic proliferation already subtly stated in the novel's title, and the vaginal. The frontispiece itself resembles the female pubic area, signaling from the outset the central role that the idea of the female will play in the text. *V.* focuses – if we can determine any *one* focus in the novel – on the notion of a female counterpart, rather than womanhood (as Veronica, for example, is in fact a sewer rat) or the feminine (since both the Bad Priest and 'the woman' who is Melanie

---

V-stain (*V.* 90-2), and the dichotomous V of Victory *and* – or, perhaps more appropriately, *or* – Vanquishment. A helpful chart on the female characters in *V.* can be found in David Cowart's *Thomas Pynchon & The Dark Passages of History* (Athens: University of Georgia Press), 48, whilst David Seed provides a useful chapter-by-chapter schema of the novel's structure in *The Fictional Labyrinths of Thomas Pynchon* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press), 71-72.

<sup>12</sup> David Seed, 'Naming in Pynchon and Joyce,' in *James Joyce: The Centennial Symposium*, eds. Morris Beja, Phillip Herring, Maurice Harmon, David Norris (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986), 50.

<sup>13</sup> Alvin Greenberg sees in the V an upside down A. See: Alvin Greenberg, 'The Underground Woman: An Excursion into the V-ness of Thomas Pynchon,' *Chelsea* 27 (1969): 58-65. Both Molly Hite and Robert D. Newman suggest the V as Roman numeral. See: Newman, *Understanding Thomas Pynchon* (Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1986), 58-59; and Hite, *Ideas of Order in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1983), 27.

<sup>14</sup> Seed, 'Naming in Pynchon and Joyce,' 50.

<sup>15</sup> Martina Sciolino, 'Objects of Postmodern "Masters": Subject-in-Simulation / Woman-in-Effect,' in *Men Writing the Feminine: Literature, Theory, and the Question of Genders*, ed. Thais E. Morgan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 159.

l'Heuremaudit's lover, Lady V., take on roles traditionally ascribed masculine qualities).

As Seed asserts, 'Pynchon undoubtedly took his title from the obsessive seeker in Nabokov's novel *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (1941), where the narrator (V.) sets out to write a biography of his cousin and assimilates his subject into narcissistic self-description.'<sup>16</sup> As we will see throughout the chapter, this is also the case with Stencil's projection of his own identity into the hollowed out sign/signifier of V.. Likewise, when Susan Elizabeth Sweeney draws a structural parallel between Nabokov's *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (1941), the shape of which its narrator describes as 'two lines which have finally tapered to the point of meeting,'<sup>17</sup> and Pynchon's first novel,<sup>18</sup> she would appear to be tacitly in agreement with Harold Bloom's assessment of *V.*: 'there are two main threads or plots to its structure, threads that begin far apart from each other but ultimately intersect and interweave, forming a "V" in the plot itself.'<sup>19</sup> Scholars, among them Seed, Bloom, and Sweeney, have often pointed at the overarching convergent structure of the novel in terms of the ultimately serendipitous intersection of its protagonists' routes, yet little emphasis has been put on what is perhaps the most revealing line in the text with regards to the theme of intersecting trajectories: 'Odd how paths cross' (*V.* 470). This quote reveals what is arguably the case in all of Pynchon's novels but of particular importance to his early texts, namely, the interpretive pull between the seemingly coincidental (and extremely unlikely) trajectories of Pynchon's characters (which may, after all, result from the actions of conspiratorial forces) and the unambiguously purposeful movements of the novelistic hand that traced these trajectories.

Robert M. Adams states that *V.* is 'just as capable of being named *X*,' adding that '[o]ur dynamic duo consists of Benny Profane and Herbert Stencil, the former an inept and amorphous schlemiehl looking for a form, the latter an obsessed outline looking frantically for some substance.'<sup>20</sup> Seeing 'Profane as plasm without shape, [and] Stencil as shape without plasm,'<sup>21</sup> Adams observes in this acute

---

<sup>16</sup> Seed, 'Naming in Pynchon and Joyce,' 50.

<sup>17</sup> Vladimir Nabokov, *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight* (Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995), 95.

<sup>18</sup> Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, 'The V-Shaped Paradigm: Nabokov and Pynchon,' *Cycnos* 12, no. 2, (2008): n.p., accessed January 8, 2013, <http://revel.unice.fr/cycnos/index.html?id=1475>.

<sup>19</sup> Harold Bloom, ed., *Bloom's Major Novelists: Thomas Pynchon* (Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2003), 47.

<sup>20</sup> Robert M. Adams, 'Dynamic Duos,' *The Sewanee Review* 86, no. 4 (1978): 535.

<sup>21</sup> *Ibid.*, 536.

chiastic formulation of the novel's skeleton an iteration of what he calls the 'X-shaped dynamic duo.'<sup>22</sup> Adams highlights that '[t]heir narratives – for they both have quite distinct and elaborate narratives – originally have nothing whatever to do with each other [yet g]radually they drift into the same ambience,'<sup>23</sup> a reading similar to Bloom's structural assessment of the novel. However, Adams sees in the final separation of the Profane-Stencil double-act a structural V symmetrical to that which saw the characters originally converge: 'After Stencil scampers off to Copenhagen in pursuit of a possibly V-related glass eye, Profane resumes his helpless yo-yoing.'<sup>24</sup> Yet, as Adams himself acknowledges, the novel's protagonists' quest remains unfulfilled by the end of the narrative and, rather than reaching the vanishing point of their journey – the ever-receding horizon well-nigh the ultimately unattainable revelation of V.'s identity –, they fall into their old patterns of behavior (assuming they had in fact broken them, however temporarily). Profane's final return to his idiosyncratic yo-yoing way of life does not constitute a thrust forth, but instead a regression, a journey backwards that retraces the novel's structural V rather than projecting it forward into an X. All yo-yos must journey towards the hand that animates them and back out again to their 'apocheir'; Profane is no exception and he is bound to said loop. Similarly, Stencil's unwillingness to abandon his investigation into V.'s identity leaves him trapped in a closed to-and-fro course of apparently interconnected clues, his 'inevitable looped trail' (V. 226). He will be unable to ever reach the implied apex of the novel's V structure, which will forever withhold its climax. Adams' argument on the X-shaped structure of *V.* relies on the notion that, as the plot unfolds, the narrative actually progresses, when – in fact – I would argue that the very opposite is what ultimately transpires. The cruciform path that Adams proposes for Profane and Stencil is, I argue, ultimately more applicable to the trajectory of Enzian and Tchitcherine in *Gravity's Rainbow*, whose paths cross forming an X, in spite of them ultimately not recognizing each other (GR 734-5).

Seed perceptively sees in the representation of the urban landscape in *V.* the influence of Giorgio De Chirico's works, 'which use strange lighting and perspective to create an atmosphere of brooding threat in street scenes.'<sup>25</sup> Seed

---

<sup>22</sup> Adams, 'Dynamic Duos,' 533.

<sup>23</sup> Ibid., 535-536.

<sup>24</sup> Ibid., 536.

<sup>25</sup> David Seed, *The Fictional Labyrinths of Thomas Pynchon* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1988), 74.

also draws attention to the fact that the text mentions De Chirico's novel *Hebdomeros* (1929) by name and his painting *Mystery and Melancholy of a Street* (1914) in a more oblique manner: 'a print of di Chirico's [sic] street' (V. 303). Even though Pynchon originally suggested another painting by De Chirico be included on the dust-jacket cover of *V. (The Enigma of the Hour, 1912)*,<sup>26</sup> both John Dugdale and Seed astutely interpret the 'print of di Chirico's [sic] street' (V. 303) as a reference to *Mystery and Melancholy of a Street*,<sup>27</sup> connecting it to a number of other urban vignettes interspersed throughout the novel.<sup>28</sup> *Mystery and Melancholy of a Street* encapsulates a number of ideas into which Pynchon delves in *V.*, from the relative solitude of the urban landscape to the implied, yet ultimately unknowable, presence of a figure beyond the viewer's field of vision, near the horizon.

De Chirico's geometrical cityscapes are particularly significant to our understanding of the V-trajectory of the novel's protagonists. Whilst the advent of the technique through which the vanishing point is employed to create a sense of perspective represented a significant step towards the creation of greater verisimilitude, De Chirico does not employ it the way Renaissance artists do. In De Chirico's work perspectival views and orthogonal lines further emphasize the sense of alienation and desolation at the heart of his work. In *Mystery and Melancholy of a Street*, perspective is not merely used to convey depth, but rather so as to create an amalgam of realism and abstraction. Similarly, early in *V.* we are told that the paths in the novel 'had in fact all fused into a single abstracted Street' (V. 10), pointing to the spatio-symbolic configuration of our protagonists' eventual V-trajectory. The V-trajectory is formed by the novel's 'crazy angles' (V. 112) down which 'Stencil [goes], pursuing a different trail' (V. 101), each time 'tracing down a lead, indefinitely' (V. 128). The emphatic indefiniteness of Stencil's quest suggests this very lack of limits and, ultimately, an end to his investigation. The novel's incompletable search is suggested in the novel's street scenes, as is the case with Mulberry Street with its 'receding sets of whorls [...] shining clear to the horizon' (V. 138). Arrival to the horizon at the hypothetical end of Stencil and Profane's road – another V-word, their *via* – is forever postponed, in its stead there being but 'another dead end' (V. 101). This postponement of the arrival to Stencil and

---

<sup>26</sup> Albert Rolls, 'Pynchon, In His Absence,' *Orbit: Writing Around Pynchon* 1, no. 1 (2012), n.p.

<sup>27</sup> Seed, *Fictional Labyrinths*, 249, n. 7.

<sup>28</sup> John Dugdale, *Thomas Pynchon: Allusive Parables of Power* (London: Macmillan, 1990), 81.

Profane's destination (in other words, V.) is already suggested in the Gaucho's narrative: 'He knew they wouldn't head directly for their destination. They did not,' we are informed, 'once over the bridge the driver began to zigzag, run in circles, retrace his way' (V. 179).<sup>29</sup> As the goal of these journeys is revealed to be unattainable (V.), the journey itself, represented predominantly through the image of the street, amasses a large symbolic capital, as the passage below evinces:

The street of the 20th Century, at whose far end or turning—we hope—is some sense of home or safety. But no guarantees. A street we are put at the wrong end of, for reasons best known to the agents who put us there. If there are agents. But a street we must walk. (V. 323-4)

In the novel's Epilogue, as the proto Profane-Stencil double-act of Demivolt and Stencil *père* converses, the 'single abstracted Street' of the novel's beginning is revealed to be the V-trajectory of all male characters in search of V.:

"Odd how paths cross."  
Stencil nodded.  
"Are we meant to keep tabs on one another? Or were we meant to meet."  
"Meant?" too quickly. (V. 470)

The convergence of male paths in pursuit of V. in the novel is to some extent a diagrammatic abstraction. The intersecting trail left behind by Stencil *père* and Demivolt's journeys mirrors the trajectory of Profane and Stencil, which keeps them from encountering V. herself, whilst simultaneously carving a chevron-shaped path in their wake. The parallel that is textually drawn between both twosomes here is intersectional and, ultimately, epitomized in the phrase: 'Odd how paths cross.' Furthermore, if we read the name Demivolt in parallel to the international unit of electromotive force, the volt, the abbreviation for which is simply V, we would see in the figure of Demivolt *half a V*, the other half of this anterior V, of course, being traced by Stencil Sr.'s path.

If, then, we read the titular 'V' as the narrative path of the novel's protagonists – keeping in mind the distinction Derrida would make between *V.* and V. as homonymous but not, strictly speaking, synonymous –, then the full stop that not only follows but, more to the point, is *not* contained *within* the titular 'V' can be

---

<sup>29</sup> This form of directionless motion would become a recurrent concern throughout Pynchon's subsequent works and is employed, I will argue in a later chapter, at a structural level in *The Crying of Lot 49*.

said to represent V. herself/itself. V. is the vanishing point suggested by De Chirico and appropriated by Pynchon, the subversion of the realist impulse behind its inception becomes obvious once one interprets it as a clear move towards abstraction.<sup>30</sup> Continually postponed, the impossible revelation of V.'s identity and true nature would be echoed in *The Crying of Lot 49*, in which Oedipa Maas attempts (unsuccessfully, as far as the reader knows) to untangle the riddle posited by her sexual Other, Pierce Inverarity. The dust-jacket for the first edition of *V.*, the design of which was undertaken by Ismar David, evinces this notion of the vanishing point through its use of perspectival lines directing the eye towards the horizon. Whilst it is not the painting on which Pynchon had his heart set, it nevertheless is strongly reminiscent of the desolation, abstraction, and techniques present in De Chirico's work. If the path of Profane and Stencil traces a V that brings to mind the converging lines of pictorial perspective, then V. herself is the vanishing point perpetually beyond one's reach, the spot on the horizon at which – due to its own nature – one may never arrive. Time and again, the Lady V., as it were, vanishes.

### **The Unattainable Quest**

V. is the grail to Stencil's unattainable quest, 'what is called a "sense of mission"' (V. 101). V.'s ultimate unknowability is clearly depicted in a passage from which Pynchon drew one of his tentative titles for the novel: *Down Paradise Street*. In chapter seven, as Stencil is sharing the information in his V. dossier with Dudley Eigenvalue (most of it, the reader is informed, being inferential), we are transported to Florence in 1899. There we are told that '[a]djoining the prison which Evan [Godolphin] had recently vacated, and not far from the British Consulate, are two narrow streets, Via del Purgatorio and Via dell'Inferno, which intersect in a T whose long side parallels the Arno' (V. 198). The text then tellingly informs us that 'Victoria stood in this intersection' (V. 198), a fact that, presumably for emphasis, is soon reiterated, as she is described as 'standing stone-still at the crossroads' (V. 199). Victoria's presence echoes, according to Dugdale, the role of Beatrice who guides Dante through Heaven, after Virgil has seen him through his

---

<sup>30</sup> The period accompanying the novel's titular 'V' could also be read as a bawdy joke analogous to Phillip F. Herring's interpretation of the dot at the end of the 'Ithaca' section of James Joyce's *Ulysses*, namely a typographical representation of Molly Bloom's anus. See Phillip F. Herring, *Joyce's Uncertainty Principle* (Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1987), 175.

journey across Hell and Purgatory.<sup>31</sup> After the aforementioned description, Evan and Victoria have a brief yet illuminating exchange of words:

“Perhaps we are in limbo,” he said. “Or like the place we met: some still point between hell and purgatory. Strange there’s no Via del Paradiso anywhere in Florence.”  
“Perhaps nowhere in the world.” (V. 201)

The text describes Victoria standing at the intersection and her ‘presence here and now between purgatory and hell’ (V. 199), yet the ‘here and now’ of her presence is – within a couple of pages, as the aforecited passage demonstrates – chiastically inverted into an unattainable place: what at first appears to be *here now* becomes *nowhere*. *Down Paradise Street*, therefore, stands as the very direction in which ultimately Stencil attempts to go: an impossible destination. Upon consideration of this passage, the reader may not only understand Stencil’s quest for V. as one which may never be fruitful (unless the mere incompletable journey were the purpose of the quest itself), but also see the title of the novel and its relation to the text with newfound clarity. If we see the titular V as the footsteps left behind by Stencil and Profane, then V. herself/itself cannot be contained within it. V. is the undeterminable point of singularity – ‘some still point [...] nowhere in the world’ (V. 201) – that remains outside their paths for, even if they were to encounter her or one of her many iterations, they would fail to recognize her V.-ness. V.-ness, after all, like Sandro Botticelli’s homonymous *The Birth of Venus* (1486), remains unobtainable to the male characters in the novel, as Rafael Mantissa and his accomplices Cesare and the Gaucho soon discover. In the novel’s title, V. herself/itself could be read as the period that follows the V, stands outside it and, therefore, remains unreachable to those within the V-trajectory. Try as Stencil may to embody that position – and he indeed does in the final section of Chapter 3, in which he attempts to ‘impersonate’ a spot, a perspective, a point: ‘the space of vantage’ (V. 94) – V. herself will forever remain beyond his range. In the same way that Old Godolphin sees ‘his fate complete, pre-assembled, inescapable’ (V. 184), Profane’s yo-yo trajectory appears to be destined to be V-shaped (even if simultaneously V.-less): ‘now it has a path marked out for it over which it has no control’ (V. 217).

---

<sup>31</sup> Dugdale, *Thomas Pynchon*, 88.

Stencil is, I argue, in search of his mother, as David Cowart, Tanner and others acknowledge.<sup>32</sup> There is, however, no clear critical consensus regarding this issue, a point on which I will elaborate shortly. The very subject of V.'s maternal status emerges during a conversation between Margravine di Chiave Lowenstein and Stencil:

MARG: It is she you are pursuing? Seeking?

STEN: You'll ask next if he believes her to be his mother. The question is ridiculous.

It is from Stencil that this topic springs, not from his interlocutor, making it plain to see that this is at the very least a possibility to which Stencil has given some consideration, whilst revealing his preoccupation with the idea of V. as his mother, whether biological or spiritual. Furthermore, after preempting a question we have no reason to believe Stencil would have been asked, he offers an answer that is nothing if not evasive. Grant resorts to a conscientious chronological reading of the novel to question the legitimacy of the notion of the materno-filial relationship between Stencil and V., arguing that Stencil 'would have had to linger in his mother's womb for more than a year in order to be born in 1901.'<sup>33</sup> Similarly, W. T. Lhamon points out that, were the reader to follow closely the novel's timeline, 'his mother would have carried him nearly two years in utero'.<sup>34</sup> This unlikely, if not slightly fantastic, protracted gestational period would undoubtedly result in the maternal ambivalence expressed by Stencil throughout the novel, whilst also justifying the representation of V. as Terrible Mother, a topic on which I will expand upon at a later point in this chapter.

It is suggested in the text that the V. in Stencil's father's journals may be his absent matriarch. This connection to an absent mother figure extends to many of the novel's other characters. We are told that Profane senses, for example, that 'now and again would come the invisible, umbilical tug' (V. 29). The metaphor of an umbilical connection with a mother figure is never far, as characters feel 'suddenly to have [their] umbilical string reconnected' (V. 217), or refer to bonds that tie people 'together like an umbilical cord' (V. 49). Profane continually 'felt that

---

<sup>32</sup> See David Cowart, *Thomas Pynchon: The Art of Allusion* (Carbondale and Edwardsville, IL: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980), 67; and Tony Tanner, *City of Words: American Fiction 1950-1970* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1971), 162.

<sup>33</sup> Grant, J. Kerry, *A Companion to V.* (Athens, GA: University of Georgia Press, 2001), 29.

<sup>34</sup> W. T. Lhamon, *Deliberate Speed: The Origins of a Cultural Style in the American 1950s* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002), 263, n. 14.

invisible string tug at his midsection' (V. 34). Whilst in Stencil's case the mother figure for which he searches may well be a literal one, the V. Profane is tacitly after (if a character without interests or drive could ever be said to be after something or someone) is the hand at the other end of the umbilical cord of his yo-yo self.

Both images, that of mother's womb and that of hand holding the end of the yo-yo string, are merged into one as the end of the novel approaches: 'Malta alone drew them, a clenched fist around a yo-yo string' (V. 444). Valletta, their Maltese destination, is after all another iteration of V.: 'Valletta, a city named after a man, but of feminine gender, a peninsula shaped like the mons Veneris – you see? It is a chastity belt' (V. 465). Furthermore, '[w]hat had Paola called the island: a cradle of life' (V. 382). Valleta is 'a vector pointing sternly to some land's-end or other, the tip of a peninsula' (V. 316). The hand directing the yo-yo and the maternal womb converge, becoming yet another intersectional micro-V.

Furthermore, Valletta represents the female on which phallocentrism has left indelible marks, the gynotextual site ('mons Veneris') that has been mutilated for generations by men who have attempted to even obliterate the female trace at a nominal level. Whilst the 'peninsula [is] shaped like the mons Veneris,' the urban construct that burdens it is 'a city named after a man,' Valletta, named so after Jean Parisot de Valette, who commanded the resistance against Ottoman forces at the Great Siege of Malta in 1565. However, this suppression of the 'feminine gender' of the peninsula is not the only one. The aforementioned passage ends '[i]t is a chastity belt': the inhabitants of Valletta call the city 'il-Belt,' the Maltese term for 'the City.' However, in typically Pynchonian fashion 'il-Belt' becomes paronomastically transliterated into the-Belt, 'a chastity belt,' further compounding the notion of Valletta as gyneco-geographical site of male suppression. If we consider again the idea of V. as an A both curtailed and inverted proposed by Alvin Greenberg,<sup>35</sup> the figure of V. could furthermore be understood in relation to the parallel John Dugdale draws between V. and the recurring A in Nathaniel Hawthorne's *The Scarlet Letter* (1850).<sup>36</sup> In my reading, however, this idea is further strengthened when read parallel to the male misinterpretation, judgment, and suppression of female figures. The novel's V-signs appear as inversions of the titular scarlet letter – quite literally an inversion of the 'A' – in opposition to its punitive symbol of

---

<sup>35</sup> Greenberg, 'The Underground Woman,' 58-65.

<sup>36</sup> Dugdale, *Thomas Pynchon*, 87.

shame. As the silencing gag is to the mouth, the accretion of suppressive male names is to the mons Veneris of Malta. From this perspective, Mélanie l'Heuremaudit's death towards the end of the novel could be read as a self-immolatory act. Mélanie refuses to wear the 'protective metal device, a species of chastity belt' that would have protected her from 'the point of the pole' (V. 414), the unambiguously phallic symbol in the play *L'Enlèvement des Vierges Chinoises* (*The Rape of the Chinese Virgins*). Like her sexual precursor Su Feng, Melanie is 'impaled at the crotch,' as she embraces this end in lieu of an existence under the oppression of men.

One of the tentative titles for V. that Pynchon and his editor originally discussed, *And His Ass Falls Off*, stems from a brief tale recalled by Profane about 'a boy born with a golden screw where his navel should have been' (V. 39). The boy's narrative culminates with him waking up from a dream to find that the potion (and subsequent dream) given to him by a voodoo doctor has worked and the screw has indeed vanished. 'Delirious with joy,' the boy 'leaps up out of bed, and his ass falls off' (V. 40). This entire micronarrative remains purposefully ambiguous as to whether Profane hears the story of the boy with the golden screw prior to the dream or within the dream itself, prompting the reader to ask, as Edgar Allan Poe once did, '[i]s all that we see or seem but a dream within a dream?' The omphalic screw is acutely read by Giorgio Mobili as a reference to Sigmund Freud's notion of the 'dream's navel,'<sup>37</sup> and by Fred Botting as 'the "secret" thing which defines [Profane's] being, the thing, like a signifier, that determines the course of his life.'<sup>38</sup> However, what both the navel and the screw imply is the seemingly absent umbilical chord and its trace, a powerful image that recurs throughout the entire novel and that underlines the connection between both protagonists who, ultimately, are but two lost men in constant need of mothering.

Whilst, in *Gravity's Rainbow*, Slothrop has little – if any – interest in journeying towards his own progenitor's maternal womb (GR 601-602), the opposite could be said to be true of both Stencil and Profane. Slothrop is entirely detached from any maternal presence, for he is unambiguously aligned with the phallus. On the other hand, the point of origination, to which V.'s protagonists

---

<sup>37</sup> Giorgio Mobili, *Irritable Bodies and Postmodern Subjects in Pynchon, Puig, Volponi* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 43-44.

<sup>38</sup> Fred Botting, *Sex, Machines and Navels: Fiction, Fantasy and History in the Future Present* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 81.

endeavour to journey, is in Pynchon's first novel explicitly said to be the uterine space: 'we all come from our mother's womb' (V. 47). This is an urge that, in the novel, is not merely restricted to the two main protagonists, as we also see Rooney Winsome enact this movement: 'He went in to the bed, assumed the foetal position' (V. 224). Considering that both the novel and its absent centre are denoted by a single *initial* – 'The magical initial!' (V., 228) –, we may wish to again examine the implications of this very word, which evokes both the notion of a beginning (*initium*) and of a 'going in' (*inire*). These two ideas of origination and entry are conflated in the text, where they become one in the quest for V. as a journey back into the womb.

An illustrative example of this ambivalent urge to journey back to the womb can be taken from Stencil's relationship with Malta. As previously discussed, throughout the text Malta is conspicuously described in both female and maternal terms. Valletta is characterized as the 'womb of rock' (V. 320) by Fausto and his peers and, the reader is informed that 'is it only because Malta is a matriarchal island that Fausto felt so strongly that connection between mother-rule and decadence' (V. 321). It is this latter idea, the connection between the maternal womb and decadence that is so pertinent to this reading of the quest at the heart of the novel as a journey towards the womb. As Douglas A. Mackey, Robert D. Newman, Zofia Kolbuszewska, and others have noted, the archetype of the Terrible Mother is a prevalent one within *V.*: as Mackey states, '[t]he historical V. is a form of the Terrible Mother.'<sup>39</sup> The Terrible (or Devouring) Mother is an archetype discussed at length in Carl Jung's *Symbols of Transformation* (1952, English 1956),<sup>40</sup> which serves as the counterpart to the Loving Mother, both dichotomous positions creating, according to Jung, ambivalence on the part of the subject, every mother figure containing both aspects. The individual with a weak Ego, such as Stencil, a comparison drawn by Mackey, finds the separation from the womb/V. problematic. It is this failure to separate that causes the emergence of the Terrible Mother and the anxieties this brings with it, unsurprising in the case of a character who might have very well spent up to two years in the womb.

---

<sup>39</sup> Douglas A. Mackey, *The Rainbow Quest of Thomas Pynchon* (San Bernardino, CA: Borgo Press, 1980), 23-24. See also Robert D. Newman, *Understanding Thomas Pynchon* (Columbia, SC: University of South Carolina Press, 1986), 35, and Zofia Kolbuszewska, *The Poetics of Chronotope in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon* (Lublin: The Learned Society of the Catholic University of Lublin, 2000), 64.

<sup>40</sup> C. G. Jung, *Symbols of Transformation*, trans. R. F. C. Hull, eds. Sir Herbert Read, Gerhard Adler, and Michael Fordham (London: Routledge, 1956), 502.

## The Inscrutability of Women

The ontological vagueness of *V.* is representative of a broader alignment of the female with ideas of inscrutability. There is a tendency in *V.*, common to its male characters, to homogenize ideas of the female, as can be best exemplified with the case of ‘the airline stewardesses Hanky and Panky,’ with whom Pig Bodine is romantically involved:

He never did find out their real names, though did it make any difference? They were virtually interchangeable; both unnatural blondes, both between twenty-one and twenty-seven, between 5’ 2” and 5’ 7” (weights in proportion), clear complexions, no eyeglasses or contact lenses. They read the same magazines, shared the same toothpaste, soap and deodorant; swapped civilian clothes when off duty. (*V.* 374)

In this passage, the obliteration of female difference is absolute. We are told that ‘[t]hey were virtually interchangeable’ in spite of them potentially differing in age, height, and, presumably, the natural colour of their hair. By virtue of them both dying their hair blonde, having 20/20 vision, reading the same magazines, and sharing toiletry products, they are reduced to the status of virtual interchangeability, ‘along with half a dozen more of their kind’ (*V.* 374). The names by which Groomsman and Bodine know these women, moreover, emphasizes both men’s hollow sexual involvement with them: mere hanky-panky. Victoria Wren is reduced in the novel to the status of ‘any Victoria’ (*V.* 73). Likewise, as Profane and Stencil prepare for their trip to Malta, the narrator informs us that Rachel was ‘looking like all those other women and girls: camp followers’ (*V.* 381), revealing their perception of her. The male homogenization of female diversity is made explicit soon thereafter, in a conversation between Rachel and Profane:

“If I am hooked on anything it’s you, Rachel O.” Watching her shifty in the mirror.

“On women,” she said, “on what you think love is: take, take. Not on me.” (*V.* 383)

What Profane fails to see (for he even fails to see his failure to see), Rachel intuitively instantly: he thinks he loves her, yet if it were not her, it would be someone else, for – in *V.* – women are indistinguishable the one from the other under the blunt,

reductive male gaze which transforms, with the greatest of ease, a specific woman into any woman.

A further manifestation of this tendency to homogenize the female and obliterate individuality can be found in the representation of women as objects, as can be evidenced in the way in which Profane, Stencil, and Lady V. herself interact with women in the text. Both the objectification and the homogenization of women in the novel are contained in 'the unhappy undergraduate adage: "All the ugly ones fuck"' (V. 102). Regarding Profane's gynopolitics, the text presents us with two main conceptions: women as accidents and women as objects. 'Women,' we are told 'had always happened to Profane the schlemihl like accidents' (V. 134). Likewise, in a conversation with Mafia Winsome, Profane's interpretation of women comes to light:

But a schlemihl, that was hardly a man: somebody who lies back and takes it from objects, like any passive woman. [...]

"What are you," she snarled, "a latent homosexual? You afraid of women?"

"No, I'm not queer." How could you say: sometimes women remind me of inanimate objects. Young Rachel, even: half an MG. (V. 288)

Of course, Profane's perception of women as objects could play on the idea of visual agnosia, similar to the man described in the case study that gives neurologist Oliver Sacks' *The Man Who Mistook His Wife for a Hat and Other Clinical Tales* (1985) its title. Both conceptions of women align Profane with the passive, as either someone *to whom accidents occur* or someone 'who lies back and takes it from objects, like any passive woman.' These two characterizations of the female, on the other hand, furthermore depict women as both unfortunate incidents and inanimate objects, denying the female body its agency. Whilst Profane responds to Mafia's first question ('What are you [...] a latent homosexual?'), her ensuing inquiry remains unanswered: 'You afraid of women?' The ambivalence male characters display towards women in *V.* suggests that the answer to this question is a resounding yes.

'Did he feel trapped?' the narrator asks the reader of Stencil Sr.: 'Having escaped lucky from one womb, now forced into the oubliette of another not so happily starred?' (V. 319). The journey back into the womb is defined by 'what the psychoanalysts used to call ambivalence' (V. 249). Hence, Stencil Jr., like his father

before him, adopts the ‘approach and avoid’ (V. 55) tactic. This is a clear reference on Pynchon’s part to the psychological concept of the approach-avoidance conflict, first delineated by Kurt Lewin and formalized by Neal Elgar Miller, whereby a person must weigh the potential benefits of an action against its detrimental consequences. The conflict is not resolved until the person in question opts in favor of one or the other.<sup>41</sup> In *V.*, our protagonists find themselves equally attracted and repelled by their own notions of what *V.* is and, therefore, asymptotically approach closure whilst never reaching it. As a result of this ambivalence, the novel’s ending must remain open, for they are yet to make a final decision.

Profane’s objectification of women is prevalent throughout the text. Speaking to Rachel, he states: ‘You know what I always thought? That you were an accessory. That you, flesh, you’d fall apart sooner than the car’ (V. 383), bringing to mind the dismantling of the so-called Bad Priest in Valletta (V. 341-345). Women are, in the eyes of the novel’s male characters, accidents, inanimate objects, accessories. The reader soon finds out that ‘Victoria was being gradually replaced by *V.*; something entirely different, for which the young century had as yet no name’ and that ‘she became – to Freudian, behaviourist, man of religion, no matter – a purely determined organism, an automaton, constructed, only quaintly, of human flesh’ (V. 410, 411). Here the homogenization of female identity is tacitly restated: ‘all inanimate objects, to one victimized by them, are alike’ (V. 410). In the world of the novel, if all objects are the same, and women are objects, it naturally follows that women are all alike.

Lady *V.*, in turn, objectifies the female body, particularly that of Mélanie l’Heuremaudit in chapter 14. Lady *V.* defines Mélanie in a forthright manner, ‘You are not real’ (V. 404), before expanding upon the logic behind her evaluation of the ballerina. ‘Do you know what a fetish is?’, she asks Mélanie before answering the question herself: ‘Something of a woman which gives you pleasure but is not a woman. A shoe, a locket... une jarretière. You are the same, not real but an object of pleasure’ (V. 404).<sup>42</sup> Synecdochically, Mélanie is reduced to the position of *jarretière*, demoted to the status of a mere garter. Through this very process of fetishization it is that, to some extent ironically, *V.* is herself reconfigured by Stencil

---

<sup>41</sup> See David Matsumoto, ed., *The Cambridge Dictionary of Psychology* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009), 127.

<sup>42</sup> In *Against the Day*, however, it is Dally Rideout who is the *jarretière*, not Mélanie, presumably due to the fact that the world depicted in Pynchon’s 2009 novel is one parallel to the one Stencil and Profane and – arguably – we inhabit.

into a mere object, perhaps a play on the different meanings of the word objective. In this light, V. becomes but an excuse for Stencil to pursue his quest, as we are told that 'Stencil was seeking in her his own identity' (V. 411). I would be inaccurate to term V. a mere MacGuffin, yet her role is, however, reduced to that of a structuro-pivotal force driving the narrative forward through her absence. It is the objectification that V.'s figure undergoes under the male gaze that allows her to become but a final goal, a fetish. Sigmund Freud is, undeniably, an important referent in any discussion concerning fetishism. According to Freud, 'the fetish is a substitute for the woman's (the mother's) penis that the little boy once believed in and [...] does not want to give up.'<sup>43</sup> It is at the moment in which the boy realizes his mother does not possess a penis that he must create a phallic substitute (the fetish) so as to avoid regarding his mother as a castrated being for, if she has been castrated, the same fate could befall him. The child both retains the belief in the female phallus and, at the same time, gives it up, the castration fear bringing about the creation of a phallic substitute.<sup>44</sup> It is, in Freud's conception of the fetish, the sight of the female genitals that brings about the process of fetish creation, with items of clothing or underwear often embodying the fetish, as they 'crystallize the moment of undressing, the last moment in which the woman could still be regarded as phallic.'<sup>45</sup> Aligning the fear of castration with the 'fig-leaf on a statue,'<sup>46</sup> Freud's essay further connects *The Birth of Venus* with Stencil's ambivalent feelings towards V., as in Botticelli's painting our sight of the threatening void of the female pudenda is averted, Venus covering it with her long hair. Cesare and the Gaucho must also approach, and immediately avoid, their own goal: *Venus/V-ness*. Freud's influential conception of the fetish resonates with Stencil's relationship with V., as the final goal is that which the fetish allows men *not* to look at directly. Stencil's quest for V. is a quest for an absence, a journey in which every clue is fetishized, to the point where *clues* regarding V.'s whereabouts are what Stencil craves, not V's actual whereabouts. Any physical, direct encounter between Stencil and V. is, ultimately, perpetually postponed.

The failure of men to accurately comprehend women in *V.* is made explicit through the representation of women as inscrutable creatures. Examples of this

---

<sup>43</sup> Sigmund Freud, 'Fetishism,' trans. James Strachey, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. XXI (London: Hogarth Press, 1971), 152-153.

<sup>44</sup> Freud, 'Fetishism,' 154.

<sup>45</sup> *Ibid.*, 155.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 157.

unreadability abound throughout text, from the fact that Schoenmaker 'wondered aloud if he would ever understand women' (V. 297) to the scene in which Kholsky, 'a huge and homicidal tailor,' characterizes History itself as womanly, in conversation with M. Itague: 'Perhaps she is a woman; women are a mystery to me' (V. 405). The communicational failure in the novel appears to be ascribed to men who, time and again, misread women's thoughts, desires, wishes, and even their language, both verbal and bodily. 'The woman herself was an enigma' (V. 221), we are told of Paola, whilst a similar sentiment is expressed regarding Lady V.: 'But as for V.-V. in love—the hidden motives, if there were any, remained a mystery to all observers' (V. 407). I would speculate that all the observers in question are, in fact, male. Again, in an act reminiscent of rituals in which oblations are presented as offerings to appease a deity, 'Knoop who was having marital difficulties [...] somehow come[s] up with the notion that 2½ pounds of hamburger might serve as a peace-offering' (V. 373). This ill-conceived plan is doomed to fail, due to the fact that, one may assume, the '2½ pounds of hamburger' gift is merely a projection of Knoop's own desires, which would no doubt include further down the line Knoop's own wife cooking it for him. The male failure to comprehend women in the novel is also represented as a failure on the part of men to make themselves understood: 'There are no words in Maltese for this. Nor finer shades; nor words for intellectual states of mind. She cannot read my poetry, I cannot translate it for her' (V. 309). This passage directly aligns the idea of unintelligibility and literature, alongside gender, in a move that appears to be conspicuously self-reflexive.

Even women's physical gestures and body language, as I have stated above, are unreadable to the men in the novel, as can be illustrated through Profane's interactions with Rachel: 'At the door he looked back. Was she blowing a kiss or yawning[?]' (V. 217). The same dynamic of inter-gender communicational breakdown is echoed in *Gravity's Rainbow*, tellingly in the form of yet another V-sign: 'She thumbs him upstairs and then gives him either the V-for-victory sign or some spell from distant countryside against the evil eye that sours the milk. Whichever it is, she is chuckling sarcastically' (GR 254). Slothrop's failure to decode the smiling old woman's hand gesture parallels the form of male interpretive failure present throughout V.. After all, Slothrop 'believes that women, like Martians, have antennas men do not' (GR 188). Ultimately, the V-sign can be a 'V-for-victory' (GR 129) as much as it can represent an abusive gesture of

contempt, particularly within the British context of *Gravity's Rainbow*. The inherent ambiguity of the V-sign in Pynchon's first novel is carried through into *Gravity's Rainbow*: 'Is Webley's V here for victory, or ssörrender?' (GR 230).

This inability to comprehend the female psyche quickly gives way to indifference, as when we are told, early in the text, that Profane 'soon gave up trying to decode [Paola's] several hankerings' (V. 18). Yet, this troublesome communicational disconnection persists nonetheless, and it cannot always be ignored. In turn, this inevitably results in what the men in the novel term 'woman trouble', which is in fact nothing other than the difficulties *men* encounter when attempting to successfully elucidate the female mind. 'Don't tell me any woman trouble. I got enough for the both of us,' (V. 348), McClintic Sphere tells Rooney. Similarly, the narrator informs us of Stencil that '[f]or a boy not getting any he had more woman problems than anybody he knew' (V. 364). The idea recurs again in a conversation between Stencil and Profane: 'So he had Profane talking about his woman problems. "I don't know what Paola wants"' (V. 381). The notion of 'woman trouble' is echoed in the title of Judith Butler's 1990 seminal feminist study *Gender Trouble*, in which the term's phallogentric, accusatory tone is removed and replaced for a neutral, unspecific one: gender. The novel, however, presents a purely masculine (mis)conception of the female: 'Stencil has a problem. A woman' (V. 385).

Male characters in the novel appear to be utterly unable to comprehend women, a fact that is represented throughout the text in unambiguous terms. The singularity of the female experience is what in the novel is represented by the V-sign. Not only is V. a cryptic glyph, symbolizing the impossibility of an accurate male reading of it, but it is also reductive in the extreme: V. is also a vagina. The novel presents us with male characters that reduce women synecdochically to the one physical attribute that distinguishes women from them biologically, the one difference that historically has been declared by men a lack on women's part, inherent to their anatomy. The narrator, discussing Esther's rhinoplasty for example, describes her nose in vaginal terms, as if there were a 'clitoris somewhere inside her nasal cavity', concluding that '[a] cavity is a cavity, after all' (V. 109). The representation of women in this reduced anatomical form is further compounded by the recurrence of vulgar allusions to the female genitals. Women become synonymous with a dirty word, a fact that is echoed in the name of one

'Mrs. Grossería' (V. 114), *grosería* being Spanish for *swear word*. The prevalence of the female genitals within the text is time and again echoed in the names of characters, such as 'Da Conho, a mad Brazilian who wanted to fight Arabs in Israel' (V. 22), whose name is a homophone for the Spanish for cunt, *coño*: V. 'as spread thighs are to the libertine' (V. 61). The reductive position assigned to female presences by the male characters in the novel is made explicit by Profane's fellow alligator hunters and buddies, who also partake in the hunting of the figurative pussy: 'prowling for coño' (V. 138). 'We are going out after some coño' (V. 135), the reader is told, yet a double standard pervades throughout, since '[g]irls are different from coño' (V. 135): their mothers, sisters, daughters. The conflation of two notions central to the novel – the quest and the vaginal – can be perceived in the following passage:

But soon enough he'd wake up the second, real time, to make again the tiresome discovery that it hadn't really ever stopped being the same simple-minded, literal pursuit; V. ambiguously a beast of venery, chased like the hart, hind or hare, chased like an obsolete, or bizarre, or forbidden form of sexual delight. And clownish Stencil capering along behind her, bells ajingle, waving a wooden, toy oxgoad. For no one's amusement but his own.

(V. 61-2)

The axial point on which the two aforementioned notions pivot can be found in the term *venery*, implying both hunting, and by extension the chase, and sexual indulgence. The preys listed in the passage – hart, hind, hare – not only echo the alliterative V-thrust of the novel, but can also be read as representing love both romantic and lascivious (through the homophonic *heart* and the homographic *hind*) and the protracted – and possibly never-ending – chase (*hare*).

The representation of women in the novel oftentimes descends into an oversimplification of their role as mere container. From early on in the novel, we are presented with a 'barmaid with a ship's propeller tattooed on each buttock' (V. 10), presenting her as a vessel, particularly as the context surrounding her description is a bar frequented by sailors. The feminine vessel, yet another male misconception, then becomes the space into which male characters project their own desires and expectations, Stencil's ambivalent relation with V. being the epitome of this dynamic.

Whilst unsuccessfully attempting to describe the true nature of Vheissu to Veronica Wren, Godolphin Sr. depicts it in dermic terms, as a surface whose novelty quickly palls:

soon that skin, the gaudy godawful riot of pattern and color, would begin to get between you and whatever it was in her that you thought you loved. And soon, in perhaps only a matter of days, it would get so bad that you would begin praying to whatever god you knew of to send some leprosy to her. To flay that tattooing to a heap of red, purple and green debris, leave the veins and ligaments raw and quivering and open at last to your eyes and your touch. I'm sorry. (V. 171)

Godolphin Sr.'s wish to pierce the skin of Vheissu brings to mind the male urge to penetrate the female hymen, to perforate the genital membrane and find what lies beneath – or beyond – the surface. Godolphin wishes to penetrate the skin of Vheissu, in the hope that the piercing and flaying of the surface will unveil the significance of the alien markings on its body.

The first of Godolphin *père's* descriptions of Vheissu characterizes it as being '[l]ike the skin of a tattooed savage', after which he offers a second simile in which it is depicted 'like a woman' (V. 170). After drawing these two parallels Godolphin Sr. conflates them both into a third, a few lines later: 'as if the place were, were a woman you had found somewhere out there, a dark woman tattooed from head to toes' (V. 171). It is in this conflation of both that we may see a microcosmic iteration of the convergent structure of the novel, where the two different descriptions swiftly cross paths: from the cryptic meaning of unreadable tattoos, the image shifts to one of gendered otherness and female dermis (with the undertone of sexual unreadability that riddles V.), before it becomes an amalgam of gendered, cultural, and even semiotic unintelligibility. Furthermore, the motif of skin as interconnected with the idea of penetration recurs throughout the text. An illustrative example may be taken from Godolphin Sr.'s conversation with Signor Mantissa on the subject of tourists:

"[...] They want only the skin of a place, the explorer wants its heart. It is perhaps a little like being in love. I had never penetrated to the heart of any of those wild places, Raf. Until Vheissu. It was not till the Southern Expedition last year that I saw what was beneath her skin."

"What did you see?" asked Signor Mantissa, leaning forward.

“Nothing,” Godolphin whispered. “It was Nothing I saw.”  
Signor Mantissa reached out a hand to the old man’s shoulder.  
“Understand,” Godolphin said, bowed and motionless (V. 204)

Here the reader may discern in Godolphin’s words the notion of men as tourists in the world of women, the masculine eye but attempting to scratch the feminine surface. In addition to this, the reader must be careful not to take the fact that Godolphin Sr. sees nothing as definitive proof that there is in fact nothing to be seen. Godolphin’s statement tells us more about the male perception of the female than it does about any aspect intrinsic to female singularity. Men in *V.* see the female – the many V.’s and the V.-ness that draws them together – as a void, an indeterminable emptiness, a mere concavity. Women are perceived by men as a void waiting to be filled with male projections of their own desires, as well as their own misconceptions of what the female experience entails.

The inscrutable void perceived by men in the novel in the presence of women becomes a monstrous threat to their own masculinity. Nowhere is this more clearly expressed than in the notion of the *vagina dentata*, to some extent an iteration of the Terrible Mother and of the terrifying void. The *vagina dentata* can be read in Lucille’s brief tryst with Profane, in which she is depicted as having her ‘[s]kirt raised, mouth open, teeth all white, sharp, ready to sink into whatever soft part of him got that close’ (V. 143). The fact that the description begins with a reference to her lower garment, in addition to the mention of Profane’s soft parts, suggests that the sharp, white teeth ready to bite may be those of the monstrous female. Likewise, in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, Katje’s vagina is pronounced ‘her cunt, that fearful vortex’ (GR, 235). The vortex, yet another V-sign, will bring to mind the final page of *V.*, in which an unexpected waterspout brings Stencil Sr.’s narrative to an abrupt and untimely end, devouring him. This final passage is then followed, not by the traditional ‘The End’ or ‘Fin’, but rather by yet another ‘V’, perhaps a typographical representation of the terrible waterspout itself.

## *The Early Novels II: Gravity's Rainbow's Parabola*

'Your mind is in the sewer' (V. 121)

Prior to its publication, Viking Press had referred to *Gravity's Rainbow* in its press releases by its original working title, *Mindless Pleasures*.<sup>1</sup> Since 'no one at all seemed pleased with it'<sup>2</sup> and the date of publication approached, Edwin Kennebeck, who acted as copy editor of *Gravity's Rainbow*, 'floated, with the air of semidesperation one feels in these situations, such duds as *Powers That Be*, *Angel of the Preterite*, *Control*, and *Slothrop Dodging*'<sup>3</sup>. The novel's working title, *Mindless Pleasures*, comes from a section near the end of the narrative, in which we are told that 'No one Slothrop has listened to is clear who's trying whom for what, but remember that these are mostly brains ravaged by antisocial and mindless pleasures' (GR 681). In other words, Slothrop and his drug buddies cannot quite make sense of the Nuremberg trials, in which – as Molly Hite asserts – IG Farben executives were cleared of any charges involving the fomentation of war.<sup>4</sup> In the worldview expounded by Pynchon in *Gravity's Rainbow*, Hite maintains, there is a certain desirability to these 'brains ravaged by antisocial and mindless pleasures.'<sup>5</sup> Ultimately, editor Gerald Howard speculates, 'Pynchon came up with *Gravity's Rainbow*'<sup>6</sup> as the title of the novel.

The titles of works of art, as the very text of *Gravity's Rainbow* itself informs us, require a specific *raison d'être*. At the White Visitation, as Katje Borgesius and Osbie Feel reach the final section of a film entitled *Doper's Greed*, we are told that '[t]here is a brief epilogue to this, with Osbie trying to point out that of course the element of Greed must be worked somehow into the plot line, in order to justify the title, but the film runs out in the middle of an "uh. . .".' (GR 535). Even the

---

<sup>1</sup> Gerald Howard, 'Rocket Redux - Gerald Howard on *Gravity's Rainbow*: Remembered, Reread, Reconsidered,' *Bookforum*, 12, no. 2 (2005): 37.

<sup>2</sup> Ibid.

<sup>3</sup> Ibid.

<sup>4</sup> Molly Hite, *Ideas of Order in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1983), 166, n. 18.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Howard, 'Rocket Redux', 37.

characters in *Gravity's Rainbow* are aware of the fact that the titles of a film or, in this case, a novel must bear a certain correlation to the work itself. This theory of naming is echoed throughout the novel, as in the episode in which Säure renames Slothrop 'Rocketman', a nominal reconfiguration to which I will return in this section: "'Raketemensch!'" screams Säure, grabbing the helmet and unscrewing the horns off of it. Names by themselves may be empty, but the *act* of naming. . .' (GR 366).

There are within Pynchon scholarship a number of existing theories regarding the structure, or even the shape, of *Gravity's Rainbow*, as the novel itself foresaw: 'All we have are the thousand dim, academic theories' (GR 349). A thousand academic theories, all equally dim, all equally brilliant. Doug Haynes states that '[u]nlike other schemas suggested for the structure of the book—Puritanism, Tarot, Kabala, and so on—Rilke's poetry and, to an extent, the life of the poet himself, allows Pynchon [and by extension *Gravity's Rainbow*] a purchase on a crucial period of German history.'<sup>7</sup> Here Haynes is, to some extent, aligning his conception of the novel with that of Charles Hohmann, Thomas Moore, and others.<sup>8</sup> In what is undeniably a *mimikomorphic* structural interpretation, Hohmann painstakingly charts the many parallels between the conceptual structure of Rilke's *Duino Elegies* (1920) and *Gravity's Rainbow*, the most noteworthy shortcoming of this comparative reading being, as Bernard Duyfhuizen states, the fact that 'the promises of transcendence that are so crucial to Rilke's transfigurative vision become either sick jokes or targets of sympathetic parody in Pynchon's post-nuclear vision.'<sup>9</sup> Nevertheless, as Duyfhuizen and others have acknowledged, Rilke's work had an undeniable influence on Pynchon as he wrote *Gravity's Rainbow*.

As Haynes states, scholars have similarly examined the role of the Tarot as organizational device in *Gravity's Rainbow*, as the references to mysticism, divination, and individual cards in the Tarot deck interspersed throughout the narrative culminate in the card-by-card enumeration of 'WEISSMAN'S TAROT':

---

<sup>7</sup> Doug Haynes, "'Gravity Rushes Through Him': Volk and Fetish in Pynchon's Rilke', *Modern Fiction Studies*, 58, no. 2 (2012): 311.

<sup>8</sup> See: Charles Hohmann, *Thomas Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow: A Study of Its Conceptual Structure and of Rilke's Influence* (Bern: Peter Lang, 1987), the second half of which has been reprinted under the title of *Angel and Rocket: Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow and Rilke's Duino Elegies* (Norderstedt: Books on Demand, 2009); and Thomas Moore, *The Style of Connectedness: Gravity's Rainbow and Thomas Pynchon* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987).

<sup>9</sup> Bernard Duyfhuizen, "Taking Stock: 26 Years since *V.*," *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 23, no. 1 (1989): 84.

Significator: Knight of Swords  
Covered by: The Tower  
Crossed by: Queen of Swords  
Crowning: King of Cups  
Beneath: Ace of Swords  
Before: 4 of Cups  
Behind: 4 of Pentacles  
Self: Page of Pentacles  
House: 8 of Cups  
Hopes and Fears: 2 of Swords  
What will come: The World (GR 746-7)

Dwight Eddins reads the Tarot in connection with Gnosticism,<sup>10</sup> yet another of the many structuring devices that have been posited in relation to the novel, in this case a structural amalgam of the *mimikomorphic* and the *logomorphic*. To me, Weissman's Tarot has always seemed reminiscent of the *dramatis personæ* lists that preamble plays in a paratextual fashion, which – strangely enough – does not seem to account for Slothrop, whom both Weisenburger and the novel align with the figure of The Fool.<sup>11</sup>

Another structuring principle that has been proposed for the novel is mandalic in nature, with Steven C. Weisenburger stating that '*Gravity's Rainbow* is not arch-shaped, as is commonly supposed. It is plotted like a mandala, its quadrants carefully marked by Christian feast days that happened to coincide, in 1944-45, with key historical dates and ancient pagan festivals.'<sup>12</sup> Weisenburger's schema, however, is predominantly *chronomorphic*, as is the critical conception of the structure of *The Crying of Lot 49* as Pentecostal, another perspective from which I will diverge in my own analysis of that novel. Given the comparisons Weisenburger draws between the undoubtedly invaluable *Companion* and Don Gifford and Robert J. Seidman's indispensable annotations to James Joyce's *Ulysses* (1922), it does not seem implausible that Pynchon could have employed overlapping – competing, even – schemata, like those Joyce employed during the composition of his novel. Yet, ultimately, Heikki Raudaskoski states, '[a]s the critics haven't failed to notice, the rocket's parabolic arc presents itself as the whole

---

<sup>10</sup> Dwight Eddins, *The Gnostic Pynchon* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 150 and *passim*.

<sup>11</sup> Steven C. Weisenburger, *A Gravity's Rainbow Companion: Sources and Contexts for Pynchon's Novel*, 2<sup>nd</sup> revised edition (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 327.

<sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, 9.

novel's dominant structural metaphor.<sup>13</sup> It may well have been scholarly decorum that has lead critics to assert that, in *Gravity's Rainbow*, (a) the rocket lies at the heart of the narrative, (b) the novel is structured like the flight of the V-2 rocket, and (c) the penis and the rocket are interchangeable symbols of both Destiny and that which the text terms '*male supremacy*' (GR 155), without, however, proposing that (d) the novel is, in a manner of speaking, shaped like a penis. This section will propose a *logomorphic* reading of the novel, in line with a parabolic conception of *Gravity's Rainbow*, which will extend this notion, whilst positing the penis as the prevalent organizational symbol in the text. I will read *Gravity's Rainbow* against *V.*; where *V.* has the eternally elusive female and the chevron, *Gravity's Rainbow* has the ever-present male and the 'inverted V' (GR 312) of the parabola; whereas the former has at its centre an unattainable quest back to the womb, the latter has the unavoidable journey to the grave at its heart. The novels find complementary echoes in each other: the inscrutability of women (as seen through the eyes of men) and the undeniable bluntness of men, the concave and the convex, the vagina and the phallus, or, as Tony Tanner puts it, *V.* and *V-2*.<sup>14</sup>

### The Parabolic Trajectory

As Sir Stephen Dodson-Truck phrases it, the characters in *Gravity's Rainbow* are not only depicted in terms of their roles, but also through the principle of *pars pro toto* as their mere function:

“My ‘function’ is to observe you. That's my function. You like my function? You like it? *Your* ‘function’ . . . is, learn the rocket, inch by inch, *I* have . . . to send in a daily log of your progress. And that's all I know.” (GR 216)

The emphasis on Slothrop's progress reminds us of the importance of the parabolic arc, the progress of the rocket, whilst Dodson-Truck's punctuational emphasis on the very word *function* brings to mind both the formalist/narratological notion of the character as mere function and the mathematical language employed when pairs of coordinates have been calculated

---

<sup>13</sup> Heikki Raudaskoski, “‘The Feathery Rilke Mustaches and Porky Pig Tattoo on Stomach’: High and Low Pressures in *Gravity's Rainbow*,” *Postmodern Culture* 7, no. 2 (1997): n.p. Accessed November 30, 2012.

<http://pmc.iath.virginia.edu/text-only/issue.197/raudaskoski.197>.

<sup>14</sup> This being the title of Tanner's insightful essay '*V. & V-2*,' in *Pynchon: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Edward Mendelson, 16-55 (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1978).

and the data can then be employed to plot the graph of a function, in this case, one can only imagine, a parabola. Every single character in the novel could be seen, from this perspective, as a single point in the complete parabolic arc of the text. Slothrop's role, he is told, is to 'learn the rocket, inch by inch':

But it is a curve each of them feels, unmistakably. It is the parabola. They must have guessed, once or twice -- guessed and refused to believe -- that everything, always, collectively, had been moving toward that purified shape latent in the sky, that shape of no surprise, no second chance, no return. Yet they do move forever under it, reserved for its own black-and-white bad news certainly as if it were the rainbow, and they its children. . . . (GR 209)

The 'purified shape latent in the sky, that shape of no surprise, no second chance, no return' is unmistakably the parabola, here also equated by the end of the passage to the titular rainbow. If what structures the novel is 'a Destiny with a shape' (GR 362), then the shape of destiny is, in the text's conception of the world, parabolic. This destiny is invariably described throughout the novel as destructive, as embodied in the 'paraboloids of concrete' that were meant to create 'a perfect shock wave to destroy anything in its path' (GR 728-9) mentioned as *Gravity's Rainbow* reaches its final climax.

In the oft-quoted line 'a repetition high and low of some prevailing form' (GR 232) the reader may be reminded of the parabola and the rocket (*repetitions high*: in the high language of mathematics and, quite simply, high in the sky) and a crude phallic pictorial depiction and, in particular, Slothrop's penis (*repetitions low*: the first, low art, and the second – colloquially – hanging low) as iterations of the arc/arch that dominates the novel's structure. Slothrop is undeniably the narrative epicenter of the novel. To call him the protagonist would be to ignore the plethora of parallel storylines, each with its own protagonistic role embodied by any number of characters (Pirate Prentice, Katje Borgesius, Enzian and Tchitcherine, Roger Mexico and Jessica Swanlake, &c), yet Slothrop is at the paranoid centre of the novel. Paranoia is, in many ways, the opposite of the *deus ex machina* closure-inducing device that cuts through a narrative's Gordian knot. If an abrupt and unexpected final revelation (*deus ex machina*) slices through the Gordian knot by the end of the narrative, then its mirror image in Pynchon's fiction is the device which ties together from the very outset of the narrative all the threads that ultimately become that Gordian knot, the 'progressive *knotting into*'

(GR 3): paranoia, the force through which ‘*everything is connected, everything in the Creation*’ (GR 703).

In a manner analogous to the way in which the path of the Stencil-Profane (and the Stencil-Demivolt) duo traces a V-shaped trajectory through *V.*, so has Slothrop’s trajectory through the novel been described as parabolic. ‘The protagonist Tyrone Slothrop’s journey makes a shadow image of the parabola of V-2 rockets,’ Heikki Raudaskoski states, ‘from London via Southern France to Northern Germany.’ Raudaskoski concludes: ‘Thus there might well be a closing correspondence between parabola and parable.’<sup>15</sup> The parabola of Slothrop’s progress is also the arc of rise and fall, which unavoidably culminates in his rocket-like explosion, with the fragmentation of his identity, as he is metaphorically blown to bits. The arc of the rocket in flight is also the ‘geometrical path’ (GR 282) of Slothrop’s journey to the grave, everyone’s inevitable destination in the novel. It is also ‘an inverted V’ (GR 312), therefore emphasizing the symmetrical relationship between *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s journey to the tomb and *V.*’s journey to the womb: destination and origination.

Slothrop is not only at the paranoid centre of the novel, but he is himself the epicenter of the narrative at a structural level. He does not merely trace a parabolic shape across the text, but he also becomes himself another embodiment of the rocket when he assumes the persona of ‘Raketemensch! [*sic*]’ (GR 366), the Rocketman. From the very beginning of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, Slothrop and the rocket are equated through the uncanny overlapping of both the trails left in their respective wakes: the map of the V-2 bomb sites is exactly the same as that of Slothrop’s sexual conquests in London. This eventually becomes an unambiguous alignment between them when Slothrop, in the Zone, finally takes on the persona of Rocketman. Not only does his course emulate the behavior of the V-2 rocket, but he himself begins to mimic its appearance, as he dons a helmet that looks ‘just like the nose assembly of the Rocket’, and a cape with ‘a big, scarlet, capital R—’ (GR 366). In the novel, Parabola, Rocket, and Slothrop all become iterations of the same, single, master motif around which the sprawl of *Gravity’s Rainbow* wraps itself. Slothrop even becomes, in a synecdochical inversion, his own penis:

Now something, oh, kind of funny happens here. Not that Slothrop is really aware of it now, while it’s going on—but later on, it will

---

<sup>15</sup> Raudaskoski, “‘The Feathery Rilke Mustaches and Porky Pig Tattoo on Stomach,’” n.p.

occur to him that he was—this may sound odd, but he was somehow, actually, well, inside his own cock. If you can imagine such a thing. Yes, inside the metropolitan organ entirely, all other colonial tissue forgotten and left to fend for itself, his arms and legs it seems woven among vessels and ducts, his sperm roaring louder and louder, getting ready to erupt, somewhere below his feet . . . maroon and evening cunlight reaches him in a single ray through the opening at the top, refracted through the clear juices flowing up around him. He is enclosed. Everything is about to come, come incredibly, and he's helpless here in this exploding emprise . . . red flesh echoing . . . an extraordinary sense of waiting to rise. . . . (GR 469-470)

In this passage, the reader is told that some funny, yet odd and seemingly unimaginable occurrence has taken place. Slothrop is 'somehow, actually, well, inside his own cock.' The text goes on to describe Slothrop hearing his own ejaculatory reflexes at work nearby, his limbs entwined around his efferent ducts, whilst light from within the vagina reaches him through the urinary meatus and is refracted through the 'clear juices flowing around him.' This intra-phallic location represents to some extent a counterpart to the uterine space to which male characters long to return in *V.* As ejaculation approaches, Slothrop himself, echoing not only seminal motion, but also the Rocket, feels 'an extraordinary sense of waiting to rise. . . .'

Slothrop's penis, the most prevalent *literal* penis in the novel, highlights the potential of the phallus as non-procreational – but rather, at best, recreational and, in most cases, de-creational/destructive – organ. 'The Pope's staff', we are told, 'is always going to remain barren, like Slothrop's own unflowering cock' (GR 470). There is throughout the novel an overwhelming pervasiveness of 'terrible penises' (GR 88), to such an extent that one may read in them the implicit presence of a Terrible Father, one that plays the role of counterpoint to the notion of 'Terrible Mother' suggested in *V.* The phallus in *Gravity's Rainbow* is depicted as symbol of the forces of destruction: the 'penis a blood monolith' (GR 95). There are but a few noteworthy exceptions to this overall readerly impression, and they both contain qualities which cancel them as terrible penises and, to some extent, as phalluses at all: Jeremy, whose nickname 'Beaver' aligns him to the vagina and whose penis is, in fact, never described in detail, unlike the genitals of most of the male characters in the novel; Bianca's anonymous father, whose anonymity aligns him and his sexual organ with the unattainability of Lady V.; and Ilse's father Franz Pökler, whom she refers to as 'Mama' (GR 220) in the text. The textual examples in which

the male characters could potentially be read as procreational (as opposed to merely destructive) are all aligned with the feminine, therefore they do not disrupt the characterization of the phallus as symbol of destruction and death.

‘In under parabola and parable’ (GR 299) we enter the gravity’s rainbow, and under them we will still be as we reach its end. The parabola pervades the text and is undoubtedly there in the notes of Milton Gloaming, who is ‘trying to develop a vocabulary of curves—certain pathologies, certain characteristic shapes you see’ (GR 32). The parabola is itself mentioned time and again in the novel in relation to structure. It appears architecturally in relation to both Slothrop’s entrance into and exit from Mittelwerk (GR 298, 312-13) and, as the action of the novel unfolds, we are told that the parabola has become the commanding emblem of New German Architecture (GR 372, 436). The parabola is said to be ‘a Nazi inspiration [...] but again also a symbol belonging to the Rocket’ (GR 299), and its presence is not evident merely in the realm of architecture, but throughout German culture: ‘A parabola! A trap!’ we are warned, ‘You were never immune over there from the simple-minded German symphonic arc, tonic to dominant, back again to tonic. Grandeur! Gesellschaft!’ (GR 443). Even though the structure of the novel is regimented by the shape of the parabola, it is the parabola’s agents – those that enact its form and configuration – that delineate it: the rocket and the penis.

Whilst the penis is the imaginative agent of the parabola, the rocket is its historical and factual agent. Through the constant recurrence of rocketry and the rocketlike, the V-2 vengeance weapon (*Vergeltungswaffe 2*) asserts itself as one of the prevalent narrative symbols. The text is riddled with V-2 poetry (the ‘Rocket Limericks’, GR 305-7, 311, 334-5), ballistochronicity (‘Rocket Noon’, GR 500), and even commodified infantile likeness of it (‘toy moon-rockets’, GR 431), among innumerable other iterations of the destructive phallus. Yet, ultimately, ‘the Rocket’, the text informs us, always implies ‘an annihilation’ (GR 396).

The phrase ‘pornographies of flight’ (GR 567) evinces the amalgamation of penis and rocket. If the rocket is an enormous phallus, then its path as it traverses the skies cannot be but an obscene pornography of flight: ‘the parabola was also the shape of the path intended for the rocket through space’ (GR 298). Rocket and penis are both interconnected, from early on in the overlapping of London’s aerial views, to their respective depictions, in which a description of one inevitable turns into a description of the other and *vice versa*. An illustrative example can be taken

from the previously mentioned 'pornographies of flight. Reminders of impotence and abstraction, the stone Treppengiebel shapes, whole and shattered, appear now over the green plains, and last a while, and go away' (*GR* 567). The impotence of the penis and the abstraction of the plotted parabolic curve merge together. Similarly, the untimely burnout and subsequent falling short of V-2 missiles is referred to as 'premature Brennschluss' (*GR* 8), bringing to mind this union of both phalli in a name that is strongly reminiscent of premature ejaculation. Even the very creation of the rocket aligns it to a manly destructive urge:

'do you think we'd've had the Rocket if someone, some specific somebody with a name and a penis hadn't wanted to chuck a ton of Amatol 300 miles and blow up a block full of civilians? [All of which is done] 'for the numb and joyless hardons of human sultans' (*GR* 521)

As extensions of each other they enforce the notion of 'male supremacy' (*GR* 155). As if the phallic connection between these symbols were not enough, the text tells us of Enzian –but presumably this is also applicable to Tchitcherine, to Slothrop, &c– who 'was led to believe that by understanding the Rocket, he would come to understand truly his manhood. . . .' (*GR* 324). Likewise, Thanatz draws this comparison in unambiguous terms:

"Yes, fueled, alive, ready for firing . . . fifty feet high, trembling . . . and then the fantastic, virile roar. Your ears nearly burst. Cruel, hard, thrusting into the virgin-blue robes of the sky, my friend. Oh, so phallic. Wouldn't you say?" (*GR* 465)

Cruel, hard, and thrusting, so phallic. However, the genital analogy between V-2 rocket and penis also extends to love, not merely sexual intercourse:

'a discovery that love, among these men, once past the simple feel and orgasming of it, had to do with masculine technologies, with contracts, with winning and losing. Demanded, in his own case, that he [Enzian] enter the service of the Rocket. . . . Beyond simple steel erection, the Rocket was an entire system *won*, away from the feminine darkness, held against the entropies of lovable but scatterbrained Mother Nature' (*GR* 324)

Here the text conspicuously presents the contrast between male and female, perhaps even between the manly parabola and the womanly chevron. The 'feminine darkness' appears echoing the notion of the Terrible Mother in *V*, where the maternal is linked to the monstrous vagina. Whereas the narrative thrust in *V*.

is an asymptotic journey towards the womb, in *Gravity's Rainbow* the drive is one 'away from the feminine darkness', as opposed to the movement *into* it.

Male characters in *Gravity's Rainbow* are pulled towards the rocket, after all 'Pöckler was an extension of the Rocket' (GR 402), Enzian and the Hereros 'grew so close to the Rocket' (GR 362), and so forth. Similarly, Slothrop is time and again compared to the Aggregat-4, or A4 (GR 197). Slothrop is yet 'another rocket-creature, a vampire whose sex life actually fed on the terror of that Rocket Blitz-ugh, creepy, creepy' (GR 629). The Rocket is said to be 'electric-shocked as any rat into following this very narrow mazeway of clear space' (GR 517) and, like the V-2, so is Slothrop. The laboratorial language of the passage with its constricted mazework and electric shocks is that of Pavlovian conditioning, yet it also resonates with deterministic undertones. The 'very narrow mazeway of clear space' is none other than the parabolic trajectory. The conjunction of fatalist notions and Pavlovian conditioning is also manifested in the character of Slothrop. After all, Slothrop –who has throughout the text been following his penis, soon finds out he was never truly in control of it: 'THE PENIS HE THOUGHT WAS HIS OWN' (GR 216).

The parabolic narrative arc could also be characterized as an ejaculatory trajectory, a fact that is gestured towards from the very first sentence of the novel: 'A screaming comes across the sky' (GR 3). This oft-quoted opening sentence reverberates throughout the text, but its first echo takes place almost immediately, 'Screaming holds across the sky. When it comes, will it come in darkness, or will it bring its own light?' (GR 4). Molly Hite suggests a conceptual equivalence between the images of 'rocket, flight, fate, parabola, rainbow', drawing a parallel to Soviet poet Andrei Voznesensky's poem 'Ballad of the Parabola'<sup>16</sup>, which is clearly alluded to not only in the novel's structure and title, but also in the aforementioned passage. Voznesensky's poem beings:

Fate flies  
like a rocket, on a parabolic curve—  
Mostly in darkness, but sometimes—  
It's a rainbow.<sup>17</sup>

---

<sup>16</sup> Hite, *Ideas of Order*, 164, n. 4.

<sup>17</sup> Andrei Voznesensky, 'Ballad of the Parabola', in *Selected Poems of Andrei Voznesensky*, trans. Anselm Hollo (New York: Grove Press, 1964), 36.

The tension between the notion of the rainbow as brilliant parabola and the darkness of the parabolic curve traced by the flight of the rocket certainly strikes a chord with *Gravity's Rainbow*. Yet, the phallotextual nature of the novel, with its emphatic focus on the penis as the rocket's equal suggests another reading of the opening sentence of *Gravity's Rainbow*. At a syntactical level the verbs that in close succession are employed in these rippling clauses – which do not feature in 'Ballad of the Parabola' – are 'to come', 'to hold' and, again, 'to come', introducing an alignment between sexuality and violence that becomes prevalent throughout the text as the novel unfolds.

Throughout Pointsman's investigation the inquiry's focus on Slothrop is briefly questioned, after all it revolves around a 'coincidence of maps, girls and rocketfalls' (GR 176). Jessica and subsequently Roger both dare ask the seemingly unthinkable: '*What about the girls?*' (GR 91, clearly echoing page 87). But *Gravity's Rainbow* is the phallocentric foil to *V.*'s gynocentrism and it is the 'Slothropian sex adventures' as they fall 'into the erotic Poisson' (GR 270), not the sexual partners left in their wake, that the reader will follow. The textual thrust of the novel hints at 'a purity begging to be polluted. . . of course Empire took its way westward, what other way was there but into those virgin sunsets to penetrate and to foul?' (GR 214). Time and again, the text zeroes in on '*male supremacy*' (GR 155). The ever-elusive female of *V.* becomes distorted through the phallic lens of *Gravity's Rainbow*, which characterizes women bluntly: 'something warm and kind around his penis besides his lonely fist' (GR 351). Women are solely defined in terms of their relation to the phallus, reminding the reader of the fact that in *V.* women are also presented through the male lens: both Profane and Stencil, in addition to the novel's knowing author, who is purposefully playing on this idea. The powerful female figure in *V.* is predominantly presented as feeble in *Gravity's Rainbow*: 'extrahuman anxieties—they only weaken, feminize the will' (GR 228). In the novel, to feminize the will is to debilitate it, even to impair it.

The alignment of the penis with weaponry and its potential for destruction is unambiguous. We are told that 'Imipolex G [the fictional synthetic material used in the novel's rockets] is the first plastic that is actually erectile' (GR 699). Likewise, during Tchitcherine's Oneirine-fuelled haunting, as Nikolai Ripov's men disarm him, this parallel between penis and weapon is further emphasized: 'Through the nerves of hip and ass he feels his Nagant being slid from its holster,

and feels his own cock sliding out of a German girl he can't remember now' (*GR* 704-5). The novel is riddled with images of bellicose phalli. From the 'wirephoto of a giant white cock, dangling in the sky straight downward out of a white pubic bush' (*GR* 693) which is none other than the mushroom cloud over Hiroshima as seen through Slothrop's fixated eyes, to the 'truncheons already unsheathed, black dildos in nervous hands, wobbling, ready for action' (*GR* 570). This 'action' represents a blending of violence and sexuality, made obvious in the fantasies Major Marvy has whilst having sexual intercourse with a prostitute: 'visions go swarming, violent, less erotic than you think—more occupied with thrust, impact, penetration, and such other military values' (*GR* 606). Penetration and dominance are casually designated as 'military values', making them a global imperative at an institutional level. It is not an alignment that can be found solely in Slothrop nor merely in the geographical location of Germany, but a ubiquitous quality of the phallus in isolation.<sup>18</sup>

Slothrop's penis and a falling projectile become a seamless unity in the eyes of Darlene, one his many conquests:

'The floor has twitched like a shaken carpet, and the bed with it. Slothrop's penis has sprung erect, aching. To Darlene, suddenly awake, heart pounding very fast, palms and fingers in fear's pain, this hardon has seemed reasonably part of the white light, the loud blast. By the time the explosion has died to red strong flickering on the shade, she's begun to wonder . . . about the two together . . . but they're fucking now, and what does it matter, but God's sake why shouldn't this stupid Blitz be good for something?' (*GR* 120)

Darlene briefly questions the simultaneity of erection and explosion, wondering 'about the two together,' yet her reservations are ephemeral and soon she finds herself resuming intercourse with Slothrop. What to the reader has so far been nothing more than reported suspicions, in the aforementioned passage is, in fact, confirmed: the rocket, by virtue of its mere presence (or its future presence), will elicit an erectile response in Slothrop. His hard-on is not simply associated,

---

<sup>18</sup> It should be noted that I do not propose a reductive binary reading of gender for *Gravity's Rainbow*. Any reading of gender in the novel must acknowledge that both male and female characters contain the potential for evil, perversion, and destruction. One need look no further than Margherita, Bianca's infanticidal mother. What I aim to highlight in this chapter is the conspicuousness of the (ever-present) male in *Gravity's Rainbow* in contrast to the dominant role of the (absent) female in *V.* Undoubtedly the pervasiveness of phallic imagery accounts for much of the bellicose connections between penis and destruction within *Gravity's Rainbow*.

connected, nor a mere harbinger of the rocket: his very erection is 'part of the white light, the loud blast' itself.

Although – symbolically, synecdochically – the parabola, the rocket, and the phallus represent in the novel the male perspective, the highest point of the parabola is described in conspicuously female terms:

Ascending, programmed in a ritual of love . . . at Brennschluss it is done—the Rocket's purely feminine counterpart, the zero point at the center of its target, has submitted. All the rest will happen according to laws of ballistics. The Rocket is helpless in it. Something else has taken over. Something beyond what was designed in.

Katje has understood the great airless arch as a clear allusion to certain secret lusts that drive the planet and herself, and Those who use her—over its peak and down, plunging, burning, toward a terminal orgasm . . . (GR 223)

Brennschluss, the point at which the rocket's fuel ceases to burn, determines the apex of the parabola. The two powers that come face-to-face, force and counterforce, are the rocket and gravity, here conceived of as male and female counterparts. As Louis Mackey asserts,

sooner or later *Gravity wins*. And Gravity is a female force. Gravity alone receives *and reverses* the thrust of a self-assertive masculinity. [...] The straight arrow: parabola:: the erect phallus: the climaxing and descending phallus. What comes between—and makes the difference—is the female = Gravity. Receiving the erect phallus (the straight arrow of flight at  $G=0$ ), she bends it into the parabola of detumescence. Hers is the power of the passive, the venereal potency that always in the end subsumes and subdues the sword of Mars.<sup>19</sup>

The flight of the masculine rocket is cut short by the feminine force of gravity:

Gravity bends the straight line of its trajectory into a parabola. The instant after *Brennschluss* is the infinitesimal point ( $\Delta t$ ) just before gravity takes charge: the bare far side of orgasm just before your cock shrivels and Chiquita's picture flutters to the bathroom floor. At that point the rocket is neither launched nor falling, but—in that timeless moment and only there—hanging in space.<sup>20</sup>

Rocket and penis are one and the same, '[a]scending, programmed in a ritual of love', yet 'at Brennschluss [premature or timely] it is done' (GR 223). The mention

---

<sup>19</sup> Louis Mackey, 'Thomas Pynchon and the American Dream,' *Pynchon Notes* 14 (1984): 22, n. 8.

<sup>20</sup> *Ibid.*, 12.

of 'the Rocket's purely feminine counterpart' reinforces the passage's gendered nature. The parabola, that 'great airless arch', is but 'a clear allusion to certain secret lusts that drive the planet' (GR 223). Plater is right when, reading this aforementioned passage, he concludes that the 'Rocket provides the only genuine unity for the novel's multiple plots,'<sup>21</sup> yet he fails to draw attention to the fact that the rocket, the parabola, and the penis are all iterations of the same concept. The rocket's rise will end at Brennschluss, '[t]his ascent will be betrayed to Gravity' (GR 758), and it will fall 'down, plunging, burning, toward a terminal orgasm . . .' (GR 223).

### **The Unavoidable Destination**

Katje's description of the interaction of male and female forces that takes place during the flight of the rocket moves from the specific and concrete (Katje and Slothrop) to the general and abstract ('secret lusts that drive the planet'). These forces' final port of call, however, remains always the same: 'terminal orgasm...' The unavoidable destination in *Gravity's Rainbow* is, as critics have noted, death, symbolized by the phallus in isolation which, resulting from its isolation, thrusts in the direction of decay and devastation. Death in the novel finds its counterpart in the womb of V.'s titular character: the inevitability of the end echoes the unattainability of the beginning. Whilst the paternal phallus dominates *Gravity's Rainbow*, what structures V. is the maternal vagina *in absentia*. Both momentums – that of the knotting into death (the final *not*) and that of the urge to return to the womb (the beginning *before* the beginning) – ultimately represent different iterations of the death drive, as death is often imagined as a return into the mother's womb.<sup>22</sup> Furthermore, as Freud states:

It often happens that neurotic men declare that they feel there is something uncanny about the female genital organs. This *unheimlich* place, however, is the entrance to the former *Heim* [home] of all human beings, to the place where each one of us lived once upon a time and in the beginning.<sup>23</sup>

---

<sup>21</sup> William M. Plater, *The Grim Phoenix: Reconstructing Thomas Pynchon* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978), 155.

<sup>22</sup> Sigmund Freud, "The 'Uncanny,'" in *Writings on Art and Literature* (Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1997), 220.

<sup>23</sup> Freud, "The 'Uncanny,'" 222.

Whilst the journey to the womb in *V.* clearly is in keeping with Freud's description of the return to the mother's body as a death drive, in *Gravity's Rainbow* death is associated with the penis. Thanatos and Eros become intertwined by virtue of Eros manifesting itself as Auto-Eros, in *Gravity's Rainbow*. The phallus in isolation does not constitute a procreative, survival instinct, but merely an embodiment of the thwarting of this impulse towards self-preservation. By itself, the phallus comes to represent, in the novel, an assertion of death, undoubtedly one of the 'structures favoring death. Death converted into more death' (*GR* 167). This is what pervades the geo-temporal setting of *Gravity's Rainbow*, namely 'a culture of death' (*GR* 176), with Germany being described as 'the territory of the dead' (*GR* 612) and London characterized as 'Death's antechamber' (*GR* 40). The novel, after all, proposes that the reason behind the human tendency to bring about death and destruction is none other than a fear arising from the knowledge of Man's own mortality (*GR* 230). In the text, even the notion of life after death is refuted (*GR* 704), making death the ultimate judgment, one from 'which there is no appeal' (*GR* 4, 137).

The idea of a final judgment is, in the novel, embodied in the symbol of the parabola. Hite states that '[t]o the extent that it controls and structures the novel, this parabola encodes a unified vision of the world hurtling toward annihilation,' adding that it 'signifies what Josephine Hendin has called the message of the book, "the death at the heart of all experience."' <sup>24</sup> Hite concludes that '[t]he only revelation that this gravity promises is that the world is destined for the grave.'<sup>25</sup> Where *V.* has at its ultimately absent centre the unfinishable journey to one's origins, *Gravity's Rainbow's* parabolic structure marks the inevitable journey to the grave. Steven Weisenburger accurately declares that '[e]verywhere in *Gravity's Rainbow* the parabolic arch symbolizes disease, dementia, and destruction.'<sup>26</sup> However, the novel does not solely depict death, but rather consistently focuses on the journey *in the direction* of our inevitable end, the trajectory traced by our motion *towards* death. As Mackey asserts, '*Gravity's Rainbow* is obsessed with death. And yet death (singular, terminations, fulfillments) are not narrated.'<sup>27</sup> The novel focuses on the movement towards death more than it does on individual

---

<sup>24</sup> Hite, *Ideas of Order*, 98.

<sup>25</sup> *Ibid.*, 114.

<sup>26</sup> Weisenburger, *A Gravity's Rainbow Companion*, 10.

<sup>27</sup> Louis Mackey, 'Paranoia, Pynchon, and Preterition', in *Modern Critical Interpretations: Thomas Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1986), 58.

deaths experienced narratively: this is, after all, the 'Kingdom-of-Deathward' (GR 673).

*Being* is, in the *V.-Gravity's Rainbow* diptych, assailed by two distinct yet comparable death drives: the desire to move to a state of *Not Yet Being* and the impulse to reach a state of *Not Being Anymore*. Where *V.* tentatively moves backwards toward an undisclosed beginning, *Gravity's Rainbow* rushes forwards toward the end, a narrative urge that is made evident through the novel's anticipatory anxieties. *Gravity's Rainbow* has, after all, the theme of prediction at its heart: Brigadier Pudding's *Things That Can Happen in European Politics* (GR 77); 'the number of drops [of saliva], for this lab and Dog Vanya and the metronome at 80, is each time predictable' (GR 78); Säure's knowledge of 'papyromancy, the ability to prophesy through contemplating the way people roll reefers—the shape, the licking pattern, the wrinkles and folds or absence thereof in the paper' (GR 442), the implied potential for ballistomancy in the rockets that flew with 'no one in all the spas to read anything in the patterns the fires made' (GR 475); the fact that Thanatz can 'read the scars down [Greta's] back, as a gypsy reads a palm' (GR 484); and the role played in the novel by Chiclitz, who 'has his eyes on the future' (GR 558); and so forth. Similarly, at a syntactical level Pynchon's use of hysteron proteron – documented at length by Weisenburger<sup>28</sup> – emphasizes this pervasive urge to anticipate that which is still to come, as if willing it to take place.

Whilst the aforementioned examples illustrate instances in which future events are anticipated, the ultimate anticipation in the novel involves death. Slothrop is the epitome of this notion, since he 'has become obsessed with the idea of a rocket with his name written on it' (GR 25). This brings us back to the quotations employed as the epigraphs for this chapter:

'And you never hear the one that gets you.'  
(V. 23)

'You know that. You never hear the one that gets you.'  
(GR 23)

There is to the repetition of this exact phrase in both novels an uncanny sense of symmetry. In *Gravity's Rainbow* the otherwise paranoid fixation with one's own unexpected demise is justified, as the causal reversal of the V-2 rocket's ultrasonic

---

<sup>28</sup> Steven Weisenburger, 'Hysteron Proteron in *Gravity's Rainbow*,' *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 34, no. 1 (1992): 87-105.

speed keeps this statement from being exclusive to the realm of the metaphoric. In *V.*, the phrase implies a sense of paranoia, whilst simultaneously highlighting an utter lack of foreseeability: events taking (or *not* taking) place, regardless of individual plans and expectations.

Death is the common currency of war to such an extent that we are told that Roger Mexico has 'forgotten his first corpse, or when he first saw someone living die. That's how long it's been going on' (*GR* 39-40).

"What's the most frequent word?" asks Jessica. "Your number one."  
"The same as it's always been at these affairs," replies the statistician, as if everyone knew: "death." (*GR* 32)

Such is the prevalence of death in the novel that Josephine Hendin reads the shape of the titular gravity's rainbow as 'Death's hate, Death's grimace, the tragic mask of the heavens pulled down forever in one inviolable affirmation of depression.'<sup>29</sup> As Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds puts it, '[t]hrough the motions of causal, linear history, even the hand of God points to an inevitable end.'<sup>30</sup> *Gravity's Rainbow* aligns death, the inevitable end, with the masculine, informing us that '[f]athers are carriers of the virus of Death, and sons are the infected . . .' (*GR* 723). In *Gravity's Rainbow*, 'so that the infection may be more certain, Death in its ingenuity has contrived to make the father and son beautiful to each other as life has made male and female. . . '(*GR* 723). Men are, thus, described as conveyors of death, destruction, and decay. The journey towards the womb in *V.* finds its symmetrical counterpart in the asymptotic 'penetration toward the Center' (*GR* 509) of *Gravity's Rainbow*. Hite sees certain similarities between Stencil's 'approach and avoid' technique and the 'Holy-Center-Approaching' of Slothrop.<sup>31</sup> In David Seed's formulation, in *Gravity's Rainbow* Pynchon defines 'an absent Centre which paradoxically by virtue of its absence still attracts characters towards it.'<sup>32</sup> Both Seed and Hite's readings strengthen the notion of a conceptual parallel between *V.* and the *V-2*.

---

<sup>29</sup> Josephine Hendin, *Vulnerable People: A View of American Fiction Since 1945* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1978), 207.

<sup>30</sup> Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds, 'Thomas Pynchon, Wit, and the Work of the Supernatural,' *Rocky Mountain Review* 54, no.1 (2000): 27.

<sup>31</sup> Molly Hite, "'Holy-Center-Approaching" in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon,' *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 12, no. 2 (1982): 127.

<sup>32</sup> David Seed, *The Fictional Labyrinths of Thomas Pynchon* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1988), 188.

### Chiasmus: 'Parts that Ought to Be Inseparable'

Death appears in *Gravity's Rainbow*, as I have shown above, in many different forms, not only due to the novel's setting (World War II) but, more importantly, as a recurrent thematic concern. In the novel, War itself stands as either an urge to separate that which ought to be a whole or as a force with a will of its own that wishes to bring about separation where an inherent unity was originally present. The text is peppered with instances in which symbols representing a specific concept or notion have been inverted, at times literally, so as to undermine their specific signification to the point where they come to denote something opposite to their original meaning. An illustrative example of the inversions that permeate the text can be taken from the character of Zhlub, who has 'a habit of throwing his arms up into an inverted "peace sign"' (GR 755). Thomas Moore identifies Zhlub as a dead ringer for Richard Nixon<sup>33</sup>, the novel therefore positing Nixon as the embodiment of war. In a manner similar to that in which the peace sign is inverted to reveal its counterpunctual opposite, the rocket can, at the very end of the narrative, be read as incorporating yet another set of conflicting worldviews.

Both the swastika as symbol of the National Socialist Party in Germany and the V-2 rocket as the fearsome epitome of the nation's warfare technology are undermined in the final flight of the rocket in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Gottfried, whose name means 'God's Peace', is inside the novel's final rocket fitted with the Schwarzgerät<sup>34</sup> ('black device'), ridiculing in this single episode notions of Aryan purity, totalizing structures, historical reliability and phallic myths. In this section the Nazi swastika is immediately reverted into the Eastern swastika, signifying auspiciousness. In his *Histories*, Herodotus inaccurately comments of Indian men that '[t]heir semen is not white like other people's, but black like their own skins'<sup>35</sup>, a fallacy that is echoed in *Gravity's Rainbow* in the image of the V-2 rocket as penis with the Schwarzgerät/'black device' as the black seed within it. This symbolic reversal is hinted at earlier in the novel,

On the spot where tradition sez Enzian had his Illumination, in the course of a wet dream where he coupled with a slender white rocket, there is the dark stain, miraculously still wet, and a smell you understand is meant to be that of semen (GR 297).

---

<sup>33</sup> Moore, *The Style of Connectedness*, 68.

<sup>34</sup> Alternatively, Gottfried *himself* could be read as being the Schwarzgerät.

<sup>35</sup> Herodotus, *The Histories*, trans. Aubrey de Sélincourt (London: Penguin, 2003), 215.

The black semen in the text not only emphasises the ripeness of phalli in the text and provides humorous relief (also a pun on the term Aryan), but also points at the unreliability of historical discourse and, more broadly, the fallibility of totalizing narratives. These scenes represent a blow to the symbolic capital of Nazi Germany and, by extension, totalitarianism. As Julie Christine Sears states, Blicero and Gottfried both stand at one end of the moral spectrum of the novel: 'a morality that reverses the traditional association of black with evil and white with good.'<sup>36</sup>

In both aforementioned examples, that of Zhubb and that of the final A4, the reader sees the interplay between conceptual inversions and oppositional notions. Both examples also consist of a *pulling inside out* of a symbol denoting peace, turning it into one signifying war, and vice versa: 'here everything's been turned inside out' (GR 373). Throughout the novel, a discursive tension makes itself evident between Edward Pointsman and Roger Mexico. Pointsman, 'the Antimexico' (GR 89) and Mexico, 'the Antipointsman' (GR 55) are to *Gravity's Rainbow* what Captain Zhang and Father Zarpazo would be to *Mason & Dixon* some twenty-four years later. Their discursive incompatibility is revealed as they converse on the subject of Pavlov's 'ideas of the opposite.' Pointsman argues that:

'Pierre Janet [...] had no real grasp of the opposites. "The act of injuring and the act of being injured are joined in the behavior of the whole injury." Speaker and spoken-of, master and slave, virgin and seducer, each pair most conveniently coupled and inseparable—The last refuge of the incorrigibly lazy, Mexico, is just this sort of yang-yin rubbish.' (GR 88)

It is, however, exactly 'this sort of yang-yin rubbish' that *Gravity's Rainbow* ultimately presents as the condition of being in the novel: the potential for unity. 'Everything in the Creation,' we are told, 'has its equal and opposite counterpart' (GR 555), whilst War and the Force are depicted as purposefully attempting to disrupt this otherwise seamless complementarity: 'The War [...] wants a machine of many separate parts, not oneness, but a complexity. . . .' (GR 131). Time and again the reader encounters the artificial opposition between 'screwer and screwie' (V. 50), 'fucker and fuckee' (GR 559), yet this is merely '[t]he illusion of control. That A could do B. But that was false. Completely. No one can do. Things

---

<sup>36</sup> Julie Christine Sears, 'Black and White Rainbows and Blurry Lines: Sexual Deviance/Diversity in *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Mason & Dixon*,' in *Thomas Pynchon: Reading From the Margins*, ed. Niran Abbas (Madison: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003), 109.

only happen, A and B are unreal, are names for parts that ought to be inseparable...' (GR 30). What Pynchon proposes in the *V.-Gravity's Rainbow* diptych is a unity that time and again appears to remain purposefully vague. The text informs us, however, that 'every true god must be both organizer and destroyer' (GR, 99). This ideal undoing of separateness also finds, in the text, a gendered form: 'Male and female, together' (GR 563). As Leo Bersani succinctly puts it, 'Pynchon's novel is a dazzling argument for shared or collective being – or, more precisely, for *the originally replicative nature of being*.'<sup>37</sup>

Throughout *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow*, this often thwarted impulse towards unity manifests itself through depictions of the sexual act:

[Jessica's] warm-skirted thighs and mons pushing close to heat and rouse his cock, losing the last of her lipstick across his shirt, muscles, touches, skins confused, high, blooded—know so exactly what Roger meant to say? (GR 58)

And there've been the moments, more of them lately too—times when face-to-face there has been no way to tell which of them is which. Both at the same time feeling the same eerie confusion . . . something like looking in a mirror by surprise but. . . more than that, the feeling of actually being joined . . . when after—who knows? two minutes, a week? they realize, separate again, what's been going on, that Roger and Jessica were merged into a joint creature unaware of itself. . . (GR 38)

Skins become confused, even fused, momentarily, as lovers are 'merged into a joint creature.' The unity the reader is presented is most often what Shakespeare terms 'the beast with two backs', a psychosexual union that the text finally reveals has been present in the novel's title all along. If we consider the following characterization of the rainbow as witnessed through the eyes of Slothrop: 'Slothrop sees a very thick rainbow here, a stout rainbow cock driven down out of pubic clouds into Earth, green wet valleyed Earth, and his chest fills and he stands crying, not a thing in his head, just feeling natural...' (GR, 626). Whilst the rainbow, we are told, is male, gravity according to Nora Dodson-Truck, Sir Stephen's wife, is female:

In recent weeks, in true messianic style, it has come clear to her that her real identity is, literally, the Force of Gravity. *I am Gravity, I am That against which the Rocket must struggle, to which the*

---

<sup>37</sup> Leo Bersani, 'Pynchon, Paranoia, and Literature,' *Representations* 25 (1989), 113.

*prehistoric wastes submit and are transmuted to the very substance  
of History. . . . (GR, 639)*

If the male/phallic is aligned in the text with the rainbow and the female/vaginal is associated with gravity, then we may read in the novel's very title the coming together of both.

### **Chiasmus: V. and the Parabola, the 'inverted V'**

In the final section of this chapter, I propose that the 'inverted V' (GR 312) of *Gravity's Rainbow's* recurrent parabolic symbol be read in conjunction with the chevron of V.'s ever-proliferating v-signs, forming an X, or chiasmus. In *Lines of Flight* (2002), Stefan Mattessich discusses the notion of chiasmus in relation to *The Crying of Lot 49*; however, he approaches this idea in terms of a temporality that is opened up 'in the form of a chiasmic inversion of end and origin, failure and promise.'<sup>38</sup> In the same study, Mattessich similarly sets out to 'track the principal features of [*Gravity's Rainbow's*] time through the range of its chiasmic, iterative, and self-replicating effects,'<sup>39</sup> again focusing on the temporal. I employ the term chiasmus in its structural and etymological sense, rather than as synonymous with antimetabole. I do, however, see in the joint chiasmic structure of V. and *Gravity's Rainbow* an emphasis on antithetical inversions and oppositions. As Preben Jordal states, in his comparative essay on the work of Rainer Maria Rilke and Pynchon, '[t]he dynamic structure inherent in the figure [of the *chiasmus*] produces a tension that serves to bring about a change, not on the level of semantic meaning, but rather in the way we come to perceive the image as it is developed in the poem.'<sup>40</sup> Rather than constructing the novels through a chiastic reversal of order, Pynchon assembles them by employing an adapted chiasmus that presents a series of conceptual inversions. Like Mattessich, Jordal focuses on the chiastic structural elements of individual texts, in this case *Gravity's Rainbow*. Whilst I find their respective assessments of the individual texts compelling, the thematic and structural reciprocity between V. and *Gravity's Rainbow* that I have presented in

---

<sup>38</sup> Stefan Mattessich, *Lines of Flight: Discursive Time and Countercultural Desire in the Work of Thomas Pynchon* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 66.

<sup>39</sup> Mattessich, *Lines of Flight*, 69.

<sup>40</sup> Preben Jordal, 'The Savage Flower – reading Pynchon reading Rilke,' in *Blissful Bewilderment*, eds. Anne Mangen and Rolf Gaasland (Oslo: Novus, 2002), 112.

this chapter reveals a preoccupation, common to both texts, with human alienation and incompleteness.

Blicero and Enzian's first meeting stresses the near-transcendent nature of their union:

*We make Ndjambi Karunga now, omuhona . . .* a whisper, across the burning thorn branches where the German conjures away energies present outside the firelight with his slender book. He looks up in alarm. The boy wants to fuck, but he is using the Herero name of God. An extraordinary chill comes over the white man. He believes, like the Rhenish Missionary Society who corrupted this boy, in blasphemy. Especially out here in the desert, where dangers he can't bring himself to name even in cities, even in daylight, gather about, wings folded, buttocks touching the cold sand, waiting . . . Tonight he feels the potency of every word: words are only an eye-twitch away from the things they stand for. The peril of bugging the boy under the resonance of the sacred Name fills him insanely with lust, lust in the face – the mask – of instant talion from outside the fire . . . but to the boy Ndjambie Karunga is what happens when they couple, that's all: God is creator and destroyer, sun and darkness, all sets of opposites brought together, including black and white, male and female . . . (GR 100)

The description of Enzian and Blicero's first encounter under the night-sky in the desert in 1920s South-West Africa begins with Enzian, as Blicero would name him, uttering the words '*We make Ndjambi Karunga now, omuhona . . .*' As the narrator, infused with Blicero's voice, explains to the reader '[t]he boy wants to fuck, but he is using the Herero name of God.' Blicero is immediately frightened by what he takes to be blasphemy, the invocation of God as a by-word for sodomy. Yet, he soon understands that 'to the boy Ndjambie Karunga is what happens when they couple, that's all.' Young Enzian's notion of God encapsulates the universe; therefore, Enzian sees the coming together of opposing concepts as a reenactment of the divine. Since 'God is creator and destroyer,' Ndjambi Karunga is also both 'sun and darkness, all sets of opposites brought together, including black and white, male and female . . .' Enzian interprets copulation as a form of communion with Blicero. The destabilizing of opposites, in their being brought together, suggests Maurice Merleau-Ponty's concept of the chiasmus. Merleau-Ponty discusses the notion of the chiasm with an emphasis on the corporeality of 'being,' as opposed to a simply consciousness-based conception. Employing the haptic as an example, Merleau-Ponty states that 'every relation with being is *simultaneously* a taking and being taken, the hold is held, it is *inscribed* and inscribed in the same Being that it takes

hold of.’<sup>41</sup> The individual thus experiences himself/herself as both a subject who can touch and an object that can be touched and, therefore, enters the world of things that they themselves, in turn, touch. The body, thus, can perceive and be perceived. Merleau-Ponty first poses, and immediately answers, the following question: ‘Is my body a thing, is it an idea? It is neither, being the measurant of the things,’<sup>42</sup> a state that is encapsulated in the idea of an individual’s hand touching his/her other hand. He expands the idea of the chiasm by linking it to the physiology of vision through stereopsis, vision achieved not through the combination or overlaying of two separate sights (left and right eye), but the image that appears between both. According to Merleau-Ponty, the chiasm contains the potential for human communion, ‘the connection between the chiasm of my eyes and the chiasm of the eyes of an other. Rather than rivaling my own gaze, the two gazes co-function as two identical organs of one unique body.’<sup>43</sup> In *Gravity’s Rainbow* it is the War that attempts to prevent chiasmic communion, as its aim is to produce separation, even the separation of things that ought to be a single whole. In the aforementioned passage, as well as in the descriptions of Roger and Jessica’s trysts, as in the depiction of Pirate and Scorpio’s romantic rendezvous, a non-dualistic ontology commences, however briefly, to emerge. The characterization of the sexual act as bringing into existence a new being, challenging the division between interiority and exteriority, both in terms of the psychical and the physical, that the War wishes to concretize. After all, as Cathryn Vasseleu states, reading Merleau-Ponty, ‘the carnal body [is] never proper, but “between the pure subject and the pure object a third genus [genre or gender] of being.”’<sup>44</sup> Through the union of their bodies in a manner that momentarily makes them oblivious to the fact that they are separate entities, these characters offer the reader ephemeral moments in which resistance to the War appears to be possible: ‘They are in love. Fuck the War’ (GR 42).

Jacques Derrida also addresses the notion of the chiasm, as he sees it at play within the semiotic ambivalence of the concept of the *pharmakon*, which he characterizes as ‘the medium in which opposites are opposed, the movement and

---

<sup>41</sup> Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968), 266.

<sup>42</sup> Ibid., 152.

<sup>43</sup> Ibid., 215.

<sup>44</sup> Merleau-Ponty, quoted in Cathryn Vasseleu, *Textures of Light: Vision and Touch in Irigaray, Levinas and Merleau-Ponty* (London: Routledge, 1998), 33.

the play that links them among themselves, reverses them or makes one side cross over into the other.’<sup>45</sup> Derrida goes on to list several sets of traditionally oppositional notions whose polarity the *pharmakon* destabilizes: ‘soul/body, good/evil, inside/outside, memory/forgetfulness, speech/writing, etc.’<sup>46</sup> In *V.* it is the eponymous character that embodies this chiasmic ambiguity. As John W. Hunt puts it, ‘[s]he is Vesuvius, Venezuela, the Violet of the vulgar mnemonic; ultimately she is the V of the spread thighs and the *mons Veneris*.’<sup>47</sup> *V.* is both subject and object, in line with Merleau-Ponty’s corporeal understanding of the chiasm, and she is also the indefinable point of ambiguity of Derrida’s conception of the *pharmakon*/chiasm.

Considering the complementary aspects of *V.* and *Gravity’s Rainbow* that this chapter has delineated, in addition to the reciprocal narrative emblems of both novels, the reader may bring together the chevron of the former and the parabolic arc of the latter to form quite literally a cross representing the conceptual chiasmus conformed by these two works. Whilst, as I have previously noted, I disagree with Robert M. Adams when he asserts that *V.* is ‘just as capable of being named *X*’<sup>48</sup>, I do nevertheless see *V.* as a single half of a bi-textual chiasmus configured by Pynchon’s first novel and *Gravity’s Rainbow*. The X formed by the union of the narrative emblems of *V.* and *Gravity’s Rainbow* brings to mind the psychogeographic (*avant la lettre*) trajectories of Father Conmee and the Viceroy in episode X of James Joyce’s *Ulysses* (‘The Wandering Rocks’). As Leo Knuth asserts, the paths of Father Conmee and the Viceroy ‘form an X on the map of Dublin, with Bloom practically at the intersection of the two lines – an X which ties up with the number of this chapter and with the cross symbolism with which it is permeated’<sup>49</sup>. As it is made explicit in *V.*, ‘a woman is only half of something there are usually two sides to’ (*V.* 18). In this narrative diptych, *Gravity’s Rainbow* provides the complementary phallotextual element to *V.*’s gynotextuality.

Historically, the physical differences between male and female anatomy have been conceptualized in a number of ways in the West. Within the Judeo-

---

<sup>45</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (Chicago, University of Chicago Press, 1981), 127.

<sup>46</sup> *Ibid.*, 127.

<sup>47</sup> John W. Hunt, ‘Comic Escape and Anti-Vision: *V.* and *The Crying of Lot 49*’, in *Critical Essays on Thomas Pynchon*, ed. Richard Pearce (Boston: G.K. Hall, 1981), 36.

<sup>48</sup> Robert M. Adams, ‘Dynamic Duos,’ *The Sewanee Review* 86, no. 4 (1978): 527.

<sup>49</sup> Leo Knuth, ‘A Bathymetric Reading of Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Chapter X,’ *James Joyce Quarterly* 9, no. 4 (1972): 406.

Christian tradition, the question of whether woman was man's mirror image was the source of much debate. Whilst Saint Augustine accepted the idea that man could, without woman, be the image of God, Saint Hildegard of Bingen states that '[m]an and woman are [...] so involved with each other that one of them is the work of the other. Without woman, man could not be called man; without man, woman could not be named woman.'<sup>50</sup> Hildegard arrives to this conclusion from the initial premise that 'God gave the first man a helper in the form of a woman, who was man's mirror image,'<sup>51</sup> therefore giving women a significant role in the created order. As Grace Jantzen succinctly encapsulates it, since 'woman was man's mirror image, the two could not be separated as Augustine sometimes suggested; each was completely dependent upon the other.'<sup>52</sup> In the world of science, Galen envisioned the penis as a vagina turned inside out, and vice versa, as a result of which women were considered to be 'inverted, and hence less perfect men.'<sup>53</sup> Both religious and scientific discourses have long utilized the biological differences between male and female bodies to create and enforce a gendered hierarchy. If we understand *V.* as gynotext and *Gravity's Rainbow* as phallotext, in reading these novels alongside each other as forming a narrative chiasmus, it is my assertion that Pynchon dismantles such gendered hierarchies. What he proposes instead is a form of Merleau-Pontian non-dualistic ontology that brings into question the binary opposition of genders:

"“Anywhere you go there'll always be a woman for Benny. Let it be a comfort. Always a hole to let yourself come in without fear of losing any of that precious schlemihlhood." She stomped around the room. "All right. We're all hookers. Our price is fixed and single for everything: straight, French, round-the-world. Can you pay it, honey? Bare brain, bare heart? [...] You and anybody. Until that thing doesn't work any more. A whole line of them, some better than me, but all just as stupid. We can all be conned because we've all got one of these," touching her crotch, "and when it talks we listen." (V. 384)

In the *V.-Gravity's Rainbow* gender-diptych, when their vaginas speak to them, women listen, and when men receive orders from their penises, they follow

---

<sup>50</sup> Hildegard of Bingen quoted in Grace Jantzen, *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 228.

<sup>51</sup> Ibid.

<sup>52</sup> Ibid.

<sup>53</sup> Thomas Laqueur, *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990), 26.

them. In other words, we may read the structural similarities between *V.*'s structural 'cunt, that fearful vortex' (GR 235) and *Gravity's Rainbow*'s 'phancy phalli' (GR 708) as more than mere 'Kute Korrespondences' (GR 590). The conceptual structures of both *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow* echo each other with an analogous complementarity. The unattainable wombward journey in *V.* represents the equivalent of *Gravity's Rainbow*'s deathbound movement *turned inside out*. The male perception of women as inscrutable, complex creatures in *V.* finds its counterpart in the blunt, over-simplistic male self-definition in *Gravity's Rainbow*. The elusiveness of *V.* and her infrequent, isolated sightings are the counterpoint to the ever-present characterization of the V-2 which, we are told, one need *barely* look for, because *it* will find one. Similarly, the synecdochical reduction of the female to the *vagina* in *V.* is mirrored in the over-simplification of male identity as but the *phallus* in *Gravity's Rainbow*. These, in turn, organize the narrative trajectory of the respective texts, with Profane and Stencil tracing a V.-like shape as the plot of the novel unfolds and Slothrop demarcating, in an analogous manner, a parabola across Europe as he journeys towards the Zone. The conceptual complementarity of these novels narrative structures is conspicuous, as are the similarities of their compositional emblems, the V, the chevron, the vagina, and the parabola, the arc, the penis, and – together – the chiasmus.

## *Oedipa, the Oracle, and the Riddle: Lost in the Semiopolis of The Crying of Lot 49*

Much of the literary analysis of Pynchon's second novel, *The Crying of Lot 49*,<sup>1</sup> has focused on what critics have perceived to be one of its central themes: communication. In a novel that recurrently employs *mise-en-abyme*, commentators have frequently noted the microcosmic quality of *The Courier's Tragedy* – the play at its heart – which, like *The Mousetrap* in *Hamlet*, mirrors the larger narrative within which it is embedded.<sup>2</sup> Frank Kermode, Tony Tanner, and Maurice Couturier have all been quick to highlight the fact that The Tank, the theatre at which Oedipa sees the play performed, is located 'between a traffic analysis firm and a wildcat transistor outfit' (CL49 43) between 'circulation and communication.'<sup>3</sup> Whilst this duality is crucial to Tanner's reading of the novel,<sup>4</sup> Couturier rephrases it stating that the theatre is "'framed" between (...) information gathering and broadcasting.'<sup>5</sup> A large part of existing scholarship has prioritised the communicational and informational aspect of this presumed duality, neglecting the role that circulation plays within the novel. Whilst it would be practically impossible to fully extricate one theme from the other, the following chapter will predominantly aim to interrogate the themes of navigation and circulation, with particular respect to the ways in which they contribute to the narrative structure of the novel, which will be approached in a three-fold manner. The first of the approaches I propose will connect – on a *mimikomorph* level – the

---

<sup>1</sup> The novel will henceforth be referred to as *Lot 49* within the body of the text.

<sup>2</sup> Maurice Couturier, 'The Death of the Real in The Crying of Lot 49,' *Pynchon Notes* 20-21 (1987): 17.

<sup>3</sup> Frank Kermode, 'The Use of the Codes,' in *The Art of Telling: Essays on Fiction* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983), 85.

<sup>4</sup> Tony Tanner, 'The Crying of Lot 49,' in *Modern Critical Views: Thomas Pynchon*, ed. Harold Bloom (New York: Chelsea House, 1986), 181.

<sup>5</sup> Couturier, 'The Death of the Real,' 17.

novel to mummy narratives and Egyptology, with which the novel shares its central concerns of decryption, meaning, and the indefinite sign. I will offer three brief intertextual connections with narratives of the so-called Mummy Craze. Crucially what I propose here is a reading of *Lot 49* as a navigational text, in line with the nature of the *Egyptian Book of the Dead*. Stemming from this concept of the navigational text, in the second part of the chapter, I shall offer a *logomorphic* interpretation in terms of urban semiotics, in the form of a reading of the novel's structure through traffic signs. The last section of the chapter will analyse the urban landscape itself as structural device on a *topomorphic* level.

### **'Lot No. 249'**

The novel's preoccupation with themes of coded signs and decryption is well documented, however, the fact that Pynchon repeatedly invokes the vocabulary of Egyptology to express these concerns deserves further attention: 'Though she [Oedipa] knew even less about radios than about Southern Californians, there were to both outward patterns [circuit boards and San Narciso] a hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning, of an intent to communicate' (*CL49* 14-15). In addition to the many references to hieroglyphics in the text, *Lot 49* appears to have an intertextual connection, through its very title, to the conspicuously similarly titled 1892 short story 'Lot No. 249'<sup>6</sup> by Sir Arthur Conan Doyle.<sup>7</sup> This titular connection allows us to interpret the novel through the lens of the Mummy Craze of the Victorian era, which will facilitate a re-evaluation of many of the existing critical assumptions regarding Pynchon's text. 'Lot No. 249' concerns the life of certain students at the University of Oxford, one of whom is in possession of an Ancient Egyptian mummy which, with the aid of a scroll, he is able to reanimate and send forth to commit atrocious acts. Whilst 'Lot No. 249' begins with an implied auction at which a rare item is bought by one of its main characters, *Lot 49* ends with an implied sale at an auction of a rare item by its protagonist, supporting

---

6 Arthur Conan Doyle, 'Lot No. 249' in *The Great Keinplatz Experiment, and Other Tales of Twilight and the Unseen* (New York: George H. Doran, 1919), 170-224. A further intertextual connection can be found in the character of Diocletian Blobb in *Lot 49*, who may very well find his nominal genesis in that of Blobbs, the 'Odd Man' in W. J. Fisher's 1888 "*Lot 49*", *Farce in One Act*, a re-imagining of a play by G. von Moser. See Fisher, W. J., "*Lot 49*", *Farce in One Act* (London: Samuel French, 1888).

7 In *Generi, Recupero, Dissoluzione*, Luigi Cazzato connects the title of Pynchon's novel with both H. P. Lovecraft's 1928 short story 'The Call of Cthulhu' and, merely in passing, Doyle's story. His observation places most of its emphasis on the former. See Luigi Cazzato, *Generi, recupero, dissoluzione: L'uso del giallo e della fantascienza nella narrativa contemporanea*, (Roma: Schena, 1999), 88.

the notion that *Lot 49* not only deals with inversions and reversions, but is also inverted in some respects: it is highly unusual for a novel to unveil the significance of its title only in the last few words of its final sentence.<sup>8</sup> In Doyle's tale a shadow figure is hard at work attempting to rid itself of whoever gets in its master's way; likewise, in *Lot 49* Oedipa notices that every man in the narrative who could have shed light on the matter of the Trystero<sup>9</sup> mysteriously disappears one way or another. In the former, the antagonist forces are represented by Edward Bellingham and his mummy, who is entirely lacking in agency, whereas, in the latter, the antagonist forces take the form of the Trystero and possibly, we are led to surmise, the recently deceased Pierce Inverarity. The Trystero, however, remains more ominous than the nameless mummy in 'Lot No. 249,' due to the organisation's pervasive facelessness. What I feel is most pertinent in 'Lot No. 249' is the illustration of the power of the written word, the logos, the sign. It is only through reading the scroll that Bellingham can reanimate and send forth the mummy to *do his bidding*. Likewise, it is the reading of the letter sent by Inverarity's lawyers that is the catalyst for Oedipa's quest and sets the action of the novel in motion. It is also the subsequent proliferation of interconnected signs that determines the direction of Oedipa's path. Oedipa is both reader of signs and subject to their demands, she is both the voice that utters the word and the action that follows it. I will return, in a later part of this chapter, to examine the role that this letter and the epistolary form play in the novel.

### **'The Ring of Thoth'**

Halfway through her journey towards what may or may not be a revelation, Oedipa stumbles upon a Mr. Thoth who sports a signet ring that has the emblem of the muted horn. Critics have commented often on the link between this character and the homonymous Egyptian deity Thoth, yet a connection with Sir Arthur Conan Doyle's 1890 short story 'The Ring of Thoth'<sup>10</sup> remains to be made. Doyle's narrative tells the story of an ancient Egyptian priest, Sosra, who discovered the secret to immortality, only to outlive the love of his life, and to come to the

---

<sup>8</sup> Zofia Kolbuszewska, *The Poetics of the Chronotope in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon* (Lublin: Learned Society of the Catholic University of Lublin, 2000), 92.

<sup>9</sup> I will use both the term Trystero and Tristero throughout, in line with the inconsistent spelling within the novel itself.

<sup>10</sup> Arthur Conan Doyle, 'The Ring of Thoth,' in *The Great Keinplatz Experiment, and Other Tales of Twilight and the Unseen* (New York: George H. Doran, 1919), 139-162.

realisation, centuries later, that – without her – life is not worth living. The story's title refers to a ring buried with the mummified corpse of the priest's beloved, one that contains a poison that may counter his immortality. Like Sosra, Oedipa too develops a fixation with a dead lover. To a certain extent, both 'The Ring of Thoth' and *Lot 49* are tales of a love that transcends death. It is only after Inverarity has died that Oedipa embarks on her quest. Even though neither she nor the narrator explicitly state Oedipa's feelings towards her recently deceased former lover, it is evident that in the course of the novel she becomes obsessed with the mystery surrounding his demise, to the point where Inverarity eclipses even the relationship she has with her own husband, Mucho, and reconfigures her perception of the world.

Pynchon's Mr. Thoth is a nonagenarian living in a home for senior citizens built by the late Inverarity, whom Oedipa encounters almost exactly halfway through the novel. The elderly man is subject to moments of temporal confusion and prone to mistake dream for reality. As Matthew Winston observes, the cartoon to which Mr. Thoth refers within this passage, 'the one about Porky Pig and the anarchist' (CL49 63) is likely the 1936 Warner Brothers short *The Blow Out*.<sup>11</sup> In a moment of confusion between the televisual and the real that would come to be a defining feature of Pynchon's 1990 novel *Vineland*, Mr. Thoth speaks of the cartoon in the past tense, when it is in fact playing on the television whilst he and Oedipa converse: '[she found him] nodding in front of a dim Leon Schlesinger cartoon show' (CL49 63).<sup>12</sup> Not only are temporal boundaries blurred in his mind, but he draws comparisons between the anarchist cloaked in black in the cartoon and the Native Americans in 'black feathers, the Indians who weren't Indians' (CL49 64) that his grandfather had fought during the American Indian Wars. The figure of Mr. Thoth is reminiscent of Sosra, the 'Priest of Thoth'<sup>13</sup> in Doyle's story; whilst Mr. Thoth feels as if he has 'been 91 all [his] life' (CL49 63), the Priest of Thoth has literally remained the same age for centuries, the two characters are therefore united in a form of ageless, suspended temporality. The significance of Pynchon's Mr Thoth's age is interesting on a further level if we consider that if, as J. Kerry Grant suggests, the action of the novel takes place in the year 1964,<sup>14</sup> the 91-year-

---

<sup>11</sup> Matthew Winston, 'A Comic Source of *Gravity's Rainbow*,' *Pynchon Notes* 15 (1984), 74.

<sup>12</sup> Leon Schlesinger is the producer of the Porky Pig cartoon *The Blow Out* (1936).

<sup>13</sup> Doyle, 'The Ring of Thoth,' 154.

<sup>14</sup> Grant suggests that the action of the novel takes place in the year 1964 as a means of calculating Oedipa's age, regarding which the novel offers a strong hint (CL49 27). Grant, furthermore, states

old Mr Thoth would have been born in 1873. This year is of particular significance on two accounts; firstly, on an individual level, the year resonates with Mr Thoth's family history, as his grandfather, '[t]hat cruel old man (...) was an Indian killer' (CL49 63). The American Indian Wars were still ongoing in the year 1873. Secondly, and perhaps more importantly, on a thematic level, it is on 3<sup>rd</sup> March 1873 that the U.S. Congress enacted the Comstock Law,<sup>15</sup> whereby the sending of 'obscene, lewd, or lascivious'<sup>16</sup> books and other materials through the post was criminalised. In positing the enforcement of official censorship in the hands of the postal service in the exotextual world, the endotextual Trystero finds a further justification for its subversive crusade.

In Doyle's narrative, the ring of Thoth is described in the following terms:

It was a large and weighty circlet, [which] had, I remembered, a hollow crystal set in it, in which some few drops of liquid might be stored. Now, the secret of Parmes could not have to do with the metal alone, for there were many rings of that metal in the Temple. Was it not more likely that he had stored his precious poison within the cavity of the crystal?<sup>17</sup>

Likewise, in *Lot 49*, the episode in 'Vesperhaven House' (CL49 63) literalises the title of Doyle's short story, as the character of *Mr Thoth* is in a possession of a 'dull gold signet *ring*' (CL49 64, emphasis added), which plays a role in the quest of the protagonist. Furthermore, the scene represents an intertextual *mise en abyme*. Considering Oedipa's first impression of the home for senior citizens is characterised by an overwhelming influx of sunlight 'it seemed through every window' (CL49 63), I propose that the recreation room of Vesperhaven House represents the 'hollow crystal' of Doyle's ring of Thoth: 'She looked around, spooked at the sunlight pouring in all the windows, as if she had been trapped at the centre of some intricate crystal, and said, "My God"' (CL49 64). This notion is further compounded by the fact that, like Doyle's ring, the recreation room is also filled with poison: 'A fat nurse ran in with a can of bug spray [and] pursued [a fly],

---

that both the protagonist and the author of the novel share the same age.

<sup>15</sup> Its full name being *Act of the Suppression of Trade in, and Circulation of, Obscene Literature and Articles of Immoral Use*.

<sup>16</sup> Wayne Edison Fuller, *Morality and the Mail in Nineteenth-Century America* (Baltimore: University of Illinois Press, 2003), 110.

<sup>17</sup> Doyle, 'The Ring of Thoth,' 158.

spraying poison' (CL49 63). As Jacques Derrida highlights in *Dissemination*, in addition to being god of the scribes, Thoth is also god of the *pharmakon*: that which is both poison and remedy.<sup>18</sup> Is the written word then simultaneously both toxic and restorative? Like Stencil before her, Oedipa craves clues. However, she has no desire to extend her quest perpetually, as appears to be the case with Stencil. Oedipa's quest soon becomes her burden.

### **'Some Words With a Mummy'**

Whilst the antagonist force, namely the mummy, controlled by Edward Bellingham in 'Lot No. 249' remains nameless, we can find a parallel to *Lot 49's* *Trystero* in the name of the mummy in Edgar Allan Poe's 1845 short story 'Some Words with a Mummy': *Allamistakeo*<sup>19</sup>. Where in Poe's narrative a disclaimer can obviously be found – it is, ultimately, 'all a mistake, oh' – in Pynchon's novel one could read a similarly discouraging warning being issued to Oedipa, to 'try is to err, oh.'<sup>20</sup> Poe's story posits the notion that the past is ultimately unknowable and questions the authority of historians and the validity of written history. *Lot 49* shares a common concern with the veracity and potential unknowability of written signs and, in line with Poe, calls us to question the truth claims of historical accounts, as is the case with the plurality of versions of the events celebrated by the Peter Pinguid Society:

What happened on the 9th March, 1864 [...] is not too clear. Popov did send out a ship, either the corvette *Bogatir* or the clipper *Gaidamak*, [...] Off the coast of either what is now Carmel-by-the-Sea, or what is now Pismo Beach, around noon or possibly toward dusk, the two ships sighted each other. One of them may have fired, if it did then the other responded; but both were out of range so neither showed a scar afterward to prove anything. Night fell. In the morning the

---

<sup>18</sup> Jacques Derrida, *Dissemination*, trans. Barbara Johnson (London: Continuum, 2004), 95-100. For other readings of Derrida's *pharmakon* in *Lot 49*, see Deborah Madsen, *The Postmodernist Allegories of Thomas Pynchon* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1991); and Dana Medoro 'Menstruation and Melancholy' in *Thomas Pynchon: Reading from the Margins* ed. Niran Abbas, 71-90 (Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003).

<sup>19</sup> Edgar Allan Poe, 'Some Words with a Mummy,' in *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe, Vol. VI: Tales* (New York: Cosimo Books, 2009).

<sup>20</sup> This reading of the word *trystero* brings to mind the line 'There is no sense in trying' from Bob Dylan's 1965 folk song *It's Alright, Ma (I'm Only Bleeding)*, further pertinent images can be found in a later verse: 'From the fool's gold mouthpiece *the hollow horn* / *Plays wasted words*' (emphasis my own). Even if Pynchon seems to have been more partial to the Beach Boys, it is clear to see he was well aware of Dylan's work during the 1960s; see Jules Siegel, 'Who is Thomas Pynchon . . . and why did he take off with my wife?' *Playboy*, March 1977, 170. I will offer further possible readings of the significance of the name *Trystero*/*Tristero* throughout the chapter.

Russian ship was gone. But motion is relative. If you believe an excerpt from the *Bogatir* or *Gaidamak*'s log, forwarded in April to the General-Adjutant in St Petersburg and now somewhere in the Krasnyi Arkhiv, it was the *Disgruntled* that had vanished during the night (CL49 32-33).

Likewise, Poe's *Allamistakeo* challenges the accuracy with which historical records are read, highlighting the fundamental failure of written history to convey meaning, due to its imperfect mediation through language.

An historian, for example, having attained the age of five hundred, would write a book with great labor and then get himself carefully embalmed; leaving instructions to his executors *pro tem.*, that they should cause him to be revived after the lapse of a certain period—say five or six hundred years. Resuming existence at the expiration of this time, he would invariably find his great work converted into a species of hap-hazard note-book, [...] a kind of literary arena for the conflicting guesses, riddles, and personal squabbles of whole herds of exasperated commentators. [The aim of the historian was to prevent] our history from degenerating into absolute fable.<sup>21</sup>

Chronicles are, thus, mangled and reconfigured by their subsequent readers, who – in their own way and through their personal bias – rewrite them in the process of reading. *Allamistakeo* takes issue with future historians' attempts to illuminate the annals of history with 'guesses, etc., which passed under the name of annotations, or emendations, [which he] found so completely to have enveloped, distorted, and overwhelmed the text.'<sup>22</sup> It is the mummy's belief that these efforts to shed light on historical chronicles have the somewhat paradoxical effect of obscuring them, in fact, to the point where 'the author had to go about with a lantern to discover his own book.'<sup>23</sup> The resurrection of the past, as is the case in this short story, through the return of the mummy, disrupts the notion of historical periodization. In other words, if we consider the term *contemporary history* to refer to the period of time that remains in living memory, *Allamistakeo*'s return suddenly transforms the

---

<sup>21</sup> Poe, 'Some Words with a Mummy,' 74-75

<sup>22</sup> *Ibid.*, 74

<sup>23</sup> *Ibid.*

Ancient into the Contemporary, bestowing him with ultimate authority, as he is the only figure in possession of living memory of this period. Both Pynchon and Poe depict history as being within the bounds of the 'literary arena'<sup>24</sup> and thus challenging the idea of final, definitive readings of not only literature, but also history.

### Nominal Correspondences

The novel furthermore displays a proliferation of character names that conspicuously resemble those of Egyptian deities, the most obvious of which is the aforementioned Thoth, 'the god of wisdom and patron of scribes,'<sup>25</sup> who finds his counterpart in the novel in the form of Mr Thoth. In alluding to this Egyptian god the novel highlights the notion of the written word as synonymous with wisdom. Oedipa's last name, Robert E. Kohn has observed, is one letter away from that of Maat,<sup>26</sup> also known as Ma'at,<sup>27</sup> the Egyptian goddess of 'Truth, Justice, and Moral Integrity,'<sup>28</sup> normally depicted as a woman with an ostrich feather on her head. This feather is weighed against the hearts of the dead in the underworld in order to assess the final fate of their souls. Oedipa embodies these themes of balance and order in the novel, as she continuously strives towards a form of truth. The name of scientist John *Nefastis* brings to mind that of the Funerary Goddess Nephthys (also known as Nebthet), referred to as 'Nephthys of the bed of life,'<sup>29</sup> which can be seen as a pun on Nefastis' lecherous tendencies. Kohn also suggests that Baby Igor's name resembles an alternative name for Anubis, son of Osiris: Igau.<sup>30</sup> However, I feel a more pertinent nominal connection can be found between Baby Igor's adult identity, Metzger, and the Egyptian deity Meretseger<sup>31</sup> (also known as Merseger or Mertseger). Meretseger was the 'Cobra-goddess dwelling on the mountain which overlooks the Valley of the Kings in western Thebes [who]

---

<sup>24</sup> Poe, 'Some Words with a Mummy,' 74-75.

<sup>25</sup> Barbara S. Lesko, *The Great Goddesses of Egypt* (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999), 237.

<sup>26</sup> Robert E. Kohn, 'Seven Buddhist Themes in Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*,' *Religion & Literature* 35, no. 1 (2003): 75.

<sup>27</sup> Thoth (Djehuty) and Maat (Ma'at) are siblings/cohorts.

<sup>28</sup> George Hart, *The Routledge Dictionary of Egyptian Gods and Goddesses* (London: Routledge, 2005), 89.

<sup>29</sup> Nephthys, we are told 'can take the form of a kite guarding the funerary bed of Osiris – an inscription from the reign of Thutmose III (Dynasty XVIII) calls her 'Nephthys of the bed of life.' See Hart, *Dictionary of Egyptian Gods*, 103.

<sup>30</sup> Kohn, 'Seven Buddhist Themes,' 75.

<sup>31</sup> Her name translates as 'she who loves silence,' see Hart, *Dictionary of Egyptian Gods*, 91.

protect[ed] secluded royal tombs'<sup>32</sup>; in his role as lawyer in charge of co-executing Inverarity's will, Metzger is also charged with the protection of the interests and possessions of the dead.

In *American Hieroglyphics* (1983), John T. Irwin highlights the enormous influence that Champollion's decryption of the Rosetta Stone had upon the writers of the American Renaissance, evidenced in the previously discussed work of Poe for example. The legacy of these Egyptological concerns with notions of untranslatability, encryption, and signs can certainly be found in the works of Pynchon and many of his contemporaries. Through interrogating the symbol of the mummy we can find a number of key concepts that are relevant and illuminating to our understanding of Pynchon's novel. The mummy represents the ancient lore which remains unattainable to those in the present, the Academy included, as is exemplified in 'Some Words With a Mummy' and 'The Ring of Thoth': 'Your knowledge of the subject is contemptible,'<sup>33</sup> the Ancient Egyptian tells Vansittart Smith. That which was once within our reach but can never again be recuperated, either due to a barrier of time, language, or culture. The figure of the mummy encapsulates the notion of a missing connection, the absent link that resurfaces and undermines the idea of modern day progress. The mummy is at times a patriarch/matriarch returning home and, more often than not, casting a disapproving eye over its imagined progeny and calling into question their authoritative discourses, as previously discussed in relation to history. However, in opposition to this perception of the mummy, there is the now commonplace conception of the mummified body as mindless somnambulist or automaton, as depicted in 'Lot No. 249.' If we see the genesis of the vampire as literary character as being connected to a xenophobic fear towards Eastern Europe, the image of the Egyptian mummy may very well stem from a similar anxiety regarding Northern Africa and the Middle East. Whilst in 'Some Words With a Mummy' and 'The Ring of Thoth' we find our superior in the Ancient Egyptian, a figure to whom our technology and knowledge seems risible, in 'Lot No. 249' the mummy is not a threat on its own, but rather a tool, a puppet, completely devoid of agency. Oedipa is not quite an automaton, but is still the summoned creature, brought forth to execute someone else's will and do their bidding,<sup>34</sup> proof of which can be found

---

<sup>32</sup> Hart, *Dictionary of Egyptian Gods*, 91.

<sup>33</sup> Doyle, 'The Ring of Thoth', 149.

<sup>34</sup> I cannot help but sense a certain paronomastic connection between the term *will* as both *volition*

throughout the text as she questions her every action retrospectively. She is aware of an external force controlling her actions, but is somehow unable to extricate herself from each situation: 'She should have left then and gone back to Berkeley, to the hotel. But couldn't' (CL49 76). After having met and spoken to Randolph Driblette, Oedipa 'left, and was all the way outside before thinking, I went in there to ask about bones and instead we talked about the Trystero thing' (CL49 54). She then stands 'in a nearly deserted parking lot, watching the headlights of Metzger's car come at her, and wondered how accidental it had been' (CL49 54). Oedipa's interview with Driblette is framed by suggestive descriptions of the latter's eyes, from the very moment she meets him backstage at The Tank:

"It was great," said Oedipa. "Feel," said Driblette, extending his arm. She felt. Gennaro's costume was gray flannel. "You sweat like hell, but nothing else would really be him, right?" Oedipa nodded. *She couldn't stop watching his eyes.* They were bright black, surrounded by an incredible network of lines, like a laboratory maze for studying intelligence in tears. They seemed to know what she wanted, even if she didn't. "You came to talk about the play," he said (CL49 52, emphases added).

Driblette does not even acknowledge her first comment, but rather follows with an imperative command, urging her to feel his arm, to which Oedipa passively complies. He then offers a rhetorical question, to which no real answer is required on Oedipa's part. As if in a trance she nods in agreement, and Driblette even goes as far as to tell her what she is there to discuss. This passage illustrates Driblette's almost hypnotic power over Oedipa, accentuated through the repeated references to his intense and even ominous eyes, as in the closing frame of the sequence: '[h]e wasn't smiling. His eyes waited, at the centres of their webs' (CL49 54). Crucially, both of the aforementioned ocular metaphors –the initial 'laboratory maze' and the final 'webs'– evoke a sensation of entrapment, casting Oedipa as both mouse and snared fly, whilst positioning Driblette as scientist/Minotaur and spider.

With this exchange of glances in mind, the reader may very well reassess certain details of the theatrical performance Oedipa has just witnessed, in particular the use of the phrase 'Significant Looks' (CL49 48). Here the ambiguity of the phrase suggests several meanings. The narrator – or Oedipa, as her

---

and *legal testament*, and *bidding* as both *command* and *auction offer*.

perception often permeates the narration without distinguishing inverted commas – may be referring to looks that are of particular relevance. However, the unexpected capitalization of the phrase makes it overtly conspicuous. This unwarranted capitalization brings to mind the phrase 'Significant Form,' used within Aesthetics to describe the quality of an artwork which induces an aesthetic reaction greater than the mere subject matter of the piece.<sup>35</sup> In this case, the notion of Significant Form could apply to either *The Courier's Tragedy* or the novel itself. Furthermore, if we consider that *significant* is the present participle of the Latin *significare*, meaning to signify,<sup>36</sup> a further reading of 'Looks' within the context of The Tank's production and, by extension, Oedipa's interaction with Driblette, its director, can be reached. This construction aligns the gaze with the conveyance of meaning and, by way of *the sign*, the written word. Ultimately, that which controls Oedipa is text, sign, logos.

## A Letter

It is not by sheer chance that *Lot 49* should begin with a letter. The first page of the novel in fact gives us glimpses of the document the protagonist receives, the missive that sets the action of the novel in motion, sending Oedipa forth, in much the same way as Bellingham animates his mummy. However, the letter does not appear in its entirety, but rather in fragments that emulate the experiential moment of a first reading of it. Whereas, Hite states that '*Lot 49* should be a fragment, not a novel at all,'<sup>37</sup> what I propose is that it is a *fragment* composed of *other fragments*. This mimetic emulation of the letter-reading experience would certainly account for Oedipa being referred to as 'Mrs Oedipa Maas' in the first sentence of the novel, the only time this designation is employed in the text,<sup>38</sup> which can easily be explained as an exoepistolar representation of the recipient's name, written on the outside of its envelope. Further evidence of this can be found at a subsequent point in the sentence, when she reads 'that she, Oedipa, had been named executor, or she supposed executrix, of the estate of one Pierce Inverarity' (*CL49* 5). This is the first sign of the mesmeric influence that the letter exerts on

---

<sup>35</sup> OED.

<sup>36</sup> OED.

<sup>37</sup> Molly Hite, *Ideas of Order in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1983), 72.

<sup>38</sup> In the last pages of the novel, Genghis Cohen addresses her as 'Miz Maas' (*CL49* 126); I will offer a reading of this instance at a later point in this chapter.

Oedipa, as she replicates the appositional phrasal structure that the letter has just employed: 'she, Oedipa, had been named executor' is quite clearly the epistolar voice, whilst what follows ('executor, or she supposed executrix, of the estate') appears to be Oedipa's emulation of the epistolar voice, as if in a hypnotic trance, repeating what the master has just uttered. However, it is also an evident endoepistolar representation of the recipient's name, the way it would most certainly appear in an official letter or a legal document, with the form *Pronoun + Appositional Proper Noun*, a form that does not recur throughout the text. In this way, the first mention of Oedipa's name that both she and the reader encounter in the novel is so solemn and bureaucratic in its accuracy, and so alien in its tone, due to the fact that it belongs on the outside of the envelope, whereas the second mention of her name, with the exactitude of its grammatical repetition, its appositional echo, emanates from within the envelope, from the body of the epistle itself. Thus, both the exo- and the endoepistolar are represented. Fragments from within the letter are offered to the reader throughout the first page, as the official letterhead ('The letter was from the firm of Warpe, Wistfull, Kubitschek and McMingus, of Los Angeles' (CL49 5)), the signature ('signed by somebody named Metzger' (CL49 5)), and even the postscript (the name Pierce echoes the acronymic form of postscript, *PS* – also present in *Serge's Song*: 'P.S. 33'<sup>39</sup> (CL49 101)) can be found. At a later point in the text the much-belated post-postscript will finally arrive, in the form of 'Peter Pinguid Society' (CL49 32) correspondence with, 'instead of a postage stamp, the handstruck initials PPS' (CL49 35). In the second paragraph of the novel the discerning reader will even find a few most unpynchonian sentences inserted within the text, like foreign clausal bodies: 'Metzger was to act as co-executor and special counsel in the event of any involved litigation. Oedipa had been named also to execute the will in a codicil dated a year ago' (CL49 5). Hence, these epistolar traces highlight, from the earliest point in the novel, the blurring of the borderline between the quoted and the reported, the direct and the indirect, a theme that recurs throughout the text, as when Oedipa is urged to subdivide all her information regarding the Tristero into categories akin to primary and secondary sources: her 'hard intelligence' and everything she 'only

---

39 This could furthermore be viewed as a reference to Psalm 33, in particular verse 12 which resonates with the themes of inheritance, predestination, Manifest Destiny expansionism, and America: 'Blessed is the nation whose God is the Lord; and the people whom he hath chosen for his own inheritance.' *The Bible: Authorized King James Version* (Oxford: Oxford University Press), 656.

speculated, assumed' (CL49 116). I assert that the first page of the novel deconstructs the late Inverarity's lawyers' letter, interspersing its fragments throughout the opening passages.<sup>40</sup> A strong hint of this epistolar deconstruction can, furthermore, be found in the remarkable structure of the very first sentence of the novel. Its length and vertiginous pace emulate the experience of skim-reading, echoing the buzzing of a quick first read, one that is in no way final or definitive, aligning Oedipa with the reader from the outset through this form of experiential mimesis.

Oedipa's pseudo-quest begins with an epistle, as the almost somnambulistic Oedipa is driven by a letter, in a manner that is reminiscent of the way in which golems are characterized in Jewish mythology. The golem is often animated and brought to life through the inscription of three Hebrew characters forming the word *emet* (truth) on its forehead, and it is by erasing one of these characters – the aleph – that the golem is eventually put to rest, *emet* then turning into *met* (dead). It is one letter that sends them both forth, Oedipa and the golem. Oedipa is enthralled by the letter she receives and her quest towards truth thus commences. Paradoxically enough, it is the news of a death – that of Inverarity – that prompts the aforementioned quest, rather than ending it. This first letter can thus be seen as the animating scroll; like Bellingham's mummy, it is the *missive* – from the Latin *mittere*, 'to send,' and etymology shared with the word *mission* – that sends Oedipa forth, giving her a purpose beyond that of a mid-1960s housewife. Oedipa is awakened from the stupor of her suburban life, a fact emphasised by her refusal to become yet another housewife in Dr Hilarius' psychotropic trials. As with the mummy, this awakening is paradoxical, in that it is a restricted animation: the moment Oedipa escapes the numbing experience of her domesticated life in Kinneret-Among-the-Pines, she finds herself silently bound, a slave to her seemingly liberating quest. Thus, it is still the logos that serves as both Oedipa's driving and restrictive force, the letter both as epistle and grapheme, two sides of the same concept.

---

40 The letter is one of very few examples of objects/subjects owned, so to speak, without their owners being aware of their ownership over them: the letter belongs to the addressee even before he/she knows of its existence. Letters, inheritances, and pregnancies all fall under this category. In some countries, certain procedures exist for the sender to recall a piece of mail – PS form 1509 in the US, for instance –, but the petition must be lodged and the form must be filed very shortly after the package or letter in question is mailed. For a more detailed description of the process, see: Kenneth Eisenberger, *The Expert Consumer: A Complete Handbook* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1977), 183.

The idea of a recto and a verso is crucial to our understanding of *Lot 49*, an image, its mirrored self, and the uncertainty regarding which is one and which the other:

"Interested in sophisticated fun? You, hubby, girl friends. The more the merrier. Get in touch with Kirby, through WASTE only, Box 7391, L. A." (CL49 34)

Here we find a particularly obvious writerly trace, a form of authorial signature in the numeric value of the postal address, as if we invert the numbers in the WASTE box we then find the year of Thomas Pynchon's birth: 1937. This detail seems unlikely to be coincidental, in fact, as the odds of it being accidental are negligible. In a manner analogous to the humorous name of the radio station at which Wendell Maas is employed, KCUF Radio, true meanings can be found in certain novelistic minutiae only when they are inverted. The number 37 recurs throughout the novel: in Dr Hilarius' Rorschach-like face, 'his number thirty-seven, the "Fu-Manchu"' (CL49 11), and in the SS uniforms Winthrop Tremain plans to sell, a 'lot of 37 longs' (CL49 103), as it does in John Nefastis' WASTE box, "Box 573" (CL49 60) which, if inverted, give us a further authorial detail, as Pynchon was born in May '37. It should be noted that the only two graphic depictions of the muted horn accompany the aforementioned WASTE box numbers, as wax seals or emblems in secret correspondence, a fact that finds its textual confirmation in Mr Thoth's signet ring, which has the insignia of the muted horn emblazoned on it.

Furthermore, the novel shows us that if we compress or abbreviate a specific word or phrase, say in the form of an acronym, once we decompress or elongate it back to its original length it might no longer mean the same, as is the case with *post post scriptum*, which after becoming PPS can no longer be recovered, and becomes Peter Pinguid Society instead; or *alternating current* / *direct current*, which first evolves into AC/DC ('AC-DC,' in the text), and eventually into 'Alameda County Death Cult' (CL49 84). Here the inscription is accompanied by 'a box number and post horn,' yet 'Oedipa did not copy the number' (CL49 84). One could easily speculate that, had she copied down the number, it would have contained an inverted combination of Pynchon's date of birth. Then, moreover, there are those words that we perceive as straightforward, literal terms, such as *waste*, which in the novel is not only the unwanted and the seemingly unusable, but rather the

ominous motto 'We Await Silently Tristero's Empire,' hence making every possible word a message waiting to be decoded and every known word a potentially indecipherable hieroglyphic. Likewise, the author has in fact monogrammed the novel at its heart through the inclusion of the phrase 'Tristero Rapid Post,' which is – in its acronymic form, TRP – a textual stand-in for the author's full name, Thomas Ruggles Pynchon, a sort of novelistic watermark. In fact, given Oedipa's obsession with the Tristero, one could affirm that she, Oedipa, is a *personaggio in cerca d'autore* in a most Pirandellian way, the authorial presence hence haunting, taunting even, our protagonist. Telescoped words thus appear to have been altered at some point between their *original* form and being concertinaed back to their actual length. Semantic density is thus collapsed, prior to its re-expansion, the significance of signs possibly forever lost to entropy, never to be reconfigured back to their primary form. These textual appearances of authorial watermarks, secret correspondence seals and emblems, and writerly traces would all seem to point to the fact that *Lot 49* is in actuality an epistolary novel not strictly told in letters, a deconstructive epistolary novel in essence, leading both the Oedipa and the reader down its sinuous path.

### **Navigational Texts**

In contrasting the concepts of information and circulation in the novel, we may find a parallel between the structure of Oedipa's journey through *Lot 49* and the nature, and purpose, of the *Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead*, as navigational texts. By navigational text I mean the text that conspicuously signposts the way forward for its reader and protagonist's benefit. The *Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead* is a compendium of incantations meant to guide the recently deceased through the underworld (the *Duat*) into the afterlife. These scrolls contained the name of the deceased and could only be employed by them,<sup>41</sup> thus collapsing the roles of reader and protagonist into one, in a way comparable to *Lot 49*. I propose that the navigational signposts in *Lot 49* function in an oracular manner, foreshadowing later events: 'Some immediacy was there again, some promise of hierophany: printed circuit, gently curving streets, private access to the water, Book of the Dead. . . .' (*CL49* 20).

---

<sup>41</sup> *Lot 49* and *Inherent Vice* are rare within Pynchon's oeuvre, in that they have *one and only one* main character.

The text *literally* signposts future events in the novel. As Oedipa herself points out near the end of the narrative, virtually all characters that could have aided her in her quest vanish. The novel does, in diverse manners, foreshadow these disappearances. However, the reader and Oedipa, in her role as *reader*, fail to find the aforementioned foreshadowings relevant, due to the never-ending amount of details and their interpretative nuances. It is essentially impossible to tell what in the narrative is *to the point* from that which is *beside* the point, and the decision is made mostly arbitrarily by Oedipa herself. The text does, nevertheless, predict the disappearance of several of its characters. Whilst watching *Cashiered* on television, Oedipa spots 'a leggy, ringletted nymphet who, should there be a happy ending, would end up with Metzger' (CL49 20). This proves to be the case when, later in the novel, 'Metzger and Serge's chick [...] run off to Nevada, to get married,' (CL49 102) her being 'just another nymphet' (CL49 101) to him.<sup>42</sup> Whilst taking a shower, Randolph Driblette says – seemingly almost incidentally – to Oedipa: 'If I were to dissolve in here, [...] be washed down the drain into the Pacific, what you saw tonight would vanish too' (CL49 54). Eventually, as it transpires, 'Randy walk[s] into the Pacific [...] [i]n his Gennaro suit' (CL49 105), literally vanishing and becoming a driblet in the ocean. Doctor Hilarius's disappearance from the narrative is unavoidably hysterical, in both senses of the word, as his name preambles. In a novel riddled with looking glasses, mirror-images, reflections and references to the myth of Narcissus, his eventual madness should not come as a surprise to the reader, given that 'there is a face [...] that [he] can make' (CL49 93) that turns anyone who sees it or is even nearby 'hopelessly insane' (CL49 93). He may very well have driven himself mad. Pierce Inverarity most likely died – Oedipa speculates – as a result of being wounded with a sharp object (CL49 5), and was thus pierced, leaving behind a *rarity* of a legacy riddled with *inveracities*. Manny Di Presso would eventually be consumed by paranoia and his nominal manic depression, whilst it can be assumed that John Nefastis will – either literally or

---

42 Metzger's name is German for butcher, as Nicholson and Stevenson tell us, butchers having been – in Medieval Germany – temporary postmen; see C. E. Nicholson and R. W. Stevenson, "Words You Never Wanted to Hear": Fiction, History and Narratology in *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Pynchon Notes* 16 (1985): 94. Charles Hollander sees the character's nickname – 'Metz' (CL49 39, 43) – as a sign of his Jewish heritage; see 'Pynchon, JFK and the CIA: Magic Eye Views of *The Crying of Lot 49*', *Pynchon Notes*, 40-41 (1997): 75. A further reading of his family name – my own – connects him to the centuries-old rivalry between *Thurn und Taxis* and the Tristero. His name not only conspicuously echoes that of the eponymous character in Poe's short story "Metzengerstein: A Tale In Imitation of the German," but also highlights his position as *messenger/Metzenger*. In addition to this, the plot of the story involves a long-standing feud between the Berlitzing family and the Metzengersteins.

metaphorically, as is the case with his notion of entropy – *lose his head*, perhaps losing equilibrium, perhaps being decapitated, like his near-homophonic counterpart John the Baptist, under nefarious circumstances. Mr Thoth shares the fate of Sosra, his analogous self in 'The Ring of Thoth': 'She knew that if she went back to Vesperhaven House to talk again to old Mr Thoth about his grandfather, she would find that he too had died' (CL49 114). Even Mike Fallopian is transformed by the end of the narrative, his attitude towards Oedipa having grown hostile, his name can thus be read as an allusion – by way of reference to the female reproductive system – to the sexual paronomastic joke on the name 'Mike Hunt.' As Oedipa states, addressing him, 'I knew you'd be different, [...] Mike, because everybody's changing on me' (CL49 116). As those who could have potentially assisted Oedipa in her quest continue to disappear, we are told:

They are stripping from me, she said subvocally—feeling like a fluttering curtain in a very high window, moving up to then out over the abyss—they are stripping away, one by one, my men. My shrink, pursued by Israelis, has gone mad; my husband, on LSD, gropes like a child further and further into the rooms and endless rooms of the elaborate candy house of himself and away, hopelessly away, from what has passed, I was hoping forever, for love; my one extra-marital fella has eloped with a depraved 15-year-old; my best guide back to the Trystero has taken a Brody. Where am I? (CL49 105)

This gradual yet relentless disappearance of characters calls to mind Jorge Luis Borges' short story 'Death and the Compass' (1944)<sup>43</sup> in which the protagonist Erik Lönnrot, a detective, is lured by means of intricate subterfuge to an isolated Villa by Red Scharlach, his nemesis, who then kills him. The ploy in question consists in making Lönnrot believe that the culprit is attempting to spell the secret name of God by killing specific people, there being some relation between each letter in the divine name and the identity of each victim. It is, as is eventually revealed, but a ruse to lure the intellectual Lönnrot to a secluded place, the aforementioned Villa, whose name is conspicuously echoed by Pynchon's Tristero: Triste-le-Roy. In *Lot 49*, as in 'Death and the Compass,' the vanishing of secondary characters appears to serve the plot by driving it forward.

---

<sup>43</sup> Jorge Luis Borges, 'Death and the Compass,' in *Collected Fictions*, trans. Andrew Hurley (New York: Penguin, 1998), 147-156.

In addition to Oedipa's gender, and the fact that she undoubtedly had a unique relationship with Inverarity, what sets her apart from the aforementioned disappearing secondary characters – and perhaps even protects her from harm – is her nominal malleability. She begins the novel as suburban housewife 'Mrs Oedipa Maas' (CL49 5, M.O.M., in acronymic form) yet, in time, she assumes many pseudonyms, however briefly. Inverarity refers to her as 'Margo' (CL49 6) in the second page of the novel, a reference to *The Shadow's* Margo Lane. At 'The Greek Way' she becomes 'Arnold Snarb' (CL49 76 and 122), upon visiting the gynaecologist she fleetingly assumes the identity of 'Grace Bortz'<sup>44</sup> (CL49 118), Genghis Cohen refers to her as 'Miz Maas' (CL49 65, 67, 68, 121 and 126, mishmash), whilst Mucho believes he must pronounce her name 'Edna Mosh' (CL49 96) on the air in order for it to come out as its original 'Oedipa Maas' once it is broadcast: communication must undergo distortion before it can be circulated. He also calls her by the contraction 'Oed' (CL49 10 and 100) which visually resembles the acronym for the *Oxford English Dictionary*, yet sounds like the Freudian Id.<sup>45</sup> Could it be that it is this very nounal fluidity that serves as Oedipa's safeguard?<sup>46</sup> If we were to follow the most overt reference that her name conjures up, further parallels between these themes of foreshadowings and predestination and the Oedipus myth can be drawn. Although Terry Caesar humorously rejects any possible Oedipal meaning in *Lot 49*, I believe that his assertion that Maas 'can be voiced to sound like my "ass"' and that 'this Oedipa is no Oedipus, or only one at the earnest reader's peril'<sup>47</sup> closes down the text's semantic potentiality. As I have shown, Oedipa is indeed an Oedipus-like figure in at the very least one respect: she is given oracular glimpses – however brief and ambiguous – into her future, yet she fails to avoid the fate destined for her. Perhaps Caesar understands the Oedipal figure from an exclusively Freudian perspective. However, I feel that through the course of this chapter I have demonstrated that there is much to be gleaned from interrogating the author's use of names in *Lot 49*, in certain ways a microcosmic version of what this thesis attempts to do with the titles of his novels.

---

<sup>44</sup> Georgiana M. M. Colvile suggests that this name contains within it a tacit reference to abortion: 'A Bortz = abortions'; see *Beyond and Beneath the Mantle: On Thomas Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988), 28

<sup>45</sup> In fact, she could also be referred to as Mrs Mucho Maas, a possible reading of which is *misses mucho más*, as she *misses a lot more* than she perceives.

<sup>46</sup> Even in her final telephonic exchange with the Inamorato Anonymous, he tells her '[i]t's too late,' to which she replies, '[f]or me?' He answers: 'For me' (CL49 122), then the line goes dead. Regardless of his namelessness, the Inamorato Anonymous is also doomed.

<sup>47</sup> Terry P. Caesar, 'A Note on Pynchon's Naming,' *Pynchon Notes* 5 (1981): 5.

Due to their nominal equality, I would like to now turn to a comparative analysis of the Maases: Oedipa and Mucho. Regarding the aforementioned foreshadowings, Mucho's final 'disappearance' is also prophesized, as Oedipa states early in the novel that he is 'too sensitive' (CL49 7). In light of Nefastis's use of the word (CL49 60 and 72-74), Mucho's eventual breakdown (or enlightenment) is to be expected: he soon begins to see the world differently. Already on the fifth page of the novel, Oedipa, whilst describing her husband's night terrors, announces to the reader Mucho's eventual fate: 'they calm down, one day they lose it: she knew that' (CL49 9). The much overlooked figure of Wendell "Mucho" Maas deserves, I believe, further analysis. The fact that Oedipa has taken on Mucho's family name equates it to one of her many fleeting identities. However, the very name Mucho Maas implies plurality, as *mucho más* is Spanish for *a lot more*, making him in many regards Oedipa's counterpoint: whilst Oedipa wishes to weave these pluralities into a singular definitive meaning, Mucho embraces them, revels in them. In this respect, I view Oedipa and Mucho as representing two different approaches to the very interpretation of the novel.

### **Semaphiles and Semaphobes**

Oedipa compulsively seeks the sign. She is constantly chasing after interconnections between seemingly disparate miscellanea. Even the sight of a toilet wall that has not been defaced immediately frightens her:

She looked idly around for the symbol she'd seen the other night in The Scope, but all the walls, surprisingly, were blank. She could not say why, exactly, but felt threatened by this absence of even the marginal try at communication latrines are known for. (CL49 47)

Whereas she finds further justification for her quest in a latrine wall that *has* been graffitied: 'In one of the latrines was an advertisement by AC-DC, standing for Alameda County Death Cult, along with a box number and post horn' (CL49 84). As I have already stated, it is the sign, the letter, the logos that compels her and drives her forward. She is the semaphile. Mucho, on the other hand, begins the novel as the semaphobe. He is not only uncomfortable with 'all things viscous' (CL49 7), but for this very reason cannot even bring himself to hear the *word* 'creampuff.' His recurrent nightmares described in the opening chapter (CL49 9) also revolve

around an utter fear of the sign:

'In the dream I'd be going about a normal day's business and suddenly, with no warning, there'd be the sign. We were a member of the National Automobile Dealer's Association [*sic.*]. NADA. Just this creaking metal sign that said nada, nada, against the blue sky. I used to wake up hollering.' (CL49 100)

Here Mucho's semaphobia is evident: his nightmare consisted of a sign (the word nada, Spanish for nothing) within a sign (the squeaking metal logo containing the acronym). Whereas Oedipa fears the total absence of signs, Mucho is so afraid of signs that he dreads even the presence of the husk of a sign: a sign that reads nothing.

By the end of the novel, Mucho has ceased to see himself as an individual and he no longer recognises singularity as synonymous with uniqueness, but rather sees singularity as equivalent to generic sameness, oneness. This allows him to overcome his previous fear of signs: 'The bad dream that I used to have all the time, about the car lot, remember that?,' Mucho confesses to Oedipa, 'I could never even tell you about it. But I can now. It doesn't bother me any more. It was only that *sign* in the lot, that's what scared me' (CL49 100, emphasis added). Mucho's triumph over his initial phobia even enables him to dwell on *signs* within signs, such as Nestlé Quik's 1960s advertising slogan: 'rich, chocolaty, goodness' (CL49 98). His suspension of individuality is either the cause or the consequence of his perspective shifting from that of one more item in a mathematical set, to the perspective of the set itself. In stark contrast to Oedipa's completely short-sighted, microcosmic view, Mucho adopts a farsightedness so extreme – he is literally *far out* – and macrocosmic that he becomes the 'Brothers  $N$ '<sup>48</sup> (CL49 97), the quantity sought in a problem, the unknown in a mathematical riddle. A possible source for this enigmatic phrase could be found in the following mathematical problem from G. Shilov's *Mathematical Analysis*:

4. (Riddle). I.  $X$ , a mathematician, recently received a visit from his dear brothers  $N$ . In the entrance-hall they took off their hats and hung them on the stand. When

---

<sup>48</sup> Misprinted as 'the Brother's  $N$ ' in the 2000 Vintage edition.

they assembled to leave and began to put on their hats, it appeared, to their host's great confusion, that they were a hat short. Nobody had come into the entrance-hall during this time.

II. When the brothers  $N$  paid another visit to  $X$  (all with hats), they again hung their hats on the stand in the hall. When, on leaving, they started to put on their hats, it turned out that there was a hat too many. Both host and guests recollected definitely that until their arrival the hat stand had been quite empty.

III. On the next occasion, the guests put on their hats and left, and the host, having seen his guests to the street, returned to discover that all the hats were hanging on the stand.

IV. Finally, on the fourth occasion, the guests arrived hatless, and on their departure made use of the hats that remained from their last visit. When he had seen off his guests, the host again caught sight of all the hats on the hatstand,--the same number as were there before the guests' arrival.

What is the explanation of all these paradoxical events?  
See the hint on p. 19.<sup>49</sup>

The hint in page 19 informs us that '[t]he set of brothers,  $N$ , is a countable set.' This problem is illustrative of the seemingly paradoxical mathematical qualities of the infinite. The answer to the problem is that the brothers  $N$  are infinite, as are their hats. In Point I, for example, as the brothers  $(0, 1, 2, \dots, i)$  are leaving and putting on their hats  $(0, 1, 2, \dots, i)$ , brother  $i$  takes hat  $i-1$ , brother  $i-1$  takes hat  $i-2$ , and so on, thus, brother 0 is left without a hat. Following the same reasoning, in point II, as they leave, brother 0 takes hat 1, brother 1 hat 2, and so forth, leaving hat 0 behind. And so on.<sup>50</sup> Crucially, I feel this reference to Mucho as 'the Brothers  $N$ ' in *Lot 49* highlights his eventual openness towards the infinite, his macrocosmic view of life, as he becomes one with the universe. Whilst the aforementioned mathematical problem can be seen as exemplifying Galileo's Paradox, I believe yet another reference to Mucho's relationship to the infinite can be found in the following quotation:

---

<sup>49</sup> G. Ye Shilov, *Mathematical Analysis: A Special Course*, trans. J. D. Davis (Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1965), 12-13.

<sup>50</sup> Professor Zhaohui Luo of the Department of Computer Science at Royal Holloway kindly helped further my understanding of these qualities intrinsic to infinite sets.

my husband, on LSD, gropes like a child further and further into the rooms and endless rooms of the elaborate candy house of himself and away, hopelessly away, from what has passed, I was hoping forever, for love.

(CL49 105)

Here the image of the endless rooms points towards David Hilbert's Paradox of the Grand Hotel, analogous to Shilov's previously mentioned problem. The Grand Hotel consists of infinite rooms, which are *all* occupied by infinite guests. Yet, due to the nature of the concept of infinity, there are always enough vacancies to accommodate infinite new arrivals. Likewise, Mucho's LSD-induced breakdown causes him to experience even his own identity as being made up of infinite selves. The way the novel depicts this notion is interesting in that the rooms are internal to the self: Mucho is both the Grand Hotel *and* its guests, both child and elaborate candy house.<sup>51</sup> 'He's losing his identity,' Funch confides in Oedipa near the end, '[d]ay by day, Wendell is less himself and more *generic*. He enters a staff meeting and the room is suddenly full of people, you know?' (CL49 97, emphasis added). Whilst Mucho embraces the generic and the universal, Oedipa ventures towards the specific and individual. Their relationship configures the eternal imbalance between abstract and concrete thought. When Oedipa interrogates Mucho regarding why he is 'coming on like a whole roomful of people,' he simply replies: 'That's what I am, [...] right. Everybody is' (CL49 99). Within these two perspectives we can find analogies to two distinct modes of interpretation: Oedipa is the close reader, 'a rare creature indeed [...] just a whiz at pursuing [or perhaps simply following] strange words in Jacobean texts' (CL49 72), whereas Mucho represents the global, all-encompassing vision. This rupture can be found throughout the text, one of its most clear examples appearing on the second page of the novel:

"But Margo," earnestly, "I've just come from Commissioner Weston, and that old man in the fun house was murdered by the same blowgun that killed Professor Quackenbush," or something. (CL49 6)

---

51 A similar image of seemingly infinite indoor space can be found earlier in the novel: 'When he [Cohen] opened the door of his apartment / office she saw him framed in a long succession or train of doorways, room after room receding in the general direction of Santa Monica, all soaked in rain-light' (CL49 65).

Here the narration goes from the painstakingly particular – references to *The Shadow* interwoven in what sounds like the answer to a game of *Cluedo* – to the effortless and casual of the final 'or something,' that undermines all specificity. Oedipa attempts to find her way through a maze that is external. Conversely, Mucho's journey is internal. The split between them, I believe, occurs early on in the novel, perhaps as soon as Oedipa leaves Kinneret-Among-the-Pines, and the culprit is of course none other than Dr Hilarius, Oedipa's shrink. However, regardless of the established critical view that denotes her relationship with Metzger as an infidelity<sup>52</sup> – Oedipa herself being her harshest critic (CL49 29) – we must closely look at two details in the novel: the name of the man who comes between Oedipa and Mucho, and Mucho's aversion of viscosity. Whilst Hollander believes Hilarius' name to be a reference to 'the Latinate form of the name of St. Hilary of Poitiers, St. Hilarius of the Arian Controversy,'<sup>53</sup> I believe it to be an allusion to Pope Saint Hilarius. Within the Roman Catholic Church, the Pope is invested with the power to annul marriages, provided that certain requirements be met, one of which involves the lack of its consummation (from the Latin *consummat-*, meaning *bringing to completion*). If we take into consideration Mucho's dread of 'all things viscous' (CL49 7), in addition to the 'naked lust' in the voices of his female callers and the sexual 'throbs in every word [he] say[s]' on the air (CL49 9), we can safely assume that Mucho has completely substituted private sexual intercourse for public dirty talk, as actual ejaculation would in fact distress him, due to the viscid texture of semen. Thus, Hilarius can be seen to annul the unconsummated marriage between them, hence making Oedipa's subsequent love affairs untreachorous.

### **City as Text: Forking Paths**

In *Lot 49*, space, both textual and urban, is self-aware and knowing: 'You're sick, Oedipa, she told herself, or the room, which knew' (CL49 2). Just as Oedipa goes *walking in the city*, to borrow Michel de Certeau's words, the urban landscape in

---

<sup>52</sup> John Johnston, 'Toward the Schizo-Text: Paranoia as Semiotic Regime in *The Crying of Lot 49*,' in *New Essays on Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49*, ed. Patrick O'Donnell (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 59.

<sup>53</sup> Hollander, 'Pynchon, JFK and the CIA,' 71.

the novel appears to echo the spirit of such utopian cityscapes as Ron Herron's 1964 Archigram project for a 'Walking City.'<sup>54</sup> Oedipa's movements are controlled by the city as text. Oedipa sees the urban sprawl as a living self: 'What the road really was, she fancied, was this hypodermic needle, inserted somewhere ahead into the vein of a freeway, a vein nourishing the mainliner LA, keeping it happy, coherent, protected from pain, or whatever passes, with a city, for pain' (CL49 16). This much cited image of the city, as having freeways for veins, highlights not only the notion of the city as an independent being, but also emphasises its very structure as a circulatory system, thus bringing to the fore our theme of circulation and navigation. The city is again conceptualised as a corporeal entity later in the novel: 'The city was hers, as, made up and sleeked so with the customary words and images (cosmopolitan, culture, cable cars) it had not been before: she had safe-passage tonight to its far blood's branchings, be they capillaries too small for more than peering into, or vessels mashed together in shameless municipal hickeys, out on the skin for all but tourists to see' (CL49 81). These two final images represent a further allusion to micro- and macrocosmic modes of interpretation, Pynchon's text calls upon us to peer into 'tiny capillaries' whilst also attending to 'hickeys, out on the skin.'

The themes of signalling and signs in the novel, as well as its setting San Narciso – an imagined hybrid of Los Angeles and San Francisco, defined by freeways<sup>55</sup>, avenues and roads – allow for a number of possible interpretations of the novel's structural design. The 'Thurn and Taxis' (CL49 44), although historically accurate, can also evoke taximeter cabs, those inescapable icons of the urban landscape. It is certainly the association made by the possibly imaginary children Oedipa encounters in the novel: 'Tristoe, Tristoe, one, two, three, Turning taxi from across the sea...' (CL49 82). In addition to this, the concept of a muted horn is not merely suggestive of postal horns, the apocalypse, jazz music, or – in graphic form – a film projector, but also – and more pertinently to my analysis – car horns. The depiction of the 'Muted Horn' (CL49 34 and 58) brings to mind the sign for "no sounding of horns" (see figures 1-3).

---

<sup>54</sup> Simon Sadler, *Archigram: Architecture Without Architecture* (Cambridge: MIT, 2005), 39.

<sup>55</sup> Freeways also being known as controlled-access highways, here the term being particularly suggestive, and one with implications to *Inherent Vice*.



figure 1<sup>56</sup>



figure 2<sup>58</sup>



figure 3<sup>57</sup>

"No sounding of Horns" ideogram

Car horns are traditionally employed to signal and give warning to nearby automobiles and pedestrians, which is fitting for a novel riddled with signs, signals, and warnings such as *Lot 49*. Furthermore, by the time Oedipa reaches the end of the novel she is on the horns of a dilemma. Yet, the significance of the muted quality of the novel's horn lies in the fact that the oracular moments that the text offers both Oedipa and the reader are somewhat smothered by the impressionistic cacophony brought about by the endless chain of possibly interconnected minutiae that the text constantly emits. Collisions, in the novel, are consistently averted. From the unlikely trajectory of a spray can which 'knew where it was going' (*CL49* 24)<sup>59</sup> in Oedipa's room at Echo Courts, through the unexpectedly accident-free multi-rhythmic ball at the deaf-mute convention<sup>60</sup> (*CL49* 90), collisions are against all odds and reason ward off, as if by magic or design. Even Oedipa is kept safe from her very own suicidal impulses, as 'she went out and drove on the freeway for a while with her lights out, to see what would happen. But angels were

56 Thomas Pynchon, *The Crying of Lot 49* (London: Vintage, 2000), 34.

57 Rudolf Modley, *Handbook of Pictorial Symbols* (New York: Dover Publications, 1976), 133.

58 Pynchon, *Lot 49* (London: Vintage, 2000) 58.

59 Here I include the much cited full quote, which I consider to be relevant: 'The can knew where it was going, she sensed, or something fast enough, God or a digital machine, might have computed in advance the complex web of its travel' (*CL49* 24).

60 Deaf-mutes being, essentially, readers, as they cannot communicate orally, and can only vocalize – so to speak – with the aid of pen and paper. Moreover, they communicate in *sign* language, in a novel epitomised by the very notion of signs.

watching (...) [she] got drunk and went driving on these freeways' (CL49 122). This lack of collisions seems indicative of a sort of preordained pattern. As I have shown earlier in this chapter, Oedipa herself wonders at several points in the narrative whether her path is truly her own or has been laid there for her by an unseen force or conspiracy.

The moments of foreshadowing in the text, likewise, give rise to questions regarding predetermination and order. Pynchon's characters are clearly victims of a narratorial – if not authorial – plot, as *Lot 49* puns on the different meanings of the word plot itself. The path or structure of the novel is inescapably delineated, thus, Oedipa experiences the illusion of choice, yet it is nothing but a simulacrum. Her route has already been chosen for her, it has been mapped out prior to her arrival in San Narciso. If we view the text as city –and the city as text– the following reading of its structure can, therefore, be classed as topographic/typographic.

The very first mention of the Tristero in the novel is introduced by a change in direction, a turn<sup>61</sup>, as '[t]hings then did not delay in *turning* curious' (CL49 29, emphasis added). Originally, the first two chapters of the novel were published separately in *Esquire* magazine, which makes perfect sense, as they are in many ways entirely independent and preambular, in their own open-ended way. Chapters 1 and 2 of *Lot 49* precede the downward spiral that leads Oedipa into the jaws of paranoia, thus the beginning of chapter three clearly echoes the initial narrative turn, as the Tristero is what will drive the remainder of the novel.

After this initial 'turn' of events, a proliferation of circles, rings and other annular images takes over the narrative, with even Oedipa's progress replicating the aforementioned motion. When looking for Driblette, she 'went looking for dressing rooms [and] circled the annular corridor outside twice before settling on a door' (CL49 52), thus going in circles within a circle. Searching for the Tristero, she encounters the aforementioned Mr. Thoth with his 'dull gold signet ring' (CL49 64). 'The device on the ring was once again the WASTE symbol' (CL49 64). As events unfold, '[i]n Golden Gate Park she [comes] on a circle of children in their nightclothes, who told her they were dreaming the gathering,' (CL49 81) and 'had inside their circle an imaginary fire' (CL49 82). Three quarters into the novel, we are offered a glimpse at a WASTE courier, whom 'Oedipa follow[s]. Halfway up Telegraph the carrier got off and led her down the street to a pseudo-Mexican

---

61 This turn is echoed too in the name of the Tristero's rival postal organisation, 'Thurn and Taxis' (CL49 44).

apartment house. Not once had he looked behind him. John Nefastis lived here. She was back where she'd started, and could not believe 24 hours had passed' (CL49 90). She comes full circle within a day. Oedipa's movements begin to echo the solipsism of the narrative, continually going in circles, in this case *literally* so. Having returned to her hotel, 'she [is] seized about the waist by a handsome young man in a Harris tweed coat and waltzed round and round' (CL49 90) as attendants at a deaf-mute convention dance in different fashions to imaginary tunes without there being a single collision. Oedipa then 'gesture[s] in circles with her hands' (CL49 106) before, finally, seeing herself 'as an alien, unfurrowed, assumed full circle into some paranoia' (CL49 126). As I have previously discussed, throughout the text the reader's experience often parallels that of Oedipa, and as such the reader is also faced with an identical sensation of disorientation in the central part of the novel, lost in the semiopolis.

As the novel approaches its climax, the narrative bifurcates for the final time, with Oedipa waiting to find out whether she will discover 'a transcendent meaning, or only the earth' (CL49 125), 'zeroes [or] ones' (CL49 125), 'right [or] left' (CL49 125), as '[s]o did the couples arrange themselves' (CL49 126). Oedipa's short-sightedness makes her see the remainder of her journey as a 'cul-de-sac [Pierce]'d tried to find a way out of' (CL49 122), yet this is not the end of the road for her, simply for the reader. For Oedipa, the road continues to branch into further sub-paths, in the shape of a 'T-t-t-t-t...' (CL49 49): a T-junction. As in 'what may be the shortest line ever written in blank verse' (CL49 49), Oedipa's route follows the shape of 'a cross (...), [a] cross? Or the initial T? The same stuttered by Niccolò in *The Courier's Tragedy*' (CL49 62).



figure 4<sup>62</sup>



figure 5<sup>63</sup>



figure 6<sup>64</sup>

A turn, a loop, a fork in the road. Put in the vocabulary of traffic signs: a *right turn*, a *roundabout*, and a *T-junction*. Thus, the structure of the novel could be seen to spell the word LOT in traffic signs (see figures 4-6), making explicit the theme of semiotics and navigation in the text. Furthermore, the action of the novel takes place in California: could San Narciso be situated along California State Route 49? (which traverses Calaveras county, Plumas county, and so on, names which resonate with Tristero references and symbolism). In line with critical readings of *Mason & Dixon*, this reading of *Lot 49* proposes the text as a cartography of America, historical, cultural, semiotic. In a manner that is analogous to that in which Profane and Stencil trace a V-trajectory without ever realising it, Oedipa's path spells the very object of her desire: the LOT that may have the potential to reveal the answers to Oedipa's riddle.



figure 7<sup>65</sup>

62 Joel Arnstein, *The International Dictionary of Graphic Symbols* (London: Century Publishing, 1983), 143.

63 Modley, *Handbook of Pictorial Symbols*, 132.

64 Arnstein, *Dictionary of Graphic Symbols*, 144.

65 Ibid., 147.

As the novel approaches its final anti-climax<sup>66</sup>, the discerning reader realises that revelation is no longer an option. As Bloom points out, '[t]he word *meaning* goes back to a root that signifies "opinion" or "intention," and is closely related to the word *moaning*.'<sup>67</sup> Thus, 'the cry that might abolish the night' (CL49 81) is the meaning that Oedipa stubbornly awaits. However, the narrative informs the reader that no closure will be provided. Any more information we could be given as readers would constitute an authorial acknowledgement and be tantamount to a confession, since as the name of the agent at the end of *Lot 49*, 'C. Morris Schrift' (CL49 121) suggests: to 'see more is shrift'. The novel has already warned us regarding the ultimate fate of its characters, and has given Oedipa clear signs to follow. She has followed them correctly, yet she will never be certain of it. *Lot 49* distorts the concept of the hermeneutic code through its thwarting of the reader's expectations in its final pages. Ironically, the novel's central quest is one based on the action of decoding and the reading of signs, however, the text prevents the reader from witnessing any ultimate revelations. Minor revelations are offered to both the reader and Oedipa in her role of reader. Nevertheless, the aforementioned clues are of such subtlety that they only become apparent once the events that prophesied have taken place, making the narrator of the novel a Cassandra of sorts. These textual indicators are so numerous and relentless that they undoubtedly contribute to the atmosphere of paranoia that prevails over the novel. '[T]he usual hieratic geometry' (CL49 37) of Pynchon's novels is amplified in *Lot 49*, which unlike the Rosetta Stone which presents one single message in three different codes, the novel presents one single code that can be read as a number of different, contrasting messages. *Lot 49* is a peculiar inversion of the concept of the Rosetta Stone, one that can never really be read, but only be *reread*, begging to be reinterpreted differently time and again.

---

66 The end of the text is as anti-climactic as the letter sent through the W.A.S.T.E. system to Mike Fallopian that Oedipa reads (CL49 35). If one were to tap into the sexual subtext of the novel, see the Trystero as a tryst, Pierce as penetration, and analyse all advances made on Oedipa throughout the novel, the text would seem to end in *coitus interruptus* or, rather, *narrativus interruptus*.

67 Harold Bloom, 'The Breaking of Form,' in *Deconstruction and Criticism*, ed. Harold Bloom (London: Continuum, 2004), 1.

## *Zoyd in TV-land, or, Through the Television Screen, and What Prairie Found There: Vineland's Tendrillous Vines*

“We should start our own little  
republic,” Yash said one day. “Secede.”  
(AD 1210)

Pynchon's much-anticipated fourth novel, *Vineland*, was published after a 17-year-long gap in the author's novelistic *oeuvre*. The novel displays a number of themes that had already become familiar to Pynchon's readers and defined the dominant topics to emerge in subsequent criticism of the novel. The 1960s and the nostalgia with which America sometimes regards that decade and its countercultural movements are some of the major concerns across criticism on *Vineland*, as exemplified by the work of Andrew Gordon, Lovorka Gruic Grmusa, and James Berger.<sup>1</sup> Predominantly stemming from its analeptic 60s setting and the presence of such strong female characters as DL, Prairie, and –arguably– Frenesi, a prominent vein of criticism that investigates ideas of the maternal, the representation of women, and feminist perspectives in *Vineland* has also emerged: Stacey Olster, Molly Hite, and Terry Caesar have contributed to this critical approach.<sup>2</sup> Moreover, the notions of the origin and alternative or subjunctive Americas (a recurrent concern in Pynchon's novels, and one that has been central to many readings of *Mason & Dixon*, the novel that would follow *Vineland*) have

---

<sup>1</sup> See Andrew Gordon, 'Smoking Dope with Thomas Pynchon: A Sixties Memoir,' in *The Vineland Papers: Critical Takes on Pynchon's Novel*, eds. Geoffrey Green, et al., 167-178 (Normal: Dalkey Archive Press, 1994); Lovorka Gruic Grmusa, '(Post)utopian Vineland: Ideological Conflicts in the 1960s and the 1980s,' *European Journal of American Studies* 2 (2010): n.p. Accessed August 30, 2013. <http://ejas.revues.org/8833>; James Berger, 'Cultural Trauma and the "Timeless Burst": Pynchon's Revision of Nostalgia in *Vineland*,' *Postmodern Culture* 5, no. 3 (1995): n.p. Accessed August 30, 2013. DOI: 10.1353/pmc.1995.0020.

<sup>2</sup> See Stacey Olster, 'When You're a (Nin)jette, You're a (Nin)jette All the Way—or Are You?: Female Filmmaking in *Vineland*,' in *The Vineland Papers: Critical Takes on Pynchon's Novel*, eds. Geoffrey Green, et al., 119-134 (Normal: Dalkey Archive Press, 1994); Molly Hite, 'Feminist Theory and the Politics of *Vineland*' in *The Vineland Papers: Critical Takes on Pynchon's Novel*, eds. Geoffrey Green, et al., 135-153 (Normal: Dalkey Archive Press, 1994); Terry Caesar 'Take Me Anyplace You Want': Pynchon's Literary Career as a Maternal Construct in *Vineland*,' *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 25, no. 2 (1992): 181-199.

also been explored by a number of critics, among them William E. Grim, John Miller, and David Dickson.<sup>3</sup>

Set in the 1960s and 1980s, *Vineland* presents its readers with, as Samuel Thomas articulates it, 'a modern California illuminated by the glow of a million TV sets.'<sup>4</sup> The 1980s, the decade in which the action of the novel is predominantly set, saw both the ever-expanding, pervasive presence of cable television networks<sup>5</sup> and the arrival to the White House of Ronald Reagan, who from 1937 until 1964 had enjoyed limited success in film, radio, and television. Given the prominent role played by television in the novel, which most critics note,<sup>6</sup> this chapter will examine the vine-like structure of the narrative as it manifests itself in the form of the text's ubiquitous networks: televisual, political, and familial. Attending to the different resonances of the novel's title and themes, this section will begin with a reading of the tensions between geopolitical and demonymic notions contained within the very title of the novel itself.

## Vinland

Significant critical weight has been placed on the allusive title of Pynchon's 1990 novel. Through its suggestion of the Vikings' pre-Columbian discovery of America, Madeline Ostrander asserts, '*Vineland*'s title invokes the powerful American myth. "Vinland" — the place of wine and abundance, the threshold of innocence before imperialism — represents an origin of "the American dream."<sup>7</sup> David Cowart also analyses this titular connection between pre-Columbian and post-Independence

---

<sup>3</sup> See William E. Grim, "'Good-bye, Columbus': Postmodern Satire in *Vineland*," in *The Vineland Papers: Critical Takes on Pynchon's Novel*, eds. Geoffrey Green, et al., 154-160 (Normal: Dalkey Archive Press, 1994); John Miller, 'Present Subjunctive: Pynchon's California Novels,' *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 54, no. 3 (2013): 225-237; David Dickson, *The Utterance of America: Emersonian Newness in Dos Passos' U.S.A. and Pynchon's Vineland* (Göteborg, Sweden: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1998).

<sup>4</sup> Samuel Thomas, *Pynchon and the Political* (London: Routledge, 2007), 11.

<sup>5</sup> See Gary R. Edgerton, *The Columbia History of American Television* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2007), 392: 'Throughout the 1980s, the American broadcast networks—ABC, NBC, and CBS—saw a steady drop in their audience shares, as new cable networks sprang up, cable spread into more and more homes, and Twentieth Century-Fox cobbled together several formerly independent television stations into a fledgling new network—Fox.'

<sup>6</sup> See Joseph W. Slade, 'Communication, Group Theory, and Perception in *Vineland*' in *The Vineland Papers: Critical Takes on Pynchon's Novel*, eds. Geoffrey Green, et al., 68-88 (Normal: Dalkey Archive Press, 1994); Hannah Möckel-Rieke, 'Media and Memory in Thomas Pynchon's *Vineland*', *Amerikastudien / American Studies*, 43, no. 1 (1998): 51-74; Brian McHale 'Zapping, the Art of Switching Channels: On *Vineland*' in *Constructing Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 2001) 115-144; Mark Robberds, 'The New Historicist Creepers of *Vineland*,' *Critique* 36, no. 4 (1995): 237-248.

<sup>7</sup> Madeline Ostrander, 'Awakening to the Physical World: Ideological Collapse and Ecofeminist Resistance in *Vineland*', in *Thomas Pynchon: Reading from the Margins*, ed. Niran Abbas (Cranbury: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003), 122.

geography, asserting that *Vineland* ‘retains a myth that its author celebrates rather than deconstructs.’ The novel’s setting is, according to him, ‘a representation of the American land’ in which the author ‘refuses to surrender the myth of American promise,’ which Pynchon regards as part of a continuum, defending the ‘provisional validity of a leftist political alternative to contemporaneous conservatism.’<sup>8</sup> As do Ostrander, Dickson, myself, and others, Cowart believes that ‘[t]he novel’s title announces the mythic ground,’ reading it as a reference to the vinicultural reputation of California, where Pynchon’s fictional Vineland is located, whilst encompassing the entire breadth of the United States of America.<sup>9</sup> Cowart arrives at this latter conclusion by way of linking the novel’s Vineland to ‘the real Vineland—Vineland, New Jersey—’,<sup>10</sup> stating that their latitudes correspond. Through the ‘implied spanning of the continent at the latitude of its greatest breadth,’ Cowart concludes, the title of Pynchon’s novel, ‘published at the end of the second millennium, reminds American readers that their land has been known to history now (in the West, at least) for exactly a thousand years.’<sup>11</sup> Similarly, Dickson sees the author playing with ‘the idea of beginnings,’ as Vinland is the name ‘used by Vikings for the land in the far west where for a while they put up settlements about four hundred years before Columbus discovered the same land, later named after the Italian seafarer Amerigo Vespucci.’<sup>12</sup> Suggested in the aforecited statement by Dickson is the notion of the palimpsestic nomenclatural space on which these names are carved: Vinland, America, and the People’s Republic of Rock n’ Roll (PR<sup>3</sup>).<sup>13</sup> A further connection between Vineland, NJ, Vineland, CA, and the People’s Republic of Rock n’ Roll is drawn by E. Shaskan Bumás who draws our attention to the fact that ‘[t]he Jersey Vineland may be best known from Patti Smith’s (whose idea of rock and roll as a means of liberation surpassed even Pynchon’s) punk rock song “Ain’t it Strange” (1976),’<sup>14</sup> from which we may conclude that perhaps all Vinelands (Californian, New Jerseyite, Viking, or otherwise) would benefit from the establishment of a PR<sup>3</sup> of their own.

---

<sup>8</sup> David Cowart, *Thomas Pynchon and the Dark Passages of History* (Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 118.

<sup>9</sup> Ibid.

<sup>10</sup> Ibid.

<sup>11</sup> Ibid.

<sup>12</sup> Dickson, *The Utterance of America*, 139.

<sup>13</sup> Released a year prior to the publication of *Vineland*, Peter Stampfel and the Bottle Caps’ 1989 album is also conspicuously entitled *The People’s Republic of Rock n’ Roll*.

<sup>14</sup> E. Shaskan Bumás, ‘The Utopian States of America: The People, the Republic, and Rock and Roll in Thomas Pynchon’s *Vineland*,’ *Arizona Quarterly* 51, no. 3 (1995): 171.

In entitling the novel *Vineland*, Pynchon highlights the ephemeral nature of nations, empires, and states, not only directing our attention to the past for prior evidence of this fact (Vinland), but also insinuating that the USA may, at some so far unidentifiable point in the future, metamorphose into yet another space, with its own potential and promise. The many names and origins of the American palimpsest suggested in the novel bring to mind, and were foreshadowed by, Pynchon's own words in *Gravity's Rainbow*: 'like the New World, different people thought they'd discovered different things' (GR 85). From its Viking naming as Vinland, America has been seen as a space of potentiality, a potential that Pynchon's works recurrently purport has not hitherto been reached, yet is not thus far beyond its grasp. America is presented as a space that is continually (re)claimed and (re)appropriated by different factions, begging the questions 'to whom does America belong?'

The nomenclatural American palimpsest with which *Vineland* presents its readers includes its future iteration of Vineland, the 'Eureka-Crescent City-Vineland megalopolis' (VL 307), preceded by the defunct People's Republic of Rock n' Roll –whose name was presumably modeled after the People's Republic of China (PRC)–, a failed project bracketed between the United States of America, which in turn followed British Colonial Rule and the presence of the attachés, envoys, and representatives of the monarchs of France, Spain, and so forth. Before all these, we find the arrival of Amerigo Vespucci, the man after whom the continent was named, and before his disembarkation the approach of Christoforo Colombo (Christopher Columbus), after whom the continent *could have* been named. Pynchon takes us back, in the novel, to the Vikings' arrival to and departure from their Vinland, and even explicitly foregrounds the original position of Native Americans. As Isaiah Two Four states, whilst addressing Zoyd,

'Whole problem 'th you folks's generation,' Isaiah opined, 'nothing personal, is you believed in your Revolution, put your lives right out there for it — but you sure didn't understand much about the Tube. Minute the Tube got hold of you folks that was it, that whole alternative America, el deado meato, just like th' Indians, sold it all to your real enemies, and even in 1970 dollars — it was way too cheap....' (VL 372-373)

The 'whole alternative America' has become 'el deado meato, just like th' Indians.' In *Vineland*, however, Pynchon's history of the American name is traced further

into the past, suggesting to the reader what could be characterized as a pre-human America, an America in which names did not get in the way:

Someday this would be all part of a Eureka-Crescent City-Vineland megalopolis, but for now the primary sea coast, forest, riverbanks and bay were still not much different from what early visitors in Spanish and Russian ships had seen. Along with noting the size and fierceness of the salmon, the fogbound treachery of the coasts, the fishing villages of the Yurok and Tolowa people, log keepers not known for their psychic gifts had remembered to write down, more than once, the sense they had of some invisible boundary, met when approaching from the sea, past the capes of somber evergreen, the stands of redwood with their perfect trunks and cloudy foliage, too high, too red to be literal trees — carrying therefore another intention, which the Indians might have known about but did not share. They could be seen in photographs beginning at about the turn of the century, villagers watching the photographer at work, often posed in native gear before silvery blurred vistas, black tips of seamounts emerging from gray sea fringed in brute-innocent white breakings, basalt cliffs like castle ruins, the massed and breathing redwoods, alive forever, while the light in these pictures could be seen even today in the light of Vineland, the rainy indifference with which it fell on surfaces, the call to attend to territories of the spirit. . . for what else could the antique emulsions have been revealing? (VL 307)

The very structure of the paragraph represents a journey backwards in time, as the different forces that have claimed possession of the American expanse are traced through time. The passage above first projects us into what appears to be a hostile future ('Eureka-Crescent City-Vineland megalopolis') and from that predicted urban space moves rearward, through the present and into the past. The end of the passage, finally, brings us back to Vineland, but not before the readers are shown that they are merely a future context for the Yurok and Tolowa people, simply a past frame of reference for the inhabitants of the Eureka-Crescent City-Vineland megalopolis, all of which have come to claim for themselves what once belonged solely to 'the massed and breathing redwoods, alive forever.' The indigenous past of the land is regarded with what may be read as nostalgia, as 'the stands of redwood with their perfect trunks and cloudy foliage, too high, too red to be literal trees — carrying therefore another intention, which the Indians might have known about but did not share,' whilst the text allows for the possibility that the redwoods may, one day, rule an America untainted by human presence again, as they are 'alive forever.' In a manner analogous to that in which Native Americans

have been marginalized, so has logging represented the cull, as a step prior to potential eradication, of the original form that what we now term America first took: the Redwood.

By offering this alternative vision of America in which the name of the nation and, by extension, its identity is destabilized, Pynchon calls into question the validity of its demonym. In doing so, Pynchon problematizes the validity of the forcibly homogenized official idea of what the US is (or is *supposed* to be), whilst adding weight to alternative American ideals. If a name designates identity, then through the very act of changing said name (or offering an alternative one), Pynchon is also positing the potential for a re-invention that has not yet been achieved, yet remains within hailing distance. Perhaps it also points to the idea that America means different things to different people. Vineland (or PR<sup>3</sup>) may provide a name and new demonyms for those who –like the Wheelers, the Traverses, the Beckers, and perhaps the Pynchons– do not align themselves with the prevailing political discourse of the US, allowing them the possibility of sharing a geographical space whilst inhabiting a completely different political sphere, one which is anathema to the United States of Ronald Reagan and his successors. Through the very act of titling, Pynchon points his readers not only in the direction of the Subjunctive America, but also to the notion of an intra-American America, be it Vineland (either Californian and fictional or New Jerseyite and real), the People's Republic of Rock n' Roll, or the US as a whole seen as microcosm.

Historically, many alternative names for US nationals have been proposed, so as to abolish demonymic ambiguity. In his essay 'Names for Americans', Henry Louis Mencken lists and explains the genesis of many of them: Columbian, Columbard, Fredonian, Unisian, United Statesian, United Statian, Usian, Statesian, Washingtonian, Usonian, Uessian, U-S-ian, Uesican, Ustation, and the possibly humorous Colonican. Mencken also reports that Sir Edward Clarke, Solicitor-General of England from 1886 to 1892, put forth Usona – an acronym of United States Of North America – as an alternative name for the US, Usonian being its citizens' demonym. Likewise, Washington Irving proposed – Mencken cannot ascertain whether seriously or otherwise – that the name United States of America be changed to either United States of Appalachia or United States of Alleghania, therefore introducing either the demonym Appalacian or Alleghanian, stating that

even the 'old national cypher of U.S.A. might remain unaltered.'<sup>15</sup> Elsewhere, taking its form – one would imagine – from the Spanish language word *estadounidense*, Michael Kearney employs the term *unitedstatesian*.<sup>16</sup> None of these terms have, however, gained any popular currency.

The title of Pynchon's novel raises both questions regarding the heterogeneity and diversity of the US population, if we read it at a national level, and the nominal usurpation of the name *America*, if read at a continental level. It is not the case that this issue of demonymic expropriation has not been raised within the field of literary studies more broadly. Yet, most often it is awkwardly addressed in passing in introductions, or quickly mentioned in the form of typographical notes. In the introduction to *A Companion to American Literature and Culture* (2010), Paul Lauter concedes that 'the phrase "American literature" is [...] itself highly contested, and for good reason. After all,' he continues, 'the United States forms only one part of the Americas, and appropriating the term "American" to describe the literatures of this nation constitutes something of an imperial move.' Having recognized this, he goes on to justify the volume's use of the phrase on the grounds that it still is the 'most commonplace in course catalogues, syllabi, and anthologies, [despite] its inescapable difficulties.'<sup>17</sup> If we consider the city of Vineland to be a microcosm for the United States, as Cowart suggests, we are called to question these complexities inherent to the name America.

Elsewhere, Richard R. Valencia also highlights that the use of the term American to denote US citizens is 'a practice deeply embedded in historical and contemporary scholarship'<sup>18</sup>. He goes on to state that this terminological inaccuracy results from 'convention, not [from] a geo-chauvinistic claim that the USA has exclusive ownership of the word.'<sup>19</sup> The fact that Valencia relegates this complex issue to an apologetic footnote is in itself telling: the 'geo-chauvinist claim' is implied regardless. Whether a sign of a nation's definitional hesitation, or telling evidence of an urge to synecdochically take over the nominal identity of an entire continent, what may seem at first to be but a mere semantic glitch is revealed in

---

<sup>15</sup> H. L. Mencken, 'Names for Americans,' *American Speech*, 22, no. 4 (1947): 243.

<sup>16</sup> Michael Kearney, 'Borders and Boundaries of State and Self at the End of Empire,' *Journal of Historical Sociology* 4, no. 1 (1991): 53-74 (*passim*).

<sup>17</sup> Paul Lauter, introduction to *A Companion to American Literature and Culture*, ed. Paul Lauter (Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010), 3.

<sup>18</sup> Richard R. Valencia, introduction to *The Evolution of Deficit Thinking: Educational Thought and Practice*, ed. Richard R. Valencia (London: Routledge, 1997), xv.

<sup>19</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi.

fact to be a symptom. Pynchon, whose work continually questions boundaries, nation-building, and the diversity of identities that constitute the American continent, humorously reflects on geo-political chauvinism in *Against the Day*. As Professor Renfrew states:

“—you can see that it all makes one great mass, doesn’t it? Eurasia, Africa, America. With Inner Asia at its heart. Control Inner Asia, therefore, and you control the planet.”

“How about that other, well, actually, hemisphere?”

“Oh, this?” He flipped the globe over and gave it a contemptuous tap. “South America? Hardly more than an appendage of North America, is it. Or of the Bank of England, if you like. Australia? Kangaroos, one or two cricketers of perhaps discernible talent” (*AD* 271-272)

We are not only called upon to question what the defining features of America are, but also to take notice of the ambiguity contained within the very word ‘America.’ America, after all, is first and foremost a continent, not a nation. As he would again in *Mason & Dixon*, here Pynchon stresses the fact that boundaries not only signify separation, but also engender difference. In the aforementioned passage, ‘South America’ is characterized as exo-continental, a protuberance or an outgrowth, both out of sight and unsightly. In naming his novel *Vineland*, Pynchon is, as Cowart asserts, stressing the east-to-west breadth of the US, yet Pynchon also highlights through its very absence that disregard afforded to the north-to-south axis, a disregard that is given a voice in the passage above. Through the conflation of country and continent, most American nations are rendered peripheral, exiled within their own continent. Reducing the term American to signify but the inhabitants of one single nation immediately annuls any possible discussion of continental commonality.

In his 1990 essay/manifesto, ‘Border Culture: The Multicultural Paradigm’, Guillermo Gómez-Peña states bluntly:

Let’s get it straight: America is a continent not a country. Latin America encompasses more than half of America. Quechuas, Mixtecos, and Iroquois are American (not United States citizens). Chicano, Nuyorrican, Cajun, Afro-Caribbean and Québécois cultures are American as well. Mexicans and Canadians are also North Americans. Newly arrived Vietnamese and Laotians will soon become Americans. United States Anglo-European culture is

but a mere component of a much larger cultural complex in constant metamorphosis.<sup>20</sup>

As Gómez-Peña highlights, the use of such an utterly imprecise and reductionist national demonym instantly Others the rest of the American continent. In these times of ever increasing multiculturalism and global interconnectedness, it is paramount that we attend to the manner in which we categorize and conceptualize national and continental cultures. In *Vineland*, Pynchon's treatment of this subject works as his representation of framing does: zooming out *and* zooming in. Whilst he captures the distinction between both continental and national Americas with the novel's wide-angle lens, he also records intra-American diversity with the novel's macro, light-gathering lens. At the level of the internal plurivocality of US citizenry, the novel plays on the idea of the nation's motto, *E pluribus unum*. Principally through the linguistic idiosyncrasies of Vato, Blood and Zuñiga, Pynchon infuses the language of the text with a distinctively Pan-American inflection. Pynchon's conspicuous use of Spanish and Latino vernacular throughout his entire *oeuvre* displays a marked concern and awareness of intercontinental American relations. Whilst the axiom, *E pluribus unum*, present in the Seal of the United States of America, emphasizes both unity *and* plurality, Brock Vond's vision of the ideal America is one in which heterogeneity has been obliterated and consensus has been forcibly established. The promise of America is, ultimately, betrayed. The potential for an alternative nation remains purely potential, as its past is re-inscribed and its future already owned.

As Thomas, Cowart, James Berger, and others have noted, the temporal setting of *Vineland* echoes that of George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (1949).<sup>21</sup> Whilst Orwell's novel warned its readers that to see 'a picture of the future' one would have to merely 'imagine a boot stamping on a human face — forever,'<sup>22</sup> in *Vineland* is it the official radio station, KQAS, that presents us with an updated yet equally threatening version of the aforementioned stomping:

---

<sup>20</sup> Guillermo Gómez-Peña, 'Border Culture: The Multicultural Paradigm', in *The Decade show: Frameworks of Identity in the 1980s*, exh. cat., Los Angeles and New York: Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art, New Museum of Contemporary Art, and Studio Museum of Harlem (1990), 95.

<sup>21</sup> See Thomas, *Pynchon and the Political*, 133; Cowart, *Dark Passages of History*, 187; James Berger, *After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 246, n. 5.

<sup>22</sup> George Orwell, *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (New York: Plume, 2003), 277.

"KQAS! Kick-Ass 460 on th' AM dial! I got their decal on my car window, you can look at it later if you want. I got their T-shirt too, but I'm not wearin' it today. 'S too bad, 's got a good picture on it. 'S what it is, it's this close-up, of a foot, an' a ass? you know? like a freeze-frame, right where the foot is... ju-u-u-ust makin' that firs' contact with th' ass, right?" (VL 313)

As Hector Zuñiga puts it, in *Vineland* the state apparatus' foot is just making the first contact with the human ass — forever. Not only does the official bandwidth itself bear the name of this bleak prediction for humanity (KQAS, also an allusion to Mucho Maas' place of employment, KCUF radio, in *Lot 49*), but it represents the monovocal urge to homogenize difference in its willful disregard for the rest of the radio spectrum:

"I really want to tell *you*, man, about my car radio?" He moved closer to Mucho, who'd already read and filed Hector's story by now, and would presently begin to edge away. "Which is kin' of unique 'causs it only gits this one station? KQAS! Kick-Ass 460 on th' AM dial!" (VL 312-313)

Given Zuñiga's increasingly weakening grasp of reality, it is unsurprising that 460 MHz is a frequency employed by many US police departments as their dispatch channel. Zuñiga would therefore appear to take the reports of criminal activities, emergency calls, and requests for reinforcements of the police radio frequency for entertainment, as if they were merely the voices of which a talk show broadcast through AM radio comprises. Whereas elsewhere in the novel entertainment is mistaken for real life, in the case of Hector Zuñiga this misinterpretation is inversed.

## Television

McHale states that '*Vineland*, as every reader will attest, is TV-saturated.'<sup>23</sup> In 'Zapping, the Art of Switching Channels: On *Vineland*', he draws a distinction between cinema and television, contrasting the role of film in *Gravity's Rainbow*<sup>24</sup> to that of television in the latter novel. Whilst they are undoubtedly not one and

---

<sup>23</sup> McHale, 'Zapping,' 116.

<sup>24</sup> In studies on *Gravity's Rainbow*, film is a much-discussed topic. See Hanjo Berressem, 'Gravity's Rainbow: Text as Film - Film as Text,' in *Pynchon's Poetics: Interfacing Theory and Text* (Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 151-190; Charles Clerc, 'Film in Gravity's Rainbow,' in *Approaches to Gravity's Rainbow* ed. Charles Clerc (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1983), 103-151; David Cowart, 'Cinematic Auguries of the Third Reich in Gravity's Rainbow,' *Literature/Film Quarterly* 4, no. 6 (1978): 364-370; Victoria de Zwaan, 'Gravity's Rainbow as Metaphoric Narrative: Film, Fairy Tale and Fantasy in Pynchon's Germany,' *Pynchon Notes* 54-55 (2008): 154-168.

the same art form, I would argue that in *Vineland* the role of the one is analogous to that of the other. Whilst the mode of distribution for the moving image that pervades *Vineland* is undeniably televisual, not every film broadcast on television is a made-for-TV movie. In fact, both the references to the *Star Wars* films sprinkled throughout the novel and the figure of Ronald Reagan – which haunts the text and the characters therein – would appear to suggest that one of the text's main leitmotifs is, in fact, shared by both: the screen.

Since the 1950s, if not earlier, intellectuals have found the potentially detrimental influence and effects of prolonged exposure to television a source of much worry and disagreement. Edward R. Murrow famously paraphrases Karl Marx, characterizing television as 'the real opiate of the people,'<sup>25</sup> stating that 'those who control television and radio' have a certain 'disposition to take us for *what* we are, and that in turn is likely to keep us *where* we are.'<sup>26</sup> The sinister implications of Murrow's – somewhat cynical – assessment of the pernicious influence of mass broadcast media are represented in Pynchon's novel, albeit in a playful manner. In line with Murrow, poet Carl Sandburg, addressing the members of the General Federation of Women's Clubs at Asheville, NC, criticized television, asserting that 'more than half the commercials are so filled with inanity, asininity, silliness and cheap trickery that to every man and woman who loves children it's a question of what's it doing to these young people? [*sic*].'<sup>27</sup> *Vineland* does not constitute a direct attack on televisual mediums and mass production, after all Pynchon's affinity for the high/low mongrel text continually instigates an equilibrium between grand, poetic language and the ordinary colloquialisms of the everyman as much as it proposes a middle-ground between Jacobean drama and comic-books. Pynchon's work negotiates between the two ends of the spectrum alluded to in 'the old 24fps kissoff, "Be groovy or B movie"' (VL 252). The novel employs television –among other iterations of screened reality– as a metaphor for mediation, distantiation, and alienation, all resulting in a merely surface reading of life, even one's own.

The inhabitants of *Vineland* communicate in the common parlance of jingles, theme tunes, slogans, and intra-textually fictional characters. "It's im-por-

---

<sup>25</sup> Edward R. Murrow, quoted in A. M. Sperber, *Murrow: His Life and Times* (Fordham University Press, 1998), 523.

<sup>26</sup> Murrow in Sperber, *Murrow*, 523.

<sup>27</sup> 'Sandburg Hits Television,' *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, June 7, 1957, 26.

tan'," [says] Hector making a little melody out of it' (VL 11), whilst the *Jeopardy* theme is played on police car sirens (VL 9) and Van Meter flashes 'Mr. Spock's Vulcan hand salute' (VL 11). Even when Van Meter plays the 'Thanatoid World' song, it is described as '[a] kind of promotional jingle more than a song' (VL 225). The novel itself at points emulates the structure of 'one them Movies of the Week' (VL 179), with its characters acknowledging this very fact. As Prairie Wheeler and her boyfriend Isaiah Two Four prepare themselves to go separate ways, he says: "Be all right again soon." He knelt to kiss her goodbye through the window. "Only a couple more commercials, just hold on, Prair" (VL 105). A mere eight lines later, the chapter ends, going to the figurative advert break. The space that follows – thirty-three lines of blank space before the following chapter commences on page 107 – would be entirely unremarkable, if not for the fact that Isaiah Two Four describes it (and presumably experiences it) as a commercial break. *Vineland* presents us with the latest episode (with literary analepses, or televisual flashbacks) in the saga of a family who stands for resistance, be it successful (Jess) or flawed (Frenesi), active (Sasha) or passive (Zoyd): the vine of radicalism and dissent that grows *around* the American family tree, but is rarely acknowledged by the main bole. Seen from this perspective, the empty space represents a non-commercial narrative break, a pause in the story's flow that allows the reader/viewer to have a snack, or stretch their legs. Novels, as televisual narratives, tend to be broken into chapters/segments; whilst in novels these narrative pauses allow the reader to avoid having to choose an arbitrary point at which to momentarily interrupt their perusal of the text, in TV shows these breaks follow a financial imperative and are designed to stimulate in the viewers a consumeristic impulse. *Vineland*, true to its radical nature, emphasizes the profit-oriented essence of the fittingly called *commercial* break.

Characters in the novel react –and interact– differently to the presence of commercials, yet many of their different responses are conspicuously detailed. DL, for example, is 'able easily to sit attentive, pressureless, through the Christer commercial that followed, one she'd already heard more than once over the phone (VL 121). Dr. Elasmó, who plays a part in conditioning Weed Atman to failure, is 'known around San Diego for his stridently hypnotic, often incoherent radio and TV commercials' (VL 226). Conversely, at a certain point in the novel, Frenesi realizes that the way in which Brock had been watching the news regarding a

terrible storm is disquieting: 'He'd been watching it all like a commercial' (VL 212), emulating Zuñiga's disconnection with the real world and, by extension, painting a portrait of the official version of reality as marred by delusion. Whilst reminiscing with Van Meter about his flight from Zuñiga, Zoyd realizes with hindsight that 'he must have really thought, as he and the baby were making their getaway, that that was it, all over, time to go to commercials and clips of next week's episode....' (VL 42). The characters' life stories are described in terms of televisual structuring devices, bordering on the segmenting of the televisual schedule: the commercial break and the clips of next week's episode, the screened narrative's paratexts.

The *TV Guide* serves the role of appointment book, if not Bible, to the characters in the novel, whose lives revolve around television. We are told that Zoyd 'was no media innocent, he read *TV Guide*' (VL 12). The text also informs us that, after attempting to appear 'insane-looking enough for the mental-health folks' (VL 4), 'Zoyd made it home in time to watch himself on the Tube,' although not before having 'to wait till Prairie finished watching the 4:30 Movie, Pia Zadora in *The Clara Bow Story*' (VL 14). Zoyd's need to see himself on the local news emphasizes the high position occupied by the cultural artifact of the TV set within the societal hierarchy of the novel. Zoyd has *done* the deed, finished *his* performance, being its *sole* protagonist, yet he *must* see it on the televisual screen to corroborate that it happened: "'mind if I check myself out on the news?'" (VL 14), he asks his daughter. Zoyd is hardly the exception, but rather representative of what in *Vineland* is the norm. When Zoyd visits his off-the-books employer to collect his pay, he has barely any time to speak to him:

"Little busy just this second," Millard handing Zoyd an envelope with a sum of greenbacks within, "later would be better – say Hon, what's the Eight O'Clock Movie?"  
 "Um, oh, it's Pat Sajak in *The Frank Gorshin Story*."  
 "Say about ten, ten-thirty?" (VL 48)

Characters in the novel schedule their meetings and interactions *around* their TV-viewing, their lives revolving around the screen. The casting of some of Pynchon's Movies of the Week constitute televisual puns, an illustrative example of which can be taken from 'Pat Sajak in *The Frank Gorshin Story*' (VL 48). It is fitting that the life story of the actor whose most famous role was that of the Riddler in the 1960s live action television series *Batman*, would be played on the small screen by Pat Sajak, host from 1981 to 1989 of the puzzle-driven game show *Wheel of Fortune*.

Similarly, Sean Connery, whose breakthrough role was that of James Bond in *Dr. No* (1962), is recast in *Vineland* as another spy, in this case George Gordon Liddy, a key operative of a White House unit known as The Plumbers<sup>28</sup>, named after their ability to plug leaks, whose role was central to the Watergate Scandal. Accustomed to the role of Bond, the ever-successful spy, Pynchon recasts Connery as one of the key players in the espionage blunder that brought Nixon down: 'Sean Connery in *The G. Gordon Liddy Story*' (VL 339). The profusion of these amalgamations of the real and the represented further blur the distinctions between one and the other.

Pynchon's attention to the role of television and its technological flatness finds its most direct precedent in Don DeLillo's *White Noise* (1985). Yet, as David Foster Wallace suggests, their interest in the complexities involved in our relationship to TV is a subject that the generation with which these writers are most commonly associated rarely heeded. Wallace asserts that 'Pynchon and DeLillo were ahead of their time'<sup>29</sup> in what regards the seriousness with which they approached the concept of television in their fiction. *Vineland* brings to the fore the notion of the frame, through the novel's conceptual investigation of television and the manner in which characters have been conditioned by their relationship to the televisual medium. In the text, framing is represented in a number of ways. From Ché standing 'framed in the doorway' (VL 332) of Fleur's apartment, to the 'round wire-rims with ND-1 filters for lenses' (VL 239) sported by Frenesi towards the end of the novel, the frame is always presented as the method through which images are mounted or composed. In both photography, one of the organizational devices on which Pynchon would rely in *Against the Day*, and the moving image, the structuring narrative ploy in *Vineland*, framing is indeed crucial to the compositional process. An awareness of the limits of the snap or the shot is crucial for the individual holding the camera to be in total control of the creation of the work of art or end product. In *Vineland* the narrative is both framed by the notion of the screen, as America is represented through 'the safety of [the] viewfinder' (VL 116), and at the same time inhabited by a typically Pynchonian large cast of characters whose own experiences can paradoxically not be described

---

<sup>28</sup> Mark Hamilton Lytle, *America's Uncivil Wars: The Sixties Era from Elvis to the Fall of Richard Nixon* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2006), 362-363.

<sup>29</sup> David Foster Wallace, 'E Unibus Pluram: Television and U.S. Fiction,' in *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again: Essays and Arguments* (New York: Little, Brown, 1997), 43.

in terms of the empirical, due to the fact that they frame their every moment, distancing themselves from the immediacy of the ephemeral present instant.

The structural emphasis the novel places on the notion of the frame is highly suggestive of 20<sup>th</sup> century paintings such as Rene Magritte's *The Human Condition I* (1934) and Frida Kahlo's *A Few Small Nips* (1935). In the former, a large part of the painting itself becomes a frame for the canvas within the canvas, bringing to mind Pynchon's habitual fondness for the *mise en abyme* technique, whilst in the latter the movement is not inwards, but outwards, as the frame of Kahlo's oil painting becomes part of the artwork itself, with smudges of red paint representing the trespassing of the blood spilt within the sinister *retablo*, from the world of representation into this one. *Vineland* enacts both these movements, as the narrative alternates between zooming in and zooming out, giving us a portrait that encompasses both the history of a singular family tree and the genealogy of the United States of America, explicitly detailing their unfolding in the 20<sup>th</sup> century, whilst tacitly hinting at their very inception, the mythical point of origination. As I will show in the following discussion, we can see this same interaction between frame, representation, and reality within *Vineland's* depiction of both characters that enter the televisual world, and the televisual extending beyond the limits of the frame to enter reality.

A particularly interesting instance of the novel's concern with the flatness of the televisual screen is depicted in the context of Frenesi watching 'a rerun of the perennial motorcycle-cop favorite "CHiPs"' (VL 83) at home. It is then revealed that she 'enjoyed masturbating to Ponch and Jon reruns on the Tube' (VL 83). Frenesi then indulges in genital self-stimulation

when all at once what should occur for her but the primal Tubefreek miracle, in the form of a brisk manly knock at the screen door in the kitchen, and there outside on the landing, through the screen, broken up into little dots like pixels of a video image, only squarer, was this large, handsome U.S. Marshal, in full uniform (VL 83).

The terms in which the U.S. Marshal's presence is recounted leave no doubt as to the importance of the novel's treatment of screens and mediation. This seems to be, to Frenesi, 'the primal Tubefreek miracle.' The image of the uniformed man standing behind the kitchen's screen door is 'broken up into little dots like pixels of a video image, only squarer.' The translation of direct ocular perception of the real

world into the language of the small screen is ambiguous as to whether the situation is interpreted as more representational than “CHiPs” or less so. The fact that the pixels into which the Marshal’s presence is broken are ‘squarer’ than on the TV screen is pregnant with meaning. Frenesi appears to have reached a point in her relationship with television in which her desires must be mediated through a screen. Through the constant framing of the televisual, she appears to have been conditioned to not only expect, but even demand such *mountings* of narratives, even her own. *Vineland* depicts a generation of Americans who have come to depend on the technical and narrative language of television in order to interpret their own reality. The ‘squarer’ pixels suggest that Frenesi might be astonished at the clarity and verisimilitude of her own non-televisually mediated existence, amazed at the realness of the real.

### **Distortion of reality**

Pynchon suggests that reality must be pre-adjusted so that it may look *real enough* once it is televised. Zoyd, for example, carefully considers at the beginning of the novel the matter of which clothes he will wear, as he is aware of the fact that his actions will be captured and broadcast by several TV crews. After having ‘bought a party dress in a number of colors that would look good on television’ (VL 4), we are informed that:

In Tubal form he was pleased to see that the dress, Day-Glo orange, near-ultraviolet purple, some acid green, and a little magenta in a retro-Hawaiian parrots-and-hula-girls print, came across as a real attention-getter. (VL 15)

It is then, we may surmise, reality that must rise up to the challenge of the represented, an inversion of traditional Western notions of the interaction between art and life. This distortion of the world in mediated form is already present in *The Crying of Lot 49*, in which radio DJ Mucho Maas calls his wife ‘Edna Mosh’ on the air:

‘Edna Mosh?’ Oedipa said.  
‘It’ll come out the right way,’ Mucho said. ‘I was allowing for the distortion on these rigs, and then when they put it on tape.’ (CL49 96)

We must allow 'for the distortion on these rigs.' Pynchon's interest in this dilemma is ongoing, as attested by his latter works. In *Against the Day*, we are told that one of Luca and Erlys Zombini's children, Cici, 'was playing one of the Li'l Jailbirds, characters in a popular series of one-reel comedies' (AD 1177). Yet, as it turns out,

Cici played the part not of an Italian but a Chinese kid named Dou Ya. The Italian kid, Pippo, was played by a Negro. And so forth. Something to do with orthochromatic film. (AD 1177)

Communicational technologies appear to distort both sound *and* vision.

Jameson contrasts the technologies of the late 19<sup>th</sup> and early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries to those of our age, drawing a distinction by calling our contemporary technologies 'machines of reproduction rather than of production,'<sup>30</sup> adding that:

the technology of our own moment no longer possesses th[e] same capacity for representation: not the turbine, nor even Sheeler's grain elevators or smokestacks, not the baroque elaboration of pipes and conveyor belts, nor even the streamlined profile of the railroad train – all vehicles of speed still concentrated at rest – but rather the computer, whose outer shell has no emblematic or visual power, or even the casings of the various media themselves, as with that home appliance called television which articulates nothing but rather implodes, carrying its flattened image surface within itself.<sup>31</sup>

The implosion of the televisual image and the flatness of screened technologies (TVs, computers, &c) are both echoed in the very opening of *Vineland*, in what Stephen N. doCarmo calls 'the Baudrillardian simulacrum *par excellence*.'<sup>32</sup> The moment when Zoyd bursts through a window at the Cucumber Lounge (VL 11-12) is unlike Zoyd's previous defenestrations. He immediately realizes that what he runs through is not in fact a real window, but a stunt window 'made of clear sheet candy' (VL 12). As doCarmo and McHale<sup>33</sup> suggest, Baudrillard's notion of *simulacrum* comes into play, with other layers added progressively, as Zoyd goes on to watch himself in the news walking through the window. Rather than Jameson's 'implosion,' this opening scene problematizes the flatness of televisual technologies: arguably, Zoyd walks through what, within the context of this novel,

---

<sup>30</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, the Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), 37.

<sup>31</sup> *Ibid.*, 36-7.

<sup>32</sup> Stephen N. doCarmo, 'History, Refusal and the Strategic-Essentialism Politics of Pynchon's *Vineland*,' *Pynchon Notes*, 44-45 (1999): 188.

<sup>33</sup> McHale 'Zapping,' 116.

we may read retrospectively as the TV screen, the fourth wall dividing the world of televisual representation from this one. Jameson's flatness is given a volume and depth of its own in *Vineland*. Another example of this passing through the screen can be found in the character of Dr. Larry Elasmó. After the tragic events surrounding Weed Atman's failed PR3 utopian project, he finds himself haunted by the figure of Dr. Elasmó:

'Somehow, in Weed's deathstunned memory, Dr. Elasmó's video image had swept, had pixeldanced in to cover mercifully, for something else, an important part of what had happened to him in those penultimate days at College of the Surf' (VL 226).

Known for 'his stridently hypnotic, often incoherent radio and TV commercials' (VL 226), the mediated image of Elasmó's face is seen by the 'deathstunned' Atman at every turn. Everywhere 'would be the silent, staring Dr. Larry Elasmó, or a person wearing, like a coverall and veil, his ubiquitous screen image, grainy, flickering at the edges' (VL 227). Once again Pynchon offers us an encounter with the televisual that is defined not by flatness, but by an inherent tangibility – the screen here is imagined as a pixelated cloth, an elaborate disguise that allows the TV image to extend from the confines of the flat screen and frame and walk amongst the inhabitants of *Vineland*.

The oftentimes unhealthy relationship between an individual and a TV set had already been portrayed by Pynchon in *V.*, through the figure of Fergus Mixolydian:

He'd devised an ingenious sleep-switch, receiving its signal from two electrodes placed on the inner skin of his forearm. When Fergus dropped below a certain level of awareness, the skin resistance increased over a preset value to operate the switch. Fergus thus became an extension of the TV set. (V. 56)

Mixolydian can be retrospectively read as a form of proto-'Tubefreek' (VL 84), not quite a 'Thanatoid' (VL 170), Thanatoids being a form of undead television addicts.<sup>34</sup> Similarly, the confusion between the world of representation and this one that riddles *Vineland* can be traced back to Oedipa Maas' attorney Roseman,

---

<sup>34</sup> Thanatoid identity can be read in light of the pervasive televisual presence, under the light of its cathode rays, as it were. In a novel in which television is referred to as the 'Tube,' its consumers would be 'Tubers,' therefore aligning thanatoids with the 'couch potato' lifestyle. Furthermore, "'Thanatoid' means 'like death, only different'" (VL 170), Pynchon appears to playfully suggest that individuals who spend over half their lives seated in front of a television *do not have a life*, leading, as they do, existences similar to that of cinematic and televisual zombies.

whose ‘rough draft of *The Profession v. Perry Mason, A not-so-hypothetical Indictment*’ (CL49 11) suggests a similar condition, one seemingly verging on psychosis. In *Vineland*, characters that indulge in ‘Tubal abuse’ (VL 33) often overdose on television and must seek out Tubaldetox (VL 45), as such overdosage appears to result in an inevitable mental breakdown. Tubaldetox is offered by the ‘National Endowment for Video Education and Rehabilitation’ (VL 33), or simply ‘NEVER’ (VL 32). We are introduced to this televisual symptomatology through the figure of Hector Zuñiga:

It was disheartening to see how much he depended on these Tubal fantasies about his profession, relentlessly pushing their propaganda message of cops-are-only-human-got-to-do-their-job, turning agents of government repression into sympathetic heroes. Nobody thought it was peculiar anymore, no more than the routine violations of constitutional rights these characters performed week after week, now absorbed into the vernacular of American expectations. Cop shows were in a genre right-wing weekly *TV Guide* called Crime Drama. (VL 345)

Zuñiga needs the ‘Tubal fantasies’ about his own profession so as to delude himself regarding the nature of his work. The aforementioned passage makes explicit the political role played by television within the novel; not only are massive audiences provided with the right-wing discourse of Crime Drama repackaged so as to make its protagonists seem unambiguously heroic, but even law enforcement officers themselves peer into the looking glass of the TV screen to have their own images reflected back to them in a distorted and comforting light. Over a decade later, Pynchon would return to this topic in his 2003 foreword to George Orwell’s dystopian novel *Nineteen Eighty-Four*:

Looking around us at the present moment, for example, we note the popularity of helicopters as a resource of “law enforcement”, familiar to us from countless televised “crime dramas”, themselves forms of social control – and for that matter at the ubiquity of television itself.<sup>35</sup>

In the same piece, Pynchon also emphasizes the similarities between Orwell’s telescreens and the role that the television screen plays in contemporary society.<sup>36</sup>

---

<sup>35</sup> Thomas Pynchon, foreword to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell (New York: Plume, 2003), xv-xvi.

<sup>36</sup> *Ibid.*, xvi.

The words of Isaiah Two Four quoted earlier<sup>37</sup> parallel this notion of television as a means of social control, normalizing the otherwise outrageous ‘routine violations of constitutional rights these characters performed week after week,’ which have been ‘now absorbed into the vernacular of American expectations.’ Entertainment, social control and violence are aligned throughout the novel: Isaiah Two Four’s idea for theme parks or ‘violence centers’ (VL 19), Zuñiga’s interpretation of the police radio bandwidth (KQAS), and the aforementioned televisual ‘Crime Drama[s].’ Through these illustrative examples, *Vineland* suggests that this connection between entertainment and violence has a normalizing effect on the novel’s cast, to such an extent that ‘[n]obody thought it was peculiar anymore’ (VL 345), allowing law enforcers to regulate society in any way they see fit. Throughout *Vineland* we are confronted with what Thomas defines as ‘[t]he novel’s deep preoccupation with television, with the social and political impact of “the Tube.”’<sup>38</sup> Through his characterization of *TV Guide* as a ‘right-wing weekly’ (VL 345) publication, Pynchon boldly asserts that television is (at least in practice) not a politically neutral medium, but one which has been co-opted and is therefore deeply entwined with dominant (and official) ideology.

### **Ol’ Ronald Raygun**

The televisual spectre of Ronald Reagan is a presence that looms over the novel. The novel’s preoccupation with and constant references to the blurring of the boundaries between screened fiction and reality can be read as oblique, yet unequivocal, allusions to Reagan. It is my assertion that, in *Vineland*, when characters are ‘stared at by the greenish dead eye of the TV tube’ (CL49 5), it is Reagan’s elderly-sibling-like orb that watches them. The collapsing of the distance between fact and fiction in *Vineland* and, subsequently, the blurring of the distinctions between one and the other that pervades the novel can be encapsulated in the figure of the fortieth president of the United States of America. Prior to his political career, Reagan had attained a modicum of success as a film and television actor, including roles in *Accident’s Will Happen* (1938), *Baby Be Good* (1940), *Murder in the Air* (1940), *Kings Row* (1942), and the role of host to the

---

<sup>37</sup> “but you sure didn’t understand much about the Tube. Minute the Tube got hold of you folks that was it, that whole alternative America, el deado meato, just like th’ Indians, sold it all to your real enemies, and even in 1970 dollars — it was way too cheap....” (VL 372-373).

<sup>38</sup> Thomas, *Pynchon and the Political*, 143.

*General Electric Theater* television show (1954-1962), among others. Yet, stardom eluded the young Reagan and, after serving as president of the Screen Actors Guild twice (1947-1952, 1959-1960), he launched the most successful political career an American actor has had to date. Upon completing two terms as Governor of California in 1975, he set his sights on the White House and, in 1981, Reagan was sworn in as President of the United States, his second term ending in 1989.

Not only does Reagan's peculiar and unique trajectory resonate within the context of *Vineland* – after all, like the Antizoyd he undoubtedly represents, he burst through the TV screen and into another reality –, but the vast majority of the cultural references he sprinkled across his speeches, interviews, and public appearances were either televisual or cinematic in nature. The confusion arising from the destabilizing of the boundary between dramaturgy and political life is evident in *Vineland*, in which mimetic representations and that which those representations purport to mimic seamlessly merge into a single indeterminate reality. The same confusion made itself evident at certain points in Reagan's public persona: "Best role I ever played" is the way Reagan described the presidency to Richard Widmark,<sup>39</sup> a fellow Hollywood actor and personal friend, whose middle name, Weedt, may have also inspired Weed Atman's first name. Not only does Reagan's characterization of the presidential investiture as an acting role emphasize the softening of the line between the screen and reality, but it is also merely one of what can be interpreted as Reagan's many gaffes and faux pas, adding to his general bumbling – yet charismatic – presence, which during his two-term presidency become *vox populi*, as many articles in the press from the time attest.<sup>40</sup> In essence, this confusion was cemented by the fact that the Reagan 'administration so often gives the impression of working off of a shooting script,'<sup>41</sup> resulting in this period often being referred to as 'the Hollywood presidency.'<sup>42</sup>

Pynchon's inclusion and narrative reliance on characters that are hard-pressed to distinguish fact from fiction would appear to echo Reagan's semiotic indeterminacy: (a) Reagan as actor, essentially a silhouette onto which the specificities of each character he plays are mapped, and (b) Reagan as president, a

---

<sup>39</sup> Andrew Cockburn, 'Gun Crazy,' *American Film: Magazine of the Film and Television Arts*, 11, no. 3 (1985): 50.

<sup>40</sup> Cockburn, 'Gun Crazy,' 50.

<sup>41</sup> Ibid.

<sup>42</sup> Anthony J. Hall, *American Empire and the Fourth World* (Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005), xvii.

determinate and singular position of leadership. From the overlapping of these two positions, in the figure of Reagan, ontological ambiguity emerges. The duality of Reagan's persona can be illuminated by McHale's narrative model for *Vineland*, one regimented by the constant channel-switching of televisual zapping. Reagan's ascent to the presidency could be read as the very catalyst that brings about the confusion that permeates *Vineland*; the novel's cast of characters, after all, would through zapping be exposed, from one moment to the next, to Reagan playing the role of Andy McCaine in *Love Is on the Air* (1937), immediately thereafter to an official address to the nation from their president, and subsequently back again to Reagan making a brief uncredited appearance in *It's a Great Feeling* (1949). It would seem unsurprising that Hector Zuñiga, Brock Vond, Zoyd and Prairie Wheeler, and Frenesi Gates all display the symptoms brought about by this shattering of the televisual screen. Whilst the fact that Hector Zuñiga mistakes the sounds emitted by his patrol-car radio for mere entertainment might seem far-fetched and bordering on the absurd, we may turn to Reagan for a contemporaneous historical precedent.

President Reagan was an adept storyteller and one of his favourite wartime anecdotes, with which he regaled the American public, involved a bomber pilot who, instead of parachuting to safety, refused to abandon his injured tail gunner as their plane plummeted to the sea. This tale never failed to inspire great emotion in those who heard it, supporting the image of Reagan as an all-American war hero. 'The problem with this story is,' Paul Rogat Loeb states, 'that it only happened in a movie, and Regan himself never got closer to the front than the Hollywood lots.'<sup>43</sup> Yet, Reagan 'told the story as though it had happened in reality, with the pilot receiving a posthumous congressional medal of honor.'<sup>44</sup> As a matter of fact, William H. Chaffe asserts, 'this anecdote came from a movie starring Dana Andrews and a story in *Reader's Digest*,'<sup>45</sup> making Reagan's recounting of the dialogue between the pilot and the tail gunner, nearly word by word as it appears in *Wing and a Prayer* (1944)<sup>46</sup>, uncannily similar –and eerily so– to *Vineland*'s Hector Zuñiga's ever-loosening grasp on reality. It is not merely those witnessing Reagan's

---

<sup>43</sup> Paul Rogat Loeb, *Generation at the Crossroads: Apathy and Action on the American Campus* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995), 159.

<sup>44</sup> William H. Chaffe, *Private Lives / Public Consequences: Personality and Politics in Modern America* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 320.

<sup>45</sup> Ibid.

<sup>46</sup> See Reagan's obituary in the *New York Times*: Marilyn Berger, 'Ronald Reagan Dies at 93: Fostered Cold-War Might and Curbs on Government,' *New York Times*, June 6, 2004.

piercing through of the frame of the televisual threshold whose relation to reality is altered, but the very journey *through* the screen also brings about this blurring of boundaries.<sup>47</sup>

Set designer Ken Adams often described a possibly apocryphal, yet undeniably possible, anecdote involving Reagan's first day in office at the White House: "When Ronald Reagan became president, one of the first things he asked to see was the War Room, and somebody had to say "Well..." He had expected the one from *Dr. Strangelove*."<sup>48</sup> Whilst the tale of the tail gunner illustrates a blurring whereby Reagan successfully inserted himself into a screened fiction, which he then inserted into reality, the War Room anecdote represents an instance in which Reagan's attempt at inserting screened fiction into reality was ultimately thwarted. After all, the War Room in Kubrick's *Dr. Strangelove, or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb* (1964) looked nothing like the White House's Situation Room, as the US government had refused Kubrick's production team access to it, presumably due to their ultimately justified fear that the film would lampoon the White House and the Army.<sup>49</sup> The War Room, which Adams designed for the film, becoming real in Reagan's mind, comprised a 'reinforced concrete bunker with overtones of the bombastic Nazi designs of Albert Speer.'<sup>50</sup> This finds a further echo in *Vineland*, whereby Pynchon transposes the fascistic architecture of the Third Reich onto the novel's setting, characterizing Brock Vond himself as the embodiment of totalitarian institutions. Following the birth of Prairie, as Frenesi is suffering from Post-partum Depression, the narrator describes the possibly hallucinated nightly visitations of Brock Vond: 'in the half-lit hallways of the night, leaning darkly in above her like any of the sleek raptors that decorate fascist architecture' (VL 287). Here the recurrent theme of social control and political resistance that has been a staple of the critical appraisals of the novel<sup>51</sup>

---

<sup>47</sup> See also Stephen Greenblatt, 'Towards a Poetics of Culture,' *Southern Review* 20, no. 1 (1987): 3-15. This text was originally delivered as a lecture at the University of Western Australia on 4 September 1986.

<sup>48</sup> Ken Adam quoted in Donald Albrecht, 'Dr. Caligari's Cabinets: The Set Design of Ken Adam,' in *Architecture and Film*, ed. Mark Lamster (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000), 122.

<sup>49</sup> Albrecht, 'Dr. Caligari's Cabinets,' 122.

<sup>50</sup> Ibid.

<sup>51</sup> See M. Keith Booker, 'America and its Discontents: The Failure of Leftist Politics in Pynchon's *Vineland*' *LIT: Literature Interpretation Theory* 4, no. 2 (1993): 87-99; David Thoreen, 'Thomas Pynchon's Political Parable: Parallels between *Vineland* and "Rip Van Winkle"' *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews* 14, no. 3 (2001): 45-50; Thomas, 'Sir Yes Sir! Doing it to Yourself and Doing it for Yourself in *Vineland*' in *Pynchon and the Political*, 131-150; and Ostrander, 'Awakening to the Physical World,' 122-135.

makes itself evident, this thematic strand here converges with the notion of screened reality. Pynchon had already alluded to *Dr. Strangelove* in his prior California novel, *Lot 49*. Not only was the scene in which Dr. Hilarius loses his mind conspicuously similar to Brigadier General Jack D. Ripper's breakdown near the beginning of the film, but this narrative segment was also published prior to the release of the novel in *Cavalier* magazine under the title of 'The Shrink Flips', with the unambiguous subtitle 'How a lonely psychiatrist, persecuted by his past, learned to stop worrying and start shooting.'<sup>52</sup>

It is my assertion that the narrative vignette of the Marquis de Sod in *Vineland* parallels the dynamic that resulted in Reagan's ascent to the White House. We are given a micro-biography of Millard Hobbs, 'a former actor who'd begun as a company logo and ended up as a majority owner' (VL 46). 'Originally Millard had only been hired to be in a couple of locally produced late-night TV commercials' for The Marquis de Sod, a 'lawn care service' (VL 46). As time went by, Millard grew in popularity, often being mistaken for the real owner on the street. 'Millard, being an actor, started believing them. Little by little he kept buying in and learning the business' (VL 46-47), to such an extent that he becomes the majority stakeholder. The Marquis de Sod echoes the figure of Reagan, another former actor, particularly in light of an interesting anecdote recounted by Wendy Doniger:

When Ronald Reagan auditioned for the part of the president of the United States in the 1960 Broadway production of Gore Vidal's play *The Best Man*, about a presidential election, Vidal turned him down because he didn't think Reagan would be believable as the president. When asked about this in 2002, Vidal said, "Reagan was a first-rate actor as a President."<sup>53</sup>

The Marquis de Sod episode is one of many in which the presence of Reagan, who is lurking at every corner of the novel, makes itself manifest.

Reagan's disregard for the boundary between screened fiction and reality was much noted by the press. As Susan Jeffords states, 'Reagan himself quipped at a press conference after the release of the hostages in Lebanon, "Boy, I saw Rambo last night. Now I know what to do the next time this happens,"'<sup>54</sup> a comment for

---

<sup>52</sup> Thomas Pynchon, 'The Shrink Flips: How a Lonely Psychiatrist, Persecuted by His Past, Learned to Stop Worrying and Start Shooting,' *Cavalier*, March 1966, 32-33 and 88-92.

<sup>53</sup> Wendy Doniger, *The Woman Who Pretended to Be Who She Was: Myths of Self-Imitation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 2004), 23-24.

<sup>54</sup> Susan Jeffords, 'The Reagan Hero: Rambo', in *The War Film*, ed. Robert Eberwein (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005), 140.

which he was ridiculed. This remark is hardly surprising if we take into consideration the fact that Michael Thomas Carroll lists Sylvester Stallone, Arnold Schwarzenegger, and Clint Eastwood by name when stating that Reagan's 'main source for slogans was the words of action-adventure heroes.'<sup>55</sup> It is in this manner that Reagan also invoked another memorable film quote in a speech at the American Business Conference in March 1985 where, finding himself at odds with Congress regarding its proposed tax increase, he taunted the legislative body echoing Harry Callahan's words in *Sudden Impact* (1983): 'Go ahead. Make my day.' After all, '[f]or Ronald Reagan the world of legend and myth is a real world. He visits it regularly and he's a happy man there,'<sup>56</sup> as stated in 1988 by Pat Buchanan, who once served as the White House director of communications. The way in which all characters in *Vineland* not merely share a common televisual vernacular, but in fact are limited to some extent by it, is conspicuously reminiscent of Reagan, unarguably the emblematic American politician of the 1980s.

Popular wisdom would have us believe that there is none so blind as those who will not see, and none so deaf as those who will not listen. However, Pynchon plays on this preconception by upping the ante and presenting us with a conception of Reagan as the leader who will not listen and, even if he did, is deaf. When asked questions by his parents – Frenesi Gates and Flash Fletcher – in close succession, Justin imitates the televisual Reagan:

"Say, Justintime, how's 'em Transformers, making out OK?"

"And how was everything over at Wallace's?"

The kid put on a genial smile, waved, put his hand to his ear like Reagan going, "Say again?" "How about a few questions," Justin pretending to look around the room, "Mom? You had your hand up?" (VL 87)

Whilst Justin's parents' questions inspire his make-believe press conference, it is the mention of *The Transformers*, the pilot three-part miniseries of which first aired in the US in late 1984, which spurs him to impersonate Reagan in particular, echoing both his real life deafness and his playful relationship with the press. The interstitial televisual Reagan haunts the text at every turn, to such an extent that *Vineland* could almost be read as an anecdotal biography of Reagan that

---

<sup>55</sup> Michael Thomas Carroll, *Popular Modernity in America: Experience, Technology, Mythohistory* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000), 199.

<sup>56</sup> George C. Edwards III, *On Deaf Ears: The Limits of the Bully Pulpit* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003), 163.

purposefully relegates its subject to a minor role, a walk-on part, as if countering the idea of but a supporting actor (Reagan) being given the most protagonistic part in the political scene of the US (the presidency).

President Reagan proposed and insisted on the development of the Strategic Defense Initiative (SDI), commonly referred by the press at the time as the Star Wars program, which was set up in 1984. SDI would, theoretically, allow the US to destroy intercontinental ballistic missiles while in flight beyond the stratosphere, essentially making it a 'space shield'.<sup>57</sup> Ultimately, SDI was never actualized or even proven to be a technically feasible or scientifically valid project.<sup>58</sup> The president was derided for his role in its inception, as many thought it the ultimate illustration of 'Reagan's penchant for using Hollywood movies as an inspiration for policy.'<sup>59</sup> According to Chaffe, the inspiration for the Star Wars program came to Reagan after watching the science fiction film *The Day the Earth Stood Still* (1951).<sup>60</sup> In one of *Vineland's* many subtle references to Reagan, Pynchon pokes fun at Reagan's disregard for the division between fact and fiction:

Mucho blinked sympathetically, a little sadly. "I guess it's over. We're on into a new world now, it's the Nixon Years, then it'll be the Reagan Years –"  
"Ol' Raygun? No way he'll ever make president." (VL 313, added emphasis)

'Ol' Raygun' conflates politics and screened fiction, as both a reference to Reagan and the SDI, in addition to suggesting the Sci Fi genre of George Lucas' *Star Wars*, references to which pepper *Vineland*. Zoyd refers to Isaiah Two Four, Prairie's boyfriend, as 'ol' R2D2' (VL 16), whilst Brock Vond, whose last name evokes the pronunciation with which a Bond villain would undoubtedly distort 007's last name, also resorts to the much quoted line from George Lucas' 1980 *The Empire Strikes Back*: "'But Prairie, I'm your father'" (VL 376). Yet, most importantly, from the outset of the narrative we are told that 'since George Lucas and all his crew came and went there's been a real change of consciousness' (VL 7) at the local community. 'They were talking about *Return of the Jedi* (1983),' we are informed,

---

<sup>57</sup> See Sanford Lakoff and Herbert F. York, *Shield in Space?: Technology, Politics, and the Strategic Defense Initiative* (Berkeley: University of California Press Published, 1989), *passim*.

<sup>58</sup> Rebecca S. Bjork, *The Strategic Defense Initiative: Symbolic Containment of the Nuclear Threat* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992), 92.

<sup>59</sup> Chaffe, *Private Lives / Public Consequences*, 320.

<sup>60</sup> *Ibid.*

'parts of which had been filmed in the area and in Buster's view changed life there forever' (VL 7).

The first sentence of the novel, and the pages that follow, appear to counter the vision of America posited by Reagan in his 1984 reelection campaign TV ad: 'It's Morning Again in America.'<sup>61</sup> The commercial begins: 'It's morning again in America. Today, more men and women will go to work than ever before in our country's history'; this image is immediately subverted in *Vineland*: 'Later than usual one summer morning in 1984, Zoyd Wheeler drifted awake in sunlight through a creeping fig that hung in the window' (VL 3) in the hope of finding his next fraudulently-claimed 'mental disability check' (VL 3). Whilst Reagan promises that 'nearly two thousand families today will buy new homes, more than at any time in the past four years', as the action of the novel unfolds, Zoyd and Prairie lose their family home to overzealous DEA agent Brock Vond. Finally, the velvety voice-over in Reagan's ad states that 'this afternoon sixty-five hundred men and women will be married.' Without even analyzing the specifically incorporated hetero-normative language of this declaration, the breakdown of Zoyd and Frenesi's marriage (and Sasha and Hubbard's) makes Zoyd a blemish on the idealized Reaganite vision of America.

### **Vine-like Networks**

Whilst *Vineland* can be interpreted as a family saga, it is a novel that describes the interweaving of the familial and the political, as both vines see their tendrils intertwine over time. In the novel we are given glimpses of Frenesi Gates' long line of political radicalism, a family tree that would come to be expanded and given more foliage in *Against the Day*. This bloodline provides us with a vision of an alternative America, one existing both in parallel and in resistance to the official order. It is Frenesi that stands at the center of the family tree in the novel (see *figure 1*), with four family members projected forward in time (her two spouses and children), and another four projected backward in time (her parents and maternal grandparents). Yet Frenesi has, as the action of the novel commences, been 'underground' for several years. Therefore, we could see Frenesi as the

---

<sup>61</sup> See Timothy W. Luke, *Screens of Power: Ideology, Domination, and Resistance in Informational Society* (Baltimore: University of Illinois Press, 1990), 156-155, n. 28 for the full transcript of the infomercial.

absent nodal joint returning to the fold: an absent center that gradually makes itself present as the novel progresses.

Within the timescale of *Vineland*, Reagan is shown to be a consistent presence haunting the Traverse/Becker clan. Whilst Eula Becker and Jess Traverse were involved in the union struggles of the 1930s (VL 77), Ronald Reagan begun his career as an actor, which he pursued between 1937 and 1965. We are told that Frenesi grew up at 'the fringes of the political struggle in Hollywood back in the fifties' (VL 74), the decade that would see Reagan hold the office of Screen Actors Guild President twice, first from 1947 to 1952 and then again between 1959 and 1960. Frenesi's parents, Hub and Sasha, we are told, often reminisced about 'the fifties, the anticommunist terror in Hollywood' (VL 81). 'Her mother,' we are told, 'then had worked as a script reader and her father, Hub Gates, as a gaffer, always under dreamlike turns of blacklist, graylist, secrets kept and betrayed' (VL 74). These references to 'the anti-communist terror' of 'the blacklist period' (VL 81) are, I assert, tacit references to the projected image on the silver screen and the grainy likeness on the small one of Ronald Reagan's presence in the novel. As Screen Actors Guild President, Reagan takes control over his first network, a position from which he 'helped orchestrated a blacklist whose existence he denied.'<sup>62</sup> The reader may surmise that Frenesi and Brock originally meet in 1969, as DL suggests to Prairie that 'he's still chasing her [mother], 15 years down the line' (VL 101). Here, again, we find Reagan in power. This time he is in control of the state network as Governor of California between 1967 and 1975, making him the predominant antagonistic force during the span of the People's Republic of Rock n' Roll's brief existence, outliving it. As previously discussed in this chapter, the present day action of the novel takes place in the middle of Reagan's two-term presidency of the United States (1981-1989), locating it at the very center of Reagan's national network. It is, therefore, Reagan's shadowy figure that has been in the background of the entire novel. Viewing this trajectory, the reader may witness the growth of Reagan's network and its ever-expanding sphere of influence. Reagan's network grows exponentially, moving from a mere urban district and single industry (Hollywood) to encompass the entire state (California) and, eventually, the nation; at the same time, we can see parallel narrative telescoping that sees Pynchon

---

<sup>62</sup> Michael Rogin, *Ronald Reagan, The Movie: And Other Episodes in Political Demonology* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987), 31.

comment upon the entire breadth of the nation by focusing not only a single state, but a city and, within that city, the microcosm of one single family.

### Frenesi Gates' Family Tree

(Four generations discussed in *Vineland*)

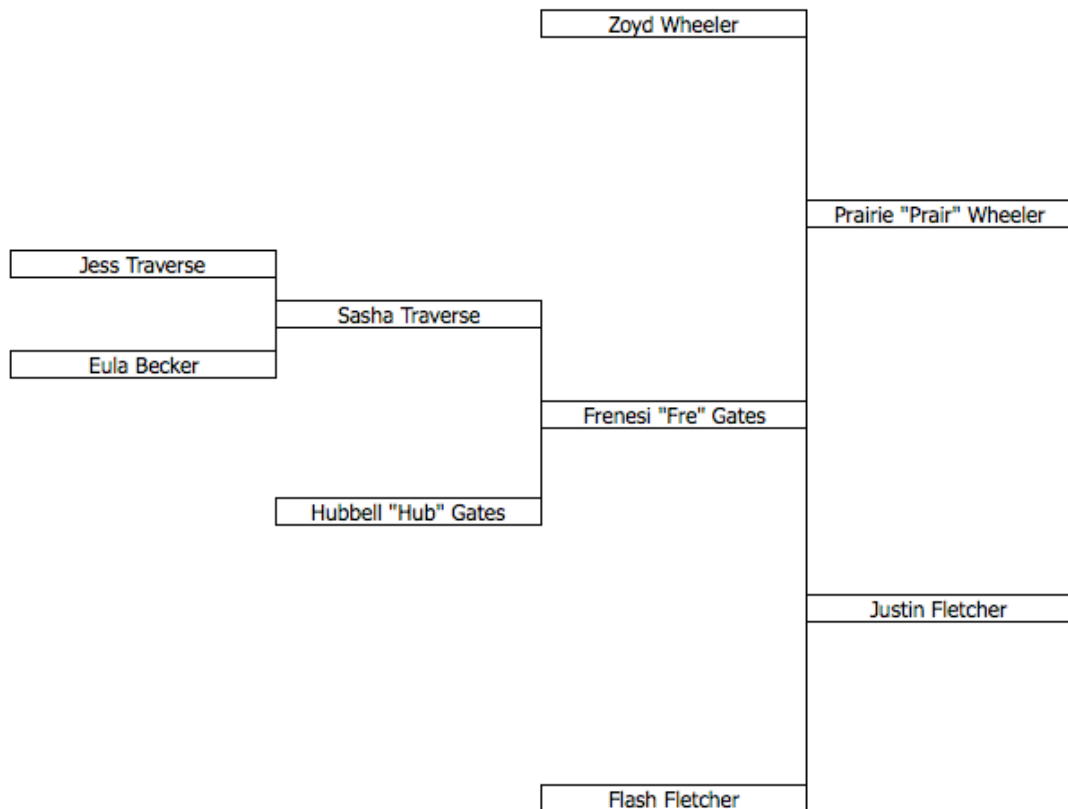


figure 1.

Ultimately, the notion of the network is, like its televisual iteration,<sup>63</sup> represented in neither strictly positive nor purely negative terms in the novel: judgment on the inherent status of networks is postponed. The vine-like tendrils of familial relations tend, however, to represent a redeeming characterization of the network, a distinguishing mark that sets it apart from the engineered network of the state apparatus, which is, for the most part, depicted in connection to oppression, an urge to homogenize diversity, and social control. N. Katherine Hayles identifies the dual nature of the network in *Vineland*, asserting that 'running in one direction are networks of family and friends that connect

<sup>63</sup> McHale, for example, discusses the dangers involved in defining Pynchon's representation of television as merely a jeremiad on its negative effects. See McHale 'Zapping,' 115-144.

generations and overcome isolation,' which she terms 'the kinship system.'<sup>64</sup> 'Running in a contrary direction,' Hayles continues, 'are networks of government agents that seek to gain information, incarcerate dissidents, and control the population – the snitch system.'<sup>65</sup>

Reagan's spectral, yet constant, presence throughout *Vineland* can be ascribed to his approach at leadership: 'Surround yourself with the best people you can find, delegate authority, and don't interfere as long as the policy you've decided upon is being carried out.'<sup>66</sup> It is, after all, Reagan's almost Reaganless network –through his almost complete deferral of power to the network itself– that sets the action of the novel in motion and, eventually, also brings it to a halt. Zoyd's first action of any import within the narrative, other than the passive act of waking up late, is to drive to the Cucumber Lounge with the intention of 'doing something publicly crazy' so as to *earn* his 'mental-disability check' (VL 3). In other words, he must avoid at all costs the cutting of his funding. It is precisely the falling of 'the Reaganomic ax blades' (VL 90) that bookend the novel. The first swing of the axe sends Frenesi, her new partner Flash Fletcher, and their son Justin on the run. Upon realizing that they have been dropped 'from the Program' (VL 88) and that her last government check will prove to be uncashable, Frenesi understands 'that she and Flash were no longer exempt, might easily be abandoned already to the upper world' (VL 90). Having collaborated with the government during the 1960s War on Drugs, Frenesi has since the demise of PR<sup>3</sup> been in hiding, receiving continuous financial support from the government. The notion of an 'upper world' implies the existence of a lower one, an underground network symmetrically parallel to its aboveground equivalent. Yet, 'at the unreadable whim of something in power, [she] must reenter the clockwork of cause and effect' (VL 90). Frenesi surmises that their deletion from the government database 'would all be done with keys on alphanumeric keyboards that stood for weightless, invisible chains of electronic presence or absence' (VL 90). This dehumanized representation of the network as merely 'keys on alphanumeric keyboards,' in addition to the elusive and indefinable 'something in power,' suggest Reagan's approach at leadership

---

<sup>64</sup> N. Katherine Hayles, "'Who was saved?': Families, Snitches, and Recuperation in Pynchon's *Vineland*,' in *The Vineland Papers: Critical Takes on Pynchon's Novel*, ed. Geoffrey Green, et al. (Normal: Dalkey Archive Press, 1994), 15.

<sup>65</sup> Ibid.

<sup>66</sup> Ronald Reagan, quoted in Frances FitzGerald, *Way Out There In the Blue: Reagan, Star Wars and the End of the Cold War* (New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001), 217-218.

discussed above, as well as being in line with Pynchon's tendency to characterize power networks and totalizing structures are ultimately faceless and inhuman. Reagan's paradoxically Reaganless network not only leaves Frenesi out in the open, endangering her and both her families, but it is also the network's indifferent eye that eventually withdraws Vond's resources, accidentally restoring peace to the Traverse-Becker-Gates-Wheeler family. Reagan can therefore be seen as the both the novel's main antagonist and, in a humourous turn of event, its inadvertent hero. Thus, *Vineland*'s final pages both do and do not constitute a happy ending,<sup>67</sup> the notion being subverted as Frenesi, Zoyd, and their family and friends triumph, as it were, by default. As such, it falls within Bordwell's category of the 'unmotivated happy ending,' which 'is a [form of] failure.'<sup>68</sup>

There is to the novel's parallel reading of these dissimilar vine-like networks that organize the novel a distinctive structural pattern: whilst at the beginning of the novel the Wheeler-Gates household (and their extended family) is entirely atomized and widely dispersed, as the action of the novel unfolds, the individual members of the family tree come together in the novel's final pages at the Gates family reunion; side-by-side to this movement *towards* togetherness, we find the official counterpart to this vine, namely the tangled network of the state apparatus, which – although at the outset of the novel seemingly unified – proves to be as the end of the novel approaches, disconnected and lacking in inter-departmental communication, with Brock Vond's funding being cut off as he is literally inches away from Prairie Wheeler. The evaporation of Brock Vond's funding as he dangles from a helicopter in the midst of a forest (VL 377) brings to mind the botanical language with which Pynchon infuses his depiction of a Garden of Eden gone astray; after all, Robberds describes *Vineland* itself as 'a botanical examination of the cultural and institutional vines that constitute America in the 1980s.'<sup>69</sup> Vond's loss of funding, which proves to be catastrophic to his quest, suggests that Pynchon plays further on the possibilities of the botanical metaphor, as it recalls the idea of the woodbine to which the author makes reference in *Gravity's Rainbow*:

---

<sup>67</sup> For a thorough analysis of the filmic notion of the 'Hollywood happy ending,' see David Bordwell, 'Happily Ever After, Part Two,' *The Velvet Light Trap: Review of Cinema* 19 (1982): 2.

<sup>68</sup> Ibid.

<sup>69</sup> Robberds, 'The New Historicist Creepers,' 237.

“But,” sez Slothrop, “but, uh, where’s my million marks, then, Emil?”  
Säure sucks yellow flame flowing over the edge of the bowl. “It is gone where the woodbine twineth.” Exactly what Jubilee Jim Fisk told the Congressional Committee investigating his and Jay Gould’s scheme to corner gold in 1869. (GR 438)

As Weisenburger explains, the exchange between Jubilee Jim Fisk and the Congressional Committee took place in October 1869, during which –asked where the funds in railroad money Fisk had put into his project had gone– he simply replied: ‘It has gone where the woodbine twineth,’ meaning ‘up the spout’.<sup>70</sup> In *Vineland* the name of ‘the Woodbine Motel’ (VL 172) already foreshadows the eventual drying up of Brock Vond’s funds. Pynchon plays further on the idea of botany, moving from the vine to the woodbine, and back again, as if the American space of potentiality with its original inhabitants, the Redwoods, were coming to the aid of the Traverse family tree.

Mark Robberds defines *Vineland* as being ‘[g]enealogical in structure and archeological in content,’ adding that ‘it traces umbilical vines back to the sixties.’<sup>71</sup> In my conception of the novel, *Vineland*’s structure is both *topomorphic* – in that it is constructed around the concept of America, both real and subjunctive – and *logomorphic*, as the concept of the vine-like network is also at its centre. In the end, it is these umbilical vines that Robberds identifies that prove the most hardy. While the tendrils of the state apparatus represented by Brock Vond are abruptly pruned without any consideration, the family reunion with which the novel ends highlight the strength of the alternative American genealogy: not only are its roots present and still strong, but it is showing no signs of decay, as it is made evident through the blooming of its new branches, namely Prairie and Justin.

It is Prairie, one of these new blooms on the familial vine of alternative America, who inadvertently foreshadows the novel’s eventual *deus ex machine* ending. Paradoxically, this takes the form of one of the few instances in which characters explicitly distinguish themselves from their screened counterparts, the televisual however model still being pined for and idealized:

Prairie huddled down in back, hanging on, wishing they could wake into something more benevolent and be three different

---

<sup>70</sup> Steven C. Weisenburger, *A Gravity’s Rainbow Companion* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006), 247.

<sup>71</sup> Robberds, ‘The New Historicist Creepers,’ 239.

people, only some family in a family car, with no problems that couldn't be solved in half an hour of wisecracks and commercials, on their way to a fun weekend at some beach. (VL 191)

In spite of Prairie's interpretation of her situation, as the end of the novel approaches, the 'happy ending' that Hollywood's silver screen and the small screen's Movies of the Week customarily demand is exactly what *Vineland* delivers: equilibrium is re-established and the protagonists, however unpatriotic or un-American, triumph. The vine of alternative America has laid its roots and finally returned 'home' (VL 385).<sup>72</sup>

---

<sup>72</sup> Several critics have noted the Pynchon's choice for the final word of the novel: 'home.' See: Elaine B. Safer, 'Pynchon's World and Its Legendary Past: Humor and the Absurd in a Twentieth-Century *Vineland*,' in *The Vineland Papers: Critical Takes on Pynchon's Novel*, eds. Geoffrey Green et al. (Normal: Dalkey Archive Press, 1994), 62; James Berger, *After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), 171.

## *The Shortest Distance from Here to There: Tangled Knots and Straight Lines in Mason & Dixon*

Set in the mid- to late 18<sup>th</sup> century, *Mason & Dixon* focuses on the cartographical and astronomical collaborative efforts of Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon, as they survey what would eventually become the cultural boundary between the United States of America's North and South: the Mason-Dixon Line (1763-1767), as it would ultimately be known. The structure of the novel has been described in a wide variety of ways. As Douglas Keeseey states, responses range 'from critics who find the novel unstructured [to] those who claim for it the simplest structure: a line.'<sup>1</sup> David Kipen,<sup>2</sup> Ted Mooney,<sup>3</sup> and Tom LeClair all propose an appetizing structure for the novel: the sandwich. As LeClair puts it, '[a]n eighteenth-century invention, 'sandwich' is Pynchon's metaphor for this book. In *Mason & Dixon*, the red meat of America (walking across bloody loam) is placed between slices of British white bread (peering into pure heavens).'<sup>4</sup> Mooney, on the other hand, sees in the novel's tripartite, snack-like structure the symmetrical 'A-B-A form'<sup>5</sup>: the novel opens and closes with the astronomical observations of the Transit of Venus, joined together – I might add – by the tracing of the Mason-Dixon line. Manfred Kopp argues that 'there are striking similarities between the structure of the DNA double helix on the one hand and the internal organization of *Mason & Dixon* on the other,'<sup>6</sup> based on what he perceives as a proliferation of textual doubles and binary oppositions within the novel. Kopp's double helix structural reading encompasses 'binarity, balance, and complementarity, but combining also linearity and circularity in its own spiraling shape.'<sup>7</sup> Also highlighting the theme of doubleness,

---

<sup>1</sup> Douglas Keeseey, 'Mason & Dixon On the Line' *Pynchon Notes* 36-39 (1995-6): 168.

<sup>2</sup> David Kipen, 'America's Own Line: Surveying *Mason & Dixon*,' *Thomas Pynchon*, 1997, n.p. Accessed September 30, 2012.

<http://www.thomaspynchon.com/mason-dixon/reviews/dkipen.html>.

<sup>3</sup> Ted Mooney, 'All Down the Line,' *The Los Angeles Times Book Review*, May 11, 1997, 3.

<sup>4</sup> Tom LeClair, quoted in Manfred Kopp, *Triangulating Thomas Pynchon's Eighteenth-Century World: Theory, Structure, and Paranoia in Mason & Dixon* (Essen: Die Blaue Eule, 2004), 130.

<sup>5</sup> Mooney, 'All Down the Line,' 3.

<sup>6</sup> Kopp, *Triangulating Thomas Pynchon's Eighteenth-Century World*, 192.

<sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, 196.

Bernard Duyfhuizen suggests parallels between Mason and Dixon and 'Don Quixote and Sancho Panza or Rosencrantz and Guildenstern.'<sup>8</sup> Similarly, Peter Schmidt asserts that at the crux of the novel is the essence of fictional partnerships, situating its protagonists alongside 'Vladimir and Estragon, Ishmael and Queequeg, Boswell and Johnson, Don Quixote and Sancho Panza, Dean Moriarty and Sal Paradise.'<sup>9</sup> These connections bring to the fore the notion of the double act, a penchant for which Pynchon has displayed since his depiction of the odd couple of Stencil and Profane in his earliest novel, *V.* The novel does not attempt to be an authoritative catalogue of Mason and Dixon's achievements and defeats, but merely employs them as a medium through which to channel a story of collaboration. The novel represents a meditation on the nature of friendship and, thus, in dealing with the ties between Mason and Dixon, it finds its epitome in the knot of the ampersand. David Cowart sees 'in the Line an epistemic watershed, a boundary between dispensations.'<sup>10</sup> Yet, *Mason & Dixon* –not unlike the rest of Pynchon's oeuvre– 'refuses to move in a straight line.'<sup>11</sup> Digressions and stories within the story overrun the novel, giving the text a vocal multiplicity. This is a story about the birth of –not only a friendship, but also– America.

As Sascha Pöhlmann notes, Pynchon's 'novels often anticipate acts of interpretation by enticing the reader to search for a particular "structure," yet, at the same time, they constantly remind us that our acts of ordering – of "making sense" – are part of the problem.'<sup>12</sup> However, as readers, we must choose between the rock of reading too little and the hard place of reading too much. Having, as it must seem evident by this chapter in my thesis, chosen to read too much, I will venture on. A novel riddled with lines of diverse character, geography, and nature, it can be seen to have at its centre –as many critics have observed– the recognizable sign of the ampersand. Pynchon himself is said to have been 'heavily

---

<sup>8</sup> Bernard Duyfhuizen, 'Reading at the "Crease of Credulity,"' in *Pynchon and Mason & Dixon*, eds. Brooke Horvarth and Irving Malin (London: Associated University Presses, 2000), 133.

<sup>9</sup> Peter Schmidt quoted in William B. Millard, 'Delineations of Madness and Science: *Mason & Dixon*, Pynchonian Space and the Snovian Disjunction,' in *American Postmodernity: Essays on the Recent Fiction of Thomas Pynchon*, ed. Ian D. Copestake (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003), 85.

<sup>10</sup> David Cowart, 'The Luddite Vision: *Mason & Dixon*,' *American Literature*, 71, no. 1 (June 1999): 359.

<sup>11</sup> Irving Malin, 'Foreshadowing the Text' in *Pynchon and Mason & Dixon*, ed. Brooke Horvarth and Irving Malin (London: Associated University Presses, 2000), 38.

<sup>12</sup> Sascha Pöhlmann, 'Untitled,' review of *Triangulating Thomas Pynchon's Eighteenth-Century World: Theory, Structure, and Paranoia in Mason & Dixon* by Manfred Kopp, *Amerikastudien / American Studies* 51, no. 1 (2006): 130.

involved in the graphic design of his 1997 novel *Mason & Dixon*, inside and out,<sup>13</sup> which suggests that the connection between typography and topography is not an accidental one.<sup>14</sup> The ampersand on the cover of the first edition (*figure 1*), states Samuel Cohen, 'fills the space between author name and title. In effect, the centrally placed ampersand is magnified to the point that it moves from the background to become the central element, more illustration than typography.'<sup>15</sup>



*figure 1.* The ampersand from *Mason & Dixon*'s first edition

In the novel's title, *Mason & Dixon*, not only is the reader introduced to the text's main characters, but also to a character that is implicitly present throughout the entire narrative: the ampersand. The conspicuous similarities between this ornamented ligature of the letters E and T –the ampersand– and Pynchon's Baroque and perpetually digressive novel seemingly find their polar opposite in the extremely rectilinear boundaries that the novel's protagonists demarcate between Pennsylvania, Maryland, Delaware, and West Virginia. This chapter will examine the master motif of the line (straight and otherwise) –in its many renderings– in *Mason & Dixon*, no doubt with some digressions of my own. Reading the opposition between straight and curved lines as representative of the paradigm shift between Classicism and Baroque, the chapter will scrutinize Pynchon's subjunctive Americas before concluding with a brief survey of the

---

<sup>13</sup> Samuel Cohen, 'Mason & Dixon & the Ampersand,' *Twentieth-Century Literature* 48, no. 3 (2002): 264.

<sup>14</sup> For more information on the dust-jacket design of *Mason & Dixon*, see Ron Rosenbaum, 'The edgy Enthusiast,' *The New York Observer*, April 28, 1997, 43.

<sup>15</sup> Cohen, 'Mason & Dixon & the Ampersand,' 265.

author's aerial views and its implications to our understanding of the role of the Mason-Dixon line within the novel.

## Lines

The line is perhaps the most common metaphor invoked when describing narratives: storylines, plotlines, narrative threads, arcs, and so on. Angles, pattern, structure, and design, all suggest the line. As does the word plot itself, as one plots a line. Even when discussing so-called non-linear narratives, what we most often mean is *segmented* narratives, in which each narrative section is seemingly disjointed either through analepsis, prolepsis, perspectival shifts, sudden locational changes, and so forth. But even segmented stories are a form of linear narrative as the segment is, of course, but a portion of the line. Non-linear narratives, I believe, exist, but they are far scarcer than most critics assume. Nevertheless, *Mason & Dixon* is most certainly not a rectilinear narrative, as a number of critics attest: David Kipen, for example states that "Thomas Pynchon can't even write a linear novel about the Mason-Dixon Line,"<sup>16</sup> whilst Bernard Duyfhuizen asserts that, "[a]lthough it is correct to say that *Mason & Dixon* traces a narrative line for its eponymous heroes,' said line does not resemble the Mason-Dixon line. Duyfhuizen proposes, instead, a comparison with 'the lines Laurence Sterne drew in volume 6, chapter 40 of *Tristram Shandy*, which just happened to be coming out in installments during the time Mason and Dixon collaborated on their different projects'<sup>17</sup> (see *figure 2*).

---

<sup>16</sup> David Kipen, 'America's Own Line: Surveying *Mason & Dixon*.' *Thomas Pynchon*. (1997): n.p., accessed September 30, 2012.

<http://www.thomaspynchon.com/mason-dixon/reviews/dkipen.html>.

<sup>17</sup> Duyfhuizen, 'Reading at the "Crease of Credulity,"' 139-140.

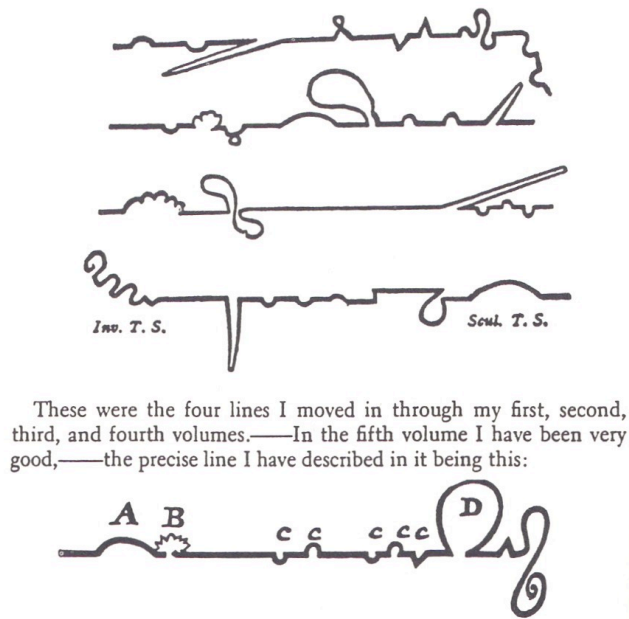


figure 2. Laurence Sterne's diagrams of *Tristram Shandy's* narrative structure<sup>18</sup>

However, Duyfhuizen immediately dismisses this Sternian model for the Pynchon's novel, stating that even Sterne's humorous narrative lines are too linear. In the case of this quick dismissal, I personally disagree. Needless to say, the structural line of *Mason & Dixon* is not without digressions and detours, of both narrative and geographical nature. McHale states that *Gravity's Rainbow* finds its counterpoint in *Mason & Dixon*, in that whereas the former emphasizes verticality, the later stresses the predominance of a horizontal axis.<sup>19</sup> Whilst I agree with both Duyfhuizen and McHale, I do feel I must emphasize that what *Mason & Dixon* does is confront its readers with different kinds of lines, to a certain extent taking for granted that most of those lines are man-made, whereas *Gravity's Rainbow* forced us to wonder whether there was a line there at all, or merely a plethora of quite possibly entirely unconnected points. Acknowledging the importance of the ampersand within this novel, I propose that if a Sternian visualization of the narrative structure of *Mason & Dixon* were to be formulated, it would be plotted in this manner:

<sup>18</sup> Laurence Sterne's sketches reproduced in Duyfhuizen, 'Reading at the "Crease of Credulity,"' 140.

<sup>19</sup> Brian McHale, 'Mason & Dixon in the Zone' in *Pynchon and Mason & Dixon*, eds. Brooke Horvarth and Irving Malin (London: Associated University Presses, 2000), 57.



figure 3. A Sternian reading of the narrative structure of *Mason & Dixon*

As Italo Calvino states, ‘Laurence Sterne’s great invention was the novel that is completely comprised of digressions,’<sup>20</sup> a concept that will resonate with any of Pynchon’s readers. From an initially unswerving plotline, the reader soon encounters one of Pynchon’s winding narrative middles/muddles, before the storyline finds its rectilinear end. *Mason & Dixon*, after all, features one of the author’s most straightforward endings –both uncomplicated and sincere– as it tells the poignant story of Mason and Dixon’s friendship and their life as a double-act of sorts – analogous to what Robert Adams calls ‘dynamic duo’ in *V.*<sup>21</sup> Taking as its starting point their very first meeting, the text follows them to their graves. A Sternian reading of the narrative structure of *Mason & Dixon* would, thus, move from the rectilinear and straightforward to the meandering and overly curvilinear, and back again.

Sterne, as critics have it, owes a debt to William Hogarth, whose *Analysis of Beauty* postulated the notion of a ‘line of beauty’, the so-called ‘serpentine line’ that pervades Baroque art. Frederick Antal, for instance, writes of ‘Sterne’s predilection for Hogarth’s Baroque line.’<sup>22</sup> In Hogarth’s own words, ‘[t]he serpentine line, or line of grace, is represented by a fine wire, properly twisted round the elegant and varied figure of a cone.’<sup>23</sup> The specific idea of the coil will be discussed in more detail at a later point in this chapter. The line of beauty makes several appearances throughout *Mason & Dixon*, for instance in the description of ‘white statues of uncertain Gender leaning in sinuous Poses’ (*M&D* 291), or the *trompe-l’œil*-like ‘sinister and wonderful Card Table which exhibits the cheaper sinusoidal Grain

<sup>20</sup> Italo Calvino, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1988), 47.

<sup>21</sup> Robert M. Adams, ‘Dynamic Duos,’ *The Sewanee Review* 86, no. 4 (1978): 527-538.

<sup>22</sup> Frederick Antal, ‘The Moral Purpose of Hogarth’s Art,’ *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 15 (1952): 193, n. 1.

<sup>23</sup> William Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty* (London: W. Strahan, 1772), 39.

known in the Trade as Wand'ring Heart, causing an illusion of Depth' (*M&D* 5).<sup>24</sup> The lines in *Mason & Dixon* only display this balance of serpentine beauty on a handful of occasions, for the most part they are radically on the side of either right angles and straight stretches or utter zigzag and pure meandering, reminiscent of the stick flourish in *Tristram Shandy*:

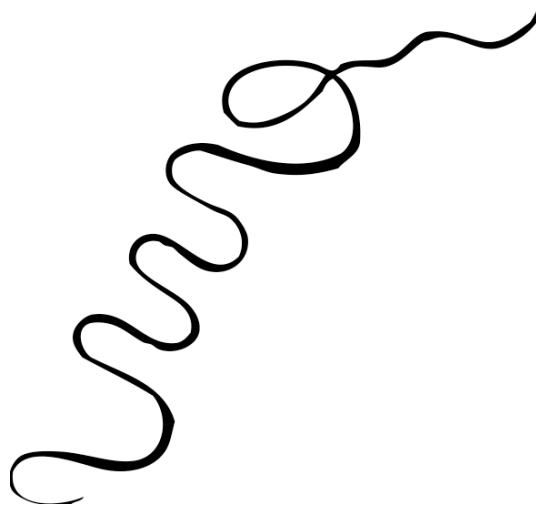


figure 4. Uncle Toby's stick flourish from Sterne's *Tristram Shandy*

It is by way of this tension between straight and meandering lines that *Mason & Dixon* alludes to the debates ongoing at the time of the novel's setting between different ideas of beauty, placing the reader in the midst of an implicit cultural and aesthetic transition. The text makes conspicuous its relation to *Tristram Shandy* in the form of 'Mr. Knockwood, the [Inn's] landlord' in Chapter 36 described as 'a sort of trans-Elemental Uncle Toby, [who] spends hours every day not with Earth Fortifications, but studying rather the passage of Water across his land' (*M&D* 364), a clear reference to Tristram's map-crazed Uncle. This intertextual connection is not only relevant due to the notion of mapmaking, but also as an illustration of the friction between the man-made and the natural world, a recurrent theme in *Mason & Dixon*: the 'passage of water' refers to both geological flows of water and artificial irrigation systems built for agricultural purposes.

When discussing *Tristram Shandy*, Calvino quotes Carlo Levi, who states: 'If a straight line is the shortest distance between two fated and inevitable points, digressions will lengthen it; and if these digressions become so complex, so tangled

---

<sup>24</sup> One of the many textual variations I have encountered when comparing American and British editions of the text is made evident here, as the 'sinusoidal Grain' of the American text becomes a 'Wave-like Grain' in the British one.

and tortuous, so rapid as to hide their own tracks, who knows—perhaps death may not find us, perhaps time will lose its way.’<sup>25</sup> As the end of the novel approaches,<sup>26</sup> Mason decides ‘to assail Maskelyne’s Sanity, by now and then posing him Questions that will not bear cogitating upon— most lately, *Über Bernouillis Brachistochronsprobleme*’ (M&D 724). The brachistochrone problem entails finding the shape of the frictionless track with constant gravity on which a bead released from point A will reach point B (situated at a lower level) in the shortest time possible. The counterintuitive aspect of the problem, to those of us who last studied science at school, is that the answer is not a straight line, but a brachistochrone curve, the curve of fastest descent. Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon’s tumultuous journeys and protracted adventures throughout Pynchon’s digressive novel, whilst not strictly speaking a brachistochrone curve, do embody the spirit of this counterintuitive, contra-orthogonal problem. The idea of the straight line –say, a hypotenuse– representing the shortest distance between two points is true in Euclidean geometry. But this shortest distance does neither represent the quickest path, nor the path of greatest beauty.

The tension between the straight and the ornate line would appear to be none other than the tension between Classicism on the one hand and the Gothic and Rococo on the other: different ideas of beauty. Throughout Pynchon’s novel there are frequent references to ‘Gothickal chat’ (M&D 70), ‘Gothickal Gates’ (M&D 78), ‘*Gothickal Scribblers*’ (M&D 117), and their ‘Gothick Fictions’ (M&D 359), ‘Gothick Interior[s]’ (M&D 497), and –the beast itself– ‘the Gothickal’ (M&D 346), all of which are historically accurate. Furthermore, Mason’s mood throughout the novel, as he mourns his late wife Rebekah, is nothing short of Gothic. All through the novel, there is a stark contrast between the artificially straight lines where all difference has been ironed out and forcibly homogenized, and the meandering curves of post-Classical mid- to late 18<sup>th</sup> century art. The dialectical tension in *Mason & Dixon* between a Classical conception of beauty and a Rococo sensibility is enacted on another level by what is one of the most important rivalries in the novel, that of Father Zarpazo, the adversarial Jesuit who wishes to build walls and draw orthogonal lines all over the world, and Captain Zhang, a Chinese *Feng Shui*

---

<sup>25</sup> Carlo Levi quoted in Calvino, *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*, 47.

<sup>26</sup> Death does find both Mason and Dixon in the end, abruptly ending their lives’ lines. The novel only charts their lives once their relationship begins, however, it continues to follow them once the drawing of the Mason-Dixon line ends, seemingly a counter movement to the yo-yoing V-trajectory of Stencil and Profane discussed in the opening chapter of this thesis.

expert.

Marking the land is not exclusively represented as harmful in *Mason & Dixon*, although the manner in which the novel's "antagonists" express their worldviews does present it as such: the fictional Jesuit Father Zarpazo and the historically accurate Dr Nevil Maskelyne, English Astronomer Royal, whose commissions work from Mason and Dixon, whose name tellingly includes both the word 'evil' and a homophone of the word 'line'. Whilst it is safe to say that the lines of Fr. Zarpazo and Dr Maskelyne are discussed in terms of scars on the face of the earth, other lines are seen in a more positive light or, at the very least, judgment is postponed. Ley lines and *Feng Shui* arrangements are, for instance, seen as being in harmony with the world. '[L]ey lines are invisible straight lines linking ancient sacred sites'<sup>27</sup> and are claimed to be alignments of locations of geographical, historical, and spiritual relevance (megaliths, temples and burial grounds, for example). Besides Pynchon's anachronistic use of the phrase (it is a 20<sup>th</sup> century term), Dixon tells Mason that he has been taught how to fly along ley lines, one of many tall tales in the text, all of which seem initially to be beside the point or, rather, beside the line. Along with ley lines, *Feng Shui* has been appropriated –and assimilated to a certain extent– into New Age subculture, as evidenced by texts like John Michell's *The View Over Atlantis*, which connects the two, and still is one of the most widely read books of the hippie movement and one Pynchon has surely encountered. Time and again, Pynchon returns to the esoteric or the New Age so as to populate his writings with a plethora of alternative histories, ever invoking questions regarding the validity or discredit of concurrent worldviews. The mythical and potentially unverifiable often emerges in defiance of official history or geography: Vheissu in *V.*, Shambhala in *Against the Day*, and Lemuria in *Inherent Vice*. In *Vineland*, Pynchon made America seem uncanny by calling it by its mythical name; in *Mason & Dixon* it is our planetary familiarity that is defamiliarized when Zhang tells us it is, in fact, a dragon:

"Boundary!" The Chinaman begins to pull his hair and paw the earth with brocade-slipper'd feet. "Ev'rywhere else on earth, Boundaries follow Nature,— coast-lines, ridge-tops, river-banks,— so honoring the Dragon or *Shan* within, from which Land-Scape ever takes its form. To mark a right Line upon the Earth is to inflict upon the Dragon's very Flesh, a sword-slash, a

---

<sup>27</sup> Danny Sullivan, *Ley Lines: The Greatest Landscape Mystery* (Sutton Mallet: Green Magic, 2005), 22.

long, perfect scar, impossible for any who live out here the year  
'round to see as other than hateful Assault. How can it pass  
unanswer'd?" (*M&D* 542)

Early in the novel, we are told that 'Serpent, Worm, or Dragon, 'tis all the same' (*M&D* 135), therefore connecting my analysis of the serpentine line to the novel's monstrous creatures.

### **Subjunctive America**

In Chapter 60, Dixon tells Captain Zhang the story of the Lambton Worm, in which the young heir to Lambton Castle goes fishing on a Sunday despite it being forbidden and catches a mysterious worm-like creature. He tosses it into a well and goes away to join the Crusades. The worm, finding no natural predator inside the well, grows unnaturally large and strong, and eventually leaves the enclosure of the water source, terrorizing everyone in the region. Whilst in Transylvania, the heir of the Lambton family, distressed to hear about the plight of his countrymen under siege by the Worm, makes a pact with a gipsy and a priest to ensure his victory over the beast: 'The Oath was fairly simple, he [...] knelt beside his sword and vow'd, that if God should allow him victory over the Worm, he would sacrifice unto Him the first living thing he then happen'd to see' (*M&D* 591). Breaking the oath would cause a severe penalty to befall his entire family: for nine generations no Lord of Lambton would die in his bed (*M&D* 594).

Ultimately, the Worm is defeated by being cut into small pieces at a faster rate than it can regenerate, yet – upon vanquishing it – the heir meets his father's gaze. Unwilling to commit patricide, he kills one of his hounds instead, in the hope that this will fulfill his sworn duties. Alas, this offering will not do, and a curse befalls the Lambton house. The curse of Lambton Castle is not Pynchon's invention, but an English legend perpetuated within the Lambton family through superstition.<sup>28</sup> Henry Lambton, the ninth and last in the line of accursed Lords of Lambton, 'died in his chariot, crossing the new bridge, in 1761, thus giving the last connecting link to the chain of circumstantial evidence connected with the history of the worm of Lambton.'<sup>29</sup> What is particularly interesting regarding this story and its connection to *Mason & Dixon* is its symmetry. The year in which the

---

<sup>28</sup> John Henry Ingram, 'Lambton Castle,' in *The Haunted Homes and Family Tradition of Great Britain* (London: Reeves, 1905), 129-134.

<sup>29</sup> Ingram, 'Lambton Castle,' 134.

Lambton family was freed from the curse is the same year in which Mason and Dixon first joined forces to observe and document the Transit of Venus (1761) that provides the first of the two Transits that bookend the narrative. When Dixon tells Captain Zhang the story, it is as if Pynchon were belatedly warning America about the curse that would befall its heirs, since 1761 and 1997, the year in which *Mason & Dixon* was published, span the breadth of nine generations. The nine generations of America's heirs who would not be allowed to die in their beds, from the 1760s and the 1990s, would fall in a number of armed conflicts, from the American Revolutionary War, through the Second War of Independence, to the Mexican-American War and the American Civil War, and beyond through the 20<sup>th</sup> century.

The Lambton Worm's dissection calls to mind Benjamin Franklin's famous political cartoon, 'Join, or Die' – the first political cartoon published in an American newspaper<sup>30</sup> – which would be re-used in the years during which Mason and Dixon were demarcating their famous line to unite the states against British hegemony. In 'Join, or Die,' Franklin – who appears briefly in *Mason & Dixon* – depicts the American states as the helpless segments of a partitioned snake. The cartoon's message of strength through unity against the British Empire remains to this date a defining image of American colonial resistance. *Mason & Dixon* conflates the political imagery of Franklin's cartoon with a further allusion to the snake as political symbol standing for America: The Gadsden Flag. This historical American flag depicts a diamondback rattlesnake coiled in a spiral shape at its centre and the motto 'DONT TREAD ON ME' underneath it. The presence of the Gadsden Flag snake can be read in the novel during the Lambton Worm's reign of terror, with the image of the serpent holding 'Lambton Castle literally in Its Embrace' as its size allows it to 'comfortably coil 'round the entire Castle' (*M&D* 590-591) bearing a striking similarity to it. The snake, *Mason & Dixon* allows its readers to conclude, is not inherently evil. Its unfettered growth, however, may result in it becoming monstrous. Whilst, in the mid- to late 18<sup>th</sup> century, the segmented snake of Franklin's cartoon required its pieces to come together so as to repel the empire that would not grant it its freedom, by the late 20<sup>th</sup> century, the once diminutive worm has grown exponentially, unchallenged by worthy predators and has become the tyrant ruling over its own empire. The worm must, this analogy appears to inform us, be segmented again lest we find ourselves with its tight coil

---

<sup>30</sup> Daniel S. Burt, ed., *The Chronology of American Literature: America's Literary Achievements from the Colonial Era to Modern Times* (Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2004), 8-9.

around our bodies. I will return to the potential monstrosity of America at a further point in this chapter.

The story of the Lambton Worm and its segmented obliteration can itself be seen to illustrate the segmented nature of the novel's narrative. Not only is *Mason & Dixon* continually presenting its reader with digressive narrative segments, but at the level of both theme and plot Mason and Dixon are in fact actively involved in the segmenting of the American territory. Geopolitical lines and the orthogonal contempt with which they treat the land are a recurrent concern in Pynchon's novels, as can be evidenced by the fact that in *Against the Day*, Native Americans, or at the very least, 'some of them already believ[ed] that Colorado, because of its shape, had actually been created as a reservation for whites' (AD 92). What characterizes the State of Colorado is its almost perfectly rectangular shape, which allows it to be charted on paper entirely on its own, without any jagged ends of neighbouring states impinging on its cartographic form, and has thus the potential for entire decontextualization. Whilst the map and the territory are not one and the same, Pynchon would appear to be highlighting the fact that some of the territories demarcated during the Enlightenment are, in fact, map-like in the extreme. Colorado and the Mason-Dixon line can be seen as the epitome of political geography. The human obsession with geometrical forms, man-made delineations, and the absurdity that seems to underline their dogmatism are crucial themes in *Mason & Dixon*.

In the same way that *Tristram Shandy* describes its protagonist's life and times, despite the fact that he is not born until Volume III, *Mason & Dixon* is a novel about the United States of America before they even became the United States of America. As David Cowart puts it, the line is a 'symbol of and index to the forces that would become America.'<sup>31</sup> Leading figures of US history are but minor characters in *Mason & Dixon*. Thomas Jefferson makes an appearance, as Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds states, 'identifiable only as a red-haired kid in, naturally, a bar.'<sup>32</sup> Given that Jefferson, referred to in the novel as 'Tom', asks to borrow the turn of phrase employed by Dixon in his toast 'To the Pursuit of Happiness' (M&D 395), a phrase that would make its way into the US Declaration of Independence, we may

---

<sup>31</sup> Cowart, 'The Luddite Vision: Mason & Dixon,' 262.

<sup>32</sup> Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds, 'Introduction: The Times of *Mason & Dixon*' in *The Multiple Worlds of Pynchon's Mason & Dixon: Eighteenth-Century Contexts*, ed. Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds (Rochester: Camden House, 2009), 7.

rightly assume that this is indeed the young man who would become the third president of the United States. Jefferson, perhaps more pertinently to our discussion, would go on to design the serpentine brick walls that surround the gardens of the University of Virginia, at Charlottesville. In *Thomas Jefferson Among the Arts*, Eleanor D. Berman asserts that Jefferson's serpentine wall mirrors 'both the wilderness and the simple virtuous life of the American countryside.'<sup>33</sup> Jefferson himself was not only aware of Hogarth's 'waving and serpentine lines,' but was in fact thoroughly against straight lines. At Caversham Park, outside Reading, Jefferson wrote, 'a straight, broad gravel walk passes before the front and parallel to it. . . . This straight walk has an ill effect.'<sup>34</sup> At Stowe House, in Buckinghamshire, he wrote, 'the straight approach is very ill.'<sup>35</sup> Jefferson's inclusion in the narrative may hint at the fact that the Founding Fathers' ideals would eventually be corrupted and by subsequent generations and, ultimately, fail to materialize.

Lines within this novel are shown to be never purely architectural, cartographic or spatial, but intimately intertwined with the temporal and ultimately the political. The text describes History as 'a great disorderly Tangle of Lines, long and short, weak and strong, vanishing into the Mnemonick Deep, with only their Destination in common' (*M&D* 349), a great tangle that the hegemonical powers strive to straighten 'in [an] Era of fluid Identity' (*M&D* 469). This era of fluidity is encapsulated in the way in which the linear nature of time, the established model of the era of *Mason & Dixon*, is consistently brought into question. Much is made in the novel of Britain's shift from the Julian calendar to the Gregorian one, during which eleven days were lost. So as to allow the alignment of the calendars, in Britain Wednesday 2<sup>nd</sup> September 1752 was followed by Thursday 14<sup>th</sup> September 1752. Protests took place, and riots ensued, with many people demanding their eleven days be given back to them, as if time were conceived as having an actual, tangible mass. Pynchon exploits the humorous implications of the cultural attitudes to these historical events within the novel. Mason, for instance, disagrees with his father regarding the eleven days:

---

<sup>33</sup> Merrill D. Peterson, *The Jefferson Image in the American Mind* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998), 399.

<sup>34</sup> Edwin Morris Betts, *Thomas Jefferson's Garden Book* (Charlottesville: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, 1999), 112.

<sup>35</sup> Betts, *Thomas Jefferson's Garden Book*, 113.

“Cheer ye, Pa, for there’s a bright side,— we’ll arrive instantly at the fourteenth, gaining eleven days that we didn’t have to live through, nor be mark’d by, nor aged at all in the course of,— we’ll be eleven days younger than we would have been.”

“Are you daft? Won’t it make my next Birthday be here that much sooner? That’s eleven Days older, idiot,— *older*.” (*M&D* 191)

In the aforementioned passage Pynchon explores a different generational paradigm shift, with Mason’s fatalistic father unable to see a positive side to the loss of the eleven days. In William Hogarth’s *Election Entertainment* –first created as a painting, and subsequently produced as a print– we can see evidence of the outrage that ensued this calendric shift. Part of Hogarth’s *The Humours of an Election* series, *Election Entertainment* portrays a raucous electoral banquet in the right-hand foreground of which can be seen a discarded placard with the words ‘Give us our Eleven Days’ emblazoned upon it. *Mason & Dixon* describes this minor temporal hitch in terms of a vortex, which Peter Schmidt uses as an analogy for all the minor embedded narratives in the novel, of which there are many, calling them ‘narrative Vortices’.

The eleven lost days can also be read in terms of the age’s constant drawing of lines and its endless segmenting of time, space, identity, and so on, into small and specific taxonomical wedges, a theme that will be taken up in relation to *Inherent Vice* in the final chapter. If the eleven days were lost, so to speak, so was the wedge of Delaware. ‘[T]he Delaware Triangle’ (*M&D* 323) was one of many problems that arose exclusively from the drawing of geopolitical lines. The wedge is a tract of land on the place where Maryland, Pennsylvania, and Delaware meet, whose ownership was disputed until the year 1921. Like those left behind in the Eleven Days (Mason, for instance, journeys into them in the novel), those left behind in the Wedge have an undetermined status. More likely than them not having to pay taxes, the novel tells us, is that they would have to pay taxes in three states simultaneously. Again, here the reader finds illustrative examples of the fluidity of American identity within the period, and of the fact that dogmatically straight man-made lines create more problems than they solve for the inhabitants of the land. Needless to say, Native Americans are in an even worse position, as their rights are nonexistent and their needs entirely disregarded: ‘They want to know how to stop this great invisible Thing that comes crawling Straight on over their Lands, devouring all in its Path’ (*M&D* 678). This reference to the Mason-Dixon Line as a ferocious and strangely unserpentine snake represents a

convergence of two dialectical perspectives depicted in the novel: the uncompromisingly orthogonal and the slithery sinuous. However, the image of the unserpentine snake ultimately displays a scenario in which the wave-like lines of America and the natural world have been artificially straightened, giving birth to an all-consuming monster. The novel's narrator himself ponders: 'Does Britannia, when she sleeps, dream? Is America her dream?' (*M&D* 345). Both Cohen and Tony Tanner have commented on the section that contains this rhetorical question, focusing for the most part on the 'subjunctive Hopes' mentioned as the paragraph unfolds. However, in a novel set in the Age of Reason, one can hardly avoid reading Cherrycoke's question as a reference to Francisco Goya's 1797 etching *El sueño de la razón produce monstruos*. Frequently translated as *The Sleep of Reason Produces Monsters*, the Spanish word 'sueño,' in fact, may be translated as both 'sleep' and 'dream.' Analogous to the monsters in Goya's etching, if Britannia during its sleep of reason dreams of America, may America not then be monstrous? Whilst this is not America's inherent vice, not an intrinsic quality, it does, as I have stated earlier in this chapter, represent a real potential nonetheless.

Whilst David Cowart describes the references to *Star Trek* in the novel as 'anachronistic material,'<sup>36</sup> in fact, the characters in *Star Trek* have been known to travel through time. Nevertheless, the Vulcan hand gesture, accompanied with the line 'Live long and prosper' (*M&D* 485), in addition to the mention of 'Trekkers' (*M&D* 154), does seem at odds with the notion of a historical novel that focuses on the endeavours of Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon, which took place in the 18<sup>th</sup> century. One must, however, again consider the publication date of Pynchon's novel: 1997. Released half a year before *Mason & Dixon's* publication, *Star Trek: First Contact* (1996) contains one of Captain Jean-Luc Picard most memorable speeches:

"I will not sacrifice the Enterprise. We've made too many compromises already; too many retreats. They invade our space and we fall back. They assimilate entire worlds and we fall back. Not again. *The line must be drawn here!* This far, no further! And I will make them pay for what they've done"<sup>37</sup> (emphasis added).

---

<sup>36</sup> David Cowart, *Thomas Pynchon & The Dark Passages of History* (Georgia: University of Georgia Press, 2012), 85.

<sup>37</sup> Brannon Braga and Ronald D. Moore, *Star Trek: First Contact*, DVD, directed by Jonathan Frakes (1996; Los Angeles: Paramount, 2000).

Again, the paratextual reader encounters this evocative symbol: the line. Through these allusions to *Star Trek*, Pynchon enforces the theme of cultural imperialism and the Empire's expansive drive, whilst simultaneously urging the alternative, subjunctive America to resist at all costs. The entire subjunctive worlds that are being assimilated by the ever-expanding orthogonal line rouse our protagonists suspicions. Mason and Dixon, as their narrative unfolds, grow mistrustful of the agenda behind their employers' commands. Mason is, by the end of the novel, uneasy even at the very sound of the word 'line':

"This might be quite in your Line, Mason"  
 "Try not to say 'Line,' Markelyne. Ehp,— that is,—"  
 "'Mask,' then," flirtatiously, "plain old 'Mask.'" (M&D 732)

In the example above the word line is suppressed, yet remains there, lurking invisibly. Yet, on the following page we find the single instance of Derrido-Heideggerian *sous-rature* in the entire novel in the body of an epistolary exchange between the novel's protagonists: 'I shall beg leave to make ~~You~~ Thee a brief visit' (M&D 733). Here the line is conspicuously present, the text underneath it suppressed yet still visible. The Mason-Dixon line itself is a form of *sous-rature*, marking the land, an erasure that nevertheless leaves an evident trace of what came before underneath it. Subjunctive America lies, its true potential undeveloped and unreached, under the path of the line, striking orthogonal and aggressively. As Native Americans and African Americans are erased in the novel, so are the histories of the land, as the monstrous worm that America threatens to become engulfs them.

### **Aerial Views**

The Mason-Dixon line, the drawing of which lies at the heart of this novel, undoubtedly exists in the collective imaginary as a cartographic and aerial image. The text is thus intimately tied to the notion of aerial perspective. The construction of narrative aerial views is a recurrent one within Pynchon's work, therefore a brief aerial view of Pynchon's aerial views will provide valuable context for interpreting the significance and function of aerial perspective within *Mason & Dixon*.

*Against the Day* opens as the Chums of Chance traverse the firmament in their skyship *Inconvenience*, 'as if it were some giant eyeball, perhaps that of

Society itself, ever scrutinizing from above' (*AD* 15), arriving at the World's Columbian Exposition of 1893 in Chicago, where the first Ferris wheel was unveiled. It is fitting that this novel transports us directly to the moment that, according to Mark Dorrian, 'marks a turning point in the cultural history of the aerial view.'<sup>38</sup> Dorrian suggests that it is with the advent of the Ferris wheel that the idea of the aerial cityscape was completely implanted in the popular imagination.<sup>39</sup> *Against the Day* presents us throughout with an aerial view, that of the Chums of Chance, which is in the process of being co-opted. As both Mason and Dixon before them, the Chums begin to question the motives behind their orders, believing them to be less than forthright.

In *Vineland*, the long arm of Ronald Reagan has already come to monopolize the aerial view. In this novel about the co-optation of the radical movements of the 1960s and their ultimate failure (which becomes obvious by the 1980s), DEA agent Brock Vond pursues a vendetta against the Wheeler family. As tension builds up and approaches the final *not-a-bang-but-a-whimper* of the novel's denouement, Vond begins employing helicopters to such an extent that 'his colleagues were calling [him] "Death From Slightly Above"' (*VL* 375) and '[n]o hour day or night [is] exempt from helicopter visits' (*VL* 209). The aerial view is furthermore present in the form of the monolithic 'new Nixon Monument, a hundred-foot colossus in black and white marble at the edge of the cliff, gazing not out to sea but inland, towering above the campus architecture, and above the highest treetops, dark-and-pale, a quizzical look on its face' (*VL* 205), the dissenting voices of the 1960s are closely observed from above. This vision of the surveillance of lived space further compounds the parallels drawn between *Vineland* and Orwell's *1984* in the previous chapter. This novel shows the process by which the urban spaces that had been appropriated (perhaps even re-appropriated) by the young political movements of the 1960s are, by the 1980s, *re-misappropriated* through co-optation by the dominant forces of Reaganism, whose elderly sibling-like orb scrutinizes its unwilling subjects from the air.

In his 2009 work *Novels, Maps, Modernity: The Spatial Imagination, 1850-2000*, Eric Bulson examines Pynchon's early cartographical imagery and thematics.

---

<sup>38</sup> Christopher Lindner, introduction to *Urban Space and Cityscapes: Perspectives from Modern and Contemporary Culture*, ed. Christopher Lindner (London: Routledge, 2006), 9.

<sup>39</sup> Mark Dorrian, 'Cityscape with Ferris Wheel: Chicago, 1893,' in *Urban Space and Cityscapes: Perspectives from Modern and Contemporary Culture*, edited by Christopher Lindner (London: Routledge, 2006), 17-37.

Looking at how Pynchon ‘used maps to produce the space of his novels while simultaneously critiquing their historical and ideological meaning.’<sup>40</sup> He posits that –in Pynchon’s early novels, at least– ‘[h]e associated spatial abstraction with a logic of violence that blotted out “natives” from the landscape in the nineteenth century and enabled bombing campaigns in the twentieth.’<sup>41</sup> It follows from this that some of Pynchon’s early aerial views highlight the dangers of observing space from too great a distance. Whilst the aerial view may, to some extent, give us context and objectivity, it can also often make the lived space of others seem too abstract, too distant.

However, the aerial view can also allow us to think of space in ways in which we would otherwise be unable. Pareidolia is the discernment (or misperception) of remarkable, meaningful images in otherwise vague (even obscure) stimuli. Examples could include a portrait of Jesus Christ in a bowl of soup or the so-called man in the Moon. As such, pareidolia is time and again seen as either revelatory or the result of over-reading: Humans narrativizing the seemingly abstract. In *Gravity’s Rainbow*, Pynchon makes this obvious by providing descriptions of aerial views of different sites. Weisenburger, Bulson, and others have pointed towards the importance of David Irving’s *Mare’s Nest* as a source for the aerial descriptions of Mittelwerk and Peenemünde in *Gravity’s Rainbow*. The former is described in terms of its typographic and symbolic significance, qualities that are only revealed to us from the air:

The basic layout of the plant was another inspiration of Etzel Ölsch, a Nazi inspiration like the parabola, but again also a symbol belonging to the Rocket. Picture the letters SS each stretched lengthwise a bit. These are the two main tunnels, driven well over a mile into the mountain. Or picture a ladder with a slight S-shaped ripple in it, lying flat: 44 runglike Stollen or cross-tunnels, linking the two main ones. A couple hundred feet of rock mountain, at the deepest, press down overhead.

(GR 300)

Likewise, Peenemünde, where German weapons were produced and tested, is also read as a significant sign from the sky:

---

<sup>40</sup> Eric Bulson, *Novels, Maps, Modernity: The Spatial Imagination, 1850-2000* (London: Routledge, 2009), 86.

<sup>41</sup> *Ibid.*, 86.

'Before you sight it, you can feel the place. Even draped over a gunwale, cheek against a fender smelling of tar, eyes tearing and insides sloshing as the sea. Even barren and scorched as Rossokovsky and the White Russian Army left it in the spring. It's a face. On the maps, it's a skull or a corroded face in profile, facing southwest: a small marshy lake for the eye-socket, nose-and-mouth cavity cutting in at the entrance to the Peene, just below the power station . . . the draftsmanship is a little like a Wilhelm Busch cartoon face, some old fool for mischievous boys to play tricks on. Tapping his tanks for grain alcohol, scratching great naughty words across fields of his fresh cement, or even sneaking in to set off a rocket in the middle of the night. . . .' (501)

In both aforecited passages, death is encapsulated in the architectural and geographical configuration of these locations. Bulson places these extracts alongside maps (aerial views) of both localities from Irving's text, eliciting in the reader an uncanny response. We know Mittelwerke does not look like the SS symbol; we know that Peenemünde does not look like a human skull; and yet Pynchon's words ring in our ears, shaping the way we view these spaces.

In her 1988 essay 'Views from Above, Views from Below: The Perspectival Subtext in *Gravity's Rainbow*', Hume observes 'the repetition of destructive force above and smokestacked and towered city below,'<sup>42</sup> elucidating the dual, ever-shifting viewpoint that pervades the text: the land as seen by terror from above, and the land looking at the terror in the sky from below. In the aforementioned examples, prose, cartography, architecture, and geography are read as portraiture, as either a human projection of the self in the construction of certain structures or as human projections of the self onto the very surface of the landscape. If we read these as mere coincidences, the narrator is reading too much into them, if we read them as revelatory (with the keen paranoid eye that can so often be found in Pynchon's work and in Pynchon's readers), then this is our initiation, the unveiling of a secret history carved into space, only available to us from the air, from above. Yet, as readers, we must ask ourselves: is Pynchon being paranoid? We may want to consider the forest at Zernikow, in Brandenburg, in North-Eastern Germany. The specific area of the forest to which I refer consists of around 100 trees (larches, to be precise) planted in what is largely a pine forest. Both larches and pines are coniferous trees, yet whilst pines are evergreen, larches will turn an amber (or rusty) colour for a few weeks in springtime and autumn, therefore

---

<sup>42</sup> Kathryn Hume, 'Views from Above, Views from Below: The Perspectival Subtext in *Gravity's Rainbow*,' *American Literature* 60, no. 4 (1988): 627.

revealing an enormous 'sylvan swastika with a diameter of almost 200 feet.'<sup>43</sup> Believed to have been planted in the mid- to late 1930s, the origin of the Zernikow swastika is clouded in mystery, there being several competing narratives regarding its creation. It was only in the early 1990s,<sup>44</sup> with the reunification of Germany, that –thanks to a government commissioned aerial survey– the pattern was rediscovered and, eventually, the swastika obscured. Ultimately, regardless of whether the SS symbol and the corroded skull of death are there in Mittelwerk and Peenemünde, what is remarkable is Pynchon's emphasis on space as seen from above.

From early on in *The Crying of Lot 49*, Oedipa and the reader share an apparently revelatory moment when looking at San Narciso from a great height. From the outset of the novel the aerial view introduces us to the relationship between communication and circulation that is at the crux of the narrative. A revelation is offered but it will prove too cryptic for both protagonist and reader:

She looked down a slope, needing to squint for the sunlight, onto a vast sprawl of houses which had grown up all together, like a well-tended crop, from the dull brown earth; and she thought of the time she'd opened a transistor radio to replace a battery and seen her first printed circuit. [...] Though she knew even less about radios than about Southern Californians, there were to both outward patterns a hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning, of an intent to communicate.

(CL49 14-15)

From above, the urban space is revealed to be a carefully constructed piece of machinery: a swirl, the sprawl, a hieroglyph, even. The notion of hieroglyphic meaning suggests the 'intent to communicate', whilst also highlighting its own inscrutability. And here space may only be read accurately from above. Of course, Oedipa's view is earthbound, not technically aerial yet from high enough a vantage point as to allow the viewer's perception to undergo a noticeable change. Likewise, in *Inherent Vice* (2009) the aerial view has, to some extent, less vengeful a tone than in, say, *Gravity's Rainbow*. As with *Lot 49*, in *Inherent Vice* the aerial view offers a brief moment of revelation in the form an LSD-induced vision Doc

---

<sup>43</sup> Frank Uekoetter, *The Green and the Brown: A History of Conservation in Nazi Germany* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006), 178.

<sup>44</sup> Catherine E. Rigby, *Topographies of the Sacred: The Poetics of Place in European Romanticism* (Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004), 224.

Sportello has in which he flies over the Caribbean. Pynchon here literalizes the notion of *getting high*.

The aerial perspective can be used either to reveal or to obscure. It can reveal even if the revelation is too cryptic to be decoded, or the revelation is that no revelation will take place, or that we all are stumbling our way through the dark. The aerial perspective has the potential for clarity and obfuscation, for revelation or terror, for freedom and control – the thin line between them is sometimes rendered obsolete, as I will show is the case in *Mason & Dixon*.

As discussed throughout this chapter, Pynchon's 1997 novel has at its centre the tension between orthogonality and the meandering, freewheeling line. This is, of course, part of a recurrent concern on Pynchon's part. Already in *V.*, Profane and Stencil converse in 'The wilds of that skinny rectangle...' (*V.* 391), which is none other than Central Park as seen from the air. Likewise in *Against the Day*, Native Americans, or at the very least, 'some of them already believ[ed] that Colorado, because of its shape, had actually been created as a reservation for whites' (*AD* 92). What characterizes the State of Colorado is its almost perfectly rectangular shape. Colorado and the Mason-Dixon line can be seen as the epitome of political geography. The human obsession with geometrical forms, man-made delineations and the absurdity that seems to underline their dogmatism are a crucial theme in *Mason & Dixon*, and they become particularly evident if seen from above.

The central tension within this novel is that between the rigidity of Father Zarpazo's lines and the fluidity of Captain Zhang's. Seen from Father Zarpazo's perspective, the Mason-Dixon line (as it would eventually be known) is a success for his cause: not only is it rectilinear, but seen from an aerial perspective it also has the shape of the logical symbol for negation, a *not*:



*figure 5.* Logical sign for negation

This aerial negation would, at first sight, appear to have prevailed, the notion of separation, yet another of Zarpazo's metaphorical walls. Yet, there is to the aerial view of the Mason-Dixon line an interesting duality. Just as the rigidity of the Mason-Dixon line is imagined from above, Pynchon provides us with an analogous version of the fluid line, the Serpent which, we are told, is reminiscent of 'the Serpent-mound which is at Avebury in England' (*MD* 595):

"And really the odd thing," the Captain's Eye now rolling back, fiendishly, to play full upon Dixon, "is that from the level of the ground, why, it seems but a high wall of dirt.— The only way even to make out the Serpent shape of it, is *from an hundred feet straight up.*"

Dixon reddens, believing, for no reason, that Shelby somehow knows of his childhood flights over the Fells. "There must be a hilltop...? a tall Tree, close by...?"

"Not close enough to 'spy down upon it from, regrettably, Sir." [...] "You must appreciate this is no idle Drudgery,— not some band of Savages, groping about earthbound for the correct Shape. Rather, 'tis a sure Artist's line, the Curves sweeping in preordain'd accommodation to the River,— if I grow too Rhapsodic, pray set the Dogs upon me. You would need to see one of these Works to understand." (*MD* 596)

Again, it is the aerial view that reveals the shape of an otherwise incomprehensible structure. The image of the serpent is a recurrent motif throughout the text: 'Serpent, Worm, or Dragon, 'tis all the same' (*MD* 135). There is an alignment of the sinuous in clear opposition to the rectilinear. And the aforementioned line is the serpentine line, a very specific line that results from coiling a straight line around a conical shape,<sup>45</sup> none other than Hogarth's line of beauty.

It is my assertion that the novel enacts the friction arising from a paradigm shift in the arts at the time in which the novel is set. On the one side we have the straight line and the circle of Classicism, on the other the line of beauty and the serpentine line of the Gothic, the Baroque, the Rococo. On the one hand we have the orthogonality of the Mason-Dixon line and even the hyphen that joins these two names, on the other the digressive path carved by both Mason and Dixon and the playful meandering line of the ampersand with which Pynchon replaces the rigid hyphen in the title of the novel. Whilst Zarpazo would undoubtedly read the

---

<sup>45</sup> 'The serpentine line, or line of grace, is represented by a fine wire, properly twisted round the elegant and varied figure of a cone,' Hogarth, *The Analysis of Beauty*, 39.

orthogonal, negatory shape of the Mason-Dixon line as evidence of his own victory, it can also be read as representing the exact opposite of this.

Paul Standard argues that the word *et* was replaced by the ampersand in the Middle Ages not solely due to the expeditiousness with which it could be written, but also due to its beauty, calling the ampersand a 'sign of continuity.'<sup>46</sup> The ampersand in *Mason & Dixon* reflects the mutations through which History goes over time. The word "ampersand" which we use as an oral interpretation of "&" is a mispronunciation of the phrase "and per se and." Historical distortion is, thus, encapsulated in the titular ampersand. The ampersand is a semiotic crucible; it is written one way, spoken another, and called by a third name: *&*, *ampersand*, and *and*, respectively. Despite its specifically Latin origins, it transcends language barriers. It is, thus, a sign of access and multiplicity, as opposed to exclusion and singularity. These themes of access and exclusion resonate strongly within *Mason & Dixon*, which has at its crux the drawing of literal and metaphorical lines: between slavery and freedom, North and South, sameness and otherness, order and chaos, reality and dream, and white and essentially any other ethnicity,<sup>47</sup> to name but a few. If the Mason-Dixon line stands as a geopolitical symbol of separation and difference, then its most appropriate opposing sign would have to symbolize union and integration. Ultimately, the Mason-Dixon line *is* also shaped like an ampersand. The gem of the existing literature on this typographical symbol is Jan Tschichold's *The Ampersand: Its Origin and Development*, published in English in 1957, which documents the evolution of this ligature, this shorthand sign of union and inclusion. Whilst the Sternian structure I posited for Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon* and the opening of the chapter does not seem all that similar to the Mason-Dixon Line, the earliest ampersand known to typographers, calligraphers, and stenographers does: the Tironian mark, or Tironian note, for the word *et*. The structure of the novel may, in this light, be seen as both *topomorphic* (as the Mason-Dixon line and subjunctive America rest at its heart) and both *logomorphic* and typographic, for the Mason-Dixon line can be read as an ambiguous sign: both a *not* and a *knot*, the symbol for negation and an ampersand.

---

<sup>46</sup> Paul Standard, 'The Ampersand: Sign of Continuity,' *Signature* 8 (1938): 44.

<sup>47</sup> The novel's protagonists have, like Oedipa Mass, 'trouble sorting the night into real and dreamed' (CL49 81).

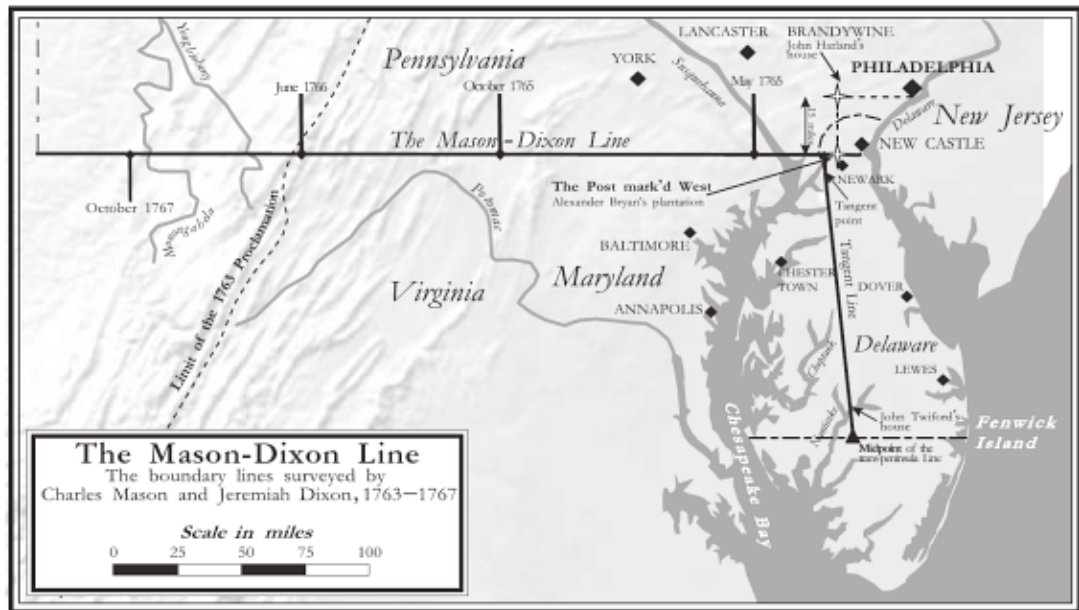


figure 6. The Mason-Dixon Line.<sup>48</sup>



figure 7. A proto-ampersand, the Tironian mark for *et*.<sup>49</sup>

Ultimately, I believe that the difference between the straight line of Classicism and the winding line of the Baroque (and Pynchon's novels certainly are Baroque in their over-ornamentation) represents a shift in paradigms. Father Zarpazo is stuck in a previous era, perhaps unable to assimilate non-Euclidean geometries, incapable of moving forward, unwilling to yield to the *zeitgeist*. Captain Zhang's *Feng Shui* lines are, on the other hand, adaptable and ultimately what defines them is their oneness with the world. Whereas Father Zarpazo's lines represent an attempt at *adapting* the environment, reshaping all of creation, the

<sup>48</sup> Illustration of 'The Mason-Dixon Line' from Edwin Danson's *Drawing the Line: How Mason and Dixon Surveyed the Most Famous Border in America* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2002), 2.

<sup>49</sup> Jan Tschichold, *The Ampersand: Its Origin and Development*, trans. Frederick Plaat (London: Woudhuysen, 1957), 11. Both Tschichold and Standard catalogue a number of historical ampersands. See Standard, 'The Ampersand: Sign of Continuity,' 44-51.

lines that Captain Zhang proposes adapt *to* the environment and are one with the land. If we see the Mason-Dixon Line not as a dividing either/or, but as a uniting ampersand, *Mason & Dixon* leaves us with the hope that the shackles that keep us bound will be transformed into the ties that keep us together. The either/or dynamic of the Mason-Dixon line as sign of negation and difference (the *not*) stands in stark opposition to the possibility of the inclusive coexistence of different subjunctive Americas implied by this interstate boundary when it is read as a sign of union and togetherness (the *knot*). Perhaps the alternative conceptions of America that have so far formed the 'very Rubbish-Tip for subjunctive Hopes [...] *may yet be true*' (*M&D* 345). Hopes on the scrapheap, the novel conveys, is still better than no hope at all.

To conclude, given that this thesis explores the organizational devices of Pynchon's novels, I am time and again forced to shift from the immensely pleasurable experience of close reading to the somewhat more arduous task of making sense of his texts as a whole. I am compelled to analyze the narrative emblems of the author's fiction, from what is arguably an aerial view of the text. In the tension between the microscopic and the macrocosmic – of Pynchon's comprehensive details and his abstracted, distant perspectives – we can see an analogy for reading, in which a balance between, say, Roland Barthes' analysis of Honoré de Balzac's 'Sarrasine' in *S/Z* must interact with Franco Moretti's *distant reading* (perhaps not as distant a reading as Moretti's, in my case). We must read the space of the text and space in the text constantly from an ever-shifting perspective and, in a manner of speaking, through a bifocal critical lens. Through prioritizing the aerial view, Pynchon calls upon his readers to focus on both the macrocosmic and microscopic space, allowing them on the one hand to experience what Michel de Certeau calls the 'pleasure of "seeing the whole,"'<sup>50</sup> whilst also highlighting what Robert Venturi and Brian McHale call 'the obligation toward the difficult whole.'<sup>51</sup> The aerial view and reading space from afar are not only key motifs, but also crucial reading strategies for the interpretation of Pynchon's otherwise labyrinthine novels.

---

<sup>50</sup> Michel de Certeau, 'Walking in the City,' in *The Practice of Everyday Life*, trans. Steven Rendall (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011), 92.

<sup>51</sup> Brian McHale, *The Obligation Toward the Difficult Whole: Postmodernist Long Poems* (Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004), 9.

## *Damnable Stillness: An Anatomy of Counter-Photography in Against the Day*

As nights went on and nothing happened and the phenomenon slowly faded to the accustomed deeper violets again, most had difficulty remembering the earlier rise of heart, the sense of overture and possibility, and went back once again to seeking only orgasm, hallucination, stupor, sleep, to fetch them through the night and prepare them against the day.  
(AD 903)

With a novel that stands as Pynchon's longest to date<sup>1</sup> and contains within its pages a group of child hot-air balloon adventurers, a revenge narrative set in the Wild West, the imaginary numbers debate, and time-travel technologies, it is little wonder that *Against the Day* has elicited a wide range of disparate critical responses. Themes such as religion, time, genre, painting, and politics have thus far provided valuable avenues for the elucidation of the text. With the recent publication in 2011 of Jeffrey Severs and Christopher Leise's edited collection *Pynchon's Against the Day: A Corrupted Pilgrim's Guide*, alongside a special issue of *GRAAT* edited by Gilles Chamerois in 2008, and contributions to both *Against the Grain* (2010)<sup>2</sup> and *Thomas Pynchon & the (De)Vices of Global (Post)Modernity* (2012)<sup>3</sup>, edited by Sascha Pöhlmann and Zofia Kolbuszewska respectively, a body of scholarship on this recent novel is beginning to emerge. Much of this criticism has touched, if mostly in passing, upon the novel's enigmatic title.

David Cowart states that, given that the 'novel documents the political and cultural currents that swept Western humanity into and through its first world war,' yet also presents this chain of events as a 'dark mirror' of the readers' 'own historical moment,' the reference implicit to the title *Against the Day* is biblical in nature.<sup>4</sup> The novel's title, Cowart continues, is 'a phrase that recurs often in the

---

<sup>1</sup> Its length varies from 1,085 (London: Jonathan Cape, 2006) to 1,220 pages (London: Vintage, 2007).

<sup>2</sup> Sascha Pöhlmann, ed. *Against the Grain: Reading Pynchon's Counternarratives* (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010).

<sup>3</sup> Zofia Kolbuszewska, ed. *Thomas Pynchon & the (De)Vices of Global (Post)Modernity* (Lublin: KUL, 2012).

<sup>4</sup> David Cowart, *Thomas Pynchon & the Dark Passages of History* (Athens: University of Georgia

King James Bible, usually with reference to the coming “day” of divine vengeance against the godless,’ concluding that Pynchon is warning the reader regarding the imminence of violence such as that which shook the world between the years 1914 and 1918.<sup>5</sup> Cowart also asserts that ‘[t]hematically, the “day” [of the novel’s title] is that of gnosis, knowledge, truly enlightened thinking, the knot of ignorance untied.’<sup>6</sup> In making this statement, Cowart aligns *Against the Day* with the critical perspective, cemented by Dwight Eddins, that considers Pynchon’s work in light of ‘the fluctuating tension between nostalgia for cosmic harmony and commitment to amoral power worship,’ which is ‘superimposed upon the fluctuating tension between the notion of a neutral, structureless universe and that of a universe infiltrated by insidious structures of Control.’<sup>7</sup> Christopher K. Coffman, alternatively, sees ‘the attitude toward light suggested by the title of the book’ as embodying ‘the obvious melancholy of the Chums in the face of the artificial illumination, and the declining possibilities for their type of adventure,’ suggesting that light in the novel may be read ‘as a negative symbol,’ going on to offer a reading of Pynchon’s ecological ethics.<sup>8</sup> Heinz Ickstadt acknowledges ‘the many ambivalences of [*Against the Day*’s] title,’<sup>9</sup> stating that the ‘metaphors of light and darkness also give the novel’s title several shades of meaning,’ going on to link them to the functions of Pynchon’s storytelling, as well as teasing out some of the interpretive possibilities of the word *against*. Inger H. Dalsgaard also attends to the prepositional nature of the novel’s title, asserting that its first word ‘is a preposition of direction, one that allows for many of those ideas of resistance or turning, even reversal’<sup>10</sup> that often characterize Pynchon’s work. On the other hand, Rodney Taveira, in his essay on painterly and photographic representation in *Against the Day*, sees the title as interchangeable with that of René Magritte’s work *Empire of Light* (1954), also connecting it to Futurist artist Umberto Boccioni’s 1909 drawing *Controluce*.<sup>11</sup>

---

Press, 2012), 18.

<sup>5</sup> Ibid.

<sup>6</sup> Ibid., 182.

<sup>7</sup> Dwight Eddins, *Gnostic Pynchon* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990), 8.

<sup>8</sup> Christopher K. Coffman, ‘Bogomilism, Orphism, Shamanism: The Spiritual and Spatial Grounds of Pynchon’s Ecological Ethic,’ in *Pynchon’s Against the Day: A Corrupted Pilgrim’s Guide*, eds. Jeffrey Severs and Christopher Leise (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011), 92.

<sup>9</sup> Heinz Ickstadt, ‘Setting Sail Against the Day: The Narrative World of Thomas Pynchon,’ in *Against the Grain*, 35.

<sup>10</sup> Inger H. Dalsgaard, ‘“Perchance to Dream”’: Clock Time and Creative Resistance in *Against the Day*,’ in *Against the Grain*, 81.

<sup>11</sup> Rodney Taveira, ‘Still Moving Against the Day: Pynchon’s Graphic Impulse,’ in *Against the Grain*,

As I have highlighted in earlier chapters, the titles of Pynchon's novels have in the past been mistranslated, and some of these idiosyncratic interpretations have since been rectified. The act (and the art) of translation itself, of course, allows for variations depending on language, culture, and other extratextual factors, yet there are, nonetheless, certain textual aspects that must be heeded and from which translations ought not to deviate, particularly if the aspects in question pertain to the structural integrity of the original text. In the case of *Against the Day*, its French translation was undertaken by novelist and translator Christopher Claro<sup>12</sup> who maintained, during the span of his task, an ongoing translator's diary online.<sup>13</sup> On the entry dated Tuesday 6 May 2008, Claro informs us that the provisional title under which he had been working, *Face au Jour* – which had been suggested by Pascal Arnauld, editor at Quidam –, would be changed for *Contre-jour* at the request of Pynchon himself.<sup>14</sup> Once more the reader's (and the critic's) attention is directed to the title of the text. Not only was the oppositional titular 'Against' ('Contre-') an aspect its author did not wish to see lost to translational entropy, but, through linking the English title back to the French term *contre-jour*, the amended title also restores the photographic metaphor which I argue is crucial to our understanding of the text in its entirety.

'A whole book could be devoted to the way Pynchon uses the word "day" in *Against the Day*,' Claro suggests, going on to emphasize that within this novel *day* 'is not just the opposite of night, page after page it ends up denoting a reality in itself. [...] A time that has come to a standstill.'<sup>15</sup> Whilst time is undoubtedly a central theme within the novel – one that has been thoroughly examined in Simon de Bourcier's recent study *Pynchon and Relativity*<sup>16</sup> – this chapter will not focus on the mechanics of time travel and the philosophical implications encapsulated in Dr. Zoot's secondhand time machine (AD 454-455), nor will it propose a *chronomorphic* structural model for the novel; it will, rather, suggest a *logomorphic*

---

137, 141.

<sup>12</sup> Claro has also translated the work of John Barth, William T. Vollmann, Mark Z. Danielewski, and others.

<sup>13</sup> See <http://towardgrace.blogspot.co.uk/>

<sup>14</sup> Taveira and Levy also observe this interesting fact - see Taveira, 'Still Moving *Against the Day*': 152, n. 1.

<sup>15</sup> By Claro's count, the word 'day' recurs over 800 times in the novel. See [Christophe] Claro, 'Translating Pynchon,' *GRAAT* 3 (2008): 21-27, Special Issue 'Reading Thomas Pynchon's latest novel *Against the Day*,' edited by Gilles Chamerois. Available at <http://www.graat.fr/backissuespynchon.htm>

<sup>16</sup> Simon de Bourcier, *Pynchon and Relativity: Narrative Time in Thomas Pynchon's Later Novels* (London: Continuum, 2012).

one that concentrates on the input that is required to envision past, present, and future (in our world and others) through Merle Rideout and Roswell Bounce's Integroscope device: photography.

The prominent role played by photography within the novel has been noted by a number of critics; Taveira examines the representation of both photography and painting in *Against the Day*, proposing that these themes are indicative of a wider graphic impulse within Pynchon's work, whilst Clément Lévy<sup>17</sup> and Georgios Maragos<sup>18</sup> investigate photography and film within the context of Pynchon's entire oeuvre and public persona. This chapter will be dedicated exclusively to the significance of photography and photographic metaphors in *Against the Day*. From the references to police mugshots (AD 432), celebrity culture (AD 552-553), Merle Rideout's photographic trade (AD 71), and so forth, photography can be said to be at the heart of *Against the Day*. The novel emphasizes vision in its numerous embodiments and through its many idiosyncrasies: Iceland Spar, doubling, counter-images, seeing and not-seeing, the visible and the invisible, real and imaginary numbers, film, painting, light and what the novel terms 'counter-light' (AD 653). I propose that it is in reading the novel through the lens of the photographic that we can find a point of commonality between many of the text's seemingly disparate themes.

## **Photography and Modernity**

*Against the Day* begins with an unambiguous emphasis on modernity:

'Merle Rideout had brought a hand camera with him, and was taking "snaps" of the flying machines, aloft and parked on the ground, which were continuing to arrive and take off with no apparent letup. "Some social, ain't it! Why, every durn professor of flight from here to Timbuctoo's flying in, 's what it looks like."

The smoke from breakfast campfires rose fragrantly through the air. Babies could be heard in both complaint and celebration. Far-off sounds of railway traffic and lake navigation came in on the wind. Against the sun as yet low across the Lake, wings cast long shadows, their edges luminous with dew. There were steamers, electrics, Maxim whirling machines, ships

---

<sup>17</sup> Clément Lévy, 'As Far as Pynchon "Loves Cameras,"' in *Against the Grain: Reading Pynchon's Counternarratives*, ed. Sascha Pöhlmann (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), 157-166.

<sup>18</sup> Georgios Maragos, 'Moving Images: Light-Capturing Technologies, Reality, and the Individual in Thomas Pynchon's Twentieth Century,' in *Thomas Pynchon & the (De)Vices of Global (Post)Modernity*, ed. Zofia Kolbuszewska (Lublin: KUL, 2012), 177-193.

powered by guncotton reciprocators and naphtha engines, and electrical lifting-screws of strange hyperboloidal design for drilling upward through the air, and winged aerostats, of streamlined shape, and wing-flapping miracles of ornithurgy. A fellow scarcely knew after a while where to look— (AD 30)

It is constant, if not relentless, movement that characterizes Pynchon's depiction of the congregation of skyships at the Chicago World's Fair of 1893. The 'flying machines,' we are told, 'were continuing to arrive and take off with no apparent letup.' After this description of man having taken over the sky, we are offered auditory evidence of his mastery of the land and its waterways, as '[f]ar-off sounds of railway traffic and lake navigation came in on the wind': air crafts, landcrafts, and watercrafts. Luminosity is ascribed to the flying machines, possibly to the *Inconvenience* in particular, and although the terms used in this passage to depict skyships do not instantly align them with the urban or the man-made (sun, lake, wings, shadows, dew), this ambiguity is abolished in the list that follows it, emphasizing the juxtaposition of the natural and the man-made that continues throughout the novel. The sentence that lists the unambiguously mechanical flying vessels reads like a technical catalogue of seemingly fantastical contraptions, highlighting the insertion of man into the natural world. The human ingenuity of modernity is made patent in this list, which even includes what appears to be an updated version of Leonardo Da Vinci's proto-helicopter: 'electrical lifting-screws of strange hyperboloidal design for drilling upward through the air.' The list itself, with its detailed and numerous items echoes the unabating rhythm of what Eric Hobsbawm terms the 'Age of Empire.'<sup>19</sup>

Whilst the *Inconvenience* and its Russian version, the *Bol'shaia Igra*, inhabit the sky, the luxury liner S.S. *Stupendica* and its Other, the battleship S.M.S. *Emperor Maximilian*, populate the sea, modernity and its technologies of transportation have, in addition, taken over the land with 'the rail-roads, which ran out over all the old boundaries, redefining the nation into exactly the shape and size of the rail network, wherever it might run to' (AD 198). Lew Basnight himself, we are told, believes 'that the steel webwork was a living organism, growing by the hour, answering some invisible command' (AD 198). It is here that Pynchon's, now customary, cautionary depiction of the dangers of globalization emerges in *Against the Day*, as the counterpart to the image of the all-devouring *Visto* in *Mason &*

---

<sup>19</sup> See Eric Hobsbawm, *The Age of Empire: 1875–1914* (London: Abacus, 1989). Hobsbawm places this age at the end of the 'long nineteenth century.'

*Dixon*, the line that bears the titular characters' names. Modernity, globalization, and so-called progress, Pynchon's narratives warn us, may all contain within them a darker side, embodied in the figure of Scarsdale Vibe.

The movement, velocity, and dynamism of modernity in the aforementioned passage stand in stark contrast to the stillness of photography, a reference to which the reader finds at its beginning and its end. 'Merle Rideout had,' after all, 'brought a hand camera with him, and was taking "snaps" of the flying machines.' The narrator's conclusion – possibly voicing Merle's thoughts – as the passage ends makes this tension between movement and stillness conspicuous: 'A fellow scarcely knew after a while were to look—.' The reader, like Merle with his camera, hardly knows where to focus, an effect also attained through the use of the vertiginous list. Technological layers are superimposed a few pages later when Merle takes a photograph of the Chums of Chance:

But say now would you mind if I got a snap of you all in front of this Trouvé-screw unit over here?"

The boys, fascinated as always with modern sciences such as the photographic, were of course happy to comply. (AD 32)

The importance and allure of photography is emphasized from very early in the text, with the Chums, in common with many characters in the novel, finding themselves enthralled by 'modern sciences such as the photographic.' Light-capturing technology is referred to through the almost onomatopoeic 'snap', a word related to the Middle Dutch or Middle Low German *snappen*,<sup>20</sup> which can also mean 'to seize,' therefore highlighting the *taking over* of light in the photographic process. If photographs allow us to *capture* light, then perhaps – within the context of the novel – photographic processes may be employed to *seize the day*, to still a rapidly shifting reality.

The interweaving of locomotive and photographic technologies within the passage above is indicative of an emphasis on photography as a mechanical and commercial process that prevails within the text:

It had always seemed [to Merle] like an idiot's game, line them up, squeeze the bulb, take the money. Like anybody, of course, he had wondered what happened during the mysteriously guarded transition from plate to print, but never enough to step across any darkroom's forbidden doorsill to have a look. As a mechanic he

---

<sup>20</sup> OED.

respected any straightforward chain of cause and effect you could see or handle, but chemical reactions like this went on down in some region too far out of anyone's control, they were something you had to stand around and just let happen, which was about as interesting as waiting for corn to grow. (AD 71)

The fact that Merle originally perceives photographic procedures as 'something you had to stand around and just let happen, which was about as interesting as waiting for corn to grow' (AD 71) demonstrates, firstly, a further example of the text's tendency to juxtapose mechanical and natural (in this case agricultural) processes, and, secondly, points to a perceived absence of human agency in photography. This latter notion contributes to the assumed objectivity of the photographic medium yet is also paradoxically instrumental in its perceived magical qualities. Throughout the text we are told that photography is at once more *real* than reality – 'clearer than real' (AD 71) – and yet also enchanted and mystical:

Lately Merle had been visited by a strange feeling that "photography" and "alchemy" were just two ways of getting at the same thing—redeeming light from the inertia of precious metals. And maybe his and Dally's long road out here was not the result of any idle drift but more of a secret imperative, like the force of gravity, from all the silver he'd been developing out into the pictures he'd been taking over these years—as if silver were alive, with a soul and a voice, and he'd been working for it as much as it for him. (AD 89)

The alignment in this passage of modern technologies with notions of alchemy and redemption, can be seen to represent what Kathryn Hume sees as Pynchon's reaction against Rationalism and the Enlightenment project, his narrative urge to 'resacralize and reenchant the modern world.'<sup>21</sup>

In the passage above we are informed of Merle's revelation that both photography and alchemy are parallel pathways for 'redeeming light from the inertia of precious metals.' These words will be echoed later in the text by Andrea Tancredi, in addition to foreshadowing the eventual creation of Merle's Integroscope. During this eureka moment, Merle ponders on his and Dally's 'long road,' their trajectory, wondering if what originally seemed like 'idle drift' might not be a preordained path, following some 'secret imperative.' The hidden

---

<sup>21</sup> Kathryn Hume, 'The Religious and Political Vision of *Against the Day*', *Against the Grain: Reading Pynchon's Counternarratives*, ed. Sascha Pöhlmann (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), 185.

command is, tellingly, compared to ‘the force of gravity’, therefore aligning the notion of a path to the ‘secret imperative’ of the V-2 rocket in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, and emphasizing the notion of the trajectory. Merle believes that it is silver – as if with a life, a soul, and a voice of its own – that is directing him. Therefore, it is not only light that is ‘redeemed from the inertia of precious metals’, but also silver itself, as its status as currency within the capitalist system – a rather ruthless one in the novel – is to some extent subverted. Another such example of counter-capitalist redemption is, for example, made patent in Ewball’s verbal exchange with his homonymous progenitor:

‘Even right side up,’ shouted Ewball Senior, ‘any nincompoop knows enough to keep stamps in mint condition—uncanceled, original gum intact! for chrissakes—otherwise the secondary-market value goes all to hell. Every time you mailed one of these letters here you wasted hundreds, maybe thousands of dollars.’

‘Exactly my point, sir. Inversion symbolizes undoing.’

(AD 1100)

Ewball Jr. ‘had been using postage stamps from the 1901 Pan-American Issue, commemorating the Exposition of that name in Buffalo, New York, where Anarchist Czolgosz had assassinated President McKinley [on which] by mistake, some of the one-cent, two-cent, and four-cent denominations had been printed with these center designs upside down’ (AD 1099-1100). The stamps ‘bore engraved vignettes of the latest in modern transportation, trains, boats, and so forth,’ emphasizing the tension between movement and stillness, between the dynamism of these technologies and the stasis of the engraving. Whilst Ewball’s father collects stamps and fetishizes the ever-increasing monetary value of the rare, inverted philatelic items, his son redeems them, liberating the scarce stamps, which he has hoarded for this very purpose, as a means to subvert the basic principles of the capitalist system.<sup>22</sup> Employing silver in the photographic process is, likewise, aligned within the novel with Ewball Jr.’s anarchist acts. Instead of employing these items as currency, they are cancelled, both literally, in the postal sense of the term, and metaphorically, as political statement, their financial value

---

<sup>22</sup> This entire argument regarding stamps between Ewball and his father brings to mind *The Crying of Lot 49*, with the anarchistic subtext of both texts. As if this were not clear enough, the narrator in *Against the Day* describes a ‘curious Oedipal spectacle’ (AD 1100), further gesturing towards this intertextual connection. Further connections between both novels can be evidenced in the Finnish stamps that, Veikko informs us, are merely pictures of stamps (AD 93).

being obliterated: 'Inversion symbolizes undoing' (AD 1100).

Merle's vocation for 'redeeming light from the inertia of precious metals' (AD 89) is reiterated in a slightly altered form by the fictional Venetian Divisionist artist Tancredi, who sees his calling as:

To reveal the Future, [to] get around the inertia of paint. Paint wishes to remain as it is. We desire transformation. So this is not so much a painting as a dialectical argument. (AD 659)

In the same way in which photography *captures* light, so does painting *capture* movement. Yet, in doing so, painting – due to the inertia of paint – stunts motion. It is, therefore, for this reason that Tancredi wishes to imprint into his artwork as much as possible of the actual *process* of creation, the transition from white canvas to painting, an intermediate phase:

everything that we imagine is real, living and still, thought and hallucinated, is all on the way from being one thing to being another, from past to Future, the challenge to us is to show as much of the passage as we can, given the damnable stillness of paint. This is why—' Using his thumb against a brushful of orpiment yellow, he aimed a controlled spatter of paint at his canvas, followed by another brushful of scarlet vermilion and a third of Nürnberg violet—the target patch seemed to light up like a birthday cake, and before any of it could dry he was at it with an impossibly narrow brush, no more than a bristle or two, stabbing tiny dots among larger ones. 'The energies of motion, the grammatical tyrannies of becoming, in divisionismo we discover how to break them apart into their component frequencies . . . we define a smallest picture element, a dot of color which becomes the basic unit of reality. . . . (AD 659-660)

Whilst Taveira reads Tancredi's artwork alongside the paintings of Luigi Russolo, René Magritte, and Umberto Boccioni<sup>23</sup>, I find the eruption of colour in Giacomo Balla's *Street Light* (ca. 1910-11) to be closer to Tancredi's fiery palette: 'Tancredi's paintings were like explosions. He favored the palette of fire and explosion. He worked quickly. *Preliminary Studies Toward an Infernal Machine*' (AD 658). Tancredi, a Futurist sympathizer who nonetheless 'failed to share their attraction to the varieties of American brutalism' (AD 657), unknowingly forces the Traverse brothers to postpone their attempt on the man responsible for their father's death. The artist's own assassination plan for 'Scarsdale how-about-you-all-go-live-in-shit-and-die-young-so's-I-can-stay-in-big-hotels-and-spend-millions-on-fine-art

---

<sup>23</sup> Taveira, 'Still Moving Against the Day' (*passim*).

Vibe' (AD 742) is, however, thwarted and Tancredi is kicked to death by Vibe's goons. The figure of Tancredi also encapsulates the notion of art's purity, as he is greatly annoyed by 'the millionaires lately dedicated to coming over and looting Italian art' (AD 657). The mere operation of purchase is seen, through Tancredi's eyes, as a criminal act of theft. The mission of this 'virtuous kid,' we are told, was to attempt 'to redeem one little rectangle of canvas at a time' (AD 836). Tancredi's call for the redemption of canvas and paint echoes Merle's conceptualization of the photographic endeavor as the redemption of silver and light.

### **Photography as metaphor**

Optical imagery and references to photographic processes recur throughout the text. Early in the novel we find "'induced paramorphism," as it was known to the artful sons of Nippon,' whereby messages are inscribed on the surface of pearls '[t]hrough a highly secret technical process, developed in Japan at around the same time Dr. Mikimoto was producing his first cultured pearls' (AD 127). The coming into sight of the message through induced paramorphism is described in the novel in the language of photography, as 'the boys directed their attention to a reflective screen set on one bulkhead, where presently, like a photographic image emerging from its solution, a printed message began to appear' (AD 127). Similarly, when the Chums of Chance come across what they believe to be warnings on what at first appears to be a *nunatak*, the message is, the reader is informed, revealed by 'the curious *camera lucida*' (AD 157) in a manner that is reminiscent of photographic development: 'At first all was a blurry confusion of strange yellowish green, in which areas of light and dark moved in a squirming restlessness, seeming in their slow boil to penetrate, while at the same time to envelop, one another' (AD 157). In both of these examples, text and photography are intimately intertwined, a unique blurring of the distinction between the written and the visual that persists throughout the novel.

Even the differences in temperament between different characters echo the colour-printing process, if not chemically sensitized paper; 'Edwarda and Scarsdale found themselves together every day and yet leading almost entirely unsynchronized lives, inhabiting each,' we are informed, 'his and her own defective city, like partial overlays in some new color-printing process, Scarsdale's in gray

tones, Edwarda's in mauve. Puce sometimes' (AD 181), as if characters were mere 'chromolitographs' (AD 560). Similarly, when Frank and Estrella 'returned to the desert camp among whirling colors including magenta, low-brilliancy turquoise, and a peculiarly pale, wriggling violet, appearing not only around contours but smudged and bleeding inside them as well' (AD 444). These passages in which descriptions emulate the coming into being of the image with allusions to the process of photographic development find their counter part in the scene in which a 'young person of neglected aspect' (AD 462) vanishes into thin air halfway through a conversation with the Chums of Chance:

'But the youngster was shaking violently now, his eyeballs, jittering in their orbits, gone wild with fright. Around the edges of his form, a strange magenta-and-green aura had begun to flicker, as if from a source somewhere behind him, growing more intense as he himself faded from view, until seconds later nothing was left but a kind of stain in the air where he had been, a warping of the light as through ancient window-glass. The bottle he had been holding, having remained behind, fell to the floor with a crash that seemed curiously prolonged.' (AD 462)

As if this were *counter*-photography, the figure of the young man in question dissolves into the white, going first through a flickering 'strange magenta-and-green aura.' Taveira discusses this passage as one of Pynchon's several portrayals of the *contre-jour* technique, concluding that 'Pynchon's execution of *contre-jour* reveals his awareness of the way Time violently undergirds visual media – painting, photography, and cinema – as they appear and work in *Against the Day*.'<sup>24</sup>

The notion of the *contre-jour* encompasses both the idea of seeing and not-seeing, as both subjects and objects in *contre-jour* are visible as silhouettes only, while their specific details are obliterated. *Against the Day* relies on this same duality between the visible and the invisible on both a thematic and a formal level. An unambiguous *contre-jour* image is described in section II, 'Iceland Spar', chapter 7, in a scene in which Frank is observing Stray:

'He tried to make out, against the daylight flowing in off the plain, what he could of her face veiled in its own penumbra, afraid somehow of misreading it, the brow smoothed by the uncertain light to the clarity of a girl's, the eyes beneath free to claim as little acquaintance with the unchaste, he guessed, as she might need.' (AD 230-231)

---

<sup>24</sup> Taveira, 'Still Moving *Against the Day*,' 137.

Echoing the novel's title, Frank casts his gaze over Stray *against the daylight*, yet is unable to accurately interpret her as 'her face [is] veiled in its own penumbra.' The illumination surrounding the entire *tableau vivant* is, unsurprisingly, pronounced 'uncertain.' The *contre-jour* can be read as a minor eclipse, a representation of that which obstructs our view of that which is ahead (the future) in a world without integroscopic capabilities. The tension between specificity and the generic (and between the visible and the invisible), inherent to the *contre-jour*, is made evident in a conversation between Yashmeen and Cyprian. "You are thinking about a man," Yashmeen asks him, "Tell me," to which Cyprian answers that his thoughts concern "[m]en, actually," "[n]ot one particular man," but "[a] generic shadow—with a substantial physique I suppose. . . ." (AD 986). In the *contre-jour* a temporary obliteration of identity and detail takes place against the day, as it does—in the novel—'against the insupportable night' (AD 754), in what Pynchon would probably call a *contre-nuit*. The dark silhouettes brought about by backlighting at times appear to be given a mass, a dark volume:

'Vibe stood at the highest point of the little bridge without speaking, back turned, a solid black silhouette, head and cloak, held waiting in an unmistakable tension seeming not to grow in size so much as, oddly, to take on mass, to become rectified into an iron impregnability.' (AD 835)

Here Scarsdale Vibe appears a mere shape, a contour, 'a solid black silhouette' that 'take[s] on mass'; this ominous image transforms Vibe – via the *contre-jour* technique – into a generic villain, an antagonist whose presence is as significant to the turn of the twentieth-century as it is to the turn of the twenty-first. The silhouette of Vibe's 'twin,' Foley Walker, is likewise described in *contre-jour*:

'Inside, Foley the dedicated substitute posed over by the window as if enthroned, against the marine daylight, a fine silver contour to his face as if it were familiar to the world as any on a postage stamp, as if proclaiming, *Yes, this is who we are, how it is, how it always is, this is what you may expect of us, impressive, isn't it? It better be.*' (AD 371)

In this case the imagery invoked is both regal and filatelic and, again, echoes of the novel's title resonate throughout the passage, as Foley, framed by the window, appears as if 'enthroned, against the marine daylight' with 'a fine silver contour to his face' and a defiant attitude. The alignment of Foley's silhouette with the printed

image, in particular the monarch's profile on a stamp, highlights the notion of the inheritance of power, simultaneously implying, as it does, its Other: the disinherited, the Preterite, the disenfranchised of America. Foley's final declaration compounds the process of homogenization that occurs at a visual level within the passage; the Establishment is reduced to a faceless force that will persist in this same form in perpetuity.

### **The Instant in Time**

By its very nature, photography highlights the tension between the idea of the instant seized or arrested, and the seemingly unstoppable flow of time:

Each carried a pocket Kodak with its shutter ingeniously connected to a small magnesium flashlight, so as to synchronize the two. Shot-glasses halted halfway to mouths, the Negro shoeshine boy quit popping his rag, the Hieronymus wheel stopped short, and the ball took a bounce and then hung there in midair, just as if everything in the scene were trying its best to accommodate a photograph or two. (AD 329)

Here it is ambiguous as to whether what is being described is a photograph or the infinitesimal moment just before the photograph is taken, with reality stilled and movement subdued in that instant: frozen in time. This notion of the snapshot and its timelessness recurs throughout the novel, always with photographic undertones:

"Best procedure when considering the Balkans," instructed Renfrew, "is not to look at components singly—one begins to run about the room screaming after a while—but all together, everything in a single timeless snapshot, the way master chess players are said to regard the board." (AD 776)

In the passage above the notion of 'a single timeless snapshot' is made explicit. These timeless snapshots, with their instants captured and perhaps even comprehended are embodied in the photograph, as it contains past, present and future in the capturing of the instant. Marshall McLuhan states that '[i]t is one of the peculiar characteristics of the photo that it isolates single moments in time,'<sup>25</sup> that which would otherwise be ephemeral being seized by the lens. As Renfrew

---

<sup>25</sup> Marshall McLuhan, *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man* (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994), 188.

states regarding the Balkans, presumably a course of action applicable to any complex situation, the '[b]est procedure [...] is not to look at components singly [...] but all together,' as the player's view of a chessboard or, more relevantly to this reading, like a snapshot. The perceptual simultaneity offered by the photograph is a concept to which the novel returns time and again, an illustrative example of it appearing in the form of Madame Eskimoff's revelatory glimpses:

"At dinner yesterday evening, Madame Eskimoff—perhaps you'll meet her—said that when spirits walk, beings living in four-dimensional space pass through our own three, and the strange presences that flicker then at the edges of awareness *are* those very moments of intersection. When we enter, even in ordinary daylight, upon a chain of events we are certain we have lived through before, in every detail, it is possible that we have stepped outside of Time as it commonly passes here, above this galley-slave repetition of days, and have had a glimpse of future, past, and present"—she made a compressive gesture—"all together." (AD 693)

Photography is employed throughout *Against the Day* as an avenue through which this exploration of linearity, time, and spectrality is pursued. The photographic image embodies 'a glimpse of future, past, and present' analogous to that which Madame Eskimoff describes, resonating with the 'single timeless snapshot' mentioned by Renfrew. The photographic image disrupts time: in the viewer's hands (present), the snapshot contains the lightprint of an object/subject that need not still exist (past), therefore projecting the object/subject's existence forward in time (future). In his 1980 investigation on photography *Camera Lucida*, Roland Barthes defines certain aspects of the medium, isolating two contrasting features of every photograph that he names *studium* and *punctum*. Whilst the *studium* is a culturally constructed 'very wide field of unconcerned desire'<sup>26</sup>, the *punctum* is the unexpectedly poignant element that 'shoots out of [the photograph] like an arrow, and pierces [the viewer].'<sup>27</sup> Whereas the *studium* represents 'inconsequential taste' and is 'of the order of *liking*', the *punctum* 'disturbs the *studium*'<sup>28</sup> and is characterized by Barthes as an affecting wound or an accident that moves one. Analyzing Alexander Gardner's 1865 photograph of Lewis Payne, as Payne awaited execution after having attempted to assassinate US Secretary of

---

<sup>26</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections on Photography*, Richard Howard trans. (London: Vintage, 2000), 27.

<sup>27</sup> Ibid., 26.

<sup>28</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 27.

State William Henry Seward, Barthes states:

'the *punctum* is: *he is going to die*. I read at the same time: *This will be* and *this has been*; I observe with horror an anterior future of which death is the stake. By giving me the absolute past of the pose (aorist), the photograph tells me death in the future [...] I shudder [...] over a catastrophe which has already occurred.'<sup>29</sup>

An anterior future stares at us from the photographic image, as Barthes affirms, further imbuing Madame Eskimoff's words with photographic significance. In our world, as in the novel's multiple words, photography stands as one such portal through which, in Eskimoff's words, 'spirits walk' and we are allowed to step 'outside of Time as it commonly passes here' (AD 693). As Laura Mulvey asserts, 'because the photograph captures the presence of life stilled, the instantaneous nature of human movement and the fragility of human life, it confuses time.'<sup>30</sup> The novel uses photography as a metaphor through which to explore this disruption to our traditional understanding of temporal order, bringing to mind Barthes' assertion that, '[i]n the Photograph, Time's immobilization assumes only an excessive, monstrous mode: Time is engorged.'<sup>31</sup> Read within the context of theories of the photographic, the 'single timeless snapshot[s]' (AD 776) with which *Against the Day* provides us certainly give us 'a glimpse of future, past, and present [...] all together' (AD 693) embodied in the presence of the photographic image. As Barthes posits in *Camera Lucida*,

'the photograph's immobility is somehow the result of a perverse confusion between two concepts: the Real and the Live: by attesting that the object has been real, the photograph surreptitiously induces the belief that it is alive [...] but by shifting this reality to the past ("this-has-been"), the photograph suggests that it is already dead.'<sup>32</sup>

Pynchon's systematic employment of photographic language, metaphor, and imagery is hardly surprising in a novel that includes time travel as one of its central motifs. There is, in theoretical writing on photography, a recurrent concern with ideas of time, timelessness, and atemporality. André Bazin, for example, likens photography to the embalming process: 'To preserve the bodily appearance artificially is to snatch it from the flow of time, to stow it neatly away, so to speak,

---

<sup>29</sup> Ibid., 96.

<sup>30</sup> Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image* (London: Reaktion, 2006), 57.

<sup>31</sup> Barthes, *Camera Lucida*, 91.

<sup>32</sup> Ibid., 79.

in the hold of life.’<sup>33</sup> Photography, within the novel, becomes yet another form of time travel, one that is even echoed in the form of the ukelele’s nature: ‘the uke’s all-but-exclusive employment as a producer of chords—single, timeless events apprehended all at once instead of serially’ (AD 620). Photography allows us to see everything at once, in the same way as the aforementioned quotation characterizes ukulele chords: ‘single, timeless events apprehended all at once instead of serially.’ Furthermore, it is interesting to note the use of the word ‘apprehended,’ which implies both understanding or perception and the idea of the capture, the seizure, the snapshot. The ‘very moments of intersection’ of which Madame Eskimoff speaks are, after all, revealed by the end of the novel to find one of their iterations in the photographic form, which the Integroscope opens up to reveal the pasts, presents, and futures contained within the photographic image, allowing us to step outside of Time and move above the ‘galley-slave repetition of days’ (AD 693) of a linear understanding of its flow.

### **Photography as Testimony**

Pynchon proposes that it is when viewing a ‘single timeless snapshot’ (AD 776) that we are offered a privileged sense of perspective: we are allowed to see every component part, in the words of both Eskimoff and Renfrew, ‘all together’ (AD 693, 776). At key moments within the narrative, it is photography that enables characters to perceive these ‘single, timeless events apprehended all at once’ (AD 620). When Merle and Frank’s narrative threads intertwine, the former gives Frank two ‘gelatin-silver prints’ that provide fuel for his quest to avenge the murder of his father. The first one is a seemingly candid portrait of:

a pair of what looked like drovers in town for the Fourth of July, one of them appearing to force the other to eat a giant firecracker, all lit and throwing bright sparks, flying, dying, filling the unmeasurable fragment of time the shutter was open. (AD 437)

It is, however, the second of these prints that makes it clear that the subjects in question are none other than contract killers Deuce and Sloat:

“Here, this one’s a little clearer.”

---

<sup>33</sup> André Bazin, ‘The Ontology of the Photographic Image,’ trans. Hugh Gray *Film Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (1960): 4-5.

It was out in front of this exact same amalgamator's office. This time Deuce and Sloat were not smiling, and the light was more proper to autumn, you could see dark clouds in the sky overhead, and nothing was casting shadows. The two men were posed as if for some ceremonial purpose. For the gray day, the exposure was a little longer, and you'd expect one at least to have moved and blurred the image, but no, they had stood rigid, almost defiant, allowing the collodion mixture its due measure of light, to record the two killers with unrelenting fidelity, as if set in front of some slow emulsion of an earlier day, eyes, Frank, bending close, noticed now, rendered with that same curious crazed radiance which once was an artifact of having to blink a couple of hundred times during the exposure, but in this more modern form due to something authentically ghostly, for which these emulsions were acting as agents, revealing what no other record up till then could've. (AD 337-338)

Merle and Frank have their conversation in the same place captured in the portrait of Deuce and Sloat, thereby creating a spatial duplicate of the setting. Simultaneously, the photograph provides Frank with an image of the past (these are the men that killed his father), the present (as he experiences the same spatial setting concurrently twice, in reality and in the photograph), and the future (for Deuce is the man Frank wishes to kill). In its capacity as identifying document, photography is presented here as having evidential value, the shutter having been able 'to record the two killers with unrelenting fidelity.' Walter Benjamin discusses Eugène Atget as the photographer who first saw the potential of the photographic medium as purveyor of evidence.<sup>34</sup> In *Against the Day*, the reader is presented with this very notion: the evidentiary capabilities of photography. Photographs of Webb Traverse and of Deuce and Sloat bear witness to their existence (AD 337-338), containing some indexical print or trace of their very physicality. The photograph allows Frank to stare into their eyes; we are told that their stance is 'almost defiant' and that they glare into the shutter, as if the two killers were playing a game of chicken against the camera, one which they, ultimately, won. It is not, however, *this* photograph that will bring about the eventual fall of Deuce, but it will still be photographic evidence nonetheless in the hands of private detective Lew Basnight that will result in his undoing. As Susan Sontag states, '[p]hotographs furnish evidence. Something we hear about, but doubt, seems proven when we're shown a photograph of it. In one version of its utility, the camera record

---

<sup>34</sup> Walter Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' in *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zorn, ed. Hannah Arendt (London: Pimlico, 1999), 219-220.

incriminates.’<sup>35</sup>

Pynchon, however, also destabilizes this conception of the truth claim made by the photograph, as we are told that “[n]obody ever looks like their ‘mug,’ you ought to know that by now” (AD 432). Similarly, we are told that “[t]oday we are used to thinking of identity as no more than the contents of one’s dossier. Back then one man might have multiple identities, ‘documents’ might easily be forged or fictional” (AD 640). In *Against the Day*, each photograph contains a plurality of worlds when reanimated with the Integroscope; through this device a single developed negative has the potential to represent every single past that could have led to that moment and every single future into which that instant led.

The ability of the photograph to persist into the future allows it to become a historical document. The novel stresses the testimonial function of the photograph by juxtaposing the clarity and perspective gained by the moment captured, as in the examples above, with the concealment of certain tragic events, which prove to be irrecoverable due to the fact that they were not documented photographically. Near the end of the novel, as the tents by the coalmines near Trinidad are about to be assaulted by the militiamen, their torches, with their black smoke, rise ‘[a]s if the purpose was not to cast light but blackness’ (AD 1141):

Half a mile away, the tents were all being set on fire, one by one, by the heroes of Linderfelt’s Company B. An impure reddish light leapt and shifted in the sky and the troopers made sounds of animal triumph. Shots kept ripping across the perilous night. Sometimes they connected, and strikers, and children and their mothers, and even troopers and camp guards, took bullets or fought flames, and fell in battle. But it happened, each casualty, one by one, in light that history would be blind to. The only accounts would be the militia’s. (AD 1142)

‘But it happened,’ we are told, as if the narrator were preemptively responding to those who would choose to deny the crime. The potential for a plurality of accounts is here curtailed by the lack of documentary evidence, therefore allowing the victors to literally get away with murder and, moreover, deny it. Those whose lives have gone undocumented form ‘a brotherhood of the willfully lost. Whose faces, afterward, would prove as unrecalable as those of the natives’ (AD 607). Their undocumented status makes it impossible, within the novel, for the Integroscope to redeem/resuscitate them, for there is no photographic footprint of

---

<sup>35</sup> Susan Sontag, *On Photography* (New York: Delta, 1978), 5.

their existence.

### Negatives and Multiples

Not only does photography constitute a more mimetically accurate representation of that which it depicts than, for example, painting, but one of the defining qualities of photography as a medium is that it commences to destabilize the notion of the singular authenticity of the image. As Benjamin states, '[f]rom a photographic negative, for example, one can make any number of prints; to ask for the "authentic" print makes no sense.'<sup>36</sup> Analogue photography represents a doubling of sight, as it records the picture framed within the viewfinder, allowing the person operating the camera to record or duplicate what he or she sees. 'Photographed images do not seem to be statements about the world,' Sontag states, 'so much as pieces of it, miniatures of reality that anyone can make or acquire.'<sup>37</sup> This duplication of the world is potentially subjected to a further number of possible replications with the aid of the negative, from which one may produce numerous copies, restricted only by the degradation of the plastic on which the developed negatives are found.

As discussed above, upon meeting Frank Traverse, Merle shows him photographs of Webb and of the men who murdered him, Deuce Kindred and Sloat Fresno. Their meeting is cut short by the quick-tempered Bob Meldrum, yet, as Frank is about to leave, Merle gifts him with the photographs: 'Might want these prints, I have negatives' (*AD* 339), emphasizing the plurality inherent to the photographic medium. However, Merle's first encounter with the photographic negative, as the novel describes, astonished him:

And Merle saw the image appear. Come from nothing. Come in out of the pale Invisible, down into this otherwise explainable world, clearer than real. It happened to be the Newburgh asylum, with two or three inmates standing in the foreground, staring. Merle peered uneasily. Something was wrong with the faces. The whites of their eyes were dark gray. The sky behind the tall, jagged roofline was nearly black, windows that should have been light-colored were dark. As if light had been witched somehow into its opposite. . . .

"What is it? They look like spirits, or haunts or something."

"It's a negative. When we print this, it'll all flip back to

---

<sup>36</sup> Benjamin, 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction,' 218.

<sup>37</sup> Sontag, *On Photography*, 4.

normal. First we have to fix it. Reach me that bottle of hypo there.”

So the night went on, spent mostly washing things in different solutions and then waiting for them to dry. By the time the sun rose over Shaker Heights, Roswell Bounce had introduced Merle to photography. “Photography, this is Merle, Merle—” (AD 71)

The image, we are told, simply appears. It is, furthermore, described in terms that exceed those of its realness; it is 'clearer than real.' However, Merle is immediately taken aback by its colours and its inversion of light and darkness. 'Something was wrong with the faces,' he surmises, seeing something awry with the eyes of its subjects, the sky, and in the background something not quite right with the buildings and their windows. The things 'that should have been light-colored were dark,' we are informed, '[a]s if light had been witched somehow into its opposite. . . .' The idea that strikes Merle is that these may be “spirits, or haunts or something.” The association of ideas of the phantasmagoric with light capturing technologies were not rare at the time of the advent of photographic techniques; Friedrich Kittler asserts that soon after the process was invented, ‘photographic plates – especially those taken with the camera shutter closed – furnished reproductions of ghosts or specters.’<sup>38</sup> Roswell Bounce – already a consummate photographer – quickly dispels Merle’s fears: 'It's a negative,' he announces. The language of photography permeates the text, as is made clear in section II, chapter 8, as Chum of Chance Miles Blundell converses with Ryder Thorn, a Trespasser:

Miles looked at the countryside, pretending to be less puzzled than he was. For the sunlight had to it the same interior darkness as the watery dusk last night—it was like passing through an all-surrounding photographic negative—the lowland nearly silent except for water-thrushes, the harvested fields, the smell of hops being dried in kilns, flax pulled up and piled in sheaves, in local practice not to be retted till the spring, shining canals, sluices, dikes and cart roads, dairy cattle under the trees, the edged and peaceful clouds. Tarnished silver. Somewhere up in this sky was Miles’s home, and all he knew of human virtue, the ship, somewhere on station, perhaps watching over him at that moment. (AD 621)

In this passage Blundell regards the countryside with bewilderment, describing the experience as 'like passing through an all-surrounding photographic negative.' The description of the entire scene as '[t]arnished silver' further positions the

---

<sup>38</sup> Friedrich Kittler, *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*, trans. Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999), 12.

reader within the context of the photographic. However, it is the convergence of photography and Thorn, one of the 'temporal trespassers [who] return in the shape of disturbing, but not wholly unknown, travelers from the past and/or future to remind the reader of the lessons of history yet to come,'<sup>39</sup> that makes this passage pregnant with meaning. The juxtaposition of photography and time travel emphasizes the temporal disruption at the heart of the novel. In light of this convergence, Thorn's description as "'snappy'" (AD 621) of the 'new arrangement of a Chopin nocturne' for ukelele, which he has recently learnt, seems to echo 'the pallid vastness of twilight, in its suspense, [with] its cryptic insinuation' (AD 619) that preceded their meeting. Miles may, after all, be within a photograph into which someone, somewhere is breathing new life with the aid of an Integroscope.

The theme of doubling, made explicit by the frequent references to photographic negatives in the text, takes a number of forms in the novel, including characters that have two minds, like Kit, one of which is drunk, whilst the 'other or co-consciousness mind would emerge at last and see what it could do' (AD 182). Lewis Basnight, we are told, is a Gemini (AD 266), whilst Foley Walker and Scarsdale Vibe, we are told, are 'the 'Vibe Twins' (AD 113), a symbolic more than a consanguineous relation. Doubling is also made evident throughout the novel in spatial terms from 'Baden-Baden to Wagga Wagga' (AD 738), Pynchon makes references to 'Guanajuato, Guanajuato' (AD 344), '*Chihuahua, Chihuahua*' (AD 437), 'Durango, Durango' (AD 438) 'Zacatecas, Zacatecas' and 'Guanajuato, Guanajato', concluding with the exclamation 'Double refraction!' (AD 436). Critics reading the novel in light of the September 11 attacks would read in the aforementioned locations echoes of the doubling of the city where the World Trade Center stood: New York, New York. "'Let us imagine,'" Grand Cohen Nicholas Nookshaft advocates, "'a lateral world, set only infinitesimally to the side of the one we think we know'" (AD 259), a world alluded to in the recurrent notion of 'the Other Side' (AD 449), '*el otro lado*' (AD 717).

Leyla Haferkamp suggests that both the novel's title and its epigraph hint towards the 'general inclination of the dichotomous towards complementarity.'<sup>40</sup>

---

<sup>39</sup> Inger H. Dalsgaard, 'Readers and Trespassers: Time Travel, Orthogonal Time, and Alternative Figurations of Time in *Against the Day*,' in *Pynchon's Against the Day: A Corrupted Pilgrim's Guide*, eds. Jeffrey Severs and Christopher Leise (Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011), 133.

<sup>40</sup> Leyla Haferkamp, "'Particle or Wave?': The 'Function of the Prairie in *Against the Day*,' in *Against the Grain: Reading Pynchon's Counternarratives*, ed. Sascha Pöhlmann (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), 307.

There is throughout the novel an undeniable emphasis on the oppositional, as evidenced by the myriad of counter-concepts: Death and Counter-Death (AD 419), Crusade and 'counter-Crusade' (AD 492), terrorism and 'the infant science of counter-terrorism' (AD 501), 'signs and countersigns' (AD 589), light and 'counter-light' (AD 653), the city and 'counter-City' (AD 658), Venice and 'contra-Venezia' (AD 660), 'signs and countersigns' (AD 662), temple and 'counter-temple' (AD 711), attack and 'counter-attack' (AD 843), attention and 'counterattention' (AD 899), the Carnevale and the 'counter-Carnevale,' or the Carnesalve<sup>41</sup> (AD 987), Te Deum and 'counter-Te Deum' (AD 1046), parts and 'counterparts' (AD 1056), paradise and 'anti-paradise' (AD 1146), Earth and 'Counter-Earth' (AD 1147), Planet and 'counter-planet' (AD 1149), and throughout the novel the notions of espionage and counterespionage, particularly in later sections.

The prefix *counter-* suggests the potential for balance, as these concepts are not merely depicted as purely oppositional *others*, but rather each one implying its twin concept, its negative equivalent: counter-*Death*, counter-*temple*, counter-*Te Deum*. These opposites destabilize traditional binaries, as 'light and dark' becomes *light and counter-light*, 'life and death' becomes *counter-death and death*, and so forth. The destabilizing of traditional counterparts can also be read in relation to the advent of imaginary numbers,<sup>42</sup> which strongly informs one of the novel's several narrative threads, in particular Kit Traverse's and Yashmeen Halfcourt's. In a similar way in which imaginary numbers presented themselves as the *counter-real* numbers, Pynchon proposes any number of *counter-*versions of well-known and seemingly easily definable concepts, problematizing them whilst emphasizing the first word of the novel's title: *against*.

A further representation of the theme of doubleness in the novel takes the form of 'the twin professors Renfrew and Werfner' (AD 260). Renfrew and '[h]is so-called conjugate' (AD 808), as the text terms him. The term has temporal implications, as we *conjugate* verbs to situate actions in specific temporal settings.

---

<sup>41</sup> The term 'Carnesalve' implying the saving of one's skin, or perhaps the liberation of one's flesh, as *carne* is Spanish for 'flesh' or 'meat,' whilst *salve* is one of several conjugations of the verb *salvar*, 'to save' or 'to liberate.'

<sup>42</sup> *i* is defined as the square root of minus one, a quantity that had seemed impossible for centuries to mathematicians, given that mathematical tradition indicated that, for a number to have a square root, it must be the result of a number being multiplied by itself. Since the multiplication of a positive number by another positive number (and the multiplication of a negative by a negative) results in a positive, the mere notion of minus one having a square root seemed counterintuitive if not, as I stated above, impossible. Leonhard Euler, Carl Friedrich Gauss, and William Rowan Hamilton, whose names are mentioned throughout the novel, are generally acknowledged as having given credence to the notion of imaginary numbers.

The word conjugate itself implies a couple, a duality. At the same time, in mathematical language it implies a reciprocal relation, as if the real parts of both Renfrew and Werfner were the same, but their imaginary parts were of the same magnitude, yet of opposite signs. The novel, therefore, defines their doubleness in terms of imaginary numbers through the word *conjugate*. At a nominal level both characters are depicted as reciprocal mirror-images: spelling one name backwards will reveal the other, and vice versa. Their nominal symmetry, however, brings to mind Martin Handford's *Where's Wally?* book series. Handford's children's books consist of a series of double-page spreads in which a large cast of minor characters are depicted from an aerial view. The challenge for the young reader is to scan the crowded setting of the illustration in search of Wally. A world traveller who is often depicted with a photographic camera, Wally was – as ensuing sequels were published – revealed to have an arch-nemesis, whose name (Odlaw) was an orthographical inversion of the name under which Wally was introduced into the US market: Waldo. Yet, we are told that '[d]espite both professors' frequent and strenuous denials of twinship, some symmetry was being broken' (AD 769). This 'denial of twinship' stems from the fact that, having mastered the art of bilocation, Renfrew/Werfner are: 'one and the same person, had been all along, that this person somehow had the paranormal power to be in at least two places at the same time, maintaining day-to-day lives at two different universities' (AD 771).

In line with the reproductive properties of the photographic process, it is a further optical device that brings about the phenomenon of bilocation within the novel: Iceland Spar. This form of calcite, we are told, '[d]oubles the image, the two overlap, with the right sort of light, the right lenses, you can separate them in stages, a little further each time,' to the point where 'it becomes possible to saw somebody in half optically, and instead of two different pieces of one body, there are now two complete individuals walking around, who are identical in everyway, capisci?' (AD 399). Pynchon utilizes the concept of bilocation (alongside the multiplicity of the photographic print) as a means through which to highlight and, to some extent literalize, an existential anxiety common amongst the novel's characters. As the Chums of Chance wonder: 'Had they gone, themselves, through some mutation into imperfect replicas of who they once were?' (AD 476). The Chums, whose *reality*-position within the text is highly ambiguous, enlist their readers 'to serve as volunteer decoys' (AD 476). Yet, this maneuver quickly results

in the existential confusion described by the quotation above. Their concerns are, unsurprisingly, described in photographic terms: 'Were they now but torn and trailing after-images of clandestine identities needed on some mission long ended, forgotten, but unwilling or unable to be released from it?' (AD 476). Are they the real Chums, or merely their decoys?

*Against the Day* allows for both possibilities. As the micro-narrative of Prince Rinpungpa attests, enlightened Yogis are able to practice bilocation: "remember one thing—when you come to a fork in the road, take it." Easy for him to say, of course, being two people at once" (AD 861). The narrative 'branching and rebranching' (AD 366) does not merely make explicit the paths *not* taken in the world of the novel, but rather implicitly emphasizes that these paths have been taken *elsewhere*, in worlds parallel to the novel's own. Whereas in *The Crying of Lot 49* Oedipa Maas is continually forced by circumstances to choose between the two paths she sees at every single juncture in her quest to learn about the Tristero and the WASTE system, *Against the Day* presents us with the possibility of, upon coming to a fork in the road where our path bifurcates, taking both paths at every single stage. As critics have suggested, bilocation, doubling, and multiple worlds are themes that recur throughout the novel, all of which would allow the novel's characters (or their doubles, or multiple selves) to take forks in the road that would otherwise have remained untraveled.

### **Integroscope**

The importance of the photographic image is revealed in *Against the Day* retrospectively, when the novel's final section introduces the Integroscope device, demanding that the reader reassess the entirety of the text in light of its presence. The very name of this device encapsulates a key thematic and formal concern within the novel: that of seeing (*scopium*) the whole (*integer*). The emergence of the counter-photographic mechanics of the Integroscope finally assert themselves at the end of the text, as if the novel were a photograph slowly developing, a photograph all the details of which only became apparent in its final stage. Roswell Bounce's explanatory words to Lew are particularly revealing:

'See, every photographic subject moves, [...] even if it's standing still. It breathes, light bounces off, something. Snapping a photograph is like what the math professors call 'differentiating' an equation of motion—freezing that movement into the very

small piece of time it takes the shutter to open and close. So we figured—if shooting a photo is like taking a first derivative, then maybe we could find some way to do the reverse of that, start with the still photo and integrate it, recover its complete primitive and release it back into action . . . even back to life . . .' (AD 1165)

Whilst photography captures light, the Integroscope frees and redeems it, 'releas[ing] it back into action.' As Bounce states, photography arrests a single slice from the whole continuum of time, a slice from which the Integroscope – even at a later date – is able to extrapolate context. Returning once more to the metaphor of calculus, Pynchon conceives a hypothetical contraption capable of integrating that which has been differentiated. Where initially the novel's photographers had been said to be redeeming silver from its otherwise worldly employment as mere legal tender, by the novel's conclusion they find themselves redeeming the apprehended image and the light captured in the photographic process. The workings of the integroscopic *time machine*, however, seem primitive by early 20<sup>th</sup> century science-fiction standards:

Merle now had cranked a small gasoline motor-generator into action, brought two carbons together at right angles, and eased them apart again with a blinding arc sizzling between them. He made some lens adjustments. On the wall appeared an enlarged photo of downtown L.A., monochromatic and still. Merle rocked the carbons, turned some knobs, took from a wall safe a brilliant red crystal, brought it over to a platinoid housing and carefully slid it into place. "Lorandite—brought out of Macedonia before the Balkan Wars, pure thallium arsenosulfide, purer quality than you can find anymore." High-vacuum tubes glowed eerily purple. Humming came from two or three sources, not what you'd call in harmony. ". . . Now watch." So smoothly Chick missed the moment, the photo came to life. *A horse lifted a hoof. A streetcar emerged from inertia. The clothing of city strollers began to flutter in the breeze.* (AD 1166, emphasis added)

Echoing Tancredi's artistic intentions, namely redeeming art from the damnable stillness of paint, the reader finds here its photographic counterpart. As Chick observes the machine at work, the 'enlarged photo of downtown L.A., monochromatic and still' commences to reveal the trot of a horse, the thrust of a streetcar, and the stroll of pedestrians. Rideout discloses that, ever since designing the integroscopic process, he understood 'that he was on a mission to set free the images not just in the photographs he was taking, but in all that came his way' (AD 1166). As Rideout begins his quest towards photographic redemption, we are told

that:

One by one, across the land, responsive to his desire, photos trembled, stirred, began to move, at first slowly then accelerating, pedestrians walked away out of the frame, carriages drove along, the horses pulling them shit in the street, bystanders who had their backs turned revealed their faces, streets darkened and gas lamps came on, nights lengthened, stars wheeled, passed, were dissolved in dawn, family gatherings at festive tables were scattered into drunkenness and debris, dignitaries posing for portraits blinked, belched, blew their noses, got up and left the photographer's studio, eventually along with all the other subjects liberated from these photos resumed their lives, though clearly they had moved beyond the range of the lens, as if all the information needed to depict an indefinite future had been there in the initial "snap," at some molecular or atomic fineness of scale whose limit, if any, hadn't yet been reached— "Though you'd think because of the grain-size situation," Roswell pointed out, "that sooner or later we'd've run out of resolution." (AD 1167)

The aforementioned passage commences with the suggestion of a reciprocal desire with sexual undertones between Merle and the photographs he redeems, seeing himself as 'the prince who with his kiss releases that Sleeping Beauty into wakefulness' (AD 1166-7). The photographs crave redemption from their stillness. Through his imagined technologies, Pynchon counters the moment of death that Barthes sees as being implied by every photograph, as – if their light can be liberated – it is preserved life, then, that is also contained in them.

As Rosalind Krauss asserts, photographs and daguerreotypes have an indexical quality that is not shared by many of their representational predecessors,<sup>43</sup> reinterpreting Bazin's influential essay 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image.'<sup>44</sup> Krauss, in defining photography, using C. S. Peirce's semiotic taxonomy, not as a symbol (an arbitrary culturally-defined representation of a *thing*) nor as an icon (a representation of a *thing* that bears a likeness to that which it represents) but as an index, is stating that photographs bear a 'relation to their objects [or subjects that] consists in a correspondence in fact.'<sup>45</sup> In classifying photography as an index, Krauss suggests that they share the same relation with that which they represent in much the same way as a fingerprint bears a causal

---

<sup>43</sup> Rosalind E. Krauss, *The Originality of the Avant-garde and Other Modernist Myths* (Cambridge: MIT, 1986), 203.

<sup>44</sup> Bazin, 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image,' 4-9.

<sup>45</sup> Charles S. Peirce, *Peirce on Signs: Writings on Semiotic*, ed. James Hoopes (Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press Published, 1991), 30.

connection with an individual's thumb. In *Against the Day*, 'the initial "snap," at some molecular or atomic fineness of scale whose limit, if any, hadn't yet been reached—' (AD 1167) embodies this indexical connection. A photograph becomes an index by virtue of capturing the light, unique and specific, that 'bounces off' (AD 1165) its subject, creating that subject's *lightprint*. Rideout and Bounce's Integroscope can be read as playing on the idea of cloning, a concept that resonates with the novel's overarching emphasis on multiple versions, parallel worlds, and replication. Integrosopic technology does not bring about a more perfect image, after all 'dignitaries posing for portraits blinked, belched, blew their noses, got up and left the photographer's studio,' yet it does not necessarily bring to life a less perfect image either: 'bystanders who had their backs turned revealed their faces' (AD 1167). The Integroscope simply places the image, once again, in context, allowing each subject to move 'eventually along with all the other subjects liberated from these photos' (AD 1167) enabling them to resume their lives.

The Integroscope suggests a method through which, not only all subjunctive Americas but all subjunctive worlds can be reached and their inherent implications contemplated. In the novel, from each photograph we can, integrosopically, extrapolate any number of possible pasts and futures. Therefore, it seems appropriate that near the end of the novel we would be told that 'one night [Kit] was presented with a startling implication of Zermelo's Axiom of Choice' (AD 1211-2):

'It was possible in theory, he was shown beyond a doubt, to take a sphere the size of a pea, cut it apart into several very precisely shaped pieces, and reassemble it into another sphere the size of the sun.' (AD 1211-2)

Pynchon here returns to his perennial interest in mathematical paradox, a topic I discussed earlier in relation to *The Crying of Lot 49*. The 'startling implication of Zermelo's Axiom of Choice' would in fact be reached by Stefan Banach and Alfred Tarski in 1924 and it is commonly known as the Banach-Tarski paradox.<sup>46</sup> Their findings implied that a solid ball of any size could be theoretically broken up into many pieces which could, in turn, be reassembled to construct a sphere of any other size, the caveat being that the number of pieces the ball is to be originally broken into ought to be an integer smaller than infinity. Hence, the popular

---

<sup>46</sup> Anita Burdman Feferman and Solomon Feferman, *Alfred Tarski: Life and Logic* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), 43.

understanding of the Banach-Tarski paradox is that a pea may be divided into small parts and then be reassembled into the sun. The fact that this proposition contradicts basic intuition resulted in the debate that ensued after the publication of Banach and Tarski's findings, until in 1938 Kurt Gödel proved Zermelo's Axiom of Choice, on which the foundations of the Banach-Tarski Paradox were laid.<sup>47</sup> The solar potentiality of the pea, in terms of the Axiom of Choice and the Banach-Tarski Paradox, echoes the parallel worlds that the Integroscope is capable of conjuring. From a single snapshot, an instant seized from the seemingly incessant flow of time, an entire past and future may be extended. We are told that it may be a different past from that which the photographic subject experienced originally when the photograph was taken. Furthermore, the Integroscope may also project a different future.

The destabilization of time initiated by the Integroscope connects my photographic interpretation of *Against the Day* with yet another critical reading of the novel's title; Henry Veggian<sup>48</sup> suggests that the title be read as a direct reference to William Faulkner's speech against racism delivered at the 1955 annual meeting of the Southern Historical Association.<sup>49</sup> Here Faulkner expressed that he was 'profoundly disturbed that his native region was out of harmony with [the] enlightened sentiment of the world in its racial attitudes,'<sup>50</sup> declaring that:

The question is no longer of white against black. It is no longer whether or not white blood shall remain pure, it is whether or not white people shall remain free. [...] We speak now *against the day* when our Southern people who will resist to the last these inevitable changes in social relations, will, when they have been forced to accept what they at once time might have accepted with dignity and goodwill, will say, "Why didn't someone tell us this before? Tell us this in time?"<sup>51</sup>

This passage sees Faulkner evoke a *future* moment when *present day* prejudices are now in the *past*. This simultaneous proleptic and analeptic motion enacted at a linguistic level within Faulkner's rhetoric finds its visual counterpart in the

---

<sup>47</sup> Ibid., 43-44.

<sup>48</sup> Henry Veggian, 'Thomas Pynchon *Against the Day*,' *boundary 2* 35, no. 1 (2008): 197-215.

<sup>49</sup> Richard C. Moreland, *A Companion to William Faulkner* (Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007), 28.

<sup>50</sup> Bell I. Wiley, foreword to *The Segregation Decisions: Papers Read at a Session of the Twenty-First Annual Meeting of the Southern Historical Association, Memphis, Tennessee, November 10, 1955* by William Faulkner, Benjamin E. Mays and Cecil Sims (Georgia: Southern Regional Council, 1956), 6.

<sup>51</sup> William Faulkner, Benjamin E. Mays and Cecil Sims, *The Segregation Decisions: Papers Read at a Session of the Twenty-First Annual Meeting of the Southern Historical Association, Memphis, Tennessee, November 10, 1955* (Georgia: Southern Regional Council, 1956), 12, emphasis added.

Integroscope in *Against the Day*. Pynchon, in fact, returns in his description of the inner workings of integroscopic technology to the structuring metaphor of his early short story 'The Secret Integration,'<sup>52</sup> in which the mathematical language of integration and differentiation<sup>53</sup> is employed to illustrate racial segregation and the tension between the forward-looking and the retrograde.

Given that many of the events and geographical locations portrayed in the novel bear a striking similarity to key events and locales in our own world (the Balkan Crisis, World War I, &c), whilst keeping in mind that certain technologies depicted in *Against the Day* do not in fact exist in our timeline, we could interpret the novel itself as being set in a world parallel to our own: a Counter-Earth to our Earth, or vice versa. Moreover, the narrative of *Against the Day* could be seen as someone's visual trespassing into our world through an Integroscope, forcing readers to ask themselves: are *we* watching *them* or are *we* being watched? The whole novel can be seen as an integroscopic view of a world parallel to our own, a narrative extrapolation from a handful of photographs. As Pynchon notes in the promotional blurb to *Against the Day*: '[i]f it is not the world, it is what the world might be with a minor adjustment or two.'<sup>54</sup>

---

<sup>52</sup> Thomas Pynchon, 'The Secret Integration,' in *Slow Learner: Early Stories* (Boston: Little, Brown, 1984), 141-193.

<sup>53</sup> In 'The Secret Integration,' the concept of integration finds different antonymic forms in all differentiation (mathematics), segregation (politics of race), and disintegration (the end of the protagonists' childhood and the dematerialization of their imaginary friend).

<sup>54</sup> Thomas Pynchon, 'Summary of *Against the Day*,' *Penguin*, n.p., November 21, 2006, accessed July 15, 2013. Originally released on Amazon.com.  
<http://www.us.penguin.com/nf/Book/BookDisplay/0,,9781594201202,00.html>

*'This little parenthesis of light, might close after  
all': The End of the Era in Inherent Vice*

In a letter addressed to an editor Mark Twain considered to be 'a literary kangaroo' and an 'illiterate hostler',<sup>1</sup> Twain calls the adverbial term 'moreover' a parenthesis, going on to suggest that 'a parenthesis is evidence that the man who uses it does not know how to write English or is too indolent to take the trouble to do it,' adding that 'a parenthesis usually throws the emphasis upon the wrong word.' Twain concludes that 'a man who will wantonly use a parenthesis will steal. For these reasons I am unfriendly to the parenthesis.'<sup>2</sup> Whilst Twain's remarks are editorial in nature, as parentheses are dismissed as a rhetorical element, they nonetheless point at the idea of an incongruous break in flow and the notion of the insertion, implying its antonymic form, removal. *Inherent Vice* presents us with a cultural epoch in American history that will be brought to an end almost arbitrarily. Historical periodization makes certain that the so-called sixties come to an abrupt end. The novel's temporal setting, the final stretch of Doc's era, is a particularly interesting example of the tyrannical segmenting of time, since the segment in question is none other than the decade. Our decimal system feels natural, due to the fact that humans possess ten fingers and ten toes.<sup>3</sup> However, it is the duration of a decade that embodies human time, which is not so much *natural* as narcissistic. Some of the units that conform the decade are planetary and, arguably, more natural: the day, after all, is the time it takes the Earth to complete a rotation of 360 degrees on its axis, whilst the year is defined as the time taken by the Earth to complete a revolution around the Sun. The decade, however, we have created in our own image.

I propose that the narrative structure of *Inherent Vice* be read in terms of inclusion and exclusion, stemming from three different readings of the novel's title.

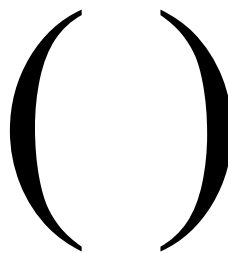
---

<sup>1</sup> Mark Twain, 'Scraps from My Autobiography: Private History of a Manuscript That Came to Grief,' in Harriet Elinor Smith ed., *Autobiography of Mark Twain: The Complete and Authoritative Edition*, Vol. 1 (Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010), 166.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*, 180.

<sup>3</sup> Annemarie Schimmel, *The Mystery of Numbers* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1994), 180.

I propose three different organisational devices at work within *Inherent Vice* that stem from distinct readings of its title: the symbol of the egg (the quintessential illustrative example of inherent vice<sup>4</sup>), the theme of original sin (visualised in connection with the circular geography of Dante Alighieri's *Commedia*), and the concept of the mechanical vise. In addition to the obvious homophonic relation to the titular *vice*, the mechanical vise (to use the American spelling) is an implicit visual motif that is textually enforced by a series of bracket-shaped images throughout the text: parentheses, waves, and the Golden Fang, among others. I categorise these interpretations as, in the first case, a 'textual reading', as the egg follows from a literal interpretation of *inherent vice* employed by Sauncho Smilax within the novel; secondly, as Doc Sportello initially misunderstands the meaning of *inherent vice* as original sin, this stands as an 'intratextual misreading'; and, finally, the mechanical vise represents an 'extratextual misreading', my own. Although these models come from different understandings of the novel's title, the geometric shapes they suggest are strikingly similar (*Fig. 1*). I will begin with a brief discussion of the implications of the term inherent vice, before moving on to an analysis of the symbol of the mechanical vise and related bracket-like images. I assert that these recurrences of the bracket can be read as representative of an apprehensive feeling regarding the end of the era and a mistrust towards the subdivisions imposed by historical narrative, which engages with what Fredric Jameson sees as the problematical conception of historical periodization.<sup>5</sup>



*Fig. 1*

---

<sup>4</sup> Many reviewers of the novel reiterated the example of the egg to clarify the term. See: Louis Menand, 'Soft-Boiled,' *New Yorker*, 3 August 2009.

<sup>5</sup> Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*, (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 3.

### **Both Cargo and Vessel, 'its form and its inner mystery'**

*Inherent Vice* takes its title from a legal term used in Maritime Law derived from the French *vice propre*.<sup>6</sup> Interestingly, the novel has been translated into French as *Vice Caché*, an editorial decision that Pynchon did not veto, adding the idea of a *hidden* vice/visé to our understanding of the text. The term is, however, misinterpreted by the novel's protagonist Doc Sportello, a Private Investigator with a taste for recreational drugs: 'Is that like original sin?', he inquires, to which his *ad honorem* legal advisor replies, '[i]t's what you can't avoid, . . . stuff marine policies don't like to cover. Usually applies to cargo –like eggs break– but sometimes it's also the vessel carrying it. Like why bilges have to be pumped out?' (IV 351). Eggs are, of course, a genuinely interesting example, as they are both the cargo *and* the vessel: the content and its form. Hence, eggs serve as a fitting analogy for narrative structures, as they encompass both the content of the story and the form used to tell it.

Madame H.P. Blavatsky's conception of the *mythical* land of Lemuria, which I will discuss later in this chapter, was undoubtedly an influence on the novel's representation of the Lemurian continent. Blavatsky states in *The Secret Doctrine* that '[t]he Egg . . . was revered both on account of its form and its inner mystery.'<sup>7</sup> As I have shown throughout this thesis, geometric shapes and patterns in Pynchon's fiction often pose more questions than they answer, thus highlighting the intrinsic symbiosis between form and content in narrative structure, the novel's 'inner mystery'.

Reviewers and critics for the most part agree that *Inherent Vice* is, or in any case emulates, hard-boiled detective fiction, a fact Bigfoot also acknowledges in the text, referring to 'that old-time hard-boiled dick era' (IV 33) in which Doc seems to be stuck. The fact that a hard-boiled novel would have as its structuring device an icon of oval form can be seen as textual pun, one in a series of references to ovoids. Allusions to eggs punctuate the text: we encounter them in the name of a cafe Doc frequents, 'Wavos' (IV 98-99), which aside from its overt surfing connotations is a phonetic rendering of *huevos*, Spanish for *eggs*; this playful use of the Spanish language is further compounded by the presence of 'a snitch known as El

---

<sup>6</sup> William Tetley, *Marine Cargo Claims*, (Ontario: The Carswell Company, 1966), 479-483.

<sup>7</sup> Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine*, Vol. 3 (Wheaton: Quest, 1993), 359.

Huevoncito,' (IV 290), who is instrumental to the entire development of the novel's plot. The text stresses the ovoid pun in the way in which this character dies: 'By and by, El Huevoncito, rest his soul, was found mysteriously deceased after an early-morning shake-and-bake on Tariq's block, which gave Tariq a perfect alibi and never got traced to him' (IV 292). Penitentiary language is here permeated with culinary jargon, as a *shake down*, the search by prison guards for contraband in the inmates' cells, becomes a *shake-and-bake* with the demise of El Huevoncito. Furthermore, The action depicted in the novel takes place prior, during, and subsequent to Easter of the year 1970, further highlighting the relevance of the oval as structuring device. One of Doc's several cases in the novel involves investigating the suspicious circumstances under which Coy Harlingen dies. Eventually, it becomes clear that Coy has not died, but simply 'fakes his own death to break the cycle of his addiction.' In due course, Coy is allowed to return to his wife and daughter, thanks to the intervention of Doc and, thus, Coy is 'resurrected' (IV 33). The concepts of birth, rebirth and renewal are intrinsically attached to those of cycles and the constant recreation of the world, a subject this paper will treat at a later point. The resurrection of Coy, however, has key religious connotations, as well as the many references to Hell.

### **Of Capital Vices, Vicious Circles, and the Circles of Hell**

The connection between 'original sin' and 'inherent vice' is foreshadowed prior to Doc's humorous misinterpretation of the term near the end of the story: '[t]entacles of sin and desire and that strange world-bound karma which is of the essence in maritime law' (IV 91). Sportello is characterised by the apparent laziness of the cannabis smoker, making him the novel's most clear exponent of sloth. At one point he concedes that he is not a psychiatrist, although '[he] do[es] have a couch?' (IV 65). The couch has previously been employed by Pynchon as the very embodiment of sloth in his essay 'Nearer my Couch to Thee',<sup>8</sup> and exists in the common vernacular as the quintessential symbol of a sedentary lifestyle through the phrase 'couch potato.' Envy appears personified as Lieutenant Pat Dubonnet, an old colleague of Bigfoot Bjornsen, as Sportello manages to reignite in Dubonnet an old professional rivalry, and in the end '[e]nvy won out' (IV 48). Bigfoot, in turn,

---

<sup>8</sup> Thomas Pynchon, 'Nearer My Couch to Thee,' *New York Times Book Review*, June 6, 1993. Reprinted as 'Sloth' in Thomas Pynchon (et al.), *Deadly Sins* (New York: Quill, 1994), 11-23.

personifies gluttony through his addiction to chocolate-covered frozen bananas. His dependency is such that Sportello finds 'several hundred frozen chocolate-covered bananas inside' Bigfoot's 'corpse-size professional pathologist's [freezer]' (IV 139). Pride and vanity are represented by Sloane Wolfmann, who is so obsessed with retaining her looks that she has had a professional Director of Photography from Hollywood design the lighting in her house, so as to create the illusion of youth, whilst her husband –Mickey Wolfmann– stands for Lust, due to his habit of collecting women as trophies and keeping mementoes of his sexual victories. Examples of greed abound in the novel, including Sloane's lover, Riggs, who immediately embraces Mickey Wolfmann's disappearance, due to the magnitude of his real estate fortune. Wrath, finally, can be seen to be represented by Puck Beaverton, whose girlfriend lives in fear 'of his anger, which was unpredictable both as to when and how dangerous' (IV 223-4). In spite of the sinful aura that surrounds Los Angeles and the long list of sinners that populate the novel, Mickey Wolfman does attempt to atone for a lifetime of selfishness by building a large complex of homes named Arrepentimiento, 'a longtime project of his' (IV 62), for the disadvantaged. Arrepentimiento is, of course, the Spanish word for repentance and repenting, or, as the implied narrator of the novel tells us, 'Spanish for "sorry about that"' (IV 248). Some characters do, however, spend the rest of their days in Purgatory, it would seem: 'Look at this miserable place. It's The Endless Bummer. Everybody else will move on, but guess who, for his sins, will remain stuck out here forever in Gordita' (IV 47). The subject of Hell arises once and again in conversations between Doc and Bigfoot:

[...] bye-bye Black Dahlia, rest in peace Tom Ince, yes we've seen the last of those good old-time L.A. murder mysteries I'm afraid. We've found the gateway to hell, and it's asking far too much of your L.A. civilian not to want to go crowding on through it, horny and giggling as always, looking for that latest thrill. Lots of overtime for me and the boys I guess, but it brings us all that much closer to the end of the world (IV 209).

Images of damnation and sin punctuate the narrative, where everyday life is described as infernal: 'the abyss you had to dare successfully every moment of every day' (IV 300). The text even makes direct allusion to Dante's singular vision of hell and its circular structure, as 'Pasadena black clouds had gathered, not just

dark gray but midnight black, tar-pit black, hitherto-unreported-circle-of-Hell black' (IV 165). Here we have a two-fold reference to Dante's *Inferno*, as the suggestion of the circular structure of Hell is not the only detail worth noting. Pynchon's evocation of the blackness of Pasadena's Hell brings to mind the term famously employed by Alighieri to denote a specific shade of purple-black which sets the tone of Hell: 'l'aer perso,' following from 'l'aer malign.'<sup>9</sup> Sportello's countercultural failure to remember, a subject this paper will explore later, can be from this perspective read as the influence of the Lethe.

### Death of the American Dream

Everything in *Inherent Vice*'s California is "[d]oomed to a bad end sooner or later" (IV 331), with a dark halo indicative of the end hanging over the characters almost constantly:

If everything in this dream of prerevolution was in fact doomed to end and the faithless money-driven world to reassert its control over all the lives it felt entitled to touch, handle, and molest, it would be agents like these, dutiful and silent, out doing the shitwork, who'd make it happen. (IV 129-130)

This doomed dream of prerevolution could be seen to suggest the always incipient Death of the American Dream –or for that matter the Birth of the American Nightmare. As I will attempt to illustrate, these references to the American Dream represent an intertextual dialogue with Hunter S. Thompson's *Fear and Loathing In Las Vegas* (1972), a connection that supports the importance of the parenthesis in *Inherent Vice*. However basic, comparisons to Thompson's novel have been drawn by several reviewers of Pynchon's text.<sup>10</sup> The parallels between the two are both thematic and plot-related. At a primary level, the novels have as protagonists 'Doctors,' in the loosest possible sense of the word. Sportello, in *Inherent Vice*, earned his nickname in his youth due to his use of a syringe as a prop to frighten debtors, working as a 'skip-tracer trainee' for 'Gotcha! Searches and Settlements'

---

<sup>9</sup> Dante Alighieri, *Inferno*, trans. Michael Palma (London: W.W. Norton, 2002), 52, Canto V, lines 86 and 89.

<sup>10</sup> See Art Winslow, 'Inherent Vice: Thomas Pynchon's Psychedelic California Dream,' *Chicago Tribune*, August 1, 2009 and Aravind Adiga, 'Inherent Vice,' by Thomas Pynchon,' *The Times*, July 23, 2009.

(IV 51). Raoul Duke, on the other hand, claims to be 'a doctor of journalism,'<sup>11</sup> the validity of which cannot be confirmed. Both characters are imbued with humour and both have legal advisors as sidekicks, Sauncho Smilax, who works 'for a maritime law firm' (IV 26), the counterpart of Thompson's 'Doctor Gonzo.'<sup>12</sup> The two novels have at their heart a drug-addled, paranoia-filled journey to Las Vegas, which takes the form of a quest, and they both subvert genre: one the hard-boiled detective novel, the other objective documentary journalism. At a thematic level, these novels dissect the corpse of the American Dream, or what their respective protagonists envisage as being the American Dream.<sup>13</sup> Their own vision of this ideal stresses the freedom of the individual, emphasising the over-indulgent aspects of freedom and promise, as opposed to material prosperity and harmonious conventionality. These two characters' delusory assessment of their era can be construed as a form of blind, complacent optimism: '[t]here was a fantastic universal sense that whatever we were doing was right, that we were winning.'<sup>14</sup> In fact, the blunt, purely monosyllabic statement made by Captain America/Wyatt in the 1969 film *Easy Rider* is a far more accurate appraisal: 'We blew it.'

*Fear and Loathing* employs the image of a wave as parenthesis demarcating the end of the 1960s: 'So now,' the narrator tells us, 'less than five years later, you can go up on a steep hill in Las Vegas and look West, and with the right kind of eyes you can almost see the high-water mark – that place where the wave finally broke and rolled back.'<sup>15</sup> The inevitability of the end of the era is implied in the unavoidable breaking of the wave. It is the very thrust and strength of the wave that ultimately betrays it, forcing it to break: 'We had all the momentum,' Thompson writes, 'we were riding the crest of a high and beautiful wave....'<sup>16</sup> The

---

<sup>11</sup> Hunter S. Thompson, *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream* (New York: Vintage, 1998), 19.

<sup>12</sup> Thompson, *Fear and Loathing*, 24

<sup>13</sup> Regardless of how progressive Sportello and the narrator of *Inherent Vice* may sound, the description of paradise we are given is rather antiquated, if not archaic, with the text seeming to borrow from English poet Thomas Gray's eloquent description of the Lake District when it declares: 'What's this? What unsuspected paradise? Did God with his finger trace out and bless this perfect little valley, intending it only for us?' (IV 343-4), which echoes Gray's 'Not a single red tile, no flaring gentleman's house, or garden walls / Break in upon the repose of this little unsuspected paradise: / But all is peace.' See Thomas Gray, quoted in William Ruddick, 'Thomas Gray's Travel Writing,' in *Thomas Gray: Contemporary Essays*, ed. William Hutchings and William Ruddick (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000), 142.

<sup>14</sup> Thompson, *Fear and Loathing*, 68.

<sup>15</sup> Ibid.

<sup>16</sup> Ibid.

notion that the very same force that empowers a subject is also what brings about its undoing calls to mind Marx's view of the nature of the ruling class: 'the rule of the bourgeois democrats will from the outset bear within it the seeds of its downfall.'<sup>17</sup> In *Vineland*, it is the very same drive that allows 24fps to break away from mainstream society that inescapably leads to the rupture and demise of the collective itself. Likewise, in *Gravity's Rainbow* the Rocket's 'ascent will be betrayed to Gravity' (GR 774). In *Inherent Vice* the action of the novel seems to come to a halt as the narrator describes 'a dope-smoking room with a huge 3-D reproduction in fiberglass of [Endo Period Japanese artist] Hokusai's famous *Great Wave off Kanagawa*, arching wall to ceiling to opposite wall, creating a foam-shadowed hideaway beneath the eternally suspended monster' (IV 125-126).

*The Great Wave off Kanagawa* has as its *studium*, to use Barthes' term, the wave itself, what we first notice and what attracts us to the woodblock print. The *punctum*, however, can be seen as either Mount Fuji in the distance (signalling the Nation and by extension the collective self), the three fishing boats (representing the individual and by implication the subjective self), or the nuances of the wave itself. Given that the first two possible *punctums* are dwarfed by the monolithic wave, I shall expand on its subtleties of form. Visually, it is strongly reminiscent of the 'seahorse tails' of a Mandelbrot set. Here the analogy is rich in suggestions, as fractals are a useful metaphor for many postmodern narrative devices, as is the case with *mise en abyme* and intertextuality. The fractal 'seahorse tail' wave presents a self-replication *ad infinitum*.<sup>18</sup> This colossal 'kahuna' (IV 46), formed of a plethora of miniature versions of itself, emphatically accentuates the idea of parentheses within larger parentheses that the novel presupposes, as the wave is, in *Inherent Vice*, employed as an ever-present and ominous reminder of the impending end of an era. The myriad of seemingly less important parentheses that can be found under the shadow of *The Great Wave off Kanagawa* can be seen as implying the bracket of historical narrative and prioritised histories. This image

---

<sup>17</sup> Karl Marx, *A Reader*, ed. Jon Elster (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986), 272. Winston Churchill's witticism on the differences between Capitalism and Socialism are also noteworthy: 'the inherent vice of Capitalism is the unequal sharing of blessings; the inherent vice of Socialism is the equal sharing of miseries' see Winston Churchill as quoted in Bill Adler, ed., *The Churchill Wit* (New York: Coward-McCann, 1965), 29.

<sup>18</sup> The image of the wave finds another echo in the textual whirlpool of Eldrano's anagrammatic name, as if we write down Leonard in the form of a circle, and read it backwards beginning with the E, we obtain his pseudonym. In this circular anagram, the letters are scrambled, but there is no chaos, only the controlled illusion of chaos.

also refers, on a more basic level, to the importance of the 'Great San Francisco Acid Wave,'<sup>19</sup> as its three-dimensionality and vivid colours call to mind the psychedelic art of this period. The wave presents itself as a surrogate for the parenthesis, echoing the master motif of the novel. Barthes describes, in *Camera Lucida*, the parenthesis as 'a micro-version of death'<sup>20</sup>; likewise, in *Inherent Vice*, the parenthesis represents both the beginning and the end of things, people, and eras. The irony, of course, is that the subtleties of the message in this image are lost on Sportello, who is more likely to think of these omens as 'diagrams [that are] kind of hip-looking' (IV 62), rather than portents of the dangers ahead. In addition to the *mise-en-abyme* of the fractal wave, there is the further level at which the scene can be read, as Sportello seems to stop for a moment in order to admire the artwork, the reader is given the chance to finally pause in order to admire the textwork,<sup>21</sup> where the background and the foreground of the novel merge into one, emphasising the thwarted, 'eternally suspended' potentiality for change of the 1960s.

Here *eternal suspension* evokes the everlasting postponement of an event, an otherwise ephemeral moment frozen in time, and even exclusion and ejection, three themes that resonate within the novel. Yet the phrase *eternally suspended* itself seems to hint towards either a socio-political or a metaphysico-aesthetic message. Or both. Mikhail Bakunin employs this locution in reference to 'a somewhat numerous class of honest but timid souls,' who do not necessarily agree with the rigid totalizing systems of Religion and Capitalism, yet who 'have neither the power nor the wish nor the determination to follow out their thought.' These timid souls are 'pale phantoms *eternally suspended* between heaven and earth . . . In public life these are known as bourgeois Socialists.'<sup>22</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, on the other hand, applies the expression to the unchanging quality of statues, which fulfil 'the paradox of an instant that endures without a future,' accentuating the tension between the ephemeral and the undying. 'Eternally,' he states, 'the smile of the Mona Lisa about to broaden will not broaden.' Likewise, the wave stands tall

---

<sup>19</sup> Thompson, *Fear and Loathing*, 68.

<sup>20</sup> Roland Barthes, *Camera Lucida: Reflections On Photography*, trans. Richard Howard (London: Vintage, 2000), 14.

<sup>21</sup> Another instance in which the narrative briefly comes to a halt is found in pages 167-168, during which another inhuman, bracket-like construction is described in detail: 'a six-story-high *golden fang*!'

<sup>22</sup> Michael Bakunin, *God and the State*, ed. Paul Avrich (Toronto: Dover, 1970), 17-18, emphasis added.

threatening, or perhaps promising, to break. But it will not break. 'An *eternally suspended* future floats around the congealed position of a statue like a future forever to come,'<sup>23</sup> Levinas affirms. When applied to the novel, Bakunin's words underline the shortcomings of the 1960s counterculture, showing the majority of its subscribers as little more than middle-class dilettantes, whereas Levinas perhaps takes the weight of agency away from them, presenting undeniable change as the endlessly delayed promise that is never fully broken, yet never fully kept. Whilst the former appears as more critical, when applied to the novel the latter posits an infinitely more disturbing fate, through juxtaposing the denial of agency with the perpetual suggestion of a utopian future that will never take place.

### **'We will never run out of you people'**

The novel's emphasis on the end of the era and its employment of the typographical and rhetorical parenthesis raise several questions. If something is parenthetical, it means that it can equally be both inserted and removed; I assert that the parenthesis as structuring device within this novel functions at a dually *logomorphic* level, on the one hand as visual motif and on the other in the concept of inclusion and exclusion. Within *Inherent Vice*, US reality is shown to be founded upon just such a tension between integration and marginalisation. Pynchon's work has long been in dialogue with the subject of racial, social, and political division in the US. From his early work within the short story form ('The Secret Integration,' 1964) to his rare forays into journalism ('A Journey into the Mind of Watts,' 1966), Pynchon's work engages time and again with issues of discrimination, marginalisation, and the countercultural. The vision of 1960s California offered to us in *Inherent Vice* is set against a backdrop of social and political upheaval which saw extensive racial tensions build up and erupt in the form the Watts Riots in LA, and similar unrest throughout the country. It was a decade marked by the Manson family murders, the Vietnam War abroad and Vietnam Protests at home, the height of the Cold War and the paranoia and red-baiting that came along with it. The community of *Inherent Vice*'s Gordita Beach is populated by a number of distinct marginalised, often countercultural, groups. Those featured most prominently, and which I will discuss, are African-Americans and Hippies, in addition to which

---

<sup>23</sup> Emmanuel Levinas, 'The Meanwhile' in *Collected Philosophical Papers*, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987), 9, emphasis added.

Pynchon can be seen to address the theme of otherness through the idiosyncrasies of Mickey Wolfmann, a Jewish entrepreneur.

Sportello belongs to one such marginalized groups: hippies. He sports a 'white-guy afro' (IV 12), has a preference for the psychedelic clothing of the day, and is most often depicted with a joint in his hand. Sportello's experience of marginalization is primarily explored through his relationship to the novel's main antagonist, LAPD Detective "Bigfoot" Bjornsen, and the many epithets he and others employ when addressing him: 'hippie scum' (IV 22), 'ball-less hippie draft dodger' (IV 23), "hippie freak" (IV 176), 'paranoid hippie' (IV 138), 'worthless hippie ass' (IV 22), among others. At the shooting range, Bjornsen even practices his aim shooting at images of Black, Chicano, and hippie figures (IV 269). The climate in which the novel takes place is one dominated by the notion of the hippie as a dangerous, rather than passive figure, having become – to some degree erroneously – equated with both communism *and* the Manson Family. Pynchon recurrently uses the figure of the hippie as the embodiment of anti-establishment sensibilities. This novel, more so than *Vineland* focuses on the persecution and derision experienced by this group during the period. What is defining about hippies as a marginalized group, however, is that this is always an elected identity.

Mickey Wolfmann represents an anomalous example of exclusion. Whilst hippies reject the Establishment in favour of – to some extent – *voluntary* marginalization, Wolfmann rejects his Jewish identity in order to be accepted by the Establishment. The Man and the little man – Pynchon's terms for a) those actively employed by the state to maintain the *status quo* and b) 'your average white L.A. taxpayer, registered voter, property owner, employed, stable, mortgaged and the rest'<sup>24</sup> – often turn the Other against itself. Wolfmann embodies the figure of the self-loathing Other:

"Westside Hochdeutsch mafia, biggest of the big, construction, savings and loans, untaxed billions stashed under an Alp someplace, technically Jewish but wants to be a Nazi, becomes exercised often to the point of violence at those who forget to spell his name with two *n*'s." (IV 7)

Wolfmann is coerced by the system to renounce his personal background and betray his cultural heritage. On a physical level, he embraces his own destruction,

---

<sup>24</sup> Thomas Pynchon, *A Journey into the Mind of Watts* (Westminster: Mouldwarp, 1983), 6.

surrounding himself with the Aryan Brotherhood and its Neo-Nazi rhetoric. At the level of the linguistic, he adds an extra *n* to his surname, nounally breaking his branch off the Wolfman family tree, denying his roots and reinventing himself. Wolfmann must shed much of his Otherness before he can be allowed into the Establishment. Yet, the moment he decides to seek atonement for his ruthless approach to capitalism by building homes to give away to the poor, to the dispossessed, he becomes a threat to the system and those keeping themselves busy perpetuating it. Extravagant charitable generosity, the text proposes, can be construed as a dramatic undermining of the principles of Capitalism and, thus, within the climate of the Cold War, interpreted as a pro-Communist gesture. Wolfmann is thus kidnapped and “deprogrammed,” causing him to abandon any philanthropic projects.

Tariq Khalil, on the other hand, represents an Other that the Establishment finds impossible to assimilate. The reason for this perceived impossible integration is shown to reside first and foremostly in the realm of the visual: the colour of Tariq's skin brings with it both social *invisibility* and an undesired heightened *visibility* in 1960s Los Angeles:

What made him unusual was, was he was a black guy. To be sure, black folks were occasionally spotted west of the Harbor Freeway, but to see one this far out of the usual range, practically by the ocean, was pretty rare. Last time anybody could remember a black motorist in Gordita Beach, for example, anxious calls for backup went out on all the police bands, a small task force of cop vehicles assembled, and roadblocks were set up all along Pacific Coast Highway. An old Gordita reflex, dating back to shortly after the Second World War, when a black family had actually tried to move into town and the citizens, with helpful advice from the Ku Klux Klan, had burned the place to the ground and then, as if some ancient curse had come into effect, refused to allow another house ever to be built on the site. (IV 14)

Here Pynchon offers a stark critique of the type of urban segregation that was a common feature of LA life during the period of the novel's setting. The first few lines of this section see the narrator adopt the tone of an ethnographer, or even a biologist, documenting the sighting of a particularly rare species. In addition to this, the passage sees Pynchon highlight a key process through which the rift between the included and the excluded is constructed: geographically.

This spatial, or geographical, enactment of racial tensions has been explored within Pynchon's work since the 1964 short story 'The Secret Integration,' which concerns the forcible rejection of a black family from a white neighbourhood. It is an issue he would come to further interrogate in his 1966 journalistic response to the Watts Riots:

'the panoramic sense of black impoverishment is hard to miss from atop the Harbor Freeway, which so many whites must drive at least twice every working day. Somehow it occurs to very few of them to leave at the Imperial Highway exit for a change, go east instead of west only a few blocks, and take a look at Watts. A quick look. The simplest kind of beginning. But Watts is country which lies, psychologically, uncounted miles further than most whites seem at present willing to travel.'<sup>25</sup>

Whereas in 'The Secret Integration' the first African-American family to relocate to Mingeborough, Massachussets, is intimidated and forced to move away, in 'A Journey into the Mind of Watts' Pynchon shows the consequences of the ghettoization of minorities, of the process of making invisible. This form of social invisibility is literalised within *Inherent Vice*, as illustrated in the following conversation between Tariq and Sportello:

'My old street gang. Artesia Crips. When I got out of Chino I went looking for some of them and found it ain't just them gone, but the turf itself.'  
'Far out. What do you mean, gone?'  
'Not there. Grindit up into li'l pieces. Seagulls all picking at it. Figure I must be trippin, drive around for a while, come back, everything's still gone.'  
'Uh-huh.' Doc typed, *Not hallucinating*.  
'Nobody and nothing. Ghost town. Except for this big sign, "Coming Soon on This Site," houses for peckerwood prices, shopping mall, some shit.'

(IV 16-17)

In these different treatments of socio-geographical segregation, Pynchon moves from the microscopic, community-based harassment of minorities to the macroscopic, State-endorsed gentrification of lower class neighbourhoods, gentrification being a byword for displacing the marginal. It is no coincidence that the white, male LA millionaires that inaugurate the plots of both *Inherent Vice* and Pynchon's 1966 *The Crying of Lot 49* have made their fortunes through property

---

<sup>25</sup> Pynchon, *A Journey into the Mind of Watts*, 4.

development and real estate. Pynchon depicts this problem as endemic and not solely the plight of African-Americans:

The long, sad history of L.A. land use... Mexican families bounced out of Chavez Ravine to build Dodger Stadium, American Indians, swept out of Bunker Hill for the Music Center, Tariq's neighborhood bulldozed aside for Channel View Estates. (IV 17)

Here Pynchon makes reference to what *Time* magazine, in 1964, called 'the most bitterly fought issue in the nation's most populous state,'<sup>26</sup> namely Proposition 14, an amendment to the California state Constitution intended to neutralize the Rumford Fair Housing Act, which protected racial minorities from experiencing discrimination when attempting to rent or purchase a property. This display of official disregard for the welfare of the disenfranchised is indicative of the heightened racial tensions that ultimately led to such events as the 1965 Watts Riots.

The repeated references to the Watts Riots in *Inherent Vice* highlight the eventual tragic repercussions of this type of geographical marginalisation, the effect of which LA would be forced to witness again almost three decades later in 1992. In the novel, physical marginalization takes place in the realm of urban geography, whereas at a psychical level discrimination is shown to be enacted in the linguistic sphere. Both contribute to the creation of the rift between inclusion and exclusion. The interplay of competing discourses is at the heart of readings of the Watts Riots, as illustrated by Spencer Crump: the subject of the riot is, we are told 'a delicate yet brutal one from many standpoints,'<sup>27</sup> and he is right not only in his characterisation of the topic as being both sensitive and monstrous, but also in his hinting at a plurality of standpoints. After all, these events are referred to by different commentators as the Watts *Riots*,<sup>28</sup> the Watts *Uprising*,<sup>29</sup> the Watts *Revolt*,<sup>30</sup> the Watts *Insurrection* (IV 17), even the Watts *Revolution*,<sup>31</sup> and –perhaps

---

<sup>26</sup> 'California: Proposition 14,' *Time*, September 25, 1964.

<sup>27</sup> Spencer Crump, *Black Riot in Los Angeles: The Story of the Watts Tragedy* (Los Angeles: Trans-Anglo Books, 1966), 11.

<sup>28</sup> The term *riots* is by far the most commonly employed designation, and is the term that Pynchon utilises in 'A Journey into the Mind of Watts.'

<sup>29</sup> Gerald Horne, *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s* (Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1995).

<sup>30</sup> Frances Stracey, 'Consuming the Spectacle: The Watts Revolt and a New Proletariat,' in *As Radical as Reality Itself: Essays on Marxism and Art for the 21st Century*, eds. Matthew Beaumont, Andrew Hemingway, Esther Leslie, 251-282 (Bern: Peter Lang, 2007).

<sup>31</sup> John C. Leggett, review of *Modern Social Movements: A Sociological Outline* by William Bruce

most accurately– the Watts *Tragedy*.<sup>32</sup> These discursive nuances are highlighted at various points in the novel, as this conversation between Tariq and Sportello highlights:

“Revenge for . . .?”

“Watts.”

“The riots.”

“Some of us say 'insurrection.' The Man, he just waits for his moment.”

(IV 17)

Halfway through the novel, we see a further linguistic characterization of the Watts Riots, as a character describes how 'the L.A. “police reserves” [...] joined up during the Watts clambake so they could play run-nigger-run and have it all be legal' (IV 195). Here Pynchon shows how the Establishment of the time attempts to belittle the importance of this act of social unrest by likening it to a lively outdoor party, whilst also hinting at the enjoyment taken by the police in employing brute force against the marginalized. A further example of the powerful role that language and metaphor play in the perpetuation of racial stereotype can be found in yet another description of the Watts Riots:

it spreads, like blood in a swimming pool, till it occupies all the volume of the day. And then maybe some playful soul shows up with a bucketful of piranhas, dumps them in the pool, and right away they can taste the blood. They swim around looking for what's bleeding, but they don't find anything, all of them getting more and more crazy, till the craziness reaches a point. Which is when they begin to feed on each other. (IV 208-209)

Here police officer “Bigfoot” Bjornsen equates the inhabitants of Watts to piranhas, stressing two points: firstly, the hunger, even ravenousness of those marginalized, whilst at the same time highlighting a second, even more disturbing notion: the racist conception of African-Americans as always on the verge of giving in to a primitive urge, seconds away from devolving into cannibalism, depicted as violent and aggressive, blood thirsty animals. They are externally defined as existing on the edge of humanity.

---

Cameron *American Sociological Review* 32, no. 1 (1967): 136.

<sup>32</sup> Crump, *Black Riot in Los Angeles*, (*passim*).

I will now examine what I perceive to be the novel's intermittent language of difference and segregation, exemplified in the recurrent phrase 'you people,' and the role it plays in the engendering of Otherness:

'You would've said no. You people all hate the FBI.'  
'What are you talking about, us people?' (IV 277)

Within the novel Pynchon illustrates the derogatory nature of the phrase 'you people,' which sees the marginalized subject become one out of many similar if not identical faceless persons, one of *them*. The term *you people* contains within it the implicit distinction between *us* and *them*. The latter phrase employs the language of conversion and confirmation, not strictly in religious terms; the persons alluded to by *us* are present undoubtedly, whereas those referred to as *them* are not necessarily there, and both terms imply plurality: one being exclusive, the other excluded. The phrase 'you people,' on the other hand, belongs to the language of confrontation, as the 'other' is unquestionably present and actively being addressed. The designation being employed to refer to the addressee is plural regardless of the number of addressees.

What offends in the phrase 'us and them' may well be the use of the word *and*, as it would seem to negate – at a first glance – the possibility of choice and the potential for mobility that the use of *or* in its stead could offer. In the phrase 'you people' what offends is the addition of the term *people*, which immediately pluralizes the otherwise possibly singular and innocuous *you*. The fact that the *you* is being verbally engaged and might be given an opportunity to reply should be enough for anyone to infer the individual's position as human subject, thus making the word *people* itself an insult, a mocking slight. Whereas the affront in 'us and them' is formed through the *disjunctional* relationship created by the *conjunction*, in 'you people' the insult is *nounal*. The inflammatory nature of the phrase 'you people' still persists, as can be illustrated in the case of 1992 presidential candidate Ross Perot, whose employment of the term whilst making an address to members of the National Association for the Advancement of Colored People caused him to drop out of the presidential race a few days later. Joseph H. Duff, president of the LA chapter of the N.A.A.C.P. succinctly captured the nature of the

affront: 'When he used the phrase "your people," he put up a big wall, and when he tried to tell us we're people, he made a big mistake. We know we're people.'<sup>33</sup>

*Inherent Vice* dramatizes the homogenizing effects of the phrase 'you people'. Within the text the construct 'you people' represents a proliferation of individuals who do not conform to the norms imposed by the Establishment. The discursive power of this phrase is shown to subsume all diverse identities under the label of subversive elements, Unamerican Americans, or simply generic Enemy; as Tariq concisely puts it: '[W]e come on in to be the next Japs' (IV 17). Pynchon highlights the Establishment's tendency to treat *all Others as the Same*. What makes all these racial, religious, and ideological minorities equal in the eyes of the dominant power structures is not an intrinsic quality, but rather an extrinsic one: it is not what, how, or who they are, but rather what they are not. They are not white. Or they are not Christian. Or they are not conservative. Or they are not middle-class. They do not conform to the assumed norm. Marginalised selves are depicted in the novel as essentially interchangeable and, thus, dispensable:

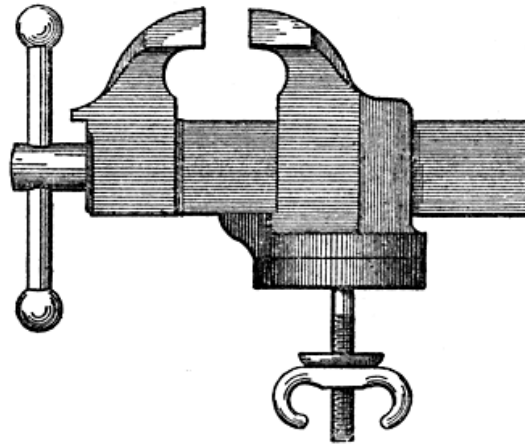
'It's about being in place. We-' gesturing around the Visitors' Bar and its withdrawal into seemingly unbounded shadow, "we're in place. We've been in place forever. Look around. Real estate, water rights, oil, cheap labor-all of that's ours, it's always been ours. And you, at the end of the day what are you? one more unit in this swarm of transients who come and go without pause here in the sunny Southland, eager to be bought off with a car of a certain make, model, and year, a blonde in a bikini, thirty seconds on some excuse for a wave-a chili dog, for Christ's sake.' He shrugged. 'We will never run out of you people. The supply is inexhaustible.' 'And you don't ever worry,' Doc grinned back cordially, 'that someday they'll all turn into a savage mob screamin around outside the gates of PV, maybe even looking to get in?' Shrug. 'Then we do what has to be done to keep them out. We've been laid siege to by far worse, and we're still here. Aren't we.' (IV 347)

In line with its parenthetical narrative emblem, *Inherent Vice* highlights the process through which American counter-identities are constructed through a process of inclusion and exclusion enacted on both geographic and linguistic levels.

---

<sup>33</sup> Joseph H. Duff quoted in Peter Applebome, 'The 1992 Campaign: Racial Politics: Perot Speech Gets Cool Reception at N.A.A.C.P.,' *New York Times*, July 12, 1992, 22.

## In Here in the Vise of History



*Fig. 2 – workbench vise*<sup>34</sup>

A reading of the central visual motif of the novel as a workbench vise closing in on the novel's protagonist, offers a visualisation of a key theme: the inevitability of the end. Not only is Sportello caught in a vise between antagonistic figures, such as “Bigfoot” Bjornsen and the Golden Fang, he is also facing the imminent end of his defining era: 'The Psychedelic Sixties' (IV 254). The notion of historical cycles is at the crux of *Inherent Vice*, particularly their beginnings and endings, and by implication the arbitrary nature of the subdivision between one era and another. 'One of the concerns frequently aroused by periodizing hypotheses,' Jameson proposes, 'is that these tend to obliterate difference and to project an idea of the historical period as massive homogeneity (bounded on either side by inexplicable chronological metamorphoses and punctuation marks).'<sup>35</sup> It is the countercultural fear of homogenisation, co-option, and assimilation that pervades in the text. Pynchon highlights the artificial division of time into ten year brackets and the assumption that cultural changes occur neatly within these units precisely by setting the novel several months into 1970, showing how the 1960s, for Sportello, clearly bled into the decade that followed. Bruce J. Schulman pinpoints the end of the 1960s as the year 1968. Philip Jenkins locates its conclusion 'with the

---

<sup>34</sup> James Slough Zerbe, *Practical Mechanics For Boys* (New York: M.A. Donohue, 1914), 16. Accessed May 15, 2010. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/22298/22298-h/22298-h.htm>.

<sup>35</sup> Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 3-4.

resignation of Richard Nixon in 1974.<sup>36</sup> Bill Thompson, manager of Jefferson Airplane, declared Altamont to be the end of 1960s.<sup>37</sup> Daniel Marcus suggests that, for the counterculture, the death of John Lennon 'registered as the final end of Sixties utopianism that had lingered through the 1970s.'<sup>38</sup> *Inherent Vice* proposes that the parenthesis of the 1960s finally closed on 8 May 1970, after the Los Angeles Lakers lost Game 7 of the NBA Championship finals, the day The Beatles released *Let It Be*, which would be their final LP, adding to the general sense of despondency and defeat that accompanied the end of the era.

It is not the end of days that preoccupies Sportello's mind, but rather a much more modest change. What concerns Sportello the most is the end of what the reader could safely assume has been his favourite decade, the 1960s: 'this little parenthesis of light, [that] might close after all, and all be lost, taken back into darkness...' (IV 254). Here the notion of darkness could imply either death, or going back into the womb, or – for that matter – an egg. The concept of a parenthesis closing as one era ends and another begins suggests both inclusion and exclusion, and the possibility of a premature *saeculum* of an artificial nature, as the world changes once more, making its old inhabitants obsolete from one day to the next. The vise of history, thus, is closing in on Sportello. In referring to the 1960s as a 'little parenthesis of light,' the narrator evokes the words of two anglophone poets from different eras, namely John Donne and Franz Wright.<sup>39</sup> 'This life is not a parenthesis,' Donne states, 'a parenthesis that belongs not to the sense, a parenthesis that might be left out, as well as put in.'<sup>40</sup> Whereas Donne's call for seriousness is of a religious nature, Sportello places his faith in the 1960s utopian project, which ultimately fails to fulfil its promises within its allotted timescale. In addition, Franz Wright in 'Twelve Camellia Texts,' from his 1995 collection of poems *Rorschach Test*, utilises the same construction in the following

---

<sup>36</sup> Bruce J. Schulman, *The Seventies: The Great Shift in Culture, Society, and Politics* (New York: Free Press, 2001), 4.

<sup>37</sup> LeRoy Ashby, *With Amusement for All: A History of American Popular Culture since 1830* (Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006), 410.

<sup>38</sup> Daniel Marcus, *Happy Days and Wonder Years: The Fifties and the Sixties in Contemporary Cultural Politics* (New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004), 74.

<sup>39</sup> Furthermore, one could potentially see this as a reference to Joel S. Goldsmith's 1963 work *A Parenthesis In Eternity*, a spiritual meditation on the ways in which Man can transcend his mundane existence. The title itself refers to the parenthesis of our lives, as opposed to 'the circle of eternity' (285). In this book, he writes that '[o]ne mystic,' who remains unnamed, 'described this life as "a parenthesis in eternity."' (100). This intertextual connection encapsulates the optimistic pseudo-spiritualism of the era depicted in *Inherent Vice*. See Joel S. Goldsmith, *A Parenthesis In Eternity* (New York: HarperCollins, 1986).

<sup>40</sup> John Donne, *The Works of John Donne* (London: John W. Parker, 1739), 160.

manner:

No one has seen the invisible rainbow  
arc of your fall

Long haired star of the peripheral Vision

All we imagine but cannot perceive  
or believe in  
or instantly forget

Our own life *a parenthesis*  
*of light*

then abrupt transition  
to an unknowing

where dark ascension  
and falling  
are one and the same<sup>41</sup>

Wright's poem foregrounds the ephemeral nature of events and acknowledges the artificiality of Man's segmentation of time: his role in the universe is far smaller than he would like to believe it is. The novel strives to prevent the 'rainbow arc' of Sportello's fall from going unnoticed. In foregrounding Sportello's 'peripheral' narrative, *Inherent Vice* is a form of counter-history.

The notion of alternative histories, or for that matter alternative readings of the one same history, is by no means alien to Pynchon's novels. *Inherent Vice* stresses this subject, going as far as describing 'a vortex of corroded history' (*IV* 110), echoing perhaps Michael Herr's 'poison history'<sup>42</sup>, and mentioning 'years of history forbidden to civilians' (*IV* 272), as well as depicting – on the other hand – an idealised prelapsarian world as one 'before written history' (*IV* 109). In line with my conceptualisation of the closing workbench vise, history appears as an oppressive and corrupting force in the novel, that inspires mistrust in those willing to question its authority. Furthermore, the novel describes history as an old LP, which implies a certain degree of circularity to history or, even, when we consider the LP's spiral groove, 'a vortex of corroded history'. Moreover, this visualisation of history in material form leaves open the possibility of the LP of history getting

---

<sup>41</sup> Franz Wright, *Earlier Poems* (New York: Knopf, 2007), 200, emphasis added.

<sup>42</sup> Michael Herr, *Dispatches* (London: Pan Macmillan, 1977), 41.

damaged or scratched, and thus skipping: 'as if some stereo needle had been lifted and set back down on some other sentimental oldie on the compilation LP of history' (IV 262). The fact that history is an oldies' LP implies that it is *always* old, and one has already heard it before. An LP is quite literally the actual record of an event, it immortalises sound at the very instant in which it is emitted; however, a 1960s compilation LP represents the edited, 'official' version of a specific decade, a version which foregrounds a particular canon and reasserts a distinct hierarchy. This edited version is produced retrospectively and not without a certain bias. Whilst the first can be seen as a primary source, even an artefact dating to the event, the latter is a secondary source at best, if not tertiary, further mediated and watered down. Through the metaphor of 'the compilation LP of history,' *Inherent Vice*, in line with much of the author's oeuvre, suggests that history is always reductive and often unreliable. The medium specificity of history is emphasised throughout the novel not only in its conceptualisation as an LP, but more importantly as text: 'The glow in the sky over Las Vegas withdrew, as if into a separate "page right out of history," as the Flintstones might say' (IV 235). In presenting history in material, perishable form, the novel destabilises its position as an authoritative discourse. The novel itself takes the form of hard-boiled detective fiction,<sup>43</sup> a fact Bigfoot acknowledges in the text (IV 33): hard-boiled, like an egg. The interrelation of form and content can therefore be evidenced if we consider the materiality of detective fiction and, more widely, the book form itself. Inherent vice is also 'a phrase librarians use to describe the acidity of chemically processed wood-pulp paper, the manufacturing toxin that supposedly burns through old books, turns the interior pages yellowish brown, and makes them brittle'.<sup>44</sup> Hence, the term can refer to the 'format specificity' of the genre into which Pynchon is working, alluding to the ephemeral, if not disposable, nature of pulp fiction. There is a comparison to be made between the fact that new books are often literally created from the pulped carcasses of older books, and the postmodern principle of intertextuality, whereby new narratives are constructed through the influence of and references to previous works of literature, as is the case with *Against the Day's* genre-poaching. Furthermore, like an ageing, fragile

---

<sup>43</sup> Reviewers for *The Times*, *The New Yorker*, *New Statesman*, *Times Literary Supplement*, *The Globe and Mail*, and even *Rolling Stone* magazine make reference to this fact.

<sup>44</sup> Lucas Hilderbrand, *Inherent Vice: Bootleg Histories of Videotape and Copyright* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2009), 6.

book, Sportello feels he is on the verge of obsolescence. As his decade comes to an end, Sportello sees his world disappear. As Crocker Fenway informs the protagonist: 'We will never run out of you people. The supply is inexhaustible,' referring to him as one of the 'swarm of transients' (IV 347). The ephemeral nature of this novel's genre mirrors one of the principal themes of the narrative: the End of the 1960s.

The theme of historical cycles, encapsulated by the 'LP of history', is a recurrent motif in *Inherent Vice*, a form of repetition that appears to take place in perpetuity, thus again calling to mind the punishments of Dante's *Inferno*. This notion of an inevitable and possibly perpetual cycle of suffering is further emphasised by the '[l]ong, sad history of L.A. land use' (IV 17) and 'the [Los Angeles Police] Department's long sorrowful history of corruption and abuse of power' (IV 66). Evildoers in the guise of law-enforcers are a constant source of fright and humour in the novel: 'You could catch the FBI in the act of sodomizing the president in the Lincoln Memorial at high noon and local law enforcement would still just have to stand around and watch, getting more or less nauseated depending which president' (IV 282). The text is, furthermore, 'swarming with [...] strange alternate cop history and cop politics – cop dynasties, cop heroes and evildoers, saintly cops and psycho cops, cops too stupid to live and cops too smart for their own good' (IV 137). A further example of this 'alternate [official] history' can be found in the text in the form of 'CIA Nixonhead funnymoney' (IV 286). This 'Nixonizing [of] U.S. Currency' (IV 118) represents a Conservative attempt at rewriting history, distinct in that this constitutes an instance of rewriting in advance: securing President Richard Nixon a place alongside the nation's Founding Fathers. The ludicrousness of this attempt is obvious to 21<sup>st</sup> Century readers who are aware of Nixon's eventual undoing.

The description of memory in the novel, like that of history, is certainly ambiguous. On the one hand it is described in mostly pejorative terms. Doc is sent 'off down the Toilet of Memory' (IV 297), and goes 'stumbling through his city dump of a memory' (IV 163). 'Out of the permanent smog alert [Doc] liked to think of as his memory, something [at certain points begins] to emerge—a rumor,' (IV 66). Memory, however, would be the only way for mankind to break away from a constant repetition of the same historical patterns, since, as George Santayana eloquently states in what has sadly become a cliché, '[t]hose who cannot

remember the past are condemned to repeat it.'<sup>45</sup> '[T]he Doper's Memory factor' (IV 318) plays a crucial role in this tension between what is and what could be: 'As well as he [can] with a doper's memory, Doc recall[s]' names, stories, and details (IV 36). Even "Bigfoot" Bjornsen, Doc's nemesis, is 'all too aware of the memory lapses you people [hippies] must constantly struggle with' (IV 203). It is the fact that the antagonists in the novel, representing the forces of evil, possess an awareness of this weak spot that allows it to perpetuate itself. Thus, Puck Beaverton deceptively tells Doc moments before betraying him that it '[h]elps to have a bad memory sometimes' (IV 317), knowing perfectly well that it does not:

Yet there is no avoiding time, the sea of time, the sea of memory and forgetfulness, the years of promise, gone and unrecoverable, of the land almost allowed to claim its better destiny, only to have the claim jumped by evildoers known all too well, and taken instead and held hostage to the future we must live in now forever. May we trust that this blessed ship is bound for some better shores, some undrowned Lemuria, risen and redeemed, where the American fate, mercifully, failed to transpire. . . (IV 341)

Yet, throughout, the feelings the text expresses towards remembering and forgetting –or disremembering– are ambivalent: 'they're suffering, or do I mean blessed, with heavy Doper's Memory' (IV 86). The subject of memory is fundamental to our understanding of the novel, but to understand the dichotomy between the suffering and the blessing of memory, we must analyse the character of Bigfoot. Bigfoot's obsession with bananas can be seen as an allusion to Samuel Beckett's one-act play *Krapp's Last Tape* (1958) that resolutely examines the human conception of recollections and their ultimate failure to enable man to define himself, or even fix his own subjective self into a well-defined identity. In the play, the protagonist is shown endlessly listening to recordings he has made in the past, as he tries to establish a permanent *persona* for himself, a quest he ultimately fails to fulfil. In *Inherent Vice*, memory is suggested in two different ways.

History is shown in *Inherent Vice* as perpetually repeating itself, as on the one hand the Establishment constantly endeavours to perpetuate itself as the predominant social power. On the other hand, the Sixties counterculture

---

<sup>45</sup> George Santayana, 'Introduction and Reason in Common Sense' in *The Life of Reason; Or, The Phases of Human Progress*, Vol. 1 (London: Archibald Constable, 1906), 284.

awkwardly attempts to seize power, and ultimately fails. When Santayana states that '[t]hose who cannot remember the past are condemned to repeat it,' he is, of course, referring to those who actually *wish* to keep history from repeating itself. In the novel, Sportello and the countercultural movement he symbolises are represented, in this respect, as both metaphorically and literally forgetful. Bigfoot, however, and by extension the Establishment manage to retain power by remembering. Bjornsen for example is fully aware of the tradition of law-enforcers to which he belongs. He collects barbed wire, we are told, 'along with spurs, harness[es], cowboy sombreros, saloon paintings, sheriffs' stars, bullet molds, all kinds of Wild West paraphernalia' (IV 24). Bigfoot praises the history of the law-enforcing canon, regretfully stating that 'people forget' (IV 48). The same notion of memory that Santayana posits, thus, can either represent '[a] suffering or [a] bless[ing]' (IV 86), as Sportello perhaps unknowingly reveals to the reader. Whilst the counterculture assumes that the cycle will be broken on its own at some point, the Establishment is hard at work to maintain the *status quo*, as it endeavours to perpetuate itself as the predominant social power. The text seems to be critiquing this notion of hope inasmuch as it breeds inaction and indolence. Knowledge of events past, which the counterculture fails to assimilate, would be absolutely necessary for the grip of the Establishment to be loosened.

Sportello offers an alternative system, however impractical, for documenting the past, whilst counteracting the reductive nature of history, as well as its unreliability: 'sometimes I'd like to have one [Polaroid] for every minute. Rent, like, a warehouse?' (IV 42). For this project to represent an unbiased method for recording the past, everyone on Earth would require such a warehouse. The impossibility of this project, therefore, becomes apparent. The futility of the endeavour is further compounded within the text itself: 'Polaroids,' we are told, 'have no negatives and the life of the prints is limited' (IV 42). Instantaneity, the defining feature of Polaroids, is also their inherent vice. In spite of its shortcomings, Sportello's unrealised proposal calls to mind Walter Benjamin's third thesis on the Philosophy of History:

A chronicler who recites events without distinguishing between major and minor ones acts in accordance with the following truth: nothing that has ever happened should be regarded as lost for history. To be sure, only a redeemed mankind receives the fullness of its past –

which is to say, only for a redeemed mankind has its past become citable in all its moments. Each moment it has lived becomes a *citation à l'ordre du jour* – and that day is Judgment Day.<sup>46</sup>

Here Benjamin posits the idea that it is only with total hindsight that mankind will be able to make an educated assessment of the past. All other attempts at doing so prior to that point will be merely provisional. This thesis also asserts the importance of every single instant, suggesting, in line with Donne, that nothing in life is parenthetical. It is an anxiety regarding the possibility of the bracketing and subsequent removal of the 1960s counterculture from history that pervades the novel.

As Paul Kantner, co-founder of Jefferson Airplane, famously stated, '[i]f you can remember anything about the sixties, you weren't really there.'<sup>47</sup> In the text this notion is implicitly present throughout in the form of Sportello's 'heavy Doper's Memory' (IV 86). Moreover, it is explicitly referenced in the Summer 2009 Penguin Press catalogue entry for *Inherent Vice*.<sup>48</sup> On the one hand, this conception of 1960s memory appears to be self-defeatist in that it undermines all eyewitness accounts of the decade, leaving its legacy at the mercy of reductionist editors, or even official censors. In forfeiting its voice, the 1960s counterculture allows external spokespersons to construct their narrative, thus passively consenting to '[t]he conservative attempt to erase the Sixties,'<sup>49</sup> which is perhaps Sportello's greatest fear. On the other hand, the relinquishment of self-definition can be seen to liberate the decade from the constraints of historical narrative. In voiding all primary accounts of the 1960s, this proclamation pre-empts and hinders the corruption of the decade's history. If we read Kantner's words as a self-sacrificial gesture, rather than the natural result of excess, the counterculture could be seen as attempting to destabilise the position of history as an authoritative discourse.

*Inherent Vice* begins to question the parameters under which we conceptualise history, through a critique of periodization. The novel explores the

---

<sup>46</sup> Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, trans. Harry Zorn, ed. Hannah Arendt (London: Pimlico, 1999), 246.

<sup>47</sup> Ben Agger, *The Sixties at 40: Leaders and Activists Remember and Look Forward* (Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2009), 1.

<sup>48</sup> 'In this lively yarn,' the catalogue reads, 'Thomas Pynchon, working in an unaccustomed genre, provides a classic illustration of the principle that if you can remember the sixties, you weren't there . . . or . . . if you were there, then you . . . or, wait, is it . . . ' see 'Penguin Press Summer 2009.' *Penguin UK*. Web. 11 January 2010, 28.

<sup>49</sup> Marcus, *Happy Days and Wonder Years*, 74.

human anxiety regarding the End of Days, which appears to stem not simply from an apocalyptic fear, but more tellingly from a perverse desire to bear witness to the End.<sup>50</sup> This desire could be seen as a possible reason behind the apparently arbitrary manner in which historical narrative segments and brackets the otherwise unbroken flow of Time into manmade units through periodization. Decades allow humans to experience first-hand the beginnings and endings denied to them by their relative insignificance within the larger bracket of the grand narrative of mankind.

### **‘Him Not the Golden Fang of Furious Heaven’**

As the end of the era approaches, Sportello feels the impending doom of uncertainty looming over his days. The novel seems to highlight the tension between the subcategories that sprout from historical taxonomies and a kind of grand narrative of mankind, by juxtaposing the importance that the end of a minor era such as the 1960s has to such an unexceptional individual as Sportello. The notion of a grand narrative of mankind is alluded to through both the constant textual references to Lemuria and the recurrence of ‘the Golden Fang’ (IV 87) in the novel. Lemuria represents the beginnings of mankind. This lost continent was first postulated as a hypothesis explaining why lemurs could be found in land masses separated by oceans, prior to the discovery of the tectonic plates in the lithosphere: ‘[A]ll through history,’ we are told, ‘islands in the Pacific Ocean have been rising and sinking [...] repeating a karmic loop as old as the geography of those oceans’ (IV 101-109). In the 19<sup>th</sup> Century, however, the pseudo-scientific discourse from where it originated was appropriated by the spirituo-esoteric discourse of Madame Blavatsky, who was allegedly revealed the secrets of the origins of mankind by holy men. According to her book *The Secret Doctrine*, the Third Root Race –from which man descends– comes from Lemuria and is particular in that it is ‘egg-born.’<sup>51</sup> ‘The Golden Fang,’ on the other hand, can be seen as a reference to the final days of mankind depicted in Edna St. Vincent Millay’s poem ‘Epitaph For The Race of Man.’ The poem details man’s tendency to be complacent towards the precariousness of his survival and continued

---

<sup>50</sup> In other words, we have already missed the Beginning, thus the only way in which we can confirm our presumed individual historical importance is for the End to take place during our lifetime, and thus enabling us to avoid becoming but a minor footnote. The evident paradox being that there would be no-one left to receive an eyewitness account of the Apocalypse.

<sup>51</sup> Helena Petrovna Blavatsky, *The Secret Doctrine: Vol. 3* (Wheaton: Quest, 1993), 131.

supremacy over nature and other men. The poem places the fault of man's demise in no hands other than his own:

Him not the *golden fang* of furious heaven,  
Nor whirling Aeolus on his awful wheel,  
Nor foggy specter ramming the swift keel,  
Nor flood, nor earthquake, nor the red tongue even  
Of fire, disaster's dog—him, him bereaven  
Of all save the heart's knocking, and feel  
The air upon his face: not the great heel  
Of headless Force into the dust has driven.<sup>52</sup>

Likewise, in *Inherent Vice* the Golden Fang appears as an oppressive, semi-mythical, faceless entity that is, however, ultimately not to blame for the ills of society. Kanagawa and 'sunken cities' are, after all, also featured in Millay's poem.<sup>53</sup> As is the case with the wave, which contains within it the root of its own obliteration, so too is human nature man's inherent vice: 'You shall achieve destruction where you stand, / In intimate conflict, at your brother's hand. / Alas for Man, so stealthily betrayed, / Bearing the bad cell in him from the start.'<sup>54</sup> The implied references to *The Secret Doctrine* and 'Epitaph for the Race of Man,' thus, configure the great Hokusai-like parentheses of history, demarcating both the dawn of mankind, as in the case of Madame Blavatsky's Lemuria, and its ultimate demise, symbolised by the bracket-shaped Golden Fang of the swan song to humanity offered by Millay, the Golden Fang that mankind, in the poem, and the counterculture, in the novel, wish to blame for their own shortcomings. The world Sportello knows is, therefore, but a minor parenthesis within this larger set of brackets.

Parentheses, Edward Said tells us, 'emphasize the proleptic as well as . . . recapitulatory aspects'<sup>55</sup> of the body they inhabit. Prolepsis refers in rhetoric to the anticipation and pre-emptive responses to possible counter-arguments, as a means to strip them of strength. It can also be in its adjective form taken to mean 'projected backwards in time,' (*OED*) in specific reference to dates 'calculated

---

<sup>52</sup> Edna St. Vincent Millay, *Collected Poems* (New York: Harper & Brothers, 1956), 714, emphasis added.

<sup>53</sup> Millay, *Collected Poems*, 708 and 714.

<sup>54</sup> *Ibid.*, 715-716.

<sup>55</sup> Edward W. Said, *Beginnings: Intention and Method* (New York: Basic Books, 1975), 166. In this instance, Said is referring specifically to typographical devices in Freud's written work, but I believe his observations to apply to the very nature of the concept of parentheses as well.

retrospectively using a dating system not in use at the specified point in time' (*OED*). This is of particular significance to *Inherent Vice*, a novel about the tail end of the 1960s published near the end of the first decade of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Nostalgia, neither reviewers<sup>56</sup> nor critics<sup>57</sup> have failed to notice, is at the crux of the novel, particularly in its elegiac, or for that matter eulogy-like, tone. '[T]he parentheses on the printed page represent the mechanisms of disguise and repression,'<sup>58</sup> and it is in this same way that *Inherent Vice* assimilates the emblem of the parenthesis as its organisational device. Parentheses traditionally incorporate that which can be omitted or excluded from the sentence that contains it, without altering the sentence's meaning. The revolutionary activities of the 1960s have been bracketed and therefore neutralised within America's official history. The counterculture of the 1960s was incorporated into mainstream America in the decades that followed, the result of which can be evidenced in *Vineland*, for instance, where the counterculture appears as a spent force. Those elements of the counterculture that resist incorporation are, eventually, excluded and ultimately disappear. Thus, as the parenthesis of light is extinguished in *Inherent Vice*, the novel asserts that the window of opportunity for real change in the 1960s has now been closed, padlocked, and boarded up. *Inherent Vice* establishes its structural emblem through an effect of representational accumulation, whereby similar images and themes are gradually embedded in the narrative, culminating in the mounting effect of the oval bracket-like icon. The arbitrary demarcation of historical time, with its beginnings and endings, is stressed by this powerful symbol of apposition and both inclusion and exclusion.

The end of the novel, with its 'convoy of unknown size,' which Sportello joins, 'each car keeping the one ahead at taillight range, like a caravan in a desert of perception, gathered awhile for safety in getting across a patch of blindness'<sup>59</sup> (*IV*

---

<sup>56</sup> See Sarah Churchwell, 'There are More Quests than Answers,' review of *Inherent Vice* by Thomas Pynchon, *Observer*, July 26, 2009; Andy Martin, '*Inherent Vice*, by Thomas Pynchon,' *Independent*, July 31, 2009; David Flusfeder, '*Inherent Vice*, by Thomas Pynchon,' *New Statesman*, July 30, 2009.

<sup>57</sup> See Thomas Hill Schaub, '*The Crying of Lot 49* and other California novels,' In *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Pynchon*, edited by Inger H. Dalsgaard, Luc Herman and Brian McHale, 30-43. (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012), 41; Simon de Bourcier, *Pynchon and Relativity* (London: Continuum, 2012), 42.

<sup>58</sup> Said, *Beginnings*, 166. Here the sentence continues: 'not only by virtue of their presence, but also, paradoxically, by their delayed appearance.'

<sup>59</sup> This is reminiscent of a passage in Robert Nye's 1967 novel *Doubtfire*: 'the writing on the other side of the night . . . living metaphors travelling across the desert of perception, making marks in the white sand for no caravan to follow,' see Robert Nye, *Doubtfire* (London: Calder and Boyars, 1967), 182.

368) brings to mind Julio Cortázar's 1966 short story 'La autopista del sur' ('The Southern Thruway'). Pynchon was, after all, very much aware of Cortázar's work and describes himself as an 'Argentinophile, if not maniac.'<sup>60</sup> In Cortázar's narrative a large number of daytrippers returning to Paris from the South are caught in a monumental traffic jam that lasts for days. As they wait, the drivers form, at first, connections with one another and, eventually, small communities where possessions and responsibilities are shared. Finally, the traffic clears, and every driver returns to his car and proceeds towards Paris as if nothing had happened. We can read this as a prophetic note on the subsequent fate of the communal spirit of the 1960s counterculture. Tending to be a metropolitan phenomenon, traffic congestion occurs when the units in circulation (cars, trains, airplanes, pedestrians) push the capacity of the space allowed by the network (roads, railways, air routes, sidewalks or passageways) beyond its infrastructural limits. In the case of Cortázar's short story, the inadequacy of the network and its inability to permit freedom of movement to its users, the motorists, can be read as the capitalist system's failure (or unwillingness) to concede space to the counterculture and radical movements of the 1960s. Similarly, Pynchon's novel ends with Sportello driving in the fog, blindly following the car immediately ahead, perhaps a symbol of a return to conformity, as all cars fall in line. The connection to Cortázar's story is further compounded by Sportello's fantasy of the drivers on the freeway attending a yearly meeting in the future to 'remember the night they set up a temporary commune to help each other home through the fog' (*IV* 368). The novel here literalizes the idea that the official America, anxious to leave the 1960s behind, leaves Sportello lost in the fog. Even though the drivers in *Inherent Vice* are still showing signs of camaraderie, one cannot help but wonder how long it would take for them to drive they own way once the fog clears.

---

<sup>60</sup> Samuel Thomas, 'The Gaucho Sells Out: Thomas Pynchon and Argentina,' *Studies in American Fiction* 40, no. 1 (2013): 58.



*Fig. 3 – End (still from Inherent Vice promotional video)*

## Epilogue

### *At the Bleeding Edge of Narrative*

Through the interplay between the theme of paranoia and the interpretive possibilities of the titles of Pynchon's novels, the texts examined throughout this thesis draw our attention to the synoptic and epithetic potential of a work of art's title. The titles of Pynchon's narratives display a tendency to encapsulate certain structural features of the text as a whole, presenting themselves as *mise en abyme* micronarratives of the works they denote. Through their liminal condition (as they are located somewhere between paratext, peritext, and text), titles stand simultaneously beside, around, and *in* the text. Throughout this work, I have discussed Pynchon's novels through the lens of the titular statement, developing new interpretations of the novels' conceptual structures that, I hope, will further the long-standing dialogue on the subject within Pynchon studies. I have attempted to give a panoramic view of the existing scholarly perspectives on Pynchon's narrative structures, often finding correspondences in seemingly disparate readings of his novels, whilst at the same time suggesting my own original interpretations of the texts' narrative emblems.

I have proposed that this model for reading may shed light on the texts' structural frameworks, whilst attending to the author's recurrent themes, as elucidated by several generations of scholars. Rather than claiming that my own interpretations of these novels are definitive, I have attempted to place them alongside and in conversation with preexisting critical views, for he '[w]ho claims Truth, Truth abandons' (*M&D* 350). The purpose of this thesis has been to pick up and expand upon what most critics discuss only in passing: the importance of the titles of Pynchon's novels.

The taxonomy of narrative structures detailed in my introduction, I believe, successfully negotiates between different approaches at our conception of narrative. Positing spatial, temporal, symbolic, and intertextual methods of literary elucidation adjacent to each other, instead of presenting them in stark opposition, this taxonomy has allowed me to read each of Pynchon's novels both as part of the

author's ever expanding body of work and as individual artworks whose uniqueness need not be subsumed under a restrictive, totalizing theme, instead taking as a starting point each novel's epithetic title. This method has the potential to suggest new avenues through which to reinterpret Pynchon's more widely studied texts, as well as those that have been neglected by comparison, avenues that manifested themselves due to the placing of critical focus on the works' titles and their implied narrative emblems. In Chapters 1 and 2, I read *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow* in line with the textual complementarity originally suggested by Tanner: as he puts it, 'V. and V-2.' In this bipartite section, I drew parallels between the V-trajectory that structures *V.* and the parabolic path of the V-2 rocket, of Slothrop, and of the novel's conception of history in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Reading the incompletable journey to the womb and the female absence in the former against the unavoidable path to the tomb and the ever-presence of the male in the latter, I posited that the structure of the *V.-Gravity's Rainbow* gender diptych is chiastic: X. In Chapter 3, I read *The Crying of Lot 49* as the 'variorum' (CL49 6) it undoubtedly is, paying special attention to the notion of the unreadable sign, a theme I explored through mummy narrative intertextualities, the text of the city (traffic signs) and the city as text. I proposed that the novel's structure spells out that which its protagonist seeks, unbeknownst to Oedipa, in a manner analogous to the way in which the protagonists of *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow* unknowingly trace paths that are V-shaped and parabolic, respectively. In Chapter 4, *Vineland* was also read through its title, in this case firstly through its implied titular refusal to refer to America by its current name but, instead, by its mythical one, and secondly by examining the vine-like networks that proliferate throughout the narrative, paying special attention to the tension between familial and official networks, and to the seemingly omnipresent notion of the televisual network, haunted as it is – in my conception of the novel – by the specter of Reagan. *Mason & Dixon*, examined in Chapter 5, I read in relation to both the concept of the line and the typographical mark of the ampersand. Negotiating between the oppositional discourses around which the novel is constructed, I read the novel as being ampersandic in shape. Chapter 6 took photography as the entry point through which *Against the Day* was analyzed, considering its structural implications stemming from the photographic term *contre-jour*, suggested by its title. In Chapter 7, I examined the parenthesis (or bracket) as narrative emblem of *Inherent Vice*, playing on the dominant theme of

the end of the era in the novel and a possibly authorial pun on the word *vise/vice*. The readings I have presented of Pynchon's novels fall predominantly into the categories of *logomorphic* and *topomorphic* structures. Notably, three of the *logomorphic* structures are of typographical nature, seeming to literalise the author's preoccupation with the *sign*: the letter V, the ampersand, and the parenthesis. Conversely, the landscape that structures Pynchon's *topomorphic* narratives is most often America itself.

This thesis has attempted to observe these novels from above, as the Chums of Chance contemplate the world in *Against the Day*, in the hope of isolating each narrative's master motif(s) in the intersection between narrative structure and theme. Reading for structures and pattern in Pynchon is undeniably a fool's errand, yet one all his readers must eventually undertake. Pynchon's texts simultaneously demand and dismiss pattern recognition. The reader, therefore, tiptoes their way through the narrative, aware of the fact that both interpretive alternatives will lead to a hermeneutic abyss: either reading too little, or reading too much. Engaging with Pynchon's encyclopedic work inevitably involves choosing to err on the side of over-reading, taking a pleasurable plunge into the abyss, as it were. It is not accidental that his characters recurrently discuss the pervasive presence of patterns and organizational structures, but instead an invitation to the reader to engage in paranoid reading.

This is not mere hypotyposis, nor is it ekphrasis, although admittedly a similar dynamic takes place. Not exactly iconotexts, the novels I have discussed in this thesis represent the novelistic equivalent of concrete or pattern poetry, as they are engineered narratives structured around their master emblems. Each novel returns time and again to the image (temporal, spatial, conceptual, or intertextual) suggested by its title, successive readings of the text each time reinforcing a titular-structural connection. As Forster asserts, without the 'geometrical simile' of a novel's narrative shape, without this overarching sense of pattern in the text, 'the story, the plot, and the characters [...] would none of them exert their full force, they would none of them breathe as they do.'<sup>1</sup>

With the recent publication of Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge* (2013), his first novel set in the post-9/11 landscape of the still adolescent 21<sup>st</sup> century, and the imminent release of Paul Thomas Anderson's film adaptation of *Inherent Vice*, the

---

<sup>1</sup> Forster, *Aspects of the Novel*, 150-151.

body of Pynchon's work grows and continues to interact with our contemporary world, remaining at the forefront of American fiction. It is only logical to assume that Pynchon's tacit incursion into Hollywood will increase the already substantial size of his readership, as well as increasing the interest in his work and its scholarly analysis. In light of these recent additions to the Pynchon canon, new work remains to be done in relation to the organizational devices of Pynchon's narratives. Moreover, having isolated and identified a number of texts that evince a similar correlation between their engineered narrative structures and their titles, I believe this same critical approach could be implemented in the analysis of a wide range of texts, bringing about valuable new interpretations of both canonical and emerging texts, with ramifications beyond the realm of American literature. Whilst the title is normally regarded as the mere threshold one must cross to enter the text, the model undertaken in this thesis proposes that – instead of hastily disregarding the title – we pause and contemplate it, attending to its capacity to guide us through the text.

## Works Consulted

- Adams, Robert M. 'Dynamic Duos.' *The Sewanee Review* 86, no. 4 (1978): 527-538.
- Adiga, Aravind. 'Inherent Vice, by Thomas Pynchon.' *The Times*, July 23, 2009.
- Adler, Bill. ed. *The Churchill Wit*. New York: Coward-McCann, 1965.
- Adorno, Theodor W. *Notes to Literature: Volume Two*. Edited by Rolf Tiedemann and translated by Shierry Weber NicholSEN. New York: Columbia University Press, 1992.
- *Aesthetic Theory*. Translated by Robert Hullot-Kentor. London: Continuum, 2004.
- Agger, Ben. *The Sixties at 40: Leaders and Activists Remember and Look Forward*. Boulder: Paradigm Publishers, 2009.
- Albrecht, Donald. 'Dr. Caligari's Cabinets: The Set Design of Ken Adam.' In *Architecture and Film*, edited by Mark Lamster, 117-127. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2000.
- Aledort, Andy. 'The Heart of Texas: SRV Gets Out of Rehab and Gives a Clearer Perspective on His Work.' In *Guitar World Presents Stevie Ray Vaughan*. Milwaukee: Hal Leonard, 1998.
- Alighieri, Dante. *Inferno*. Translated by Michael Palma. London: W.W. Norton, 2002.
- Antal, Frederick. 'The Moral Purpose of Hogarth's Art.' *Journal of the Warburg and Courtauld Institutes* 15 (1952): 169-97.
- Apollinaire, Guillaume. *Calligrammes: Poems of Peace and War (1913-1916)*. Translated by Anne Hyde Greet. London: University of California Press, 2004.
- Applebome, Peter. 'The 1992 Campaign: Racial Politics; Perot Speech Gets Cool Reception at N.A.A.C.P.' *New York Times*, July 12, 1992.
- Arnstein, Joel. *The International Dictionary of Graphic Symbols*. London: Century Publishing, 1983.
- Ashby, LeRoy. *With Amusement for All: A History of American Popular Culture since 1830*. Lexington: University Press of Kentucky, 2006.
- Bakhtin, Mikhail M. *The Dialogic Imagination: Four Essays*. Edited by Michael Holquist and translated by Caryl Emerson. Austin: University of Texas Press, 1982.

- Bakunin, Michael. *God and the State*. Edited by Paul Avrich. Toronto: Dover, 1970.
- Barthes, Roland. *Image, Music, Text*. Translated by Stephen Heath. London: Fontana Press, 1993.
- *Camera Lucida: Reflections On Photography*. Translated by Richard Howard. London: Vintage, 2000.
- Bazin, André. 'The Ontology of the Photographic Image.' Translated by Hugh Gray. *Film Quarterly* 13, no. 4 (1960): 4-9.
- Benjamin, Walter. 'The Work of Art in the Age of Mechanical Reproduction.' In *Illuminations*, translated by Harry Zorn and edited by Hannah Arendt, 211-235. London: Pimlico, 1999.
- Berger, James. 'Cultural Trauma and the "Timeless Burst": Pynchon's Revision of Nostalgia in *Vineland*.' *Postmodern Culture* 5, no. 3 (1995): n.p. Accessed August 30, 2013. DOI: 10.1353/pmc.1995.0020.
- *After the End: Representations of Post-Apocalypse*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999.
- Berger, Marilyn. 'Ronald Reagan Dies at 93: Fostered Cold-War Might and Curbs on Government.' *New York Times*, June 6, 2004.
- Berressem, Hanjo. *Pynchon's Poetics: Interfacing Theory and Text*. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1993.
- Bersani, Leo. 'Pynchon, Paranoia, and Literature.' *Representations* 25 (1989): 99-118.
- Betts, Edwin Morris. *Thomas Jefferson's Garden Book*. Charlottesville: Thomas Jefferson Memorial Foundation, 1999.
- The Bible: Authorized King James Version*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
- Bjork, Rebecca S. *The Strategic Defense Initiative: Symbolic Containment of the Nuclear Threat*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1992.
- Blavatsky, Helena Petrovna. *The Secret Doctrine*. Vol. 3. Wheaton: Quest, 1993.
- Bloom, Harold. ed. *Modern Critical Interpretations: Thomas Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow*. New York: Chelsea House, 1986.
- *Modern Critical Views: Thomas Pynchon*. New York: Chelsea House, 1986.
- *Bloom's Major Novelists: Thomas Pynchon*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2003.
- *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Thomas Pynchon*. Philadelphia: Chelsea House, 2003.

- Bloom, Harold, Paul de Man, Jacques Derrida, Geoffrey Hartman and J. Hillis Miller. *Deconstruction and Criticism*. London: Continuum, 2004.
- Bordwell, David. 'Happily Ever After, Part Two.' *The Velvet Light Trap: Review of Cinema* 19 (1982): 2-7.
- Borges, Jorge Luis. 'Death and the Compass.' In *Collected Fictions*, translated by Andrew Hurley, 147-156. New York: Penguin, 1998.
- Botting, Fred. *Sex, Machines and Navels: Fiction, Fantasy and History in the Future Present*. Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999.
- Braga, Brannon and Ronald D. Moore. *Star Trek: First Contact*. DVD. Directed by Jonathan Frakes. 1996; Los Angeles: Paramount, 2000.
- Bordwell, David. 'Happily Ever After, Part Two', *The Velvet Light Trap: Review of Cinema* 19 (1982): 2-7.
- Booker, M. Keith. 'America and its Discontents: The Failure of Leftist Politics in Pynchon's *Vineland*.' *LIT: Literature Interpretation Theory* 4, no. 2 (1993): 87-99.
- Boyd, Brian. *Vladimir Nabokov: The American Years*. New Jersey: Princeton University Press, 1993.
- Bukofzer, Manfred F. *Music in the Baroque Era: From Monteverdi to Bach*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2007.
- Bulson, Eric. *Novels, Maps, Modernity: The Spatial Imagination, 1850-2000*. London: Routledge, 2009.
- Bumas, E. Shaskan. 'The Utopian States of America: The People, the Republic, and Rock and Roll in Thomas Pynchon's *Vineland*.' *Arizona Quarterly* 51, no. 3 (1995): 149-175.
- Burn, Stephen J., "'Webs of Nerves Pulsing and Firing": *Infinite Jest* and the Science of Mind.' In *A Companion to David Foster Wallace Studies*, edited by Marshall Boswell and Stephen J. Burn, 59-86. New York: Palgrave, 2013.
- Burt, Daniel S., ed. *The Chronology of American Literature: America's Literary Achievements from the Colonial Era to Modern Times*. Houghton Mifflin Harcourt, 2004.
- Caesar, Terry P. 'A Note on Pynchon's Naming.' *Pynchon Notes* 5 (1981): 5-10.
- "'Take Me Anyplace You Want": Pynchon's Literary Career as a Maternal Construct in *Vineland*.' *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction* 25, no. 2 (1992): 181-199.
- 'California: Proposition 14.' *Time*. September 25, 1964.

Calvino, Italo. *Six Memos for the Next Millennium*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1988.

Carroll, Lewis. *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland*. London: Macmillan, 1968.

——— *Through the Looking Glass, and What Alice Found There*. London: Macmillan, 1971.

Carroll, Michael Thomas. *Popular Modernity in America: Experience, Technology, Mythohistory*. Albany: State University of New York Press, 2000.

Cazzato, Luigi. *Generi, recupero, dissoluzione: L'uso del giallo e della fantascienza nella narrativa contemporanea*. Roma: Schena, 1999.

Chaffe, William H. *Private Lives / Public Consequences: Personality and Politics in Modern America*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005.

Chatman, Seymour. *Story and Discourse: Narrative Structure in Fiction and Film*. London: Cornell University Press, 1993.

Chisholm, Roderick M. *Person and Object: A Metaphysical Study*. London: Routledge, 2004.

Churchwell, Sarah. 'There are More Quests than Answers.' Review of *Inherent Vice* by Thomas Pynchon. *Observer*, July 26, 2009.

Ciccoricco, David. *Reading Network Fiction*. Alabama: University of Alabama Press, 2008.

Clark, Michael. *Paradoxes from A to Z*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. New York: Routledge, 2007.

Clerc, Charles. 'Film in *Gravity's Rainbow*.' In *Approaches to Gravity's Rainbow*, edited by Charles Clerc, 103-151. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1983.

Cockburn, Andrew. 'Gun Crazy.' *American Film: Magazine of the Film and Television Arts* 11, no. 3 (1985): 49-52.

Coffman, Christopher K. 'Bogomilism, Orphism, Shamanism: The Spiritual and Spatial Grounds of Pynchon's Ecological Ethic.' In *Pynchon's Against the Day: A Corrupted Pilgrim's Guide*, edited by Jeffrey Severs and Christopher Leise, 91-114. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011.

Cohen, Samuel. 'Mason & Dixon & the Ampersand.' *Twentieth-Century Literature* 48, no. 3 (2002): 264-291.

——— *After the End of History: American Fiction in the 1990s*. Iowa: University of Iowa Press, 2009.

Collado-Rodríguez, Francisco. 'From Science to Terrorism: The Transgressing Function of Energy in Pynchon's *Against the Day*.' In *Against the Grain: Reading*

- Pynchon's Counternarratives*, edited by Sascha Pöhlmann, 323-347. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010.
- Collins, John. *Musicmakers of West Africa*. Boulder: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 1985.
- Colville, Georgiana M. M. *Beyond and Beneath the Mantle: On Thomas Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49*. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 1988.
- Copestake, Ian D. ed. *American Postmodernity: Essays on the Recent Fiction of Thomas Pynchon*. Bern: Peter Lang, 2003.
- Cortázar, Julio. *Todos los Fuegos el Fuego*. Buenos Aires: Editorial Sudamericana, 1966.
- Couturier, Maurice. 'The Death of the Real in The Crying of Lot 49.' *Pynchon Notes* 20-21 (1987): 5-29.
- Cowart, David. 'Cinematic Auguries of the Third Reich in *Gravity's Rainbow*.' *Literature/Film Quarterly* 4, no. 6 (1978): 364-370.
- *Thomas Pynchon: The Art of Allusion*. Carbondale and Edwardsville: Southern Illinois University Press, 1980.
- 'The Luddite Vision: Mason & Dixon.' *American Literature* 71, no. 2 (1999): 341-363.
- *Thomas Pynchon & The Dark Passages of History*. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2012.
- Crump, Spencer. *Black Riot in Los Angeles: The Story of the Watts Tragedy*. Los Angeles: Trans-Anglo Books, 1966.
- Dalsgaard, Inger H. "'Perchance to Dream'": Clock Time and Creative Resistance in *Against the Day*.' In *Against the Grain: Reading Pynchon's Counternarratives*, edited by Sascha Pöhlmann, 81-96. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010.
- 'Readers and Trespassers: Time Travel, Orthogonal Time, and Alternative Figurations of Time in *Against the Day*.' In *Pynchon's Against the Day: A Corrupted Pilgrim's Guide*, edited by Jeffrey Severs and Christopher Leise, 115-137. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011.
- Danson, Edwin. *Drawing the Line: How Mason and Dixon Surveyed the Most Famous Border in America*. New York: John Wiley & Sons, 2002.
- Davis, Miles. *Miles, The Autobiography*. London: Simon & Schuster, 1989.
- de Certeau, Michel. *The Practice of Everyday Life*. Translated by Steven Rendall. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2011.
- de Zwaan, Victoria. '*Gravity's Rainbow* as Metaphoric Narrative: Film, Fairy Tale and Fantasy in Pynchon's Germany.' *Pynchon Notes* 54-55 (2008): 154-168.

- Denyer, Ralph. *The Guitar Handbook*. London: Pan Macmillan, 1992.
- Derrida, Jacques. 'Before the Law.' In *Acts of Literature*, edited by Derek Attridge, 181-220. New York: Routledge, 1992.
- . *Of Grammatology*. Translated by Gayatri Chakravorty Spivak. Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1997.
- . *Dissemination*. Translated by Barbara Johnson. London: Continuum, 2004.
- Dickson, David. *The Utterance of America: Emersonian Newness in Dos Passos' U.S.A. and Pynchon's Vineland*. Göteborg: Acta Universitatis Gothoburgensis, 1998.
- doCarmo, Stephen N. 'History, Refusal and the Strategic-Essentialism Politics of Pynchon's *Vineland*.' *Pynchon Notes*, 44-45 (1999): 173-194.
- Doniger, Wendy. *The Woman Who Pretended to Be Who She Was: Myths of Self-Imitation*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2004.
- Donne, John. *The Works of John Donne*. London: John W. Parker, 1739.
- Doyle, Arthur Conan. 'Lot No. 249.' In *The Great Keinplatz Experiment, and Other Tales of Twilight and the Unseen*, 170-224. New York: George H. Doran, 1919.
- . 'The Ring of Thoth.' In *The Great Keinplatz Experiment, and Other Tales of Twilight and the Unseen*, 139-162. New York: George H. Doran, 1919.
- Dr. Strangelove, or, How I Learned to Stop Worrying and Love the Bomb*. DVD. Directed by Stanley Kubrick. 1964; Los Angeles: Columbia Pictures, 2001.
- Dugdale, John. *Thomas Pynchon: Allusive Parables of Power*. London: Macmillan, 1990.
- Duyfhuizen, Bernard. 'Taking Stock: 26 Years since *V*.' *NOVEL: A Forum on Fiction*, 23, no. 1 (1989): 75-88.
- . 'Reading at the "Crease of Credulity."' In *Pynchon and Mason & Dixon*, edited by Brooke Horvarth and Irving Malin, 132-142. London: Associated University Presses, 2000.
- Earl, James W. 'Freedom and Knowledge in the Zone.' In *Approaches to Gravity's Rainbow*, edited by Charles Clerc, 229-250. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1983.
- Easy Rider*. DVD. Directed by Dennis Hopper. 1969; Los Angeles: Columbia Pictures, 1999.
- Eddins, Dwight. *The Gnostic Pynchon*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990.

Edgerton, Gary R. *The Columbia History of American Television*. New York: Columbia University Press, 2007.

Edwards III, George C. *On Deaf Ears: The Limits of the Bully Pulpit*. New Haven: Yale University Press, 2003.

Eisenberger, Kenneth. *The Expert Consumer: A Complete Handbook*. Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1977.

Faulkner, Raymond O., trans. *The Ancient Egyptian Book of the Dead*. Edited by Carol Andrews. London: British Museum Press, 2008.

Faulkner, William, Benjamin E. Mays and Cecil Sims. *The Segregation Decisions: Papers Read at a Session of the Twenty-First Annual Meeting of the Southern Historical Association, Memphis, Tennessee, November 10, 1955*. Forward by Bell I. Wiley. Georgia: Southern Regional Council, 1956.

Feferman, Anita Burdman and Solomon Feferman. *Alfred Tarski: Life and Logic*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004.

Ferry, Anne. *The Title of the Poem*. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1996.

Fisher, W. J. "Lot 49", *Farce in One Act*. London: Samuel French, 1888.

FitzGerald, Frances. *Way Out There In the Blue: Reagan, Star Wars and the End of the Cold War*. New York: Simon & Schuster, 2001.

Flusfeder, David. 'Inherent Vice, by Thomas Pynchon.' *New Statesman*. July 30, 2009.

Forster, E. M. *Aspects of the Novel*. New York: Harcourt, 1985.

Fowler, Douglas. *A Reader's Guide to Gravity's Rainbow*. Ann Arbor: Ardis, 1980.

Francavilla, Joseph, 'Disching It out: An Interview with Thomas Disch.' *Science Fiction Studies* 12, no. 3 (1985): 241-251.

Frank, Joseph. *The Idea of Spatial Form*. London: Rutgers University Press, 1991.

Freud, Sigmund. 'Fetishism.' In *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works of Sigmund Freud*, Vol. XXI. Translated and edited by James Strachey, 152-157. London: Hogarth Press, 1971.

——— 'The Uncanny.' In *Writings on Art and Literature*. Translated and edited by James Strachey, 193-233. Palo Alto: Stanford University Press, 1997.

Fuller, Wayne Edison. *Morality and the Mail in Nineteenth-Century America*. Baltimore: University of Illinois Press, 2003.

Genette, Gérard. *Paratexts: Thresholds of Interpretation*. Translated by Jane E. Lewin. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1997.

Goldsmith, Joel S. *A Parenthesis in Eternity*. New York: HarperCollins, 1986.

Gómez-Peña, Guillermo. 'Border culture: the multicultural paradigm.' In *The Decade show: Frameworks of Identity in the 1980s*, 93-103. Exh. cat., Los Angeles and New York: Museum of Contemporary Hispanic Art, New Museum of Contemporary Art, and Studio Museum of Harlem, 1990.

Gordon, Andrew. 'Smoking Dope with Thomas Pynchon: A Sixties Memoir.' In *The Vineland Papers: Critical Takes on Pynchon's Novel*, edited by Geoffrey Green, Donald J. Greiner, and Larry McCaffery, 167-178. Normal: Dalkey Archive Press, 1994.

Greenberg, Alvin. 'The Underground Woman: An Excursion into the V-ness of Thomas Pynchon.' *Chelsea* 27 (1969): 58-65.

Greenblatt, Stephen. 'Towards a Poetics of Culture.' *Southern Review* 20, no. 1, (1987): 3-15.

Grim, William E. "'Good-bye, Columbus": Postmodern Satire in *Vineland*.' In *The Vineland Papers: Critical Takes on Pynchon's Novel*, edited by Geoffrey Green, Donald J. Greiner and Larry McCaffery, 154-160. Normal: Dalkey Archive Press, 1994.

Grmusa, Lovorka Gruic. '(Post)utopian Vineland: Ideological Conflicts in the 1960s and the 1980s.' *European Journal of American Studies* 2 (2010): n.p. Accessed August 30, 2013. <http://ejas.revues.org/8833>.

Gussow, Mel. 'Pynchon's Letters Nudge His Mask.' *New York Times*, March 4, 1998.

Haferkamp, Leyla. "'Particle or Wave?": The Function of the Prairie in *Against the Day*.' In *Against the Grain: Reading Pynchon's Counternarratives*, edited by Sascha Pöhlmann, 307-322. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010.

Hayles, N. Katherine. "'Who was saved?": Families, Snitches, and Recuperation in Pynchon's *Vineland*.' In *The Vineland Papers: Critical Takes on Pynchon's Novel*, edited by Geoffrey Green, Donald J. Greiner and Larry McCaffery, 14-30. Normal: Dalkey Archive Press, 1994.

Hall, Anthony J. *American Empire and the Fourth World*. Montreal: McGill-Queen's University Press, 2005.

Harris, Charles B. *Passionate Virtuosity: The Fiction of John Barth*. Baltimore: University of Illinois Press, 1983.

Hart, George. *The Routledge Dictionary of Egyptian Gods and Goddesses*. London: Routledge, 2005.

Haughton, Hugh. 'The Purloined Title: Contemporary Irish Poems on Paintings.' In *Seeing and Saying: Self-Referentiality in British and American Literature*, edited by Gohrbandt, Detlev, and Bruno von Lutz. Frankfurt: Peter Lang, 1998.

Haynes, Doug. "Gravity Rushes Through Him": Volk and Fetish in Pynchon's Rilke.' *Modern Fiction Studies* 58, no. 2 (2012): 308-333.

Hendin, Josephine. *Vulnerable People: A View of American Fiction Since 1945*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1978.

Herodotus. *The Histories*. Translated by Aubrey de Sélincourt. London: Penguin, 2003.

Herr, Michael. *Dispatches*. London: Pan Macmillan, 1977.

Herring, Phillip F. *Joyce's Uncertainty Principle*. Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1987.

Hilderbrand, Lucas. *Inherent Vice: Bootleg Histories of Videotape and Copyright*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2009.

Hinds, Elizabeth Jane Wall. 'Thomas Pynchon, Wit, and the Work of the Supernatural.' *Rocky Mountain Review* 54, no. 1 (2000): 23-40.

——— ed. *Mason & Dixon* in *The Multiple Worlds of Pynchon's Mason & Dixon: Eighteenth-Century Contexts*. Rochester: Camden House, 2009.

Hite, Molly. "'Holy-Center-Approaching" in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon.' *The Journal of Narrative Technique* 12, no. 2 (1982): 121-129.

——— *Ideas of Order in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon*. Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1983.

——— 'Feminist Theory and the Politics of *Vineland*.' In *The Vineland Papers: Critical Takes on Pynchon's Novel*, edited by Geoffrey Green, Donald J. Greiner and Larry McCaffery, 135-153. Normal: Dalkey Archive Press, 1994.

Hobsbawm, Eric. *The Age of Empire: 1875-1914*. London: Abacus, 1989.

Hogarth, William. *The Analysis of Beauty*. London: W. Strahan, 1772.

Hohmann, Charles. *Thomas Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow: A Study of Its Conceptual Structure and of Rilke's Influence*. Bern: Peter Lang, 1987.

——— *Angel and Rocket: Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow and Rilke's Duino Elegies*. Norderstedt: Books on Demand, 2009.

Hollander, Charles. 'Pynchon's Politics: The Presence of an Absence.' *Pynchon Notes* 26-27 (1990): 5-59.

——— 'Pynchon, JFK and the CIA: Magic Eye Views of *The Crying of Lot 49*.' *Pynchon Notes*, 40-41 (1997): 61-106.

Hollander, John. *Vision and Resonance: Two Senses of Poetic Form*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1975.

Horne, Gerald. *Fire This Time: The Watts Uprising and the 1960s*. Charlottesville and London: University Press of Virginia, 1995.

Housman, A. E. *A Shropshire Lad*. Boston: International Pocket Library, 1989.

Howard, Gerald. 'Rocket Redux: Gerald Howard on *Gravity's Rainbow*: Remembered, Reread, Reconsidered.' *Bookforum* 12, no. 2 (2005): 29-32, 36-40.

Hume, Kathryn. 'Views from Above, Views from Below: The Perspectival Subtext in *Gravity's Rainbow*.' *American Literature* 60, no. 4 (1988): 625-642.

——— 'The Religious and Political Vision of *Against the Day*.' In *Pynchon's Against the Day: A Corrupted Pilgrim's Guide*, edited by Jeffrey Severs and Christopher Leise, 167-189. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011.

Hunt, John W. 'Comic Escape and Anti-Vision: *V.* and *The Crying of Lot 49*.' In *Critical Essays on Thomas Pynchon*, edited by Richard Pearce, 32-41. Boston: G.K. Hall, 1981.

Hutchings, William, and William Ruddick, eds. *Thomas Gray: Contemporary Essays*. Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2000.

Ickstadt, Heinz. 'Setting Sail Against the Day: The Narrative World of Thomas Pynchon.' In *Against the Grain: Reading Pynchon's Counternarratives*, edited by Sascha Pöhlmann, 35-47. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010.

Ingram, John Henry. *The Haunted Homes and Family Tradition of Great Britain*. London: Reeves, 1905.

Irwin, John T. *American Hieroglyphics: The Symbol of the Egyptian Hieroglyphics in the American Renaissance*. London: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1983.

Jameson, Fredric. *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism*. Durham: Duke University Press, 1991.

Jantzen, Grace. *Power, Gender and Christian Mysticism*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996.

Jeffords, Susan. 'The Reagan Hero: Rambo.' In *The War Film*, edited by Robert Eberwein, 140-154. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2005.

Jenkins, Philip. *Decade of Nightmares - The End of the Sixties and the Making of Eighties America*. Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Johnston, John. 'Toward the Schizo-Text: Paranoia as Semiotic Regime in *The Crying of Lot 49*.' In *New Essays on Pynchon's The Crying of Lot 49*, edited by Patrick O'Donnell, 47-78. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991.

Jordal, Preben. 'The Savage Flower – reading Pynchon reading Rilke.' In *Blissful Bewilderment*, edited by Anne Mangel and Rolf Gaasland, 103-123. Oslo: Novus, 2002.

Jordan, Julia, 'Autonomous automata: opacity and the fugitive character in the modernist novel and after.' In *The Legacies of Modernism: Historicising Postwar and Contemporary Fiction*, edited by David James, 96-113. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Jung, C. G. *Symbols of Transformation*. Translated by R. F. C. Hull and edited by Sir Herbert Read, Gerhard Adler, and Michael Fordham. London: Routledge, 1956.

Kearney, Michael. 'Borders and Boundaries of State and Self at the End of Empire.' *Journal of Historical Sociology* 4, no. 1 (1991): 53-74.

Keller, Morton. *America's Three Regimes: A New Political History* New York: Oxford University Press, 2009.

Kermode, Frank. 'The Use of the Codes.' In *The Art of Telling: Essays on Fiction*, 72-91. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1983.

Kerry, Grant, J. *A Companion to The Crying of Lot 49*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Edition. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2008.

Kipen, David. 'America's Own Line: Surveying *Mason & Dixon*.' *Thomas Pynchon*. (1997): n.p. Accessed September 30, 2012.  
<http://www.thomaspynchon.com/mason-dixon/reviews/dkipen.html>.

Kittler, Friedrich. *Gramophone, Film, Typewriter*. Translated by Geoffrey Winthrop-Young and Michael Wutz. Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999.

Knuth, Leo. 'A Bathymetric Reading of Joyce's *Ulysses*, Chapter X.' *James Joyce Quarterly* 9, no. 4 (1972): 405-422.

Kohn, Robert E. 'Seven Buddhist Themes in Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*.' *Religion & Literature* 35, no. 1 (2003): 73-96.

Kolbuszewska, Zofia. *The Poetics of the Chronotope in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon*. Lublin: Learned Society of the Catholic University of Lublin, 2000.

Kopp, Manfred. *Triangulating Thomas Pynchon's Eighteenth-Century World: Theory, Structure, and Paranoia in Mason & Dixon*. Essen: Die Blaue Eule, 2004.

Krauss, Rosalind E. *The Originality of the Avant-garde and Other Modernist Myths*. Cambridge: MIT, 1986.

Lakoff, Sanford and Herbert F. York. *Shield in Space?: Technology, Politics, and the Strategic Defense Initiative*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989.

Laqueur, Thomas. *Making Sex: Body and Gender from the Greeks to Freud*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1990.

Lauter, Paul, ed. *A Companion to American Literature and Culture*. Chichester: Wiley-Blackwell, 2010.

Lavezzoli, Peter. *The Dawn of Indian Music in the West*. London: Continuum, 2007.

Leggett, John C. Review of *Modern Social Movements: A Sociological Outline* by William Bruce Cameron. *American Sociological Review* 32, no. 1 (1967): 136.

Lévy, Clément. 'As Far as Pynchon "Loves Cameras."' In *Against the Grain: Reading Pynchon's Counternarratives*, edited by Sascha Pöhlmann, 157-166. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010.

Levinas, Emmanuel. 'The Meanwhile.' In *Collected Philosophical Papers*, translated by Alphonso Lingis. Dordrecht: Martinus Nijhoff, 1987.

Lesko, Barbara S. *The Great Goddesses of Egypt*. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1999.

Lhamon, W. T. *Deliberate Speed: The Origins of a Cultural Style in the American 1950s*. Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 2002.

Lindner, Christopher, ed. *Urban Space and Cityscapes: Perspectives from Modern and Contemporary Culture*. London: Routledge, 2006.

Logan, William. 'Back to the Future: On Thomas Pynchon's *Against the Day*.' *The Virginia Quarterly Review* 83, no. 3 (2007): 226-247.

Luke, Timothy W. *Screens of Power: Ideology, Domination, and Resistance in Informational Society*. Baltimore: University of Illinois Press, 1990.

Lytle, Mark Hamilton. *America's Uncivil Wars: The Sixties Era from Elvis to the Fall of Richard Nixon*. New York: Oxford University Press, 2006.

Mackey, Douglas A. *The Rainbow Quest of Thomas Pynchon*. San Bernardino: Borgo Press, 1980.

Mackey, Louis. 'Thomas Pynchon and the American Dream.' *Pynchon Notes* 14 (1984): 7-22.

——— 'Paranoia, Pynchon, and Preterition.' In *Modern Critical Interpretations: Thomas Pynchon's Gravity's Rainbow*, edited by Harold Bloom, 53-67. New York: Chelsea House, 1986.

Madsen, Deborah. *The Postmodernist Allegories of Thomas Pynchon*. Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1991.

Maiorino, Giancarlo. *First Pages: A Poetics of Titles*. University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 2008.

Malin, Irving. 'Foreshadowing the Text.' In *Pynchon and Mason & Dixon*, edited by Brooke Horvarth and Irving Malin, 27-42. London: Associated University Presses, 2000.

Maragos, Georgios. 'Moving Images: Light-Capturing Technologies, Reality, and the Individual in Thomas Pynchon's Twentieth Century.' In *Thomas Pynchon & the (De)Vices of Global (Post)Modernity*, edited by Zofia Kolbuszewska 177-193. Lublin: KUL, 2012.

Marcus, Daniel. *Happy Days and Wonder Years: The Fifties and the Sixties in Contemporary Cultural Politics*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 2004.

Martin, Andy. 'Inherent Vice, by Thomas Pynchon.' *Independent*, July 31, 2009.

Marx, Karl. *A Reader*. Edited by Jon Elster. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1986.

Matsumoto, David, ed. *The Cambridge Dictionary of Psychology*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009.

Mattessich, Stefan. *Lines of Flight: Discursive Time and Countercultural Desire in the Work of Thomas Pynchon*. Durham: Duke University Press, 2002.

McCalla, James. *Twentieth-Century Chamber Music*. London: Routledge, 2003.

McHale, Brian. 'Mason & Dixon in the Zone.' In *Pynchon and Mason & Dixon*, edited by Brooke Horvarth and Irving Malin, 43-62. London: Associated University Presses, 2000.

——— *Postmodernist Fiction*. London: Routledge, 2001.

——— *Constructing Postmodernism*. London, Routledge, 2001.

——— *The Obligation Toward the Difficult Whole: Postmodernist Long Poems*. Tuscaloosa: University of Alabama Press, 2004.

——— 'Genre as History: Pynchon's Genre-Poaching.' In *Pynchon's Against the Day: A Corrupted Pilgrim's Guide*, edited by Jeffrey Severs and Christopher Leise, 15-28. Newark: University of Delaware Press, 2011.

McLuhan, Marshall. *Understanding Media: The Extensions of Man*. Cambridge: MIT Press, 1994.

Medoro, Dana. 'Menstruation and Melancholy.' In *Thomas Pynchon: Reading from the Margins*, edited by Niran Abbas, 71-90. Madison: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003.

Menand, Louis. 'Soft-Boiled,' review of *Inherent Vice*, by Thomas Pynchon. *New Yorker*, August 3, 2009.

Mencken, H. L. 'Names for Americans.' *American Speech* 22, no. 4, (1947): 241-256.

Merleau-Ponty, Maurice. *The Visible and the Invisible*. Translated by Alphonso Lingis. Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1968.

Millard, William B. 'Delineations of Madness and Science: *Mason & Dixon*, Pynchonian Space and the Snovian Disjunction.' In *American Postmodernity: Essays on the Recent Fiction of Thomas Pynchon*, edited by Ian D. Copestake. Bern: Peter Lang, 2003.

Millay, Edna St. Vincent. *Collected Poems*. New York: Harper, 1956.

Miller, John. 'Present Subjunctive: Pynchon's California Novels.' *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 54, no. 3 (2013): 225-237.

Mobili, Giorgio. *Irritable Bodies and Postmodern Subjects in Pynchon, Puig, Volponi*. New York: Peter Lang, 2008.

Möckel-Rieke, Hannah. 'Media and Memory in Thomas Pynchon's *Vineland*.' *Amerikastudien / American Studies* 43, no. 1 (1998): 51-74.

Modley, Rudolf. *Handbook of Pictorial Symbols*. New York: Dover Publications, 1976.

Moreland, Richard C. *A Companion to William Faulkner*. Oxford: Blackwell Publishing, 2007.

Morris, Paul D. *Representation and the Twentieth-Century Novel: Studies in Gorky, Joyce and Pynchon*. Würzburg: Königshausen & Neumann, 2005.

Mooney, Ted. 'All Down the Line.' *The Los Angeles Times Book Review*, May 11, 1997.

Moore, Thomas. *The Style of Connectedness: Gravity's Rainbow and Thomas Pynchon*. Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987.

Laura Mulvey, *Death 24x a Second: Stillness and the Moving Image*. London: Reaktion, 2006.

Nabokov, Vladimir. *The Real Life of Sebastian Knight*. Harmondsworth: Penguin, 1995.

Newman, Robert D. *Understanding Thomas Pynchon*. Columbia: University of South Carolina Press, 1986.

Nicholson, C. E., and R. W. Stevenson. "'Words You Never Wanted to Hear": Fiction, History and Narratology in *The Crying of Lot 49*.' *Pynchon Notes* 16 (1985): 89-109.

Nye, Robert. *Doubtfire*. London: Calder and Boyars, 1967.

Olster, Stacey. 'When You're a (Nin)jette, You're a (Nin)jette All the Way—or Are You?: Female Filmmaking in *Vineland*.' In *The Vineland Papers: Critical Takes on*

*Pynchon's Novel*, edited by Geoffrey Green, Donald J. Greiner and Larry McCaffery, 119-134. Normal: Dalkey Archive Press, 1994.

Orwell, George. *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. New York: Plume, 2003.

Ostrander, Madeline. 'Awakening to the Physical World: Ideological Collapse and Ecofeminist Resistance in *Vineland*.' In *Thomas Pynchon: Reading from the Margins*, edited by Niran Abbas, 122-135. Cranbury: Fairleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003.

Peirce, Charles S. *Peirce on Signs: Writings on Semiotic*. Edited by James Hoopes. Chapel Hill: University of North Carolina Press Published, 1991.

Penguin UK. 'Penguin Press Summer 2009.' Accessed January 11, 2010. URL: <http://booksellers.dk.com/static/pdf/penguinpress-summer09.pdf>

Penguin Group. 'Penguin Promotional Video for *Inherent Vice*.' Accessed January 11, 2010. <http://www.us.penguinroup.com/nf/Book/BookDisplay/0,,9780143117568,00.html>.

Peterson, Merrill D. *The Jefferson Image in the American Mind*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 1998.

Phillipp, Claus, 'An Interview with Nikolaus Stingl, Translator of *Mason & Dixon*.' *Der Standard*, September 18, 1999. Translated by Erik Katzan, n.p.. Accessed on April 17, 2013. [http://www.themodernword.com/pynchon/Pynchon\\_stingl.html](http://www.themodernword.com/pynchon/Pynchon_stingl.html).

Plater, William M. *The Grim Phoenix: Reconstructing Thomas Pynchon*. Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1978.

Plutarch, *Lives: Voulme I*. Translated by Bernadotte Perrin. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1998.

Poe, Edgar Allan. *The Complete Works of Edgar Allan Poe, Vol. VI: Tales*. New York: Cosimo Books, 2009.

Pöhlmann, Sascha, 'Untitled.' Review of *Triangulating Thomas Pynchon's Eighteenth-Century World: Theory, Structure, and Paranoia in Mason & Dixon* by Manfred Kopp. *Amerikastudien / American Studies* 51, no. 1 (2006): 129-131.

Pynchon, Thomas. 'The Shrink Flips: How a Lonely Psychiatrist, Persecuted by His Past, Learned to Stop Worrying and Start Shooting.' *Cavalier*, March 1966.

——— *Gravity's Rainbow*. London: Picador, 1973.

——— *Rainbow*. Translated by Michel Doury. Paris: Plon, 1975.

——— *San Francisco cry*. Translated by Michel Doury. Paris: Plon, 1976.

——— *A Journey into the Mind of Watts* (Westminster: Mouldwarp, 1983)

- *Slow Learner: Early Stories*. Boston: Little, Brown, 1984.
- *Vente a la crie du lot 49*. Translated by Michel Doury. Paris: Seuil, 1986.
- *L'Arc-en-ciel de la gravité*. Translated by Michel Doury. Paris: Seuil, 1988.
- *Vineland*. London: Minerva, 1991.
- 'Nearer My Couch to Thee.' *New York Times Book Review*, June 6, 1993.
- *Mason & Dixon*. New York: Henry Holt, 1997.
- *Crying of Lot 49*. London: Vintage, 2000.
- *V*. London: Vintage, 2000.
- Foreword to *Nineteen Eighty-Four* by George Orwell, xv-xvi. New York: Plume, 2003.
- 'Summary of *Against the Day*.' *Penguin*, n.p., November 21, 2006. Accessed July 15, 2013.  
<http://www.us.penguin.com/nf/Book/BookDisplay/0,,9781594201202,00.html>.
- *Against the Day*. London: Vintage, 2007.
- *Inherent Vice*. London: Jonathan Cape, 2009.
- *Vice Caché*. Translated by Nicolas Richard. Paris: Seuil, 2010.
- Pynchon, Thomas, Mary Gordon, John Updike, William Trevor, Gore Vidal, Richard Howard, A. S. Byatt, and Joyce Carol Oates. *Deadly Sins*. New York: Quill, 1993.
- Randel, Don Michael. *The Harvard Dictionary of Music*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2003.
- Raudaskoski, Heikki. "'The Feathery Rilke Mustaches and Porky Pig Tattoo on Stomach': High and Low Pressures in *Gravity's Rainbow*.' *Postmodern Culture* 7, no. 2 (1997): n.p. Accessed November 30, 2012.  
<http://pmc.iath.virginia.edu/text-only/issue.197/raudaskoski.197>.
- Reich, Steve. *Writings On Music - 1965-2000*. Edited by Paul Hillier. New York: Oxford University Press, 2002.
- Rigby, Catherine E. *Topographies of the Sacred: The Poetics of Place in European Romanticism*. Charlottesville: University of Virginia Press, 2004.
- Robberds, Mark. 'The New Historicist Creepers of *Vineland*.' *Critique* 36, no. 4 (1995): 237-248.

Rogat Loeb, Paul. *Generation at the Crossroads: Apathy and Action on the American Campus*. New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1995.

Rogin, Michael. *Ronald Reagan, The Movie: And Other Episodes in Political Demonology*. Berkeley: University of California Press, 1987.

Rolls, Albert. 'Pynchon, In His Absence.' *Orbit: Writing Around Pynchon* 1, no. 1 (2012), n.p. Accessed August 15, 2013. DOI: 10.7766/orbit.v1.1.27.

Rosenbaum, Ron. 'The Edgy Enthusiast,' *The New York Observer*, April 28, 1997.

Rovit, Earl. 'Some Shapes in Recent American Fiction.' *Contemporary Literature*. 15, no. 4 (1974): 539-61.

Rushdie, Salman. 'Still Crazy After All These Years,' *The New York Times*, January 14, 1990.

Sadler, Simon. *Archigram: Architecture Without Architecture* (Cambridge: MIT, 2005).

Safer, Elaine B. 'Pynchon's World and Its Legendary Past: Humor and the Absurd in a Twentieth-Century Vineland.' In *The Vineland Papers: Critical Takes on Pynchon's Novel*, edited by Geoffrey Green, Donald J. Greiner and Larry McCaffery, 46-67. Normal: Dalkey Archive Press, 1994.

Said, Edward W. *Beginnings: Intention and Method*. New York: Basic Books, 1975.

'Sandburg Hits Television.' *Cedar Rapids Gazette*, June 7, 1957.

Santayana, George. *The Life of Reason; Or, The Phases of Human Progress, Vol. 1*. London: Archibald Constable, 1906.

Schaub, Thomas Hill. 'The Crying of Lot 49 and other California novels.' In *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Pynchon*, edited by Inger H. Dalsgaard, Luc Herman and Brian McHale, 30-43. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2012.

Schulman, Bruce J. *The Seventies: The Great Shift in Culture, Society, and Politics*. New York: Free Press, 2001.

Sciolino, Martina. 'Objects of Postmodern "Masters": Subject-in-Simulation/Woman-in-Effect.' In *Men Writing the Feminine: Literature, Theory, and the Question of Genders*, edited by Thaïs E. Morgan, 157-171. Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994.

Sears, Julie Christine. 'Black and White Rainbows and Blurry Lines: Sexual Deviance/Diversity in *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Mason & Dixon*.' In *Thomas Pynchon: Reading From the Margins*, edited by Niranjana Abbas, 108-121. Madison: Farleigh Dickinson University Press, 2003.

Seed, David. *The Fictional Labyrinths of Thomas Pynchon*. Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 1988.

——— 'Naming in Pynchon and Joyce.' In *James Joyce: The Centennial Symposium*, edited by Morris Beja, Phillip Herring, Maurice Harmon, David Norris, 47-56. Urbana: University of Illinois Press, 1986.

Shakespeare, William. *The Norton Shakespeare*. Edited by Stephen Greenblatt, Walter Cohen, Jean E. Howard, and Katherine Eisaman Maus. New York: W. W. Norton, 1997.

Shearer, James Edward. *Jazz Basics: A Brief Overview with Historical Documents and Recordings*. Dubuque: Kendall Hunt, 2002.

Sheff, David. '1980 Playboy Interview with John Lennon and Yoko Ono.' *Playboy*, January 1981.

Shilov, G. Ye. *Mathematical Analysis: A Special Course*. Translated by J. D. Davis. Oxford: Pergamon Press, 1965.

Siegel, Jules. 'Who is Thomas Pynchon . . . and why did he take off with my wife?' *Playboy*, March 1977.

Siegel, Mark Richard. *Pynchon: Creative Paranoia in Gravity's Rainbow*. Port Washington: Kennikat Press, 1978.

'Singers: The New Madness.' *Time*, November 15, 1963.

Silverblatt, Michael, 'Interview with David Foster Wallace,' *Bookworm*. KCRW 89.9FM, Santa Monica, CA. April 11, 1996.

Slade, Joseph W. *Thomas Pynchon*. 2nd Edition. Bern: Peter Lang, 1990.

——— 'Communication, Group Theory, and Perception in *Vineland*.' In *The Vineland Papers: Critical Takes on Pynchon's Novel*, edited by Geoffrey Green, Donald J. Greiner and Larry McCaffery, 68-88. Normal: Dalkey Archive Press, 1994.

Sperber, A. M. *Murrow: His Life and Times*. Fordham University Press, 1998.

Standard, Paul. 'The Ampersand: Sign of Continuity.' *Signature* 8 (1938): 44-51.

Sterne, Laurence. *Tristram Shandy*. Edited by Howard Anderson. New York: W. W. Norton, 1980.

Stracey, Frances, 'Consuming the Spectacle: The Watts Revolt and a New Proletariat,' in *As Radical as Reality Itself: Essays on Marxism and Art for the 21st Century*, eds. Matthew Beaumont, Andrew Hemingway, Esther Leslie, 251-282. Bern: Peter Lang, 2007.

Sullivan, Danny. *Ley Lines: The Greatest Landscape Mystery*. Sutton Mallet: Green Magic, 2005.

Sweeney, Susan Elizabeth. 'The V-Shaped Paradigm: Nabokov and Pynchon.' *Cycnos* 12, no. 2, (2008). Accessed January 8, 2013.  
<http://revel.unice.fr/cycnos/index.html?id=1475>

Tabbi, Joseph. *Postmodern Sublime: Technology and American Writing from Mailer to Cyberpunk*. Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1996.

Tanner, Tony. *City of Words: American Fiction 1950-1970*. London: Jonathan Cape, 1971.

——— 'V. and V-2.' In *Pynchon: A Collection of Critical Essays*, edited by Edward Mendelson, 16-55. London: Prentice-Hall, 1978.

——— *Thomas Pynchon*. London: Methuen, 1982.

——— 'The Crying of Lot 49.' In *Modern Critical Views: Thomas Pynchon*, ed. Harold Bloom, 175-189. New York: Chelsea House, 1986.

Taveira, Rodney. 'Still Moving Against the Day: Pynchon's Graphic Impulse.' In *Against the Grain: Reading Pynchon's Counternarratives*, edited by Sascha Pöhlmann, 133-155. Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010.

Tetley, William. *Marine Cargo Claims*. Ontario: The Carswell Company, 1966.

Thomas, Samuel. *Pynchon and the Political*. New York: Routledge, 2007.

——— 'Metković to Mostar: Pynchon and the Balkans.' *Textual Practice* 24, no. 2 (2010): 353-377.

——— 'The Gaucho Sells Out: Thomas Pynchon and Argentina.' *Studies in American Fiction* 40, no. 1 (2013): 53-85.

Thompson, Hunter S. *Fear and Loathing in Las Vegas: A Savage Journey to the Heart of the American Dream*. New York: Vintage, 1998.

Thoreen, David, 'Thomas Pynchon's Political Parable: Parallels between Vineland and "Rip Van Winkle."' *ANQ: A Quarterly Journal of Short Articles, Notes and Reviews* 14, no. 3 (2001): 45-50.

Tschichold, Jan. *The Ampersand: Its Origin and Development*. Translated by Frederick Plaat. London: Woudhuysen, 1957.

Turner, Nick. *Post-War British Women Novelists and the Canon*. London: Continuum, 2010.

Twain, Mark. *A Tramp Abroad*. New York: Harper, 1909.

——— 'Scraps from My Autobiography: Private History of a Manuscript That Came to Grief.' In *Autobiography of Mark Twain: The Complete and Authoritative Edition*, Vol. 1, edited by Harriet Elinor Smith, 164-181. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2010.

Uekoetter, Frank. *The Green and the Brown: A History of Conservation in Nazi Germany*. Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2006.

Valencia, Richard R. ed. *The Evolution of Deficit Thinking: Educational Thought and Practice*. London: Routledge, 1997.

Vasseleu, Cathryn. *Textures of Light: Vision and Touch in Irigaray, Levinas and Merleau-Ponty*. London: Routledge, 1998.

Veggian, Henry. 'Thomas Pynchon Against the Day.' *boundary 2* 35, no. 1 (2008): 197-215.

Voznesensky, Andrei. *Selected Poems of Andrei Voznesensky*. Translated by Anselm Hollo. New York: Grove Press, 1964.

Wallace, David Foster. *A Supposedly Fun Thing I'll Never Do Again*. New York: Little, Brown, 1997.

Weisenburger, Steven C. 'The Chronology of Episodes in *Gravity's Rainbow*.' *Pynchon Notes* 14 (1984): 50-64.

——— 'Hysteron Proteron in *Gravity's Rainbow*.' *Texas Studies in Literature and Language* 34, no. 1 (1992): 87-105.

——— *A Gravity's Rainbow Companion: Sources and Contexts for Pynchon's Novel*. 2<sup>nd</sup> Revised Edition. Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2006.

Winslow, Art. 'Inherent Vice: Thomas Pynchon's Psychedelic California Dream.' *Chicago Tribune*, August 1, 2009.

Winston, Matthew. 'A Comic Source of *Gravity's Rainbow*.' *Pynchon Notes* 15 (1984): 73-76.

Wright, Franz. *Earlier Poems*. New York: Knopf, 2007.

Zerbe, James Slough. *Practical Mechanics For Boys*. New York: M.A. Donohue, 1914. Accessed May 15, 2010. <http://www.gutenberg.org/files/22298/22298-h/22298-h.htm>.