“Falling Away from What Is Human:”

Thomas Pynchon and the Posthuman Gothic

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Abbreviations

ATD *Against the Day*. London: Vintage, 2007.

BE *Bleeding Edge*. London: Jonathan Cape, 2013.

GR *Gravity’s Rainbow*. New York: Penguin, 2006.

HEV “The Heart’s Eternal Vow.” *The New York Times Book Review*, April 10, 1988. https://www.nytimes.com/1988/04/10/books/the-heart-s-eternal-vow.html.

IV *Inherent Vice*. London: Vintage, 2010.

MD *Mason & Dixon*. London: Vintage, 1998.

NMC “The Deadly Sins/Sloth; Nearer, My Couch, to Thee” *The New York Times Book Review*, June 6, 1993. http://movies2.nytimes.com/books/97/05/18/reviews/pynchon-sloth.html.

OK “Is It O.K. To Be A Luddite?” *The New York Times Book Review*, October 28, 1984. https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/97/05/18/reviews/pynchon-luddite.html.

SJ Introduction to *Stone Junction*, by Jim Dodge. New York: Grove, 1998.

TCL *The Crying of Lot 49*. London: Vintage, 1996.

V *V*. London: Vintage, 2000.

VL *Vineland*. London: Vintage, 2000.

Abstract

Long recognised as one of the preeminent writers of literary postmodernism, Thomas Pynchon's reputation appears set in stone. Yet, I argue, beneath the postmodern appearance of Pynchon's writing lies a much older form: the Gothic. This thesis contends that Pynchon participates in several broad conventions of the Gothic genre by way of his dramatisation of anxieties surrounding the place of humanity and rationality within inhuman environments. This reading of Pynchon's Gothicism places his work within the contemporary subgenre of the posthuman Gothic, primarily due to his preoccupation with humanity's integration into machines, and also by way of the accompanying concerns with the loss of bodily integrity, psychological autonomy, and spiritual agency.

By examining Pynchon as a specifically *posthuman* Gothic writer I wish to show that the course of human history imagined in his novel does not lead solely to apocalypse or extinction—as critical commentary on his early fiction tends to suggest—but toward a transformation of humanity by its technical and ecological surroundings. Beyond this re-reading of Pynchon's work, this thesis also attempts to theorise the posthuman Gothic as being more than simply a rehashing of Gothic tropes with sputtering robots instead of cackling villains: in short, I suggest that the structural anxieties of the inside and outside identified by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick as hallmarks of the Gothic are isomorphic to the structures of the posthuman subject which is similarly invaded and confined by its environments.

From within this framework of the posthuman and the Gothic, I argue that Pynchon's various aesthetic and political commitments may be drawn into focus, as the seemingly archaic forms of the Gothic re-emerge once again to name an emerging posthumanity haunted by its recent human past while descending into a monstrous future.

Statement of authorship

Except where reference is made in the text of the thesis, this thesis contains no material published elsewhere or extracted in whole or in part from a thesis accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma. No other person's work has been used without due acknowledgment in the main text of the thesis. This thesis has not been submitted for the award of any degree or diploma in any other tertiary institution.

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Signed:

Gregory Marks

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Introduction

Toward a Posthuman Gothic Pynchon

The process repeats itself: across five decades and eight novels, Thomas Pynchon repeats variations on a theme. In *V.* a woman is dispersed across space and time, rendered a cyborg ghost of geopolitical spasms. In *The Crying of Lot 49* another woman sees her ex-lover's face emerge from the floating trash of the city streets and hears the cries of untold millions echoing through the telephone wires overhead. The ostensible protagonist of *Gravity's Rainbow* is taken over by a system of desire, and made a machine from the inside out. At the birth of modernity, the titular surveyors of *Mason & Dixon* discover the genesis of that great, hideous machine in the captive dreams of a continent. In *Vineland*, gods emerge out of the blips of data that represent human life and death, while in *Bleeding Edge* the ghosts of humanity glitch from the other side into our alternate realities. In each novel we discover variations on the theme of dissolution: people fragmented by mechanisms of control; bodies integrated into nightmarish circuitries; minds melted into flows of desire; and humanity itself incorporated into the vast inhuman machineries with which it has surrounded itself.

The central figure of this book, as it is with all of Pynchon's novels, is the disordered remnant of humanity. This figure finds many different forms throughout Pynchon's oeuvre, ranging from the lonely drifters of a mechanised society to the displaced masses who seek refuge somewhere beyond, and from the mangled bodies made part-machine, to the panicked explorers of an earth which refuses to be encompassed by a global machine. Pynchon's preoccupations range over the gamut of contemporary anxieties concerning what it means to be the human. They encompass various cyber-horrors and eco-terrors; the shock of human integration into machinery; and

fears of humanity's dissolution into the earth. Although widely dispersed across a number of technological and environmental tropes, Pynchon's fictions return to a core existential anxiety concerning the end of humanity as we know it and the emergence of a wholly new form of being resulting from the extinction, usurpation, or (dis)integration of humanity. In a word, the central figure of Pynchon's fiction is the 'posthuman'—a figure perceptibly derived from the human, yet made utterly alien to human norms by its disturbed technological, environmental, or psychological circumstances.

The core argument of this thesis is that Pynchon participates in several broad conventions of the Gothic genre by way of his dramatisation of anxieties surrounding the place of humanity and rationality within inhuman environments. This reading of Pynchon's Gothicism places his work within the contemporary subgenre of the posthuman Gothic, primarily due to the author's preoccupation with humanity's integration into machines, but also by way of his novels' accompanying concerns with the loss of bodily integrity, mental autonomy, and spiritual agency. By examining Pynchon as a specifically *posthuman* Gothic writer I wish to show that the course of human history imagined in his novels does not lead solely to apocalypse or extinction—as critical commentary on his early fiction tends to suggest—but toward a transformation of humanity by its technical and ecological surroundings. Beyond this re-reading of Pynchon's work, this thesis also attempts to theorise the posthuman Gothic as being more than simply a rehashing of Gothic tropes with sputtering robots instead of cackling villains: in short, I suggest that the structural anxieties of the inside and the outside identified by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick as hallmarks of the Gothic are isomorphic to the structures of the posthuman subject which is similarly invaded and confined by its environments.

If this central existential anxiety informs the common tropes of Pynchon's novels, it is also what unites his fictions in a single style. In each case, these disparate tropes are

tied together not only by their common existential concern for the fate of humanity but also by a series of formal conventions typified by an anxiety over personal interiority and the thin barriers separating the self from what lies outside itself. I argue that Pynchon's fictions about the futuristic worries of posthumanity lead back to the well-worn aesthetics of the Gothic. These Gothic structural conventions bring with them a whole range of pre-established aesthetic categories and narrative forms which constitute the Gothic style, and which may be identified in Pynchon's writings under the guise of seemingly futuristic posthuman imagery. This conjunction of posthuman concerns with the Gothic style, tentatively dubbed a 'posthuman Gothic,' and its relevance to Pynchon's novels is the broad topic of this thesis. From within this framework of the posthuman and the Gothic, I argue that Pynchon's various aesthetic and political commitments may be drawn into focus, as the seemingly archaic forms of the Gothic re-emerge once again to name an emerging posthumanity haunted by its recent human past while descending into a monstrous future. As a divergence from the typical categorisation of Pynchon as a postmodern novelist, the possibility of a posthuman Gothic Pynchon is both doubly novel and doubly tendentious. For this reason, before continuing in our examination of this new Pynchon, it is necessary first to stop and pay homage to Pynchons past.

Proliferating Pynchons

The posthuman-inflected Gothic Pynchon does not emerge into the world alone, but like a Gothic character itself must navigate the ruins and remnants of Pynchons long past. The placement of this particular reading of Pynchon among the many critical readings of his work made over the past half-century is no easy task, and threatens to overwhelm the unwary reader in a flood of incompatible translations of Pynchon's work into a host of academic idioms. One list, provided by Samuel Thomas, names the proliferating

Pynchons of recent criticism with an encyclopedic exuberance only fitting for the author. Thomas enumerates a:

> Postmodern Pynchon, poststructuralist Pynchon, deconstructive Pynchon, sublime Pynchon, romantic Pynchon, mystic Pynchon, scientific Pynchon, Pynchon read through Baudrillard, Derrida, Deleuze, Barthes, Lacan, Wittgenstein, McLuhan, the list goes on. We have Pynchon the "mythographer" and Pynchon the "allegorist," Pynchon the writer of "parables." At the more obscure end of things, we have studies on Pynchon and Malta, Pynchon and Gnosticism, even on Pynchon and menstruation.[1]

To this list may now be added Thomas' own political and modernist Pynchon by way of Adorno, alongside the Pynchons that have emerged since Thomas' inventory. The most notable of these newcomers are the newly-reconsidered historical and philosophical Pynchons; a revived countercultural Pynchon; assorted Pynchons preoccupied with sex and gender; and even a biographical Pynchon.[2] If Pynchon today "occupies a place in the front rank of twentieth-century American fiction writers," as David Cowart suggests, and has taken on the dubious honour of being named "America's finest living novelist," this is

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[1] Samuel Thomas, *Pynchon and the Political* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 10. Cited by Thomas in this paragraph are, in order: Kathryn Hume, *Pynchon's Mythography: An Approach to* "*Gravity's Rainbow*" (Carbondale: Southern Illinois University Press, 1987); Deborah Madsen, *The Postmodernist Allegories of Thomas Pynchon*, (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1991); John Dugdale, *Thomas Pynchon: Allusive Parables of Power* (London: Macmillan, 1990); Petra Bianchi, Arnold Cassola, and Peter Serracino Inglott, *Pynchon, Malta and Wittgenstein* (Malta: Malta University Press, 1995); Dwight Eddins, *The Gnostic Pynchon* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1990); and Dana Medoro, *The Bleeding of America: Menstruation as Symbolic Economy in Pynchon, Faulkner and Morrison* (Westport: Greenwood, 2002).

[2] Shawn Smith, *Pynchon and History* (New York: Routledge, 2005); David Cowart, *Thomas Pynchon & the Dark Passages of History* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2011); Martin Paul Eve, *Pynchon and Philosophy* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014); Joanna Freer, *Thomas Pynchon and the American Counterculture* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2014); Ali Chetwynd, Joanna Freer, and Georgios Maragos, eds., *Thomas Pynchon, Sex, and Gender* (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2018); Albert Rolls, *Thomas Pynchon: Demon in the Text* (Brighton: Edward Everett Root, 2019).

not to suggest that he has in any way been wholly assimilated by his academic acolytes or turned into a literary monolith.[3] On this point Thomas is right to remark that "it would therefore seem both illogical and unfair at this point to claim that there is a general consensus about Pynchon's work."[4] For this reason, perhaps, we may be forgiven for adding one more plausibly affixed Pynchon to this ever-growing list.

If one thing limits many of the assorted Pynchons enumerated above, it is that they are also *partial* Pynchons. Partial in both senses of the word: as piece-meal reconsiderations of particular elements of Pynchon's fiction and as forceful translations of his work into various theoretical jargons.[5] Although my own approach falls—

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[3] David Cowart, *Thomas Pynchon & the Dark Passages of History*, 2.

[4] Thomas, *Pynchon and the Political*, 10.

[5] For the aspiring Pynchonian disheartened by the proliferation of critical Pynchonisms and the author's seeming over-interpretation by one school of hermeneutics or another, it is worth considering the counter-intuitive lack of purchase which any of these methods have upon his work. On the curious choice of Franz Kafka by Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari for their second book, Gregg Lambert (*Who's Afraid of Deleuze and Guattari?* London: Continuum, 2006) remarks that above all writers of his generation—and we may consider him so alike to Pynchon in this respect—Kafka was a writer over-analysed and over-interpreted to the point of absurdity.

> Why Kafka? After all, is Kafka not the first case of the globalized writer-man? Is he not also a writer who has been institutionalized to a degree more than any other modern writer? Has he not been – perhaps only exceeded by the criticism of Shakespeare – existentialized, psychoanalysed, theologicized, parabolized, deconstructionized, Buddhaized, popularized, politicized, Marxianized, nationalized, feminized, nihilized, Judaicized, Christianized and finally, post-humanized? (29).

In contrast to this seemingly endless, and perhaps a little Kafkaesque, list of schools that would claim Kafka for themselves, Deleuze and Guattari begin precisely with the Kafka that refuses to be locked away in some ivory tower:

> Their image of Kafka's work is that of 'a rhizome, a burrow'. It has many entrances and exits, all of which have been fashioned for just one purpose – *Escape*! – as if to call our attention to the fact that Kafka himself fashioned a literature that has historically managed, so far, to escape every interpretation, "to steal, head over heels, away!" (29).

Critically-minded readers of Pynchon might take heart from this example—and overzealous critics given pause.

shamefully—into the latter camp, the intent of this thesis is not to erect a monument to a 'posthuman Pynchon' or a 'Gothic Pynchon' alongside the now faded ruins of the assorted postmodern and poststructuralist Pynchons of theoretical heydays past. Rather, the goal of this thesis is to put pressure upon these inherited readings by resituating Pynchon within literary and theoretical contexts no less plausible than those popularised in the last century. Rather than plaster over the interminable complexities of Pynchon's work with a series of prefab theoretical constructs—the endless parade of simulacra, mirror-stages, and différance—I wager that Pynchon's work is interesting enough on its own terms, and that its recurring tropes and motifs may be enriched rather than elided by their juxtaposition with, but not substitution by, their Gothic precursors and posthuman successors.

Despite a half century of critical appropriations, Pynchon's work retains its own theoretical charge and this has remained unassimilated by critics who attempt to read him as a member of one school of thought or another. For this reason, among the many Pynchons invented by academics, perhaps the most successful are those which do not so much seek out pre-established theories in Pynchon's work, but attempt to chart the complex philosophy and worldview that those works construct on their own terms. In *Pynchon and Philosophy*, Martin Paul Eve charts a constellation of theoretically-minded works on Pynchon, wherein a "conjunction of the political, the philosophical, and the ethical" combines to form "a reading that could be called that of the 'critical Pynchon.'"[6] Among these critical Pynchons, Eve cites Samuel Thomas' *Pynchon and the Political*, and Hanjo Berressem's *Pynchon's Poetics* as clear precursors to his own attempt to uncover the philosophical content of Pynchon's novels. Alongside these critical excavations of Pynchon may also be added Stefan Mattessich's *Lines of Flight*, as an attempt to put Pynchon in conversation with his philosophical contemporaries, and Judith

[6] Eve, *Pynchon and Philosophy*, 9.

Ryan in *The Novel After Theory*, who goes so far as to argue for a conscious connection between Pynchon's later novels and recent continental theory.[7] It is within this branch of critical Pynchon studies that I situate my own work, so that I might not forcibly weld Pynchon to the Gothic or the posthuman, but uncover his artistic debt to the former and intellectual premonitions of the latter.

The posthuman Gothic, then, does not inaugurate another partial Pynchon, but marks the shifting but ever-present zone within his fiction where the human and inhuman meet, in horror or in joy. From the strange amalgamations of body and machine in his first novel *V.* to the haunted cyberspace of his most recent novel *Bleeding Edge*, Pynchon's fictive treatment of technology is intertwined with the aesthetics of horror. Although justifiably classified as postmodern novels, with all the satirical modes, irreverence, and meta-textual play typical of the form, Pynchon's fictions just as often refuse these trappings and evade the critical consensus on his works. Although this thesis intends to do without the postmodern paradigm which characterises much of Pynchon scholarship, I do owe to this previous generation of scholars the identification of a series of core themes and preoccupations in Pynchon's fiction which cannot be reduced to the merely postmodern. Although read through a postmodern lens, Pynchon's ideas of order described by Molly Hite, his allegories decoded by Deborah Madsen, and his fictional labyrinths traversed by David Seed are not confined to the postmodern framework used

[7] Based upon *Vineland*'s joking reference to Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari and the strikingly Deleuzo-Guattarian discussions of spatial capture in *Mason & Dixon*, Judith Ryan puts forward the thesis that Pynchon's fiction doesn't merely parallel contemporary theoretical works but takes direct, if tongue-in-cheek, inspiration from them. See: Judith Ryan, *The Novel After Theory* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2011). These parallels between Deleuze and Deleuzo-Guattarian philosophy are developed to a much greater extent in Stefan Mattessich's ambitious *Lines of Flight* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002).

by those critics.[8] What these critics uncover are elements of Pynchon's fiction which have crucial precursors in the Gothic form, which dramatised the collapse of order, deployed dark allegories, and lost itself in fictive labyrinths centuries prior to the invention of postmodernism. As Sascha Pöhlmann suggests, not only are "Pynchon's novels, even the ones that are paradigmatic for theorizations of postmodernism, [...] always more than postmodernist as well," his novels presently demand readings which are capable of moving beyond the postmodern circumstances of their initial reception.[9] Qualifying this point, Pöhlmann rightly warns that this exit from the postmodern literary paradigm brings with it a new problematic of the "post-postmodern" and the predictable academic hunt for the "Next Big Thing." In contrast, I wish to ask not what comes after the postmodern but what has been passed over in this focus on the postmodern.

Following the current critical turn in Pynchon scholarship, I argue that "literary criticism has focused inordinately on [his] postmodern aesthetics," which smooths over the grotesque, horrifying, and desperately sincere moments of his fiction.[10] The proposition of a posthuman Gothic approach to Pynchon doesn't aim at fashioning a new, rigid hermeneutical account of his work, but only seeks out the ambivalent aesthetics and excessive imagery which compose his novels in combination with other well-worn forms. With this in mind, we may return to a more pressing question: what does it mean to ascribe a posthuman mode to the Gothic, or a Gothic style to the posthuman?

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[8] Molly Hite, *Ideas of Order in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1983); Deborah Madsen, *The Postmodernist Allegories of Thomas Pynchon* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1991); David Seed, *The Fictional Labyrinths of Thomas Pynchon* (London: Macmillan, 1987).

[9] Sascha Pöhlmann, "Pynchon and Post-Postmodernism," in *The New Pynchon Studies*, edited by Joanna Freer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 29. Further still, based on the mocking references to critics and critical theory in Pynchon's later novels, Pöhlmann suggests that even Pynchon himself has worked to distance himself from his postmodern reputation.

[10] Michael P. Maguire, "September 11 and the Question of Innocence in Thomas Pynchon's *Against the Day and Bleeding Edge*," *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 58, no. 2 (2017): 95.

Why Posthuman Gothic?

Although the possibility of a Gothic Pynchon has not yet received the benefit of a full-length study, his work has not gone entirely unnoticed within the field of Gothic studies. In his history of Gothic fiction, *The Literature of Terror*, David Punter describes *Gravity's Rainbow* as "Gothic for our time," which "self-consciously and often ironically" toys with the fictional tactics of modernism to create a horrifying vision of an impenetrable System at work in everything.[11] Even as Pynchon's magnum opus may be situated decidedly posterior to modernism, "the ambiguous devices of the Gothics reappear" at length to complicate the novel's postmodern style.[12] In taking on elements of the Gothic, Punter remarks, "what Pynchon has done, again like Maturin, is taken an apparently taut structure and used it for almost entirely paranoiac purposes, as a sustained and varied demonstration of the ways in which the apparently natural is under the dominion of the unnatural or supernatural."[13] In Punter's analysis, Pynchon's Gothicism interjects itself within his seemingly postmodernist form, to draw the postmodern disbelief in totality back to an archaic belief in the "hidden plans and patterns of history" in which "individuals count for nothing."[14]

If Pynchon's latent Gothicism is readily apparent, what is less discernible is the exact nature of this style, and in what sense Pynchon may be described not only as borrowing from the Gothic style but actively participating in the conventions of that genre. The first possibility, that Pynchon might be seen as an inheritor of the American

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[11] David Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, vol. 2, *The Modern Gothic*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1996), 134. On the possibility of a Gothic Pynchon, see also: Thomas Moore, *The Style of Connectedness: "Gravity's Rainbow" and Thomas Pynchon* (Columbia: University of Missouri Press, 1987), 227.

[12] Punter, *Literature of Terror*, 182.

[13] Punter, *Literature of Terror*, 134.

[14] Punter, *Literature of Terror*, 133.

Gothic of Hawthorne or Poe, is not altogether satisfactory. Punter makes clear that "Pynchon's work is very far from the so-called American Gothic, and partly this is simply a matter of scope," as his novels more often move beyond the limited world of America and towards a global historical perspective.[15] Recourse to a more traditional definition of Gothic fiction is even less help, as Pynchon's fiction retains the American Gothic's distaste for the classic Gothic tropes of decayed castles, ghastly aristocrats, religious institutions, and the spectre of Jacobin revolt. Lacking both the limited national character of American Gothic and the grab-bag of old Gothic tropes and clichés, the Gothic qualities of Pynchon's work must be identified as existing somewhere beneath its surface appearance.

Thankfully, the "shopping-list approach to the definition of Gothic romance," as Eugenia DeLamotte has described the inventorial method of defining the Gothic according to its recurrent tropes, has largely given way to a series of structural definitions of the Gothic which seek to uncover the guiding logic that connects the many disparate Gothic tropes without restricting the genre to a mere checklist of archetypes.[16] Perhaps best typified by Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, but also finding representatives in Anne Williams' Gothic poetics and Maurice Lévy's account of Gothic form, the structural definition of the Gothic treats the checklist of Gothic tropes as merely a language or reservoir of symbols united by a common grammar, which is not itself restricted to the clichés in which it is commonly expressed.[17] For DeLamotte as for Sedgwick, this deep structure of the Gothic is derived from "an

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[15] Punter, *Literature of Terror*, 135.

[16] Eugenia C. DeLamotte, *Perils of the Night* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 5.

[17] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (New York: Methuen, 1986); Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995); Maurice Levy, *Le roman "gothique" anglais* (Toulouse: Association des Publications de la Faculté des Lettres et Sciences Humaines de Toulouse, 1968).

anxiety about boundaries" which both compose and threaten the human subject.[18] In this view, the common Gothic tropes of veiled women, hidden identities, loss of memory, nested narratives, live burial, and the descent into the crypt are all united by their preoccupation with spatial rifts of one form or another, stretching from physical imprisonment all the way to psychological schisms and narratorial gaps, united in a terrified obsession with the assorted barriers and surfaces that shape these divisions.

One notable advantage of the structural account of Gothic conventions is that it allows the central Gothic dynamic to be identified beyond its original historical form, and in texts not normally associated with the readily apparent tropes of classic Gothic fiction. As Sedgwick writes of her intentions in defining the Gothic as more than a grab-bag of tropes, "I want to make it easier for the reader of 'respectable' nineteenth-century novels to write 'Gothic' in the margin next to certain especially interesting passages, and to make that notation with a sense of linking specific elements in the passage with specific elements in the constellation of Gothic conventions."[19] Indeed, the structural account of the Gothic allows for this constellation to spread far beyond the nineteenth century, and for Gothic elements to be identified far outside the historical, generic, and national literary cultures within which they first formed. While Pynchon does not merely replicate the old Gothic formulas of Ann Radcliffe, Matthew Lewis, or Charles Maturin, much less the specific tropes of castles, dungeons, and villains, his fiction does obsessively revolve around a structural anxiety concerning the coherence of selfhood. The locus of the Gothic structure in Pynchon is no longer fixed to the social-historical setting of early modernity, having been transposed into that of late capitalism, though the anxiety of that structure remains identifiably Gothic. Following Sedgwick's intentions, 'Gothic' may yet be

[18] DeLamotte, *Perils of the Night*, 13-4.

[19] Sedgwick, *Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, 4.

scrawled in the margins of Pynchon's work to denote a set of fictive conventions which have been inherited from an earlier time.

In Pynchon's fiction, considered as works of Gothic fiction, the Gothic is focused upon the functions and failure of the human subject as it is caught up in outside forces which compromise its rationality, senses, and bodily composure. But having passed through the shocks of modernity, and set adrift in the still waters of postmodernity, these conventions are no longer merely Gothic in their archaic form. To put it another way, Sedgwick's constellation of Gothic conventions now lie adjacent to another constellation of structural anxieties, which share with the Gothic a preoccupation with the collapse of the human subject into multifarious outside forces. This second term goes by the name of the 'posthuman,' and denotes the constellation of structures, subjectivities, anxieties, and affects associated with the passing of the human subject as it has formerly been conceived.

The terms of the posthuman are not altogether unfamiliar, as its own structure displays an isomorphism with that of the Gothic. As N. Katherine Hayles notes in *How We Became Posthuman*, the posthuman is post- human because it no longer allows for a stable separation of human life from its environment, and makes it impossible to "identify a self-will that can be clearly distinguished from an other-will."[20] "In the posthuman," Hayles writes, "there are no essential differences or absolute demarcations between bodily existence and computer simulation, cybernetic mechanism and biological organism, robot teleology and human goals."[21] In Pynchon's fiction, this collapse of self into other is dramatised to great effect, often to the point of horror, as his characters discover themselves to be mere puppets of suggestions and desires implanted within them

[20] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 4.

[21] Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 3.

from without. According to Sean Bolton, this posthuman integration into mechanisms of control stands in contrast to the earlier stage of the postmodern Gothic, in which fear is produced by the prospect of an "eradication of humanity at the hands of monstrous technologies."[22] While the postmodern Gothic posits an infernal machine working to eliminate the human, the posthuman Gothic turns inward, and discovers that the "there is no inside except as a folding of the outside" and that the machine has been working through us and within us without our knowledge.[23] Although Bolton's distinction between postmodern and posthuman forms of the Gothic is not the focus of this thesis, it does demand that some account be given of Pynchon's already well-recognised postmodern qualities—in contrast to which the posthuman and Gothic elements of his style stand out more starkly.

What Posthuman Gothic?

In more ways than one, the contemporary mode of the Gothic may be called a posthuman Gothic, and the intersection of the two terms in Pynchon's fiction is in no way limited only to the relatively abstract, structural level discussed above. From out of the structural affinity between the posthuman and the Gothic emerges the possibility of further affinities which function not merely as convenient parallels between the two fields but as additional entanglements growing from their shared structure. For the purposes of this thesis, the constellations of the Gothic and the posthuman touch on four main points.

The first of these is their structural isomorphism, centred around the disturbed disjunction between personal interiors and inhuman outsides. From out of this common

[22] Michael S. Bolton, "Monstrous Machinery: Defining Posthuman Gothic," *Aeternum: The Journal of Contemporary Gothic Studies* 1, no. 1 (June 2014): 2.

[23] Mark Fisher, *The Weird and the Eerie* (London: Repeater, 2016), 11.

structure follows a combined aesthetic style, a unifying preoccupation with riven subjectivities, and a shared focus upon the existential limits of those subjectivities.

The second is aesthetic, wherein the aesthetic categories of the Gothic (the sublime, the eerie, and so on) pass over into the experience of the posthuman, and the associated affective modes of the Gothic (terror, horror) take on new roles for the subject attempting to navigate the aesthetic shocks of a posthuman world.

The aesthetic content of the posthuman is already ambiguous in nature, as evidenced by Hayles' speculations on the mixed feelings of those who exit the human: "What to make of this shift from the human to the posthuman, which both evokes terror and excites pleasure?"[24] As Anya Heise-von der Lippe has argued in her foundational book on *Posthuman Gothic*, this ambiguous feeling created by the posthuman is not unfamiliar to scholars of the Gothic.[25] Citing Fred Botting and his typification of the Gothic as a mode of "negative aesthetics," Heise-von der Lippe defines the Gothic by its ambivalent mixture of revulsion and fascination, and the cultivation of negative affects—fear, disgust, pain, confusion, anxiety.[26] As Botting writes:

> Negative aesthetics, in these terms, is double: deficiency, the absence, exclusion or negation of knowledge, facts or things; and excess, an overflow of words, feelings, ideas, imaginings.[27]

Borrowing from Rosi Braidotti's account of the posthuman as what comes after the human in the wake of destabilising technological and ecological shocks, Heise-von der

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[24] Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 4.

[25] Anya Heise-von der Lippe, ed. *Posthuman Gothic* (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2017).

[26] Anya Heise-von der Lippe, "What is the Posthuman Gothic?" *Latest News* (blog), *University of Wales Press*, November 21, 2017, https://www.uwp.co.uk/what-is-the-posthuman-gothic.

[27] Fred Botting, *Gothic*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2014), 7.

Lippe argues that these same negative aesthetics of the Gothic inhere within posthuman experience.[28] As Braidotti makes clear, the posthuman in this sense encompasses both the negative and the reformative aspects of life freed from the strictures of the human as a transcendent, universal category, out of which a myriad inhuman and unhuman forms of life may emerge.[29] The overflowing mixture of joy and horror at the end of the human is typical of Pynchon's work, which as we shall see in Chapter One is caught between a Luddite desire to return to a prelapsarian humanity and a never-quite disavowed fascination with the monstrous products of technology. Chapters Two and Three will take on the aesthetic dimensions of Pynchon's Gothic posthumanism in greater detail, describing the manner in which his novels put the traditional aesthetic categories to new use in the age of our obsolescence.

The third conjuncture of the posthuman Gothic is concerned with this very question of subjectivity and its transformation, which has remained a preeminent concern for Gothic literature, and today lends to posthuman discourse readymade models for

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[28] "As a theoretical figuration, the posthuman is a navigational tool that enables us to survey the material and the discursive manifestations of the mutations that are engendered by advanced technological developments (am I a robot?), climate change (will I survive?), and capitalsm (can I afford this?). The posthuman is a work in progress. It is a working hypothesis about the kind of subjects we are becoming." Rosi Braidotti, *Posthuman Knowledge* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2019), 2.

[29] Rosi Braidotti, *The Posthuman* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2013). Terms such as "unhuman," "inhuman," "abhuman," and "suprahuman" will be used when needed to chart the various and divergence aspects of the posthuman. Of these secondary terms, inhuman is defined below, in note 36, and abhuman is defined in the introduction to Chapter Two. Following Jean-François Lyotard (1991) and Reza Negarestani (2014), the inhuman is used to describe the non-human elements which precede and compose human subjectivity, while the abhuman is derived from the Gothic criticism of Kelly Hurley (1996), and describes a state of being that is not-quite-human. Unhuman and suprahuman are used in this thesis purely in a descriptive capacity, without theoretical complications. The unhuman denotes that which is opposed to the ideal of the human, taking the place of the colloquial use of "inhuman." The suprahuman is used to describe entities greater in size or power than humanity, yet composed of human actors. For the purposes of this thesis, all of these terms have been subordinated to the overarching figure of the posthuman, which, as the unknown space beyond human subjectivity as we know it, is able to encompass all of these conflicting transformations of humanity into something other.

understanding the sometimes horrifying, sometimes edifying transformations of the human subject.

To focus upon the structure and aesthetics of the posthuman Gothic is to give the false impression that it is defined purely in formal terms, and to abstract it away from the substance and plot of the texts. If at its heart the Gothic is a genre anxious about structural coherence and stability, this structure is instantiated within its riven characters and the dramas which follow their attempts to pierce through the veil to discover the hidden nature of their being. As Eugenia DeLamotte suggests, the great power of Gothic fiction lies in its moments of revelation, of the "knowledge of the irrational, of the psyche in its hidden depths."[30] For Anne Williams, too, the Gothic speaks to the secluded zones of the human subject, but is not necessarily limited to the individual subject: in the psychological drama of the Gothic the personal is overreached by the social on all sides, which spills over into the protagonist's secret turmoil as "the printed text of the *public* dream."[31]

The posthuman Gothic marks no great departure from the classical form of the Gothic in this respect, and only transports the assorted Gothic character archetypes and plots into a new setting. As David Punter has remarked, the "Gothic, we often say, is about history; and so it is. But it has also come to be about the future, about the various trajectories along which we might see ourselves evolving."[32] In Pynchon, this subjective aspect is also evident, and is likewise transposed from the era of early modernity with its fears of an undead past to that of late modernism and the diabolic powers of the future. As will be seen in the chapters on *The Crying of Lot 49* (Chapters Two and Three) and the

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[30] DeLamotte, *Perils of the Night*, 90.

[31] Williams, *Art of Darkness*, 71.

[32] David Punter, "On the Threshold of Gothic: A Reflection," in *The Gothic and Theory*, eds. Jerrold E. Hogle and Robert Miles (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019). 307.

chapter on *Bleeding Edge* (Chapter Six), Pynchon's protagonists, and especially his heroines, frequently return not only to character archetypes inherited from Gothic fiction but also to the deeper questions of subjectivity and selfhood which typify the Gothic heroine and hero, now modulated through the language of posthumanity.

The fourth point of convergence is the existential, in the sense that both the Gothic and the posthuman look to modes of existence not only beyond the human as we know, but beyond the bounds of human perception and cognition entirely. The existential dimension of the posthuman Gothic charts the limits, and limit-experiences, common to both fields. Here, we arrive at the terminal point of the Gothic, where all the horror and torture border upon the wholesale death of the human and the triumph of the outside forces, be they natural, social, or otherwise, which lurk beyond. This sense of the Gothic finds its expression in Devendra Varma's account of the Gothic's numinous, apocalyptic character, which always threatens to cast its characters and readers alike into servitude and "humble obeisance before the great Unknown."[33]

This idea of the Gothic as a meditation upon extinction is elaborated upon and secularised in Vijay Mishra's *The Gothic Sublime*. In Mishra's calculation, the goal of much Gothic fiction becomes the charting of the outer limits of human life itself.[34] This sense of the Gothic as a literature of extinction has obvious resonances with posthumanist thought, not least the "speculative posthumanism" of David Roden, who sees the posthuman not as a presently-existing state of being but as a limit-concept, signifying that place where human reasoning and experience become insufficient and a new, by definition incomprehensible, being takes hold.[35] By this account, the posthuman takes on

[33] Devendra P. Varma, *The Gothic Flame* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1957), 15.

[34] Vijay Mishra, *The Gothic Sublime* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994).

[35] David Roden, *Posthuman Life* (London: Routledge, 2015).

additional Gothic resonances, as it no longer merely describes a present state of posthumanity—as in the formulations of Hayles or Braidotti—but the end of an ongoing process beyond which we cannot see. In Pynchon this consciousness of a limit to the human is ever-present: over the long span of his historical novels he tracks its slow approach, and in his contemporary novels he depicts people pushed to that limit, never to discover what lies on the other side. This existential crisis of the posthuman Gothic is mapped out in greater detail in the chapters on *Mason & Dixon* (Chapters Four and Five), which take as their subject the slow emergence of a global machine, and the extinction of humanity which follows in its wake.

These four points of convergence between the posthuman and the Gothic are by no means complete, and necessarily leave by the wayside the posthuman-adjacent discourses of the inhuman found in the works of Jean-François Lyotard, Claire Colebrook, and Reza Negarestani; the ahumanism of Patricia MacCormack; the post-humanist theory of Stefan Herbrechter or Cary Wolfe; and the thicket of transhumanist philosophies.[36] Likewise, the domestic Gothic of Kate Ferguson Ellis, the dark

[36] Jean-François Lyotard, *The Inhuman*, trans. Geoffrey Bennington and Rachel Bowlby (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991); Claire Colebrook, *Death of the PostHuman* (Ann Abor: Open Humanities Press, 2014); Reza Negarestani, "The Labor of the Inhuman," in *#ACCELERATE*, ed. Robin Mackay and Armen Avanessian (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2014) and *Intelligence and Spirit* (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2018); Patricia MacCormack, *The Ahuman Manifesto* (London: Bloomsbury, 2020); Stefan Herbrechter, *Posthumanism: A Critical Analysis* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2013); Cary Wolfe, *What is Posthumanism?* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2010). In terms of significance to the terms of this thesis, the inhumanisms of Lyotard, Colebrook, and Negarestani are of some interest for their recognition of the inner and outer limits of the human. Whereas posthuman theory speculates upon a future (or already present) state after the human, the inhuman instead denotes the pre-existence of the inhuman within the human and the dialectic of self-extinction and re-definition which already composes the human. For this reason Colebrook and Negarestani have critiqued the concept of the posthuman for positing an ideal of the human that is both too rigid and too ill defined, sutured onto a post- prefix without adequately defining what it would mean to even surpass the human. As apt as this critique is, it is beside the point for this thesis on two fronts: firstly, as I am looking at the posthuman in fiction I am not concerned with the philosophical rigour of the concept so much as its aesthetic and thematic components; secondly, the charge that the posthuman is all too human

Romanticism of Mario Praz, and the assorted theories of Gothic visual art are here passed over for being of secondary interest to the core of this thesis.[37]

What Pynchon?

To return to the structural heart of the posthuman Gothic, we may see that the folding of the inhuman outside into the human subject is a movement that resonates throughout Pynchon's novels, which chart the "the emergence of great systems of control" through the "self-steering and yet utterly subjectless" processes of cybernetic feedback and technological mastery.[38] This process is not treated identically in each of Pynchon's novels, due to their widely varied settings and styles, and the changing nature of Pynchon's preoccupation with the inhuman over the course of his work. The diversity of situations and settings of the novels also poses some difficulty in terms of giving a clear overview of Pynchon's oeuvre as a whole. For this reason, the novels examined in detail in this thesis have been restricted to only three: *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Mason & Dixon*, and *Bleeding Edge*. These three novels each typify a certain period within Pynchon's work: *The Crying of Lot 49* functions as a distillation of the themes of Pynchon's early novels, introduced in *V.* and further developed in *Gravity's Rainbow*. *Mason & Dixon* fits between Pynchon's first post-hiatus novel *Vineland* and his interminably complex *Against*

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is perfectly true in Pynchon's case, who does appear to hold to a more or less static image of the human which is capable of being degraded or destroyed, as shall be made clearer in Chapter Three.

[37] Kate Ferguson Ellis, *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989); Mario Praz, *The Romantic Agony*, 2nd ed., trans. Angus Davidson (London: Oxford University Press, 1951); Wilhelm Worringer, *Abstraction and Empathy*, trans. Michael Bullock (Chicago: Ivan R Dee, 1997), and *Form Problems of the Gothic* (New York: G. E. Stechert & Co., 1920); John Ruskin, *Selected Writings*, ed. Dinah Birch (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).

[38] Benjamin Noys, *Malign Velocities* (Alresford: Zero Books, 2014), 44.

the Day, which upon its release appeared to be a final burst of manic creativity meant as a capstone to the author's lifetime of writing. *Bleeding Edge* is then indicative of Pynchon's late style, inaugurated by the hardboiled thriller *Inherent Vice*, in which the interests of plot and character return with a vengeance, as Pynchon settles into more easily defined generic tropes. The periodisation of Pynchon's fiction is then as follows, with one novel chosen from each period to typify his changing attitudes and styles:

Early novels, pre-hiatus: *V.* (1963), *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973).

Middle novels, post-hiatus: *Vineland* (1990), *Mason & Dixon* (1997), *Against the Day* (2006).

Late genre novels: *Inherent Vice* (2009), *Bleeding Edge* (2013).

The choice of three novels is also convenient for mapping the two major styles that run through Pynchon's fiction, which can be tentatively divided into his historical novels (or historiographical metafictions, as some would have it)—which run from the eighteenth century of *Mason & Dixon*, through *Against the Day*'s fin-de-siècle, to the mid-twentieth century of *Gravity's Rainbow*[39]—and his Californian novels: *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Vineland*, and *Inherent Vice*.[40] Of this division, which cuts through all the stages

[39] In regard to the form of Pynchon's historical novels, see Linda Hutcheon's *The Politics of Postmodernism* (London: Routledge, 1989), and Amy J. Elias, *Sublime Desire* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2001). Tore Rye Anderson has also suggestively described that *Mason & Dixon*, *Against the Day*, and *Gravity's Rainbow* be read as "global novels" depicting the "different stages in one single story of the gestation and emergence of our contemporary global reality." Tore Rye Anderson, "Mapping the World: Thomas Pynchon's Global Novels," *Orbit: A Journal of American Literature* 4, no. 1 (2016): 37.

[40] Since the publication of *Inherent Vice* possibility of a Californian style has also become apparent, as suggested in Scott McClintock and John Miller, eds., *Pynchon's California* (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2014). A survey of critical discussions on Pynchon's relation to California is also given by McClintock and Miller in "West Coast," in *Thomas Pynchon in Context*, ed. Inger H. Dalsgaard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 45-6.

of Pynchon's career, only in first novel and his latest novel—*V.* and *Bleeding Edge*—sit uncomfortably outside, as they are set primarily in New York rather than California, while still retaining much of the character-focus of the Californian novels.[41] More troubling for any attempt at defining Pynchon's style, these two anomalous novels embody aspects of both the historical and Californian novels. On the one hand, *V.* seems a premonition of this split in Pynchon's style, in its weaving together of historical globe-trotting chapters and contemporary New York chapters, whereas *Bleeding Edge* on the other hand offers a tentative synthesis, as it casts the Californian style backward into the near past of early-2000s New York. Pynchon's fiction may then be divided into two distinct styles, and one non-category of novels partway between the two styles:

The historical epics: Depicting the birth of modernity in *Mason & Dixon*, the triumph of capitalism in *Against the Day*, and the late capitalist apocalypse of *Gravity's Rainbow*.

The Californian novels: The real San Francisco and fictive San Narciso as settings for *The Crying of Lot 49*'s conspiracy mystery, the Southern Californian family drama of *Vineland*, and the Los Angeles hardboiled story of *Inherent Vice*.

The intermediate New York novels: *V.* with its split narrative between historical and familial plots, and *Bleeding Edge* with its mixed style of historical novel and conspiracy thriller.

[41] Pynchon's complicated and personal relationship to New York and the American East Coast in general is summarised by Christopher Leise, who suggests that the East Coast is figured broadly in Pynchon's fiction as a place of origin, both for the colonial Pynchon family (and their fictionalised counterparts in *Gravity's Rainbow*—the Slothrops) and of the American empire as a whole, the "font from which flows of power, control, and capital issued." This function of the East Coast as an place of origins goes some way to explaining its intermediate position, suggestive of both the communal and despotic extremes of the American political imagination. Christopher Leise, "East Coast," in *Thomas Pynchon in Context*, ed. Inger H. Dalsgaaard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 31.

The choice of *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Mason & Dixon*, and *Bleeding Edge* thus reflects the broadest variety of both the chronological changes in Pynchon's style, and the variations of style which exist throughout his work. Obviously, this limitation means that no claims to a totally comprehensive reading of Pynchon's work may be made—although it also allows for the novels in question to be examined in far greater detail. While it is unfortunate that this thesis is not able to fully address the remaining five of Pynchon's novels or his collection of short stories with chapters of their own, I have limited myself to these three for the sake of the thesis's brevity overall, and so that the chosen novels may be examined in more detail than if they were forced into a more crowded thesis. The ideal work of scholarship runs up against the limits of both space and time, and so we must make do with work produced under these limits. Treated intensively, each of these novels is revealed to contain multitudes, and to shoot off in different directions, some of which presage or recall the novels set aside.[42]

As we shall see, *The Crying of Lot 49* functions as a compacted gem of Pynchon's early preoccupations with humanity and death, and as the earliest example of the psychedelic yet intimate style of his later Californian novels. *Mason & Dixon*, set further in the past than any of Pynchon's other historical novels, likewise functions as a mirror through which to see its generic companions, for which it establishes the genesis of the great hideous machine which would pursue the characters of *Against the Day* and consume those of *Gravity's Rainbow*. Simultaneously, *Mason & Dixon* stands in for the other middle-period novels as an expression of Pynchon's newfound sentimentality for

[42] Possibly the most glaring omission from the novels dealt with here is *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973). The inclusion of this novel would have undoubtedly been necessary in an earlier stage of Pynchon scholarship, but now the scholarship on *Gravity's Rainbow* overflows, and its inclusion would only distract from the more important task of interrogating Pynchon's more recent output. The question of where *Gravity's Rainbow* falls in the structures and schema proposed by this thesis is left open for a more complete study of Pynchon's Gothicism.

family life and intimate personal relations, adding new stakes to the otherwise nihilistic philosophy of the early novels. *Bleeding Edge*, in turn, may be seen as a convergence of these two styles, as it returns to the labyrinthine conspiracy theories of *The Crying of Lot 49*, repeats the familial concerns of *Mason & Dixon*, and brings Pynchon's historical narrative up to the twenty-first century.

Chapter Overview

The first chapter looks to the experiences of terror and the sublime in *The Crying of Lot 49* to argue for a fruitful reading of Pynchon's work in terms of the aesthetics of the feminine Gothic—typified by the drama of reason, unreason, and the heroine's escape from manipulatory forces. I argue that the novel's protagonist, Oedipa Maas, can be read as a Gothic heroine whose trials of terror and confrontations with the irrational drive her on a quest to interrogate the nature of her world. Throughout the novel, Oedipa not only performs the role of the Gothic heroine who must navigate a dark world in search of truth, but also undergoes a process of posthuman communication with forces outside herself and her own understanding. Oedipa repeatedly comes in contact with a thought from the outside that interrupts her normal existence, and in each encounter with this outside force is spurred on her search to unmask the shifting and obscure powers which have cast a shadow over her world. In this chapter I argue that these encounters are best understood through the framework of the feminine Gothic and its aesthetics of terror, with the Gothic heroine here encountering the terrors of a specifically technical environment, which do not work to elevate the soul—as in Ann Radcliffe's formulation—but to awaken it to other posthuman modes of existence.

The second chapter continues the analysis of *The Crying of Lot 49* begun in the previous chapter, but focuses not on the main protagonist, Oedipa, but on the broader

posthuman Gothic condition of the novel's secondary characters. If the preceding chapter aims to read Pynchon's novel as a feminine Gothic text—preoccupied with the trials of terror and enlightenment experienced by its central heroine—this chapter seeks out those places where the Gothic is deployed in its masculine form, with its characteristic thematics of horror and abjection. The imagery analysed in this chapter belongs in the domain of horror and the masculine Gothic, I argue, because of its focus upon the direct, bodily destruction of the human subject—as opposed to the private psychological drama of the feminine Gothic. These aspects of the novel also lack the intellectually-empowering resolution of Gothic terror and the escape from danger which it entails. While Oedipa's plot leads from one revelation to another, towards an ambiguous epiphany of the inhuman nature of her universe, the various depthless and destitute people who she encounters find themselves in far less edifying positions. Each in their own ways are determined, denigrated, and dissolved by the forces which surround them and course through them. The argument of this chapter does not so much contradict that of the previous chapter, as it shows the possible paths of posthumanity within the Gothic nexus. While *The Crying of Lot 49*'s heroine can be read as charting a path of revelation through the technical systems of her world, the people around her sink and fall into the abyss, discovering alongside the doomed villains of Lewis and Maturin the one horrifying truth of the masculine Gothic: hell is real, and we are living in it.

The third chapter takes up Pynchon's nonfictional writings as statements on the place and purpose of Gothic literature in making sense of our increasingly posthuman world. In his 1984 essay "Is It O.K. To Be A Luddite?" Pynchon's ambivalent attitude toward technology becomes overt when it converges with the literary aesthetics of the Gothic. For Pynchon, technology on the one hand holds the key to positive change and the realisation of utopia on earth, but on the other threatens to bring forth new forms of control. This dynamic is longstanding within Pynchon's fiction, which condemns

technology for its dehumanising effects while exhibiting a fascination with the myriad combinations that spring from the convergence of humanity and machine. The ambivalence between condemnation and fascination lies at the core of the Gothic genre, the negative aesthetics of which thrive on the mixed feelings of disgust and desire. In the "Luddite" essay, Pynchon re-states this Gothic conjunction in explicitly posthuman terms: even while obsessing over the degradations of modernity, capital, and industry, the Gothic novel is in Pynchon's terms a way to "deny the machine."[43] In this manner, Pynchon's nonfiction functions not only as a commentary upon previous works of Gothic fiction such as *Frankenstein* and *The Castle of Otranto*, but also explicitly places his own fiction within that same nexus of Luddite politics, Gothic fantasy, and posthuman fears.

In the fourth chapter of this thesis, I turn from the mechanical threats of Pynchon's early work to the environmental themes of *Mason & Dixon*. Crucially, I suggest that *Mason & Dixon* does not abandon the cybernetic concerns of Pynchon's previous works, but rather places the forces of machinery in contest with the powers of the earth itself. Telluric and subterranean flows of energy, desire, and bodies dominate the novel's narrative, as the titular protagonists unwittingly work to place the planet under the control of a vast territorial machine. My analysis of Pynchon's ecogothic narrative pairs the spatial dynamics of the novel with its explicit critique of Enlightenment ideology. As the novel progresses, the space of the frontier takes on inhuman qualities, as the titular line is revealed as a mere focal point in a vast network of territories that slowly creep across the continent, shaping the earth's surface to better capture its flows—economic, libidinal, or otherwise. Concurrently, the age of Enlightenment is given a terrifying aspect, as all the proclaimed ideals of rationality are discovered to hide a manipulation of desire on a geocosmic scale. Through the eyes of Dixon in particular, whose youthful dreams of mapping the world slowly give way to a guilty complicity in the capture of the earth, the

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posthuman Gothic character of Pynchon's fiction spirals outward in ever more terrifying proportions, but also attains its clearest expression as a plea for alternatives to the machine.

The fifth chapter expands the theme of spatial capture and the Gothic line in *Mason & Dixon* into the novel's depiction of time. One of the characters in the novel notes that "Time is the Space that may not be seen," while another observes that "the Battle-fields we know, situated in Earth's three Dimensions, have also their counterparts in Time."[44] Given the weight placed upon the struggle for control of the Earth's space in the novel, the question of time opens the way for greater and more terrible mechanisms of capture and control. While the preceding chapter focuses upon Dixon's education in complicity with the powers that be, this chapter turns to Mason's side of the story, and the emphasis which his melancholic disposition places upon the themes of time lost, time regained, and the assorted minutiae of time measurement and temporal order. Central to this nexus are the various hauntings experienced by Mason, not least of which is the constant return of his deceased wife to soliloquise the passing of the world, and his melancholic journeys outside of clock-time. In a particularly surreal series of events, Mason finds himself caught within the eleven days lost in the English switch from the Julian to the Gregorian calendar, which now lie parallel to our own present, empty of all original inhabitants, but wherein he discovers all the twisted escapees from our rational world. Within this nexus of time, the thematics of the posthuman Gothic abound, as other worlds and other times are folded into our own prosaic reality, either as fuel for further expansion and control, or as reminders of the terrifying, transfixing worlds which lie just outside our own.

[44] MD 326, 190.

The sixth chapter turns to Pynchon's latest novel *Bleeding Edge* to bring Pynchon's Gothic account of humanity and technology into the digital era. The novel's treatment of technology, business, and government in the years of the early web reveals a dark undercurrent of haunted websites, illegal dealings, and official collusion beneath the increasingly sanitised veneer of the surface internet. The specifically posthuman Gothic character of the novel comes increasingly to the fore as, in typically Pynchonian fashion, technology folds into conspiracy and new systems of communication beget increasingly subtle methods of control. Functioning both as a love-letter to the cyberpunk fictions of yesteryear, and as a pastiche of their most overhyped predictions, *Bleeding Edge* juxtaposes the heightened unreality of digital utopianism with the cybergothic's wildest nightmares, all against the backdrop of the new millennium's failure to realise the dreams with which it was charged.

In the conclusion I return to the question of Pynchon's place in contemporary literature as the figurehead of the postmodern style, and the possibility of reading his work as part of a Gothic literary tradition both more archaic and more alien than his postmodern reputation would suggest. In the traditional postmodern reading of Pynchon, the novelist's rejection of historical metanarratives and his play with the insufficiency of language are read as signs of a fundamentally unspeakable object at the heart of his fiction—the unrepresentable trauma of modern history or the horrifying collapse of self into structure. But the unspeakable has a much longer literary history, and as if by a trick of the light reveals within the postmodern mistrust of representation the hidden presence of the Gothic tropes of the sublime. I argue that Pynchon's predilection for the unspeakable is as much a sign of his debt to Gothic fiction's own fragmented narratives and suggestive absences as it is indicative of the presence of the Gothic form's structural anxiety within the recent fictions of postmodernity and posthumanity.

Chapter One

"The darkest, slowest hours:" Oedipa as Gothic Heroine and the Aesthetics of Terror in *The Crying of Lot 49*

Much has been made of *The Crying of Lot 49*'s labyrinthine plot, of its wayward protagonist, Oedipa Maas, and of the paranoid structures built by its heroine and readers alike to uncover the hidden (or perhaps nonexistent) meaning of the novel. For all the wealth of detail packed into the novel's hundred odd pages, the academic and literary reception of *The Crying of Lot 49* has been marked by an incapacity to make adequate sense of its interminable complexities. At its heart, the novel seems to revolve around an ambiguity that motivates both its protagonist and readers to sort through its scattered elements in some hope of making sense of it. As Peter Cooper writes, "like Oedipa, the reader encounters 'a secret richness and concealed density of dream' but nothing much more concrete or verifiable. [...] In this way, Oedipa, or anyone hovering at the threshold of such knowledge is totally adrift, without compass or quadrant."[1] Likewise, Molly Hite has remarked that although Pynchon's novel "possesses no Grail that will fulfil his hero's, or his readers', expectations," still "Oedipa's world cries out for so much meaning that the novel cannot reasonably be expected to satisfy it."[2] After over half a century's worth of critical reappraisals, this central ambiguity appears indissoluble, but has not for this reason lost any of its power. On the contrary, and despite many an ambitious critic's attempts to give a definitive reading to the novel, the core ambiguity of *The Crying of Lot*

[1] Peter L. Cooper, *Signs and Symptoms: Thomas Pynchon and the Contemporary World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 151.

[2] Molly Hite, *Ideas of Order in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1983), 78.

49 has only been strengthened, and its mystery further obscured, by the weight of critical material piled about its twisting passages.

If, as Deborah Madsen suggests, "ambiguity remains the single greatest obstacle for the reader of Pynchon," this is not to say that it hasn't also provided the most fruitful element of his fiction.[3] For the purposes of this thesis in particular, the irreducible ambiguity of Pynchon's novel presents an opening for a Gothic reading, which takes this absence of final meaning and the uncertainty it creates as the beating heart of the novel. Like *The Crying of Lot 49*, the classic works of Gothic fiction are often driven by the dramatisation of the desire to know or uncover some hidden truth. But coterminous with this search for knowledge is the desire to continue the search, and to thrill in the unknown itself. As Eugenia Delamotte argues, although the readers and characters of the Gothic desire knowledge, "it is the experience of *not* knowing that they find exhilarating. The desire not to know is one of the great appeals of Gothic romance; behind it, perhaps, is a hope that there may be something, after all, that cannot be known."[4] From out of this generative absence of knowledge spill the most recognisable of the Gothic's core elements, such as hauntings, hallucinations, madness, and the sublime, which have as much to do with failures of reason as they do with reason's slow progress toward understanding.

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[3] Madsen continues: "That is to say, ambiguity characterizes every aspect, formal and thematic, of Pynchon's narrative project – for readers both inside and outside the storyworlds his narratives create. As Schaub points out, characters are caught between facts or actions and their possible meaning(s), as is the external reader of narratives that refuse to align literary form with meaning.1 These fictional worlds not only lack certainty but are constructed to suggest that an order exists but is withheld and remains unknown because it is unnamed, experienced only in suspicions." Deborah L. Madsen, "Ambiguity," in *Thomas Pynchon in Context*, ed. Inger H. Dalsgaard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 298.

[4] Eugenia C. Delamotte, *Perils of the Night: A Feminist Study of Nineteenth-Century Gothic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 64.

It is in this context, that I propose a Gothic reading of *The Crying of Lot 49* as a novel which dramatises reason and reason's limits. Specifically, I argue that the novel replicates the conventions of the feminine Gothic, as typified by the works of Ann Radcliffe, whose fictions so often revolve around a heroine's struggle to make sense of her world, "to distinguish real from apparent, [...] to make valid discriminations, [and] to 'realize' the validity of her perceptions."[5] Drawing from the common tropes of Radcliffe's fiction, Peter Otto defines the feminine Gothic according to three key traits:

> [Firstly,] female Gothic locates the source of terror in the present, in the possibility that the paternal protector (whether father or lover) is untrustworthy or immoral. [Secondly,] supernatural terrors are discovered to be illusions, fabricated by the heroine's imagination, a consequence of a culture that shelters her from the truth. [Thirdly,] terror evaporates as the heroine learns of her true identity. Alternatively, it modulates into awe, as the heroine glimpses the divine order behind nature.[6]

Pynchon's novel does indeed replicate these core traits of the feminine Gothic, but only up to a point. Oedipa's story begins with the disappearance and potential subterfuge of a male lover, whose spectre hangs over the novel and torments Oedipa in her search for

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[5] Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 165. Following the work of Susanne Becker, I have opted to use the term "feminine Gothic" in place of the "female Gothic" to mark a shift from "the (traditional) critical interest [in the] gender of the author (female gothic) to that of the speaking subject in the text (feminine gothic)." Whereas the critical formulation of "female Gothic" has tended to focus upon the categorisation of texts as "women's writing"—and, more problematically, the sorting of texts by the perceived sex of their authors—the category of "feminine Gothic" marks a small step toward a less essentialist view of gender and authorship. See: Susanne Becker, *Gothic Forms of Feminine Fiction* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1999), 10.

[6] Peter Otto, "Terror and Horror Gothic," in *Gothic Fiction: Rare Printed Works from the Sadleir-Black Collection of Gothic Fiction at the Alderman Library, University of Virginia*, eds. Peter Otto, Marie Mulvey-Roberts, and Alison Milbank (Marlborough: Adam Matthew Publications, 2003), http://www.ampltd.co.uk/digital_guides/gothic_fiction/Introduction8.aspx.

signs of his passing. This spectre is never truly dispelled, but in Oedipa's attempts to give reason to his haunting she punctures the other illusions of her culture which have hidden from her the underbelly of her world. The novel reaches its crescendo not with the revelation of the divine order of nature, but the uncovering of a vast and secret world communicated through wires and waste. This is to say that whereas the feminine Gothic as typified by Radcliffe is capable of navigating its trials of terror and moments of unreason, to arrive at a final point of resolution and restoration of reason, Pynchon's novel follows the same path without ever reaching its end. Of these three points, the first will be the focus of the first section of this chapter, which deals with Inverarity and his ghostly influence over Oedipa's life; the second is the focus of the second and third sections, which examine Oedipa's productive failures to dispel the experience of terror; finally, the fourth and fifth sections turn to Oedipa's interrogation of her own being and the nature of her world.

Oedipa Maas, Gothic Heroine?

If *The Crying of Lot 49* refuses to complete its performance of the feminine Gothic plot, there still remains the one central element upon which these conventions rest—the Gothic heroine. In Radcliffe's novels, the elements of the feminine Gothic cohere around the psychological drama of the heroine, whose journey is defined by her anxious encounters with figures and symbols of authority and her eventual overcoming of that anxiety by means of her faculties of reason and empathy.[7] In Pynchon's novel, too, Oedipa performs the role of the heroine, who struggles to break through the spectral world she knows and

[7] This is in contrast to the conventions of the masculine Gothic, typified by Matthew Lewis' *The Monk*, and its preoccupations with the reality of the supernatural, the ruin of reason, and the ensuing torture of the body. This other form of the Gothic is examined in detail in the following chapter.

arrive at some new understanding of what lies beyond.[8] But having refused the traditional resolution of the feminine Gothic plot, *The Crying of Lot 49* instead leaves Oedipa caught within that moment of derangement, of terror, and takes her further into the realms of uncertainty and unreason than Radcliffe's heroines ever would dare venture. As Deborah Madsen observes,

> for Oedipa, the discovery of unanticipated ruptures and discontinuities within her culture leave her poised between the signs that she tries to interpret and their culturally constrained potential for meaning. But as her descent continues, the perimeter between reality and fantasy becomes blurred.[9]

As reality and fantasy grow indistinct, and Oedipa's attempts to impose some form of reality spiral away into ever more complex fantasies, *The Crying of Lot 49* becomes what Allan Lloyd-Smith has described as "a controlled exercise in hysteria."[10]

In *The Crying of Lot 49* the conventions of the feminine Gothic are, therefore, not so much replicated in full or avoided entirely, but allowed to run out of control, unbound from the rationalist ends to which they typically lead. What ensues is an intensification of the feminine Gothic's prevailing interest in human subjectivity at the edge of cognition and perception, and the "knowledge of the irrational, of the psyche in its hidden depths" which emerges from the heroine's encounters with the unknown.[11] In its layered secrecy,

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[8] The similarities between Oedipa and the typical Gothic heroine have not gone unnoticed. As Susan Sweeney remarks, Oedipa performs the role of "heroine who discovers evidence of sinister machinations against her, but whom no one believes. Unable to verify the pattern that she has deduced, she cannot help doubting her sensations as well as her sanity." Susan Elizabeth Sweeney, "Gothic Traces in the Metaphysical Detective Story: The Female Sleuth in Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49* and Gibson's *Pattern Recognition*," *Orbit: A Journal of American Literature* 4, no. 2 (2016): 5-6.

[9] Deborah L. Madsen, *The Postmodernist Allegories of Thomas Pynchon* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1991), 60.

[10] Allan Lloyd-Smith, *American Gothic Fiction: An Introduction* (New York: Bloomsbury, 2004), 62.

[11] Delamotte, *Perils of the Night*, 90.

Oedipa's search is as much driven by a desire to know as it is motivated by "a need to fill in the lack perceived" and to find "recompense for that loss in a new mode of experience."[12] Which is to say that Oedipa's story takes the shape of an aesthetic education, in which the confusions and expansions of Oedipa's perceptive faculties take centre-stage, as she learns to re-situate herself amidst a dark and inhuman landscape. Not only is Oedipa bombarded by signs, but each sign she encounters is defined by its paradoxical fusion of excess and insufficiency, and at every moment she is tested to expand her powers of perception and understanding to decipher what little she can.

In an added twist upon the feminine Gothic's drama of reason, Pynchon's novel frequently reverses the priority of the human subject and its encounters, giving the latter precedence, and letting the former be shaped by exterior forces. In a sense, Oedipa is "only incidental" as a conduit for the flows of information which pass through her, leading David Seed to remark that "[it] is appropriate that the protagonist of *The Crying of Lot 49* should be a figure with a minimal past and social context since the narrative takes her through an extended present where she is constantly trying to decipher the cultural signs which bombard her."[13] As in Radcliffe's account of terror, Oedipa's experience "expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life," but in the case of Pynchon's novel this higher degree of life stretches beyond the scope of human life altogether.[14] In her precipitous descent into the realms of terror, Oedipa navigates the inhuman mechanisms of a technological society and communes with faceless masses over wires and through waste.

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[12] Williams, *Art of Darkness*, 150-1.

[13] TCL 13; David Seed, "Media Systems in *The Crying of Lot 49*," in *American Postmodernity: Essays on the Recent Fiction of Thomas Pynchon*, ed. Ian D. Copestake (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003), 19.

[14] Ann Radcliffe, "On the Supernatural in Poetry," *New Monthly Magazine* 16, no. 1 (1826): 149.

Like the Gothic heroine of Radcliffe's *The Mysteries of Udolpho*, Oedipa "is impelled forward by forces beyond her control; her trials involve confronting the demands of cruel circumstances both natural and cultural;" and through her trials "she is even separated from herself, by being made to doubt her own reason, and in moments of crisis, by losing consciousness altogether."[15] But whereas Radcliffe's Emily survives these trials by recomposing herself and surmounting the terrifying forces which threaten her, Oedipa delves ever deeper, seeking ways to lose herself in the "inconclusive signs" of her search, and "establish [an] *occult* communication between otherwise incompossible affects, percepts, and events."[16] Although Oedipa's search ends in a state of total paranoia it cannot be said to have failed for this reason—for in the absolute acceptance of paranoid (un)reason, she affirms her fragmentary investigation into "real if hidden modes of existence" which because of its object cannot but fail at every turn.[17] Thrust into the grip of impossibly vast forces of conspiracy and control, haunted by fragments of an irretrievable past, Oedipa does not attempt to reduce their complexity down to her level, but instead attempts to incorporate herself into the overflow, to become a conduit for all that she can sense but may never understand. In typical Gothic fashion, the text vacillates between excess and emptiness, providing at once too much and too little for any sense to be made of it. Yet it is precisely this negativity which drives the novel forward, which compels Oedipa in her search for one more sign, one step further removed from the ordinary. As much as the suspense of terror shocks Oedipa and confuses her

[15] Williams, *Art of Darkness*, 163.

[16] Joshua Ramey, *The Hermetic Deleuze* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2012), 135.

[17] Broadly speaking, art itself must "affirm other possible modes of life beyond the clichés of what generally passes for life, and will discover life within uncanny imbrications of past and future, and at particularly tense conjunctions of affect, in order to explore an elusive multiplicity of sense." Ramey, *Hermetic Deleuze*, 135.

understanding, it nonetheless points to the great fecund darkness outside of her perception and thought, which leaves its signs scattered throughout her limited human world.

The Shadow Visits

The theme which dominates *The Crying of Lot 49* is that of death, and beneath its shadow, the encounter with an outside.[18] At the core of these themes is the figure of Pierce Inverarity, who at once disappears from life and ceaselessly re-appears as a spectral presence in Oedipa's world. The novel begins when Oedipa is struck by the death of her former lover and in her grief searches Southern California for some shred of his passing. A year before his death, as Oedipa recalls, Inverarity made one last early morning call, to deliver only a barrage of nonsense and character imitations. Quite literally fulfilling his last persona, Lamont Cranston as "The Shadow," Inverarity is cast into Oedipa's story as both an entity which haunts her and as an emptiness which opens out before her:

> Silence, positive and thorough, fell. So it was the last of his voices she ever heard. Lamont Cranston. That phone line could have pointed in any direction, been any length. Its quiet ambiguity shifted over, in the months after [Inverarity's final] call, to what had been revived: memories of his face, body, things he'd given her, things she had now and then pretended not to've heard him say. It took him over, and to the verge of being forgotten. The shadow waited a year before visiting. But now there was Metzger's letter.[19]

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[18] *The Crying of Lot 49* has been labelled a "book about loss, about the tragedy of what happens to the moment in the stream of time." Thomas Schaub, "'A Gentle Chill, An Ambiguity:' *The Crying of Lot 49*," in *Critical Essays on Thomas Pynchon*, ed. Richard Pearce (Boston: G. K. Hall and Co., 1981), 66.

[19] TCL 6-7.

In her grief, Oedipa recalls Inverarity as a ghost: Missing from the world, yet unbearably and inexplicably still there. What is devastating for Oedipa in his death is not that he is gone, but that he is strangely present, yet unable to be communicated with. He takes on the traits of his last persona, who David Seed notes "is figured iconically as a dark shape which can flit from place to place with limitless versatility. In other words, we have the case of Pierce simulating an artist of simulations, one of the earliest instances of recessive layering in *The Crying of Lot 49*."[20] As we shall see in this chapter and the next, the novel returns to the "shadow" as an ambiguous image of presence and absence, familiarity and unfamiliarity, bound together in the one space. Whether as a shade returned from the dead, or as a mere trick of the light, Inverarity the shadow forms an indeterminate space within the novel, which can never be fully inhabited by the characters or expunged from their lives.

Although by no means a villain of the sort typically found in Gothic novels, Inverarity occupies much the same role, as a figure of paternal power whose potential untrustworthiness sets Oedipa's quest in motion. The power which Inverarity exercises over Oedipa's life is recognisable in two senses. The first is simply material, in that his wealth and influence are such that even in death the suspicion remains that he may be pulling off an enormous prank, funded by his millions pilfered as a real estate mogul. The second is more intimate, as it concerns the place which Inverarity occupies in Oedipa's mind, as a shadow which hangs over her, and which she struggles to dispel. It is in these two senses that Inverarity occupies the same place in the novel as the Gothic fathers and husbands of old, having traded his titles and castle for a sprawling business empire, while still maintaining an uncertain control over the life of the novel's heroine. Although by no means a Bluebeard or a Schedoni, the Gothic patriarch remains one of Inverarity's many character masks, which he performs with some humour but not without defusing the

[20] Seed, "Media Systems," 22.

Gothic elements of this character altogether. Even as Inverarity is presented as a decidedly silly (or even, typical of Pynchon, a zany) character, his death and its aftershocks transform his bizarre antics into something more unsettling.

More than anything, the intrusion of Inverarity into Oedipa's life is presented in the language of the uncanny. The familiarity of his memory, and the unfamiliarity of his return, erupt into the domestic setting of the novel's opening, bringing with it a "sense of homeliness uprooted, the revelation of something unhomely at the heart of hearth and home."[21] This revelation of the unhomely within the homely is not disturbing because it upsets domestic norms, but rather because it reveals the instability at the heart of the home itself. In death, Inverarity's manic performances become irresolvable, no longer reducible back to the one person behind the mask. As Oedipa is soon to discover, whereas once Inverarity seemed able to put on any voice and perform any character in a comic mode, now it is impossible not to see his camouflaged face in all her surroundings. As Nicholas Royle writes,"[the uncanny] is a crisis of the natural, touching upon everything that one might have thought was 'part of nature:' one's own nature, human nature, the nature of reality and the world."[22] As Inverarity's spectre spreads its shadow over Oedipa's quiet existence, and over the pages of the novel, an ambiguity takes hold which refuses to resolve the tensions of life and death, presence and absence, which burrow through the text.

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[21] Nicholas Royle, *The Uncanny* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2003), 1. Royle's use of the uncanny is, of course, developed from that of Sigmund Freud, who characterises the experience by the persistent theme of the double and by the compulsion to repetition. As we shall see, Inverarity's assumption of the "Shadow" persona takes on both of these traits, as he both trails Oedipa as a double (her shadow) and returns to the story in the most unlikely ways. On the literary function of the uncanny, see Freud's germinal reading of Hoffman in: Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, ed. James Strachey, vol. 17 (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 226-245.

[22] Royle, *Uncanny*, 1.

In part, Oedipa's story is one of mourning and of an inability to escape a past which perpetually returns to her. But on another level, it is a willing of this same, partial return, and an attempt to reconstruct what has been lost even if only in fragments. Hanjo Berressem suggests that *The Crying of Lot 49* should be read as a study of dissolved and fragmented subjectivity. He writes that "Pierce is not an original person but a cultural simulacrum [...] A return to a real Pierce is not possible; every approach to his personality entails a deflection into cultural space, a dynamics that in a very Derridean gesture puts every utopia of a return to a stable origin under erasure, because every meaning one might want to attach to Pierce is endlessly—and hopelessly—deferred."[23] Inverarity is a man deferred; always announced within the text, but never fully arriving. But it is this impossibility of return which becomes the driving force behind Oedipa's search. Instead of a void within the text, Inverarity's uncanny absence takes the place of an ordering principle, around which Oedipa's search takes shape.

Oedipa's experience of the uncanny falls into what David Roden calls a "dark phenomenology," which lies at the edge of human perceptions and "confers no explicit or implicit understanding of its nature on the experiencer."[24] For Roden, this mode of phenomenological experience is dark because it pertains to no fixed or identifiable object, and instead functions as the apprehension of the limits of human perception. In this interzone, "a dark phenomenon could influence the dispositions, feelings or actions of the experiencer without improving her capacity to describe them."[25] It is here that the ambivalent aesthetics of the Gothic make headway into the territory of the posthuman. As we shall see, what begins as a merely uncanny confusion of presence and absence quickly gives way to other, equally disturbing, experiences of a world outside the human. Drawn

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[23] Hanjo Berressem, *Pynchon's Poetics* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1993), 89.

[24] David Roden, *Posthuman Life* (London: Routledge, 2015), 85.

[25] Roden, *Posthuman Life*, 85.

out of her domestic isolation by a ghost, Oedipa must learn to reckon with the materials and networks through which Inverarity's haunt passes, and the inhuman life into which he has been assumed. To follow Oedipa in her aesthetic initiation into the hidden machineries of posthuman life, we must first lay the groundwork of her perception of the world.

The Illusory Tower

Having encountered in Inverarity's return something which disturbs her from her normal life, Oedipa turns wholly to this otherness, and to the limits of apprehension beyond those tied to her personal relationship with Inverarity. Although Inverarity never makes a full return into the novel, his uncanny presence sparks something in Oedipa which sends her on a revelatory path.

> As things developed, she was to have all manner of revelations. Hardly about Pierce Inverarity, or herself; but about what remained yet had somehow, before this, stayed away. There had hung the sense of buffeting, insulation, she had noticed the absence of an intensity, as if watching a movie, just perceptibly out of focus, that the projectionist refused to fix.[26]

Neither Inverarity nor herself are the objects of Oedipa's revelations. Something remains on the outside of this dyad, which "had somehow, before this, stayed away." Oedipa is subject to a spatial divide, between what is near and comprehensible, and what lies just beyond—the imperceptible. This divide is described in aesthetic terms, as Oedipa feels a "sense of buffeting, insulation" and the "absence of an intensity, as if watching a movie, just perceptibly out of focus, that the projectionist refused to fix." She comes adrift from

[26] TCL 12.

the world that she knows, and is no longer affected by it in the ways that she once was. This is not only a symptom of her grief, but a shift in the way she interacts with her world.

What has until now divided Oedipa from this flood of revelation is expressed in Gothic terms. Not only does it replicate the spatial rift which Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick identifies as the basic structure of the Gothic form, but this rift is expressed within the novel in terms reminiscent of the Gothic tropes of castles, imprisonment, and escape.[27] Oedipa imagines herself at the beginning of the novel as a damsel locked in a tower, and Inverarity a hero come to rescue her. But the fabled escape does not take place. The tower assumes epistemic proportions as it comes to entrap her everywhere she goes.[28] For all Inverarity's manic tricks, and Oedipa's desperate need to connect with something outside, "all that had then gone on between them had really never escaped the confinement of that tower."[29] Once again the Gothic dynamic of inside and outside is in play, as each escape merely folds a new locale into the inside of the character's experience. Confined, Oedipa seeks rescue, which never comes, or at least not in the form she expects. If Inverarity could not rescue her from the tower in life, as a ghost his return sparks a productive encounter with the outside. In a recollection of her early days with Inverarity, Oedipa

[27] Sedgwick writes that under the conventions of the Gothic, "it is the position of the self to be massively blocked off from something to which it ought normally to have access." This something can be anything at all, but pertinent to Oedipa's plight, "it can be a lover [or] it can be just all the circumambient life, when the self is pinned in a death-like sleep. Typically, however, there is both something going on inside the isolation (the present, the continuous consciousness, the dream, the sensation itself) and something intensely relevant going on impossibly out of reach." Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (New York: Methuen, 1986), 12.

[28] Roger Henkle agrees that Oedipa's tower is primarily epistemological in nature, writing that "we are all prisoners in a world of phenomena, able only, at best, to devise cinema scenario parodies of the literary excesses of the past or to project elaborate conspiratorial fantasies that crackle out like bizarre short circuits of the brain." Roger Henkle, "Pynchon's Tapestries on the Western Wall," in *Pynchon: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Edward Mendelson (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1978), 110.

[29] TCL 13.

remembers their attempted escape to Mexico, and her reaction to a painting by Remedios Varo.

> In Mexico City they somehow wandered into an exhibition of paintings by the beautiful Spanish exile Remedios Varo: in the central painting of a triptych, titled "Bordando el Manto Terrestre," were a number of frail girls with heart-shaped faces, huge eyes, spun-gold hair, prisoners in the top room of a circular tower, embroidering a kind of tapestry which spilled out the slit windows and into a void, seeking hopelessly to fill the void: for all the other buildings and creatures, all the waves, ships and forests of the earth were contained in this tapestry, and the tapestry was the world.[30]

Varo's painting expands the terms of the novel into further uncanny territory. Here the inside and outside are involuted and turn in upon one another. On the one hand, the girls in the tower spin a world into existence from the confines of their tower. Trapped, like Oedipa, they nevertheless, from this position of solipsistic interiority, spill a tapestry of images into the void outside. The mad paranoiac creativity of this inside works outward to compose its surroundings, as the land, sea, and people outside are all created by the tireless hands of the captive women. But on the other hand, there is nothing to say that this inside is truly distinct from what spills out of it. The ground upon which the tower rests is nothing but cloth, and so the very foundations of the prison are themselves composed from within, while maintaining from without the conditions for this ceaseless production. The outside folds in to compose the walls that keep the interior contained, and it will take a more radical jolt from a more distant outside to sever the bonds which keep the cursed looms in motion. Lacking this escape, Oedipa turns to despair:

[30] TCL 13.

> What did she so desire escape from? Such a captive maiden, having plenty of time to think, soon realizes that her tower, its height and architecture, are like her ego only incidental: that what really keeps her where she is is magic, anonymous and malignant, visited on her from outside and for no reason at all. Having no apparatus except gut fear and female cunning to examine this formless magic, to understand how it works, how to measure its field strength, count its lines of force, she may fall back on superstition, or take up a useful hobby like embroidery, or go mad, or marry a disk jockey. If the tower is everywhere and the knight of deliverance no proof against its magic, what else?[31]

Far from being removed and safe within the walls of the tower, the tower's very existence is attributable to a "magic, anonymous and malignant" power. Not only is the tower everywhere and inescapable, but Oedipa begins to imagine herself from this outside perspective. Stefan Mattessich writes that "Pynchon's metaphors here signify a paratactic displacement beside one's self that characterizes the feeling of subjection to a fundamentally irrational exteriority."[32]

As in Inverarity's return, an encounter with some dark phenomenon almost takes place, but the perceptions and communications which could make it sensible slide past and into the shadows. This failure to make contact is, as we shall see in the next section, the key criteria in the Gothic aesthetics of the eerie. Mattessich goes on to suggest that in Oedipa's silent moment of despair before Varos' painting, she discovers herself to be an "incidental person, a projection, a hologram whose point of origin, that which 'keeps her where she is,' suggests a terrifying complicity between 'anonymous' gravitational force and 'malignant' social power. […] To be 'incidental' is therefore to experience alienation

[31] TCL 13.

[32] Stefan Mattessich, *Lines of Flight: Discursive Time and Countercultural Desire in the Work of Thomas Pynchon* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 47.

in the form of a fantasm installed at the center of being, a fantasm that destabilizes any clear sense of the human or real"[33] Oedipa comes to know herself not as a distinct and human subject, but as the subject of vast and incomprehensible forces which course through her.

While Inverarity's haunting disturbs Oedipa from her everyday life, the spectre of the tower awakens in her some dark consciousness of the unreality which has always haunted her world. Before she sets out into San Narciso, Oedipa comes face to face with this uncanny disturbance in her life, and in her encounter with it she takes on the task of giving it a name by which to understand it. The uncanny shadow and solipsistic tower lead her out of her mundane life, and into the eerie mechanisms of the city. As the novel progresses, Oedipa further takes on the qualities of the Gothic heroine, who must

> undergo the effects of this disillusion, doubting the nature of the powers that consume them, uncertain whether they originate internally or from external forces. Without an adequate social framework to sustain a sense of identity, the wanderer encounters the new form of the gothic ghost, the double or shadow of himself. An uncanny figure of horror, the double presents a limit that cannot be overcome, the representation of an internal and irreparable division in the individual psyche.[34]

As a Gothic heroine Oedipa navigates a maze of mixed meanings and affects, guided and propelled by the uncanny figure who traces her steps. As is the nature of the uncanny double, the horror lies not only in seeing oneself mirrored, but in discovering oneself as a reflection of that other figure.[35] Likewise, even as her epistemic tower imprisons her, it

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[33] Mattessich, *Lines of Flight*, 47.

[34] Fred Botting, *Gothic*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2014), 85.

[35] "The double is never a projection of the interior; on the contrary, it is an interiorization of the outside. It is not a doubling of the One, but a redoubling of the Other. It is not a reproduction of the Same, but a repetition of the Different. It is not the emanation of an 'I', but something that places in immanence an

also alienates her from the normality from which that prison springs. As in the feminine Gothic plot, the prison which constrains the heroine is as much psychological as it is physical, constructed by a patriarchal structure of authority and its representatives who exercise control over her thoughts as well as her movements. As Emma Miller remarks, "it is the dominant ideology which really constitutes Oedipa's tower," and while "she cannot see outside of the definitions and interpretations of her culture, to do this would be to break the magic she imagines keeps her held in captivity."[36] While Oedipa seeks out the traces of Inverarity, his ghost exerts an influence over her: leaving a trail which she consciously or unconsciously follows. "There seems to be [in the uncanny a] general acknowledgement that our lives, our experiences, the comings and goings within and all around us are increasingly *programmed*"—and so Oedipa sets out into the city to discover what sense lies behind the programming.[37]

The Eerie City

This sense of not only being haunted by something other, but of having been programmed by something outside oneself is present throughout the novel, and over its course expands from Inverarity to encompass Oedipa's entire world. As she continues on her search, what Oedipa encounters is no longer merely uncanny, but eerie. Just as the uncanny is more than a strange experience, and carries with it connotations of repetition, doubling, and the return of the repressed, the eerie is more than an unsettling feeling, and may be further

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always other or a Non-self. It is never the other who is a double in the doubling process, it is a self that lives me as the double of the other: I do not encounter myself on the outside, I find the other in me." Gilles Deleuze, *Foucault*, trans. Sean Hand (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 98.

[36] Emma Miller, "The Naming of Oedipa Maas," *Orbit: A Journal of American Literature* 1, no. 1 (2012). https://doi.org/10.7766/orbit.v1.1.12.

[37] Royle, *The Uncanny*, 23.

defined as an aesthetic category.[38] Unlike the uncanny, the eerie does not seek to return the unfamiliar to the familiar, by "processing the outside through the gaps and impasses of the inside."[39] Rather, the eerie "allow[s] us to see the inside from the perspective of the outside."[40] While the uncanny unsettles Oedipa in her isolated interior space, and reveals the manner in which this interiority is situated within a vast and threatening outside, the eerie upsets the very composition of that inside. Something programs her, which is to say it guides her movements and shapes her very being, but that something communicates through her, not to her, and hides its agency behind a veil of eerie signs.

It is this question of communication and agency that leads us out of the uncanny haunting of Inverarity and into the aesthetic experience of the eerie as it has been described by Mark Fisher. The category of the eerie, for Fisher, is

> constituted by a *failure of absence* or by a *failure of presence*. The sensation of the eerie occurs either when there is something present where there should be nothing, [or] there is nothing present when there should be something.[41]

If Inverarity's delayed re-appearance and doubling is unsettling because of its strange twisting up of human and inhuman (un)life, then the eerie is unsettling precisely when this encounter with the other fails to take place. And yet, despite this failure, something—

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[38] In using the term "aesthetic category" I borrow freely from Sianne Ngai's groundbreaking study *Our Aesthetic Categories* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2012), which situates the experiences of the zany, cute, and interesting under late capitalist consumer culture against the classical aesthetic categories of the beautiful and the sublime. "As sites in which discursive practices and modes of human intersubjectivity routinely intersect with aspects of what Arendt calls the 'thing-world,'" Ngai writes, aesthetic categories make up the "vocabulary for sharing and confirming our aesthetic experiences with other" (29). The uncanny and the eerie, although by no means as prevalent as the aforementioned aesthetic forms, may be described broadly as the aesthetic categories of the Gothic.

[39] Fisher, *The Weird and The Eerie*, 10.

[40] Fisher, *The Weird and The Eerie*, 10.

[41] Fisher, *The Weird and The Eerie*, 61.

some Thing—is still *there*, just perceptibly out of focus. This sense of the eerie is likewise detectable in *The Crying of Lot 49*'s first chapter, when Oedipa looks for the first time over the city of San Narciso

> She looked down a slope, needing to squint for the sunlight, on to 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. The ordered swirl of houses and streets, from this high angle, sprang at her now with the same unexpected, astonishing clarity as the circuit card had. 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. There'd seemed no limit to what the printed circuit could have told her (if she had tried to find out); so in her first minute of San Narciso, a revelation also trembled just past the threshold of her understanding.[42]

As in Mark Fisher's account of the eerie, the primary question raised by Oedipa's encounter with San Narciso is one of agency. From her first moment of looking across the skyline, she sees the buildings springing from the earth, "like a well-tended crop," in an "ordered swirl of houses and streets."[43] But if they are crops, by whom are they planted? From whence does this order arise? In her attempt to answer these questions, Oedipa is overwhelmed, as the totality of the city surpasses the capacity of her understanding. Such an image of the interminable complexity of the contemporary world is suggestive of what Fredric Jameson has called the postmodern sublime, which replaces the sublime's traditional object of nature with a technologised world that "loses its depth and threatens

[42] TCL 14-5.

[43] TCL 14.

to become a glossy skin, a stereoscopic illusion, a rush of filmic images without density."[44] But whereas for Jameson the postmodern sublime is engendered by the failed attempt to perceive the totality of global capital, "which turns back on and against us in unrecognizable forms," Pynchon's image of the city remains eerie for its emphasis not on the perception of magnitude but on the attempted communication with an alien agency.[45] Within Oedipa's failure to communicate and comprehend, there nevertheless lies a "clarity" of vision.[46] Revelation seems to emerge over the horizon, as Oedipa stands "at the centre of an odd, religious instant. As if, on some other frequency, or out of the eye of some whirlwind rotating too slow for her heated skin even to feel the centrifugal coolness of, words were being spoken."[47]

How does Oedipa come to understand this situation? The eeriness of the city is explained by means of an extended metaphor, in which the transistor radio and the pattern of streets become identified with one another. The radio carries in its electrical circuits a hidden message, the sounds of music and speech coded into radio waves and then transmitted through a series of wires and mechanisms to produce its message. The city too seems to contain a message, which flows through its streets like wires, modulated by its buildings, interrupted and enhanced by the movement of people and cars. Yet the frequency in which this message is transmitted is unknown to Oedipa, and the precise process by which her receiver shall translate it unknown to her. The radio and the city stand apart from Oedipa, as miraculous inventions, which function beyond her comprehension and speak without care for her participation. As Peter Cooper writes of

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[44] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 34.

[45] Jameson, *Postmodernism*, 35.

[46] TCL 14.

[47] TCL 15.

Oedipa's predicament, the "common individual, no longer equal to the works in progress, can see no pattern and feel no personal influence in the direction of events; but an inscrutable power structure seems to exist."[48] This identity between city and machine brings to the fore the precarious position in which Oedipa finds herself: situated within networks of communication and exchange, but with no agency over the information that passes by her and through her. Unlike the ghostly presence of Inverarity, who speaks to Oedipa from beyond the grave through random objects and images, the eerie city is alive yet totally mute. The radio receiver and the city are not subject to human will, but speak among themselves in frequencies lower than Oedipa may know.

Oedipa's eerie experience of the city recalls N. Katherine Hayles' discussions of communication technologies and the effects they bring about in human life as we come to know ourselves through our technological media that work to recompose us within their systems. As Oedipa gazes over San Narciso, she not only feels a sense of purposefulness in the distant hum of the city, but through her very presence as a spectator, she understands herself as a component in this mechanism.[49] For Hayles, the integration of humanity into communication networks brings about a re-conceptualisation of what it means to be a human subject. She writes that:

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[48] Cooper, *Signs and Symptoms,* 132. Commenting elsewhere upon Oedipa's experience of the city, Cooper highlights the imperceptible sense of order which Oedipa attempts to grasp: "Looking down the mountain, Oedipa senses some higher, nearly perceptible order, some shaping principle hidden beneath the surface disorder of the landscape. But she cannot quite hold onto the entire picture and comprehend it [...] Moreover, the alluring intimation of order lasts but an "instant" (56-7).

[49] As N. Katherine Hayles remarks, what terrified the first generation of cyberneticists was their unintentional demolition of the liberal subject as an impartial observer of the world, and the core discovery of second-order cybernetics that even a spectator is part of the system they observe. As Hayles quotes from Humberto Maturana: "The observer is a living system and any understanding of cognition as a biological phenomenon must account for the observer and his role in it." *How We Became Human* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 143.

> every day we participate in systems whose total cognitive capacity exceeds our individual knowledge, including such devices as cars with electronic ignition systems, microwaves with computer chips that precisely adjust power levels, fax machines that warble to other fax machines, and electronic watches that communicate with a timing radio wave to set themselves and correct their date. Modern humans are capable of more sophisticated cognition than cavemen not because modems are smarter [...] but because they have constructed smarter environments in which to work.[50]

In their totality the machines come to surpass the capacity of any one human caught within their networks, in some ways enhancing human cognition through integration in suprahuman computational systems, and in others overwhelming the human in its limited cognitive and perceptive abilities. The ambiguity of information technologies in Pynchon's work has not gone unremarked, but has only rarely been taken into the realm of posthuman studies. David Seed makes clear that—following McLuhan's analysis—"the spectator becomes part of the system or process and must supply the connections and this is exactly what happens to Oedipa. Throughout the novel she is shown to be surrounded by a dynamic environment which bombards her with information."[51] Likewise, Francisco Collado-Rodriguez identifies in Oedipa's conflation of the city and radio a connection to McLuhan's "well-known consideration of humans as electrodes in the communicative circuitry of the new global village."[52] From the start, Oedipa's investigation into the city and into Inverarity's death implicate her within a vast system of communication, in which she is an integral component.

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[50] Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 289.

[51] Seed, "Media Systems," 22.

[52] Francisco Collado-Rodriguez, "Intratextuality, Trauma, and the Posthuman in Thomas Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge*," *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 57, no. 3 (2016): 233.

The eeriness and unreality of Oedipa's first encounter with San Narciso speaks to an emerging aesthetic experience which can only be described as posthuman. What haunts Oedipa's world is the idea of the human subject bereft of its power over life and itself. The posthuman subject recedes into its environment. It becomes caught up in processes much larger than itself, and the boundaries between its own faculties and those of its surroundings grow more diffuse. While in the case of Inverarity, Oedipa witnesses a human subject distributed across time and space in uncanny fragments and refractions, in San Narciso she discovers herself undergoing a parallel process. As Inverarity is scattered across the landscape, Oedipa is drawn into it, and finds at the limits of her perception a hidden code that distributes the pieces of humanity. Her experience is marked by an incapacity to fix all that passes within her senses. Whether they operate at magnitudes of scale far greater than Oedipa, or function at frequencies lower than she may know, the mechanisms of the city remain just perceptibly out of focus, in spite of their seeming readiness to communicate to her. Whereas the traces of Inverarity constitute uncanny presences, the city is altogether characterised by an eerie aesthetic: where there is a presence, it is ungraspable; where there is an absence, it is ineffable.

Yet, within the eerie's failures of presence and absence there lies a speculative moment, which even as it confounds Oedipa's understanding still pushes her further into her attempts to make sense of the systems and circuitries now barely perceptible. Although the eerie disturbs the senses in its refusal to communicate a clear message, it is nonetheless suggestive of a vast and inhuman world that lives at the blurred corners of our vision. Looking over San Narciso, Oedipa experiences what Heather Davis calls the "defamiliarization and derangement of sense perception."[53] Under the posthuman condition, Davis writes, we experience "the complete transformation of the sensations and

[53] Heather Davis, "Art in the Anthropocene," in *Posthuman Glossary*, eds. Rosi Braidotti and Maria Hlavajova (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 63.

qualities of the world. In other words, the world that we are born into is receding in front of our eyes, causing a re-arrangement of the sensory apparatus of our organism."[54] Such becomes Oedipa's task over the course of the novel, not simply to piece together a conspiracy or the traces of her former lover, but to learn how to perceive that which eludes her. Descending into the city, Oedipa throws herself into the machinery and places herself at the disposal of whatever eerie agency is turning the gears.

In Praise of Paranoia

Oedipa's descent into the city is soon accompanied by a pervasive sense of paranoia: a sense that amidst the noise a hidden order is taking shape. The sense of revelation which hovered at the edges of Oedipa's perception now encompasses her and moves her through the city. "That's what would come to haunt her most, perhaps: the way it fitted, logically, together. As if (as she'd guessed that first minute in San Narciso) there were revelation in progress all around her."[55] Much has already been written about the theme of paranoia in *The Crying of Lot 49*, and the endless vacillations which Oedipa experiences in choosing either to pursue this revelation or to dismiss it as mere fantasy. But for all the explicit discussion of paranoia in the novel, it is apparent that it is not as all-encompassing as it is suggested to be, and if anything seems only a secondary reaction on Oedipa's part to the thought that nothing will be solved, that the expected revelation will never properly take place. Jonathan Rosenbaum is right to state that "Pynchon's concern is not only with 'paranoia' (the myth that 'everything is connected') but equally with what he terms 'anti-paranoia, where nothing is connected to anything,' a vision of chaos that is no less important; to omit this dialectic, which dictates his entire structure, is to overlook the

[54] Davis, "Art in the Anthropocene," 63-4.

[55] TCL 29.

work itself."[56] This dynamic is stated even more clearly by Pynchon in final pages of the novel: "Another mode of meaning behind the obvious, or none."[57]

This choice, between a paranoid pursuit of revelation and a collapse into disbelief, structures the main part of Oedipa's narrative during and after her trip to San Narciso. From the moment she perceives the eerie forces at work in the city streets, Oedipa is confronted not only with the possibility of a hidden order, but with the realisation that this order is not a given, but must be actively sought and pieced together if its ever to be understood. Oedipa's hilltop vision of San Narciso is a quintessentially Gothic experience of the city, as what Kelly Hurley calls a "*chaosmos*—a space of meaningless noise, activity, sensation in which narratives indiscriminately crowd one another and no one narrative has any more significance than the next [which] has its inverse in the paranoid fantasy of [the city] whose *seeming* indifferentiation masks a network of deeply-laid and infernal designs."[58] The tumult of roads, lights, peoples, and factories is experienced in a Gothic fashion as indicative of deeper, eerie forces which drive the seeming chaos of the streets.[59] Whatever is at work in the chaosmos of the city is either a brute randomness, begetting a dearth of meaning, or it is a mute and hidden order which at once overflows

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[56] Jonathan Rosenbaum, "A Reply," in *Pynchon: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Edward Mendelson (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1978), 67.

[57] TCL 126.

[58] Kelly Hurley, *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the* Fin de Siècle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 165.

[59] As Fisher writes, it is precisely this landscape emptied of meaningful human activity which is most conducive to the eerie experience: "A sense of the eerie seldom clings to enclosed and inhabited domestic spaces; we find the eerie more readily in landscapes partially emptied of the human. What happened to produce these ruins, this disappearance? What kind of entity was involved?" In the eerie, the question recurs of what agent is at work behind the movements and sensations which never quite give away their origin. "What kind of agent is acting here? Is there an agent at all?" Fisher, *The Weird and The Eerie*, 11.

with meaning while denying access to it. In either case, the choice then falls to Oedipa to pursue this hidden meaning or else herself fall into a hopeless quietude.

This disjunction between reality (hidden or dull) and unreality (paranoid or abyssal), for all its appearance of mutual exclusivity, ultimately blends together into a single whirling desire for understanding. Either Oedipa has discovered a vast conspiracy to escape the mundane life of governments and society, or she is hallucinating it all, or the hallucinations are part of a deliberate plot to fool her, or the plot itself is a figment. "Either way, they'll call it paranoia."[60] For all their differences, each possibility is positioned against a "They" who would shut it all down, take away the fantasy and the flight, and return Oedipa to stultifying normality. Whether the hidden order is real or not does not matter, because both outcomes return to the language of dream and escape. To have stumbled upon a vast underground network of communication is, Oedipa reasons, to have happened upon "a secret richness and concealed density of dream," no different from a mere hallucination of that dream.[61] Either Oedipa has discovered a real and pre-existent escape or she has effected that escape for herself in her fantasy. A "secret richness" or hallucination of it amounts to the same thing, which is to say both are "real alternative[s] to the exitlessness, to the absence of surprise to life, that harrows the head of everybody American you know, and you too."[62]

Given this false choice, between exit of one form or another and total exitlessness, Oedipa once again takes on the role of the Gothic heroine who hesitates at the edge of the unknown before diving headlong into its liberating darkness. As Molly Hite writes of the world which Oedipa leaves behind, "if this world is initially vapid and banal, Oedipa's

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[60] TCL 117.

[61] TCL 117.

[62] TCL 117, 118.

progress serves in part to restore it, for Oedipa rises above her vacuous reality by interpreting aspects of that reality as signs."[63] What most scares Oedipa is not the sublime terror of conspiracies, networks, and machines, but the possibility that these signs will ultimately be empty. In this respect, Oedipa mirrors the heroine of Charlotte Brontë's *Jane Eyre*, whose greatest fear is not simply dispossession or destruction, but damnation to a menial existence. "At the threshold of the Gothic domain, most heroines tremble in fear of they know not what," writes Eugenia DeLamotte, while in contrast Brontë's heroine is struck by fear of the "viewless fetters of a uniform and too still existence."[64] Paranoia, even when it appears to create a vast totalising system of interpretation, nonetheless appears for Oedipa as a form of freedom, from the mundane world and even from herself. Although she experiences terror at each step, she is still drawn inexorably further on her search, and one step closer to an exit from her spurious 'reality.'

The paranoid logic of Oedipa's search returns us once more to the aesthetic dimension of the novel and the encounters which spur Oedipa on her search. Some encounters merely disturb, as in the uncanny, and some fail to take place, as in the eerie, but each takes Oedipa out of herself into the vast undefined sublimity at the edges of her world. Oedipa returns time and again to the experience of terror at the enormity of this outside, but a terror which stems from the psychological recomposition of herself in the face of this enormity. As Anne Williams writes, "[t]error or the sublime [is] unlike horror, which threatens corporeal integrity—one's being as a body—[because] the sublime overwhelms the self with the *idea* of an overwhelming power.[65] While the horror of the abject depends on a disturbed physiology, the terror of the sublime lies in a psychological experience which overpowers the faculties of the mind. Terror, then, is the experience of

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[63] Hite, *Ideas of Order*, 74.

[64] DeLamotte, *Perils of the Night*, 205.

[65] Williams, *Art of Darkness*, 76.

an encounter which compels the mad scramble of the faculties to comprehend what is before them. As a source of terror, the aesthetic category of the sublime is "a contradiction experienced between the demands of reason and the power of imagination [...] When imagination is confronted with its limit by something which goes beyond it in all respects it goes beyond its own limit itself."[66] To surpass the limits of comprehension is the object of the sublime experience, which floods the mind and senses with the "'unrepresentable' features of subjectivity and reality."[67]

In Ann Radcliffe's original distinction between terror and horror, the former has the connotations of both liberation and edification, as it both elevates the soul and purifies the mind of its misjudgements. As Radcliffe famously remarks, "terror and horror are so far opposite, that the first expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life; the other contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them."[68] A prototypical example of sublime terror in Radcliffe's work occurs in *The Italian*, when the novel's heroine Ellena briefly, escapes her imprisonment by looking upon the vast mountainside upon which her prison rests. With a "dreadful pleasure," she gazes upon the stony cliff face, and in that moment "the consciousness of her prison was lost, while her eyes ranged over the wide and freely sublime scene without."[69] As her prison fades from consciousness, she grows aware of the spiritual freedom that resides within herself, inviolable to the world outside. "With a mind thus elevated, how insignificant would appear to her the transactions and the sufferings of this world! [...] Thus man, the giant who now held her

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[66] Gilles Deleuze, *Kant's Critical Philosophy*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1984), 51.

[67] Antonie Peroikou, "Of Crakers and Men: Imagining the Future and Rethinking the Past in Markaret Atwood's MaddAddam Trilogy," in *Posthuman Gothic*, ed. Anya Heise-von der Lippe (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2017), 37.

[68] Ann Radcliffe, "On the Supernatural in Poetry," *New Monthly Magazine* 16, no. 1 (1826): 149.

[69] Ann Radcliffe, *The Italian* (Richmond: Oneworld Classics, 2008), 99.

in captivity, would shrink to the diminutiveness of a fairy; and she would experience that his utmost force was unable to enchain her soul, or compel her to fear him."[70] This form of terror is at once negative, as it diminishes the stature of humanity and its works, and positive, in that this diminishment also releases the heroine from her psychological and physical bondage.

Oedipa's experience of terror and the sublime diverges from this model on two points, without entirely leaving behind the form of terror as it has developed since Radcliffe's formulation. First, whereas terror in its classic form culminates in a moment of resolution, for Oedipa this resolution is refused so that it may continue on its destructive side, as a moment of panicked speculation without end. This refusal of the ends of terror is not without its precedent in Radcliffe, as DeLamotte suggests,

> the life of her [Radcliffe's] work emanates from the moment before such revelations—the moment of not knowing for sure, when everything, including the mind, is neither-nor. That is the moment of imagination, when the boundary between self and the other has no meaning, the moment when what matters is not reality but the heroine's projection outward of her fears of reality: the moment, in short, of negative capability.[71]

Even in Radcliffe the libidinal pull of the work is toward the thrill and torment of terror's negativity, more so than its ultimately deflationary resolution. Second, Pynchon's novel does not present terror as a process which is entirely rational or willed. Whereas Radcliffean terror works to dispel superstition in favour of rational explanations, in *The Crying of Lot 49* the powers of terror turn back upon themselves to undermine the very notion of the rational human subject. This loosing of terror from its rationalist ends also

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[70] Radcliffe, *The Italian*, 100.

[71] DeLamotte, *Perils of the Night*, 48.

has its precedents in classic Gothic literature. Kate Ferguson Ellis, for example, notes that the characters in Maturin's *Melmoth, the Wanderer*, "are driven literally out of their minds by the thoughts that possess them; their waking lives have the unwilled quality of dreams, while their dreams propel them to act 'involuntarily.' [In a state of terror,] the will is not only unfree but 'stolen,' while the imagination, abhorring a vacuum, fills the space with its own introjects."[72] Terrifying thoughts cease to be the possessions of a rational subject, but themselves come to possess those who attempt to think them. Terror becomes involuntary, because it does not happen on the terms of the thinking subject, and rather arrives from outside to force the occurrence of thought. The experience of terror is not sought, and it is not begun voluntarily, but it is nevertheless encountered by the Gothic heroes and heroines who must reckon with it or perish.

By reading Oedipa's "paranoia" as a mode of Gothic terror, we may disabuse ourselves of the longstanding prejudice critics have held against Oedipa for her supposed delusions. While it is understandable that Pynchon critics may see his paranoia as somewhat old-fashioned, as a sign of "the paranoid-rubric Cold War Pynchon that still constrains his popular reception," to do so would be to mistake paranoia for a purely postmodern invention, and miss the much longer literary history from which Pynchon draws.[73] Furthermore, to have done with paranoia is ultimately to have done with *The Crying of Lot 49* altogether, and to have put Oedipa back inside her tower. As a method of terror, a way of contacting the sublime, Oedipa's paranoia is not a fixed structure of thought, but a devastating line of escape toward all that exists outside the walled interiority of the pacified subject. "Cherish it!" cries her therapist, "Whatever it is, hold it

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[72] Kate Ferguson Ellis, *The Contested Castle: Gothic Novels and the Subversion of Domestic Ideology* (Chicago: University of Illinois Press, 1989), 169-70.

[73] Ali Chetwynd, "Pynchon After Paranoia," in *The New Pynchon Studies*, ed. Joanna Freer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 34.

dear, for when you lose it you go over by that much to the others. You begin to cease to be."[74] Were this terror to be dispelled, and the paranoia fade into the dark, Oedipa would be left with nothing else but "death and the daily, tedious preparations for it."[75]

The reclamation of paranoia as a means of ideological escape also alters the Gothic form from which it borrows. Unlike Radcliffe's heroines, Oedipa does not enact a rational interrogation of the world, but recognises the place of the irrational within her world. What is at stake, and what is most Gothic about Oedipa's search, is that it walks the line between the productive irrationality of a creative world-building and the bottomless depths of the non-rational. Here Oedipa's dark premonitions of a "meaning behind the obvious" draw close to the practice of cultural critique which Margaret Cohen identifies in her Gothic Marxist reading of Walter Benjamin, notable for his "valorization of the realm of a culture's ghosts and phantasms as a significant and rich field of social production rather than a mirage to be dispelled," and his "notion of critique moving beyond logical argument and binary opposition to a phantasmagorical staging more closely resembling psychoanalytic therapy."[76] Benjamin likens the modern world to a dream, in which fragmentary and ephemeral products emerge and dissipate before our eyes, with no clear relation to their place of origin or final destination. Benjamin writes that: "Capitalism was a natural phenomenon with which a new dream-filled sleep came over Europe, and through it, a reactivation of mythic forces."[77] The study of ideology is thus not a practice of correcting erroneous beliefs, but of untangling the expressions of this collective dream-world in a similar manner to the way that psychoanalysis

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[74] TCL 95-6.

[75] TCL, 126.

[76] TCL 126; Margaret Cohen, *Profane Illuminations* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 11.

[77] Walter Benjamin *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1999), 391.

approaches the dreams of an individual. This is not the world as conceived by liberalism and the Enlightenment, in which it is only the sleep of reason that births monsters, but a Gothic world in which reason is always already asleep and beset by irrational forces from the start.[78]

The Unspeakable Word

As the novel continues, the sublime qualities of Oedipa's encounters become overwhelming. Even as she is liberated from the stultifying normality of her old life, she also becomes ungrounded and unable to give a new direction to her movements. Instead, she follows the signs of her search one by one, giving herself over to them, and abdicating her will to the involuntary thoughts and actions spurred by her encounters. Without the rationalist resolution of terror, she spirals into the contemplation of things beyond human comprehension: suprahuman voices, ineffable words, and all shades of experience for which words cannot suffice. In San Francisco as in San Narciso, a sublime immensity hangs over Oedipa, but is never fully communicated.

> At some indefinite passage in night's sonorous score, it also came to her that she would be safe, that something, perhaps only her linearly fading drunkenness, would protect her. The city was hers, as, made up and sleeked so with the customary words and images (cosmopolitan, culture, cable cars) it had not been

[78] "Civilisation does not exclude barbaric and savage energies, it reinvents them. The changing configurations of cities, crowds, commodities and consciousness compose a new 'phantasmagoria', the metaphor of the magic lantern from the eighteenth century reactivated by Walter Benjamin to signal the uncertain extent to which the modern world involves a blurring of perception and hallucination, a flux of impressions, realities, machines and media forms, in which both a sense of solidity of things and security of selves is supplanted by multiple and sometimes monstrous movements that engender apprehension but cannot be easily apprehended. It is as if the uncanny disturbances, spectres and ghosts that once were limited as effects of gothic fictions extend, via other media, into the fabric and shadowy formation of modern life, a kind of 'phantomodernity.'" Botting, *Gothic*, 149.

> 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. Nothing of the night's could touch her; nothing did. The repetition of symbols was to be enough, without trauma as well perhaps to attenuate it or even jar it altogether loose from her memory. *She was meant to remember*. She faced that possibility as she might the toy street from a high balcony, roller-coaster ride, feeding-time among the beasts in a zoo—any death-wish that can be consummated by some minimum gesture. She touched the edge of its voluptuous field, knowing it would be lovely beyond dreams simply to submit to it; that not gravity's pull, laws of ballistics, feral ravening, promised more delight. She tested it, shivering: I am meant to remember. Each clue that comes is supposed to have its own clarity, its fine chances for permanence. But then she wondered if the gemlike "clues" were only some kind of compensation. To make up for her having lost the direct, epileptic Word, the cry that might abolish the night.[79]

Once again a vast unknown city spreads out before Oedipa and prepares to speak to her in languages she either cannot hear or cannot decipher. Unlike the mute, mechanical San Narciso, San Francisco works at the level of the body, as if it were an enormous organic mass of blood vessels, folds of skin, and hidden capillaries. But even here the core metaphor of revelation is still at play, when Oedipa is assumed into the body, given safe passage through the thickly pumping arteries of the city, hidden deep in the private flesh of that great beast.

As in San Narciso the city remains a vessel of some eerie order, whose signs and symbols pass by and through Oedipa on her journey. "The consequent sense of 'safe-

[79] TCL 81.

passage' she feels at large in [the city] conditions its transformation into a vast organism, a living thing 'made up' of 'words and images,' a text-body that is strangely abstract, without affect or impersonal, breathing and pumping blood yet chimerical, as empty and unreal as Oedipa herself (or the novel itself)."[80] Oedipa is pre-eminently obsessed with these signs, which, following Mattessich, are revealed in a material semiotics irreducible to human language. The signs which Oedipa attempts to decode are not merely textual, but manifested in a base materiality which speaks to her from out of a non-linguistic medium.[81] The city speaks, the wires of a radio speak, even the body speaks, but the language spoken is of another order from the human. Oedipa's search leaves her teetering on the edge of this bottomless abyss of meaning. She is awash in a sea of communication, but without the means to make sense of those signs which push her onward. Mattessich, for example, notes that

> Oedipa Maas's search for the meaning of Tristero and of the communication system known as WASTE is never far away from an impoverishment of sense that threatens to collapse the novel into a heap of ambiguous signs. […] By undermining its own narrative and analogical consistency, the novel dramatizes a social order that subsumes subjects in immaterial nexuses of discourse, communication systems, and information.[82]

Disregarding Mattessich's unfortunately misapplied notion of "immaterial nexuses of discourse," but taking the rest of his study to heart, we may see in *The Crying of Lot 49* a human subject subsumed in a system of communication. Everywhere in the novel there is

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[80] Mattessich, *Lines of Flight*, 59.

[81] This theme of base material signs will recur in *Bleeding Edge*, and my discussion of it in Chapter Six, in which the information networks of the web ultimately collapse into a material cosmos of wires and databanks.

[82] Mattessich, *Lines of Flight*, 13.

an excess of possible meanings, a semiotic overflow which feeds Oedipa's paranoid escape. There is a potency to this excess, which sustains Oedipa's search, as she hopes that "the repetition of symbols was to be enough."[83] The overflow of communication is the source from which Oedipa's terror springs, and of the sublime and eerie effects which it brings upon her.

A distinction should be drawn between the sublime and the eerie, even as they intersect and provoke the same terror in Oedipa. As Julia Kristeva writes, "the sublime has no object" because it is the overflow of experience in "a cluster of meaning, of colors, of words, of caresses."[84] The sublime object "dissolves," because "as soon as I perceive it, as soon as I name it, the sublime triggers—it has always already triggered—a spree of perceptions and words that expands memory boundlessly. I then forget the point of departure and find myself removed to a secondary universe, set off from the one where 'I' am—delight and loss."[85] The sublime cannot be fully grasped, because in the moment of perception it explodes in our hands and leaves us tumbling from one fragment to another in search of the whole.

In contrast, the eerie has an object, but an object which overpowers us with communications that never quite lead us back to their source. The eerie is "fundamentally to do with the outside, and here we can understand the outside in a straightforwardly empirical as well as a more abstract transcendental sense," because the eerie experience is never within our grasp, even in the first moment of perception.[86] Both the sublime and the eerie objects slip from our hands, and both overwhelm our perceptive capacities, but

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[83] TCL 81.

[84] Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 12.

[85] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 12.

[86] Fisher, *The Weird and The Eerie*, 11.

whereas the sublime overwhelms us in its plenitude, the eerie overpowers us with its silence. We drown in the sublime, and suffocate in the eerie. Even as Oedipa is immersed in the sublime, she also experiences the eerie as an unsettling contact with a world which is not for her, in a night of which "[nothing] could touch her."[87]

Just as the sublime and eerie converge in their overpowering of the senses, and in their core logics of incomprehensible communication with something outside ourselves, they are drawn together on one other point. Both bring about a radical dispossession of the senses and of the self, which finds itself awash in perceptions and communications to which it can never be equal. Writing of the sublime, but in a manner just as applicable to the eerie, Kristeva elaborates on the profound othering which takes place in our apprehension—or misapprehension—of the sublime object: "Not at all short of but always with and through perception and words, the sublime is a *something added* that expands us, overstrains us, and causes us to be both *here,* as dejects, and *there,* as others."[88] Just as Oedipa's paranoia takes her out of her head, her nocturnal journey through the city transports her out of herself, to hover precipitously on the edge of something totally other, and in that proximity knowing herself as other.

In the same moment that she considers the bare repetition of signs, Oedipa reacts with mixed terror and joy at the thought of dissolving into the flood of information. "She touched the edge of its voluptuous field, knowing it would be lovely beyond dreams simply to submit to it."[89] With each sign, each "clue" she gives herself over to the eerie order which takes shape around her. Such is the terror of the eerie, the realisation that a hidden agency works through human subject, and the willed dissolution into its folds. The

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[87] TCL 81.

[88] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 12.

[89] TCL 81.

eerie sends a shiver down our spines not only because its object surpasses us, but because it composes us: "the mirror cracks, I am an other, and I always was."[90]

Somewhere beyond herself, her search, and its signs, Oedipa imagines the agency which speaks through her. She wonders "if the gemlike 'clues' were only some kind of compensation" for the refusal of this agency to materialise. In its place are only ever the traces, the uncanny remnants and eerie murmurs which make up the stuff of her paranoia. They exist "to make up for her having lost the direct, epileptic Word, the cry that might abolish the night."[91] Somewhere amidst the noise, the indirect messages, and inferred meanings, must lie this singular Word which would speak through it all and dispel the shadows that haunt Oedipa's world. If Oedipa's search is to have an object, it is not Tristero, WASTE, or even Inverarity, but this ineffable Word which lies utterly outside all that she may know. If only it could be spoken, she would give herself over to it, to become a conduit to its unknown ecstasy. She is not alone in her thirst for the final proclamation of an outside, or in her possession by its compensatory signs. Just as Inverarity's ghost lies hidden in the trash of the city, and the eerie agency of San Narciso courses through the roads and tunnels like electricity through a radio, at the novel's end, so Oedipa comes to recognise the medium that carries the Word.

> She remembered drifters she had listened to, Americans speaking their language carefully, scholarly, as if they were in exile from somewhere else invisible yet congruent with the cheered land she lived in; and walkers along the roads at night, zooming in and out of your headlights without looking up, too far from any town to have a real destination. And the voices before and after the dead man's that had phoned at random during the darkest, slowest hours, searching ceaseless among

[90] Fisher, *The Weird and The Eerie*, 12.

[91] TCL 81.

> the dial's ten million possibilities for that magical Other who would reveal herself out of the roar of relays, monotone litanies of insult, filth, fantasy, love whose brute repetition must someday call into being the trigger for the unnamable act, the recognition, The Word.[92]

The Word is no transcendence of the world, but something which would erupt through the bare electric materiality of this world, at last dispelling the illusions which keep it all together. This Word would not be passed down by priests or psychiatrists, but by the drifters, hobos, and crack-ups who people the underworld in which Oedipa finds herself. They speak as though in exile from somewhere deeply connected to the world Oedipa knows, yet also outside in "that 'exterior' darkness where one is cast by the force of banishment."[93] Everywhere she sees that there "is no inside except as a folding of the outside," and whatever small fragment she may grasp is but a sign of this untold immensity.[94] Here at last the eerie gives way totally to the sublime, as the empty roads and cities of Oedipa's America begin to swarm with these uncounted trespassers from the outside. Through the drifters' speech, and the crackle of telephone static, Oedipa awaits the revelation which would flood through the walls of her world, her epistemic tower. Not only is the Word materially instantiated, it is mechanically aided in its materialisation. Although distant, the possibility remains that through "brute repetition" some voice might be assembled from the scattered "roar of relays" and announce the arrival of the Word over the telephone wires.

Pynchon's Gothic mode remains tied up with the posthuman in that he refuses a clear split between his character and the machine. Increasingly over the course of the

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[92] TCL 124-5.

[93] Maurice Blanchot, *The Space of Literature*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1982), 78.

[94] Fisher, *The Weird and The Eerie*, 11-2.

novel, Oedipa is implicated within the chaosmos of the city. She never learns the arcane codes which pass through its networks, but she learns to wire herself into that system, and let the hidden agencies of the city pass through her. Whether in the form of an impersonal paranoid search, or the mute revelation of the Word, Oedipa comes to know that "'we' 'ourselves' are caught up in the rhythms, pulsions and patternings of non-human forces," and whatever we take ourselves to be is but a palimpsest of vast inhuman movements.[95] Stefan Mattessich suggest that "Oedipa is essentially a machine, a kind of information-processing computer that organizes or links the elements of the textual world through which 'she' seeks answer to the mystery of Tristero and WASTE."[96] Although suggestive, this metaphorical equation of Oedipa with machinery runs the risk of eliding the subjective and aesthetic elements of her search, or of ignoring her active participation in the machinery. If Oedipa is essentially a machine, the questions remain: What sort of machine is she? What is flowing through her? And to what extent does this machinic metaphor break down in the extreme overflow of the sublime?

The price of fulfilling the Gothic plot, and uncovering this mechanism that gives sense to the senseless city, is the subsumption of Oedipa's person into the vast circuit-board. Trembling "just past the threshold of her understanding" lies another world.[97] A world that is not for us, but which passes through us and drives us. It is what François Bonnet has labelled the infra-world: "Everywhere, at every moment, it is unravelling. Everywhere, it oozes, it crouches in the shadows. Beneath language, beneath sensations. A quaking world. [...] It is the world of exiled impressions and actions, but it is not an absent world. The infra-world is the world that withdraws from the infraliminal world of

[95] Fisher, *The Weird and The Eerie*, 11.

[96] Mattessich, *Lines of Flight*, 48.

[97] TCL 15.

perception. It is what fails to make a world."[98] This infra-world is not our phenomenological world, but it is intimately tied up with and implicated in our world. It is what evades perception, what falls outside our ken. Shimmering on the surface film between this world and that other, there exists what Bonnet calls "the spectral world," which is

> an accumulation of forgotten things, of losses which continue to make themselves manifest, lingering behind. It is an intermediate space, a space of disappearance and of survival. A spectral world—ghostly, because it can never be actualised. For a ghost is an entity *whose apparition is not a presence*.[99]

With Bonnet's formulation of the spectral and infra-worlds we may sketch out alongside the semiotics of Oedipa's search an equivalent topography of perceptions. By way of her metaphoric tower, Oedipa imagines herself trapped within herself, always looking toward the dim shapes and scattered lives which she cannot reach. The primary movement of the novel is outward from this imprisonment, as Oedipa ventures forth to grasp at the signs and symbols which suggest an outside, and as these objects invade her own inner space. It is in this encounter that the spectral world of the novel takes shape, in the interplay between half-perceived apparitions, undeciphered codes, and the struggle which Oedipa undertakes to comprehend the flashes of the outside. The uncanny, eerie, and sublime signs and objects of Oedipa's search compose this spectral realm, which floats dangerously on the cusp of her understanding, like the sparkle of waves on the surface of a dark water. There, outside herself, just barely perceptible past the ghosts and through the murmurs, Oedipa senses an alien and inhuman outside. Oedipa's search takes on an occult dimension, not only because of what is hidden, but the layered folding of the secret

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[98] François Bonnet, *The Infra-World*, trans. Amy Ireland and Robin Mackay (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2017), 90.

[99] Bonnet, *The Infra-World*, 75.

upon itself. The outside is never only outside, but as an infra-world intersects with the world we know, leaving strange and overpowering sensations in those places where its marks remain.

From her haunted tower down through the spectral city, Oedipa escapes by means of paranoia and descends into the underworld that sings of the great impersonal outside forbidden to those above. She is not granted direct access to the Word, but she hears in the darkness and detritus the revelation of "that magical Other who would reveal herself out of the roar of relays, monotone litanies of insult, filth, fantasy, love."[100] From the start, revelation has precipitated around her, not spoken from on high, but within the fragments of signs which she attempts to piece together. There is no one person who would speak the Word that Oedipa seeks, so she resorts to the bare "repetition of symbols" which may fall into place by their own eerie agency.[101] Oedipa comes to occupy the space which Blanchot reserves for "the speaking subject […] located within a deep anonymous murmur. It is within this murmur without beginning or end" that the speaking subject exists no longer as the "I" who speaks, but the indefinite one of "one speaks" or "she speaks."[102] The machinic metaphor suggested by Mattessich here appears insufficient, as it reduces Oedipa's search down to a reactive response to outside stimulus—making her into just another cog in the machine—and in doing so it fails to identify this subjective space which Oedipa inhabits. Amidst the floating ambiguity of language and meaning, puppeteered by hidden agencies and overwhelmed by sublime experience, the individual subject dissolves into its surroundings, but also passes some part of itself into the impersonal, inhuman outside to which it now returns.

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[100] TCL 125.

[101] TCL 81.

[102] Deleuze, *Foucault*, 7.

Land, Sea, and the Natural Sublime

By the novel's end, Oedipa finds herself lost in this undefined state. Before the titular crying of Lot 49 has even begun, the plot of the novel has drawn to a close, when Oedipa experiences one last epiphany to shatter whatever of her sense of self remains:

> She stood between the public booth and the rented car, in the night, her isolation complete, and tried to face towards the sea. But she'd lost her bearings. She turned pivoting on one stacked heel, could find no mountains either. As if there could be no barriers between herself and the rest of the land. San Narciso at that moment lost (the loss pure, instant, spherical, the sound of a stainless orchestral chime held among the stars and struck lightly), gave up its residue of uniqueness for her; became a name again, was assumed back into the American community of crust and mantle. Pierce Inverarity was really dead.[103]

Here at last Oedipa reaches the end of her journey in a state not quite of revelation, but disillusionment. For all his haunts, Inverarity is dead, never to return. "[What] did it matter now if he'd owned all of San Narciso?"[104] What remains is merely a tracing of the man, a strange outline made of fragments, properties, memories which orbit around his absence. In a final twist on the conventions of the feminine Gothic, *The Crying of Lot 49* culminates in the dispelling of a ghost, and the freeing of the heroine from her paternal tormenter—but as it also signals the end of her entire endeavour, this disillusionment does not elevate her, but deflates and defeats her. It was the spectral re-appearance of Inverarity that spurred Oedipa on her search, but by the end of the novel the fact of his death has become unescapable. Even in death, Inverarity leads Oedipa into the city, to spiral out on her search for a guiding pattern behind the urban morass. Now too, San

[103] TCL 122-3.

[104] TCL 123.

Narciso loses its lustre, and gives up its magic to "become a name again."[105] For just as the dead man's ghost was only the faint outline of the man, San Narciso was only "a name; an incident among our climatic records of dreams and what dreams became among our accumulated daylight."[106] As the city's uniqueness fades, and the spectres are dispelled, Oedipa is left alone in the scene which structured the whole novel from the start: a fragile human subject lost amidst the geological torrent of the earth, "assumed back into the American community of crust and mantle."[107] Like San Narcisco, Oedipa is only "incidental," a fold in the fabric of the earth, composed by chance encounters and subject to the fluctuations of this vast unknown outside, "as if there could be no barriers between herself and the rest of the land."[108]

At this limit, Oedipa attempts to orient herself, to face the Pacific ocean. "But she'd lost her bearings."[109] Throughout the novel, the ocean was ever-present, but sensed only as a "subliminal pull" or "as a stimulus and response just below conventional sensation."[110] Despite Oedipa's fascination with the swirl of houses and imperceptible

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[105] TCL 123.

[106] TCL 123. If San Narciso becomes a name once again, it is a name which itself signifies narcissism and solipsism on one hand, and the total loss of self on the other. As Maurice Blanchot writes of the myth of Narcissus, what is so quickly forgotten is that Narcissus does not recognise himself in the pool, but is transfixed only by an image. "It is thus not himself, not his perhaps nonexistent 'I' that he loves or—even in his mystification—desires. And if he does not recognise himself, it is because what he sees is an image, and because the similitude of an image is not likeness to anyone or anything: the image characteristically resembles nothing. [...] Does Narcissus die? Scarcely: having turned into an image, he dissolves in the immobile dissolution of the imaginary, where he is washed away without knowing it, losing a life he does not have." Maurice Blanchot, *The Writing of the Disaster*, trans. Ann Smock (Lincoln: University of Nebraska Press, 1986), 125-6.

[107] TCL 123.

[108] TCL 13, 122.

[109] TCL 122.

[110] Seed, "Media Systems," 29.

communications of the city, she senses that elsewhere, "beyond the battening, urged sweep of three-bedroom houses rushing by their thousands across all the dark beige hills, [...] lurked the sea, the unimaginable Pacific."[111] Out there, beyond the haunted streets of the city, beneath the half-sensed ghosts, drifters, and all others who pass Oedipa on their descent into the earth's immensity, "something tidal began to reach feelers in past eyes and eardrums, perhaps to arouse fractions of brain currents your most gossamer microelectrode is yet too gross for finding."[112] Even here the electrical buzzing of some outside force is felt, if not by way of the senses, then in some intimate and unspeakable suspicion that there remain whole other realms as yet inaccessible to the limited human mind. Here the mechanical imagery of the novel is also pushed to its limit and collapses back into the natural mode of the sublime. The brain conceived as a tangle of wires and electrodes is overpowered and short-circuited by the terrible enormity of the ocean, in which all Oedipa's mechanical metaphors for revelation turn to rust. The feeling of revelation which descends upon Oedipa from the earliest pages of the novel, never given a solid form by the spectral signs and figures she encounters, here at last runs steadily toward the sea.

> Oedipa had believed, long before leaving Kinneret, in some principle of the sea as redemption for Southern California (not, of course, for her own section of the state, which seemed to need none), some unvoiced idea that no matter what you did to its edges the true Pacific stayed inviolate and integrated or assumed the ugliness at any edge into some more general truth. Perhaps it was only that notion,

[111] TCL 36.

[112] TCL 37.

> its arid hope, she sensed as this forenoon they made their seaward thrust, which would stop short of any sea.[113]

Here, as later in the novel, Oedipa treats the sea "as an embodiment of redemptive hope."[114] The redemption offered by the sea is posited as something absolutely external to the whims of those on land, whose perambulations of the shore cannot impinge upon the "unvoiced" and "inviolate" depths. Whatever depredations may occur along its edges, the sea is ever-ready to assume them into itself. The sea figures as a source of hope, but an "arid hope" alien to us, emanating from "the hole left by the moon's tearing free and monument to her exile."[115] As a site of cosmic exile, the sea is figured as a great rift in the earth, where all the refuse of the land may flow.

In this theme of exile the sea is also bound up with Oedipa's unspeakable Word which is spoken of, but not directly spoken, by the outcast and downtrodden of the fallen territory of America. Like rivers to the sea, the voices of this hidden America flow together in a "roar of relays" to bring forth the impossible alterity of the Word, and both the Word and the Pacific draw Oedipa past the bounds of her perception into that dark unknown.[116] The subliminal pull of the sea arrives in those moments of uncertainty, when Oedipa stumbles from her search and begins to withdraw into her original state of isolation. In her later encounter with the ocean, when she turns from sea to land only to spiral away from all soteriological hopes, Oedipa finds that it may "no longer indicate to

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[113] TCL 37.

[114] Ian D. Copestake, "'Our Madmen, our Paranoid:' Enlightened Communities and the Mental State in *Mason & Dixon*," in *The Multiple Worlds of Pynchon's* "*Mason & Dixon*," ed. Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds (Rochester: Camden House, 2005), 173).

[115] TCL 36-7.

[116] TCL 125.

her the comforting possibility of redemptive meaning, but reveal[s] to her the presence of its absence."[117]

In its final appearance in the novel, the sea thus appears as the opposing number to the Word, no longer as redemption, but as an anti-revelation, or disillusionment of Oedipa's quest entirely. As Deborah Madsen writes, as the remnant of the moon's exile, the Pacific "is a presence that indicates an absence, containing or straddling the two, and so reifies the position in which she is located by her Tristero-quest, poised between presence (her clues) and an absence (their secondary meaning)."[118] Whereas the Word and its rush of relays promises a final consummation of Oedipa's quest, the sea appears as an endless deferment or a sign of the quest's futility. For Kostas Kaltsas too, Oedipa's final desperate desire to turn to the sea is a moment of hesitation, of turning her back upon her quest and sinking into the silent waters: "Oedipa is stuck in a loop. She can't, or won't, admit that she lives in a world that is in part of her own making and that the only identity she can legitimately lay claim to will necessarily come both from *within* and *in opposition* to that world, a possibility she contemplates but steps back from near the end of the novel: trying to 'face towards the sea.'"[119] In the Gothic context, however, the sea functions as more than an equivocation. It appears the novel's supreme image of the

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[117] "The sea's role in the novel changes and becomes a means of assessing the degree to which Oedipa is willing to accept the changed status of meaning in her world. For her to achieve a true sense of the reality around her and her own relationship to it necessitates resisting any desire to retreat to her former state of insulation. Her willingness to continue will thus be reflected in her attitude to the sea which, the narrator implies, should no longer indicate to her the comforting possibility of redemptive meaning, but reveal to her the presence of its absence." Ian D. Copestake, "'Off the Deep End Again:'" Sea-Consciousness and Insanity in *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Mason & Dixon*," in *American Postmodernity: Essays on the Recent Fiction of Thomas Pynchon*, ed. Ian D. Copestake (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003), 198.

[118] Madsen, *Postmodernist Allegories of Thomas Pynchon*, 65.

[119] Kostas Kaltsas, "Of 'Maidens' and Towers: Oedipa Maas, Maxine Tarnow, and the Possibility of Resistance," in *Thomas Pynchon, Sex, and Gender*, eds. Ali Chetwynd, Joanna Freer, and Georgios Maragos (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2018), 46.

sublime in its negative form, as an "oceanic sense of dissolution" or as "the end of narrative, and of history" in the final triumph of the death drive.[120] In contrast to Madsen and Kaltas, for whom Oedipa's contemplation of the ocean is one last vacillation, I argue that it presents the only fitting end to Oedipa's paranoia, as it works through rather than against the logic of terror to reveal an ultimate outside to her world. Ultimately, however, it is an exit which Oedipa does not take, as she elects to pursue her paranoia without end.

In the end, Oedipa is left with nothing: no grand conspiracy, no key to the puzzle, no redemptive escape. Nothing save for the search itself, which leads not to a final end or answer, but spiralling onward according to its own arcane laws of motion. If anything of the sea's original promise of redemption remains it lies in Oedipa's ability to change herself, to tap into the oceanic flows which pass through her, and the outside forces which compose her. Even as the ocean recedes and she sees all the spectral fragments assumed back into "the legacy America," Oedipa knows that "the only way she could continue [...] was an alien, unfurrowed, assumed full circle into some paranoia.[121] The progress of Oedipa's search is not in finding proofs of some farfetched conspiracy, but in the discovery of new signs and encounters that make her world unreal, and which disillusion her of her attachment to the interiority imposed upon her. Her paranoia is a "process of error, like everything which is linked to the outside," through which she finds that "if one hope remains, it is for [she] who advances, not against the current, in futile opposition, but in the very direction of error."[122] The descent from her tower is one marked at every stage by missteps, accidents, and confusion, all in the service of shattering the bonds which keep Oedipa insulated from the outside.

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[120] Vijay Mishra, *The Gothic Sublime*, (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 36-7.

[121] TCL 126.

[122] Blanchot, *Space of Literature*, 78.

The paranoia to which Oedipa surrenders herself is no simple madness, but an impersonal logic of connection between these disparate pieces, which broadens the domain of understanding to include things utterly exterior and inhuman even as it confounds her bounded senses. "In short, the various forms of 'reason' constitute an informing principle of the Female Gothic plot, even as they construct this faculty as one threatened by its 'other'—dark passions, madness."[123] In Oedipa, the Gothic heroine embodies the "modern subject split between sober rationality and poetic *délire*"—a split which Oedipa pushes to the point where rationality is "overwhelmed by [...] anorganic powers" and delirium explodes in a "collective experience of the intensities of creation."[124]

Beyond this delirious creation, the expanded bounds of Oedipa's perception reveal to her and place her in community with the forgotten members of her barren world. No longer the damsel locked in her Gothic tower, Oedipa descends to the streets to take her place among those who cry into the night for the coming of the "direct, epileptic Word."[125] What she finds in her search is "the secret of disconnection that nonetheless communicates, the broken machine that links only by unlinking, that posits as the basis for community a reversal of communal values or the 'assimilation' of an outside that is absolute and originary."[126] "In contrast to the male hero who changes the world, [the Gothic heroine] is herself transformed" by her encounters and her growing understanding of the ambiguous lines that separate good from bad, and the appearance of either from their true substance.[127] Oedipa's final loss of the sea and her disappearance into the

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[123] Williams, *Art of Darkness*, 170.

[124] Ramey, *The Hermetic Deleuze*, 201.

[125] TCL 81.

[126] Mattessich, *Lines of Flight*, 62.

[127] Williams, *Art of Darkness*, 158.

Earth's surface is not the end of her search, but the natural end to its derealising of her world, and her final escape from her imagined tower into the universe outside. From two sides, Oedipa's paranoia functions to free her from her tower: by a purely negative ethos of disillusion to dispel all interior fixtures of her psyche, and by a positive principle of salvage and reconnection of the scattered fragments of a haunted world. It is this first, negative function which has been the main focus of the present chapter, whereas the following chapter will take up the sorrows and salvage of Oedipa's world in more detail. Ultimately, knowing herself as an "incidental" contortion upon the face of some vast exterior system, Oedipa allows herself to become part of that chorus of voices who speak toward that outside, learning at last to refract "her mobile subjectivity through the decentering prism of a schizophrenic multiplicity."[128]

The Crying of Lot 49 is at its most Gothic in those dreamlike sequences of speculation, confusion, and terror when Oedipa struggles with the inscrutable details and unspeakable meanings thrust upon her. Beginning with Inverarity's death, and his uncanny disturbance of her mundane existence, Oedipa becomes increasingly aware of the unreality of her world. The uncanny return, despite or because of its perpetual deferment, spurs Oedipa from her isolation, to seek some hidden reason for the dead man's partial apparition. This search continues through the cities of San Narciso and San Francisco by way of variously alien communications and incomplete signs. Here, the personal haunting of the uncanny gives way to the expansive experiences of the sublime and the eerie—the former overflowing with noise, and the latter depriving Oedipa of anything to firmly grasp. These encounters, although impossible to decipher, begin in Oedipa a process of thought which attempts to make itself equal to the forces that swirl about her. With much hesitation, with terror, Oedipa passes by way the of the spectral signs of the uncanny, sublime, and eerie toward an awareness of what lies utterly outside

[128] Mattessich, *Lines of Flight*, 67.

herself: the geocosmic forces of the sea and land which hide within themselves all which may not be in the ordered world above. She discovers, "under the cunning, orderly surface of civilizations, the nurturing horror that they attend to pushing aside by purifying, systematizing, and thinking; [...] the sublime point at which the abject collapses in a burst of beauty that overwhelms us—and 'that cancels our existence.'"[129] Throughout *The Crying of Lot 49*, Oedipa plays the role of the Gothic heroine whose terror is a transformative process, whose search charts a tenuous balance between madness and reason, who discovers the inhuman within the human—the outside folded in—and in so doing comes to some rapprochement with the forces, "magic, anonymous and malignant, visited upon her from outside and for no reason at all."[130]

[129] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 210.

[130] TCL 13.

Chapter Two

"No wonder you were replaced:" The Abhuman Horrors of the Masculine Gothic in *The Crying of Lot 49*

While Oedipa's search is communicated primarily through the language of terror, of outside forces working through her to instigate thought and expand perception, other elements of *The Crying of Lot 49* obey the far less amenable logic of horror. As Oedipa learns to compose herself in accordance with the eerie and sublime encounters that drift around her, she is repeatedly confronted with failed attempts to achieve this same entente with the obscure outside of thought. Although she charts a tenuous course through paranoia to some unspoken revelation, all those around her are seen to slip away into the tangle of clues, to be ruined by their own private revelations, or to simply dissolve into the same Pacific where Oedipa invests her redemptive hopes. "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."[1] As much as Oedipa's plot charts an escape from the mundanity and the blindness of American life, there remain elements of another form of the Gothic which drag Oedipa back down to earth, to perceive the horrors of a life which remains trapped within the confines of her deathly reality.

A staple of contemporary Gothic criticism, stretching back at least to the genre's structural reappraisal forty-odd years ago, is the fact that the "Gothic tradition has two plots, two sets of narrative conventions, two tales to tell about the desires and fears of the self in the world—tales determined by the gender of that self."[2] As I argued in the

[1] TCL 105.

[2] Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 96.

previous chapter, the main plot of *The Crying of Lot 49* conforms to the conventions of the feminine Gothic plot, with its concerns for terror, psychological trials, and the expansion of the heroine's powers of thought. But this is not to say that the conventions of the other, masculine Gothic plot are absent from the novel. In fact, given the novel's uncomfortable performance of the feminine Gothic plot, which is often twisted or intensified beyond the scope of its original formulation, it is little surprise that moments of the masculine Gothic and its aesthetics of horror begin to seep in. Regarding the conventions of the masculine Gothic, Peter Otto defines them by the prevalence of horror, the reality of the supernatural, and the oedipal struggle with the past.

> Horror is a result of the persistence of the past in the present: it is engineered by the patriarchal father (the priest, tyrannical father), religious institutions, and tyrannical (often aristocratic) families. Supernatural terrors are real; yet at the same time, the experience of horror shatters everyday reality and reveals the unmanageable depths of the human psyche (rather than the guiding hand of God). As this suggests, male Gothic is often structured as an oedipal struggle between sons and patriarchal fathers, whether familial, religious or divine.[3]

Of these traits, not all are given equal weight in Pynchon's novel, although elements of each nonetheless make an appearance. Lacking any explicit references to the supernatural or the oedipal struggle between sons and fathers, *The Crying of Lot 49* nonetheless allows the affects of masculine horror to develop: the persistence of the past in the present evokes horror; realities are shattered; and the depths of the psyche are revealed in all their sickening inhumanity. In this sense the novel does not entirely depart from the model of

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[3] Peter Otto, "Terror and Horror Gothic," in *Gothic Fiction: Rare Printed Works from the Sadleir-Black Collection of Gothic Fiction at the Alderman Library, University of Virginia*, eds. Peter Otto, Marie Mulvey-Roberts, and Alison Milbank (Marlborough: Adam Matthew Publications, 2003), http://www.ampltd.co.uk/digital_guides/gothic_fiction/Introduction8.aspx.

the Gothic set by the quintessential work of masculine Gothic, Matthew Lewis' *The Monk* (1796). If *The Crying of Lot 49* lacks *The Monk*'s patriarchal European setting and its anti-Catholic suspicions of the culturally-foreign, it does retain the central anxieties of Lewis' novel: namely, the horror of involuntary desire and the reduction of human life to bodily functions. The full weight of *The Monk*'s horror is felt in its final pages, when the devil himself appears to claim the monk Ambrosio's soul. In that final moment, the devil's supernatural appearance seems "to announce the dissolution of nature," and his declaration to the monk that "I long have marked you for my prey: I watched the movements of your heart" announces the penetration of his diabolical will even into Ambrosio's seemingly private desires.[4] As we shall see, just as Lewis' titular monk discovers the horrors of being a slave to one's unconscious impulses and of seeing one's body scattered in fragments, so too do the characters encountered by Oedipa on her search experience similar fates of horror, shock, and dissolution.

If, as I have argued, Oedipa's plot follows a logic of terror, the individual moments of her search just as often lead to the dead ends of horror. While the distinction between the feminine and masculine Gothic is an invention of Gothic critics to categorise the genre's varied conventions, it is a distinction founded on the difference between the experiences of terror and of horror. Ann Radcliffe famously writes that terror "expands the soul, and awakens the faculties to a high degree of life" whereas horror "contracts, freezes, and nearly annihilates them."[5] In Radcliffe's account, terror and horror are fundamentally opposed in their philosophical roles—the one edifying the reader, and the other stultifying her. In contrast, later critics have formulated terror and horror not as opposing principles, but as moments which may lead into one another as easily as they may stand alone. Devendra Varma formulates the difference as one "between awful

[4] Matthew Lewis. *The Monk*. Ed. Christopher MacLachlan (London: Penguin, 1998), 369; 375.

[5] Ann Radcliffe, "On the Supernatural in Poetry," *New Monthly Magazine* 16, no. 1 (1826): 149.

apprehension and sickening realization: between the smell of death and stumbling against a corpse."[6] For the purposes of this chapter, both of these definitions will be of use, as horror makes its appearance in Pynchon's novel both as an opposing principle to terror *and* as a direct product of terror's suspenseful investigations. This is to say that as Oedipa undertakes her search according to the logic of terror, in her investigations she happens upon discoveries which are incommensurable with that logic, and which leave her no choice but to circle back in disgust and horror.

Without contradicting the argument of the previous chapter—that Oedipa's search is an aesthetic education in communication with an inhuman outside—this chapter takes as its object the purely negative moments of the novel, in which nothing may be learned, and no escape is to be found. The line separating these moments is thin, as Oedipa suspects what distinguishes her from those about her is only a matter of perspective: "The act of metaphor then was a thrust at truth and a lie, depending where you were: inside, safe, or outside, lost."[7] Far from undoing the generative terror of Oedipa's search, these moments of annihilating horror are fundamental to the novel's movement, as they give sense to the dark choice with which Oedipa is confronted: "either an accommodation reached, in some kind of dignity, with the Angel of Death, or only death and the daily, tedious preparations for it. [...] Another mode of meaning behind the obvious, or none."[8] Just as the uncanny remnants of Inverarity lead Oedipa toward productive encounters with the eerie and sublime, they also lead downward to the categories of horror: namely, the weird and the abject. While the aesthetic categories of the previous chapter are primarily of a psychological nature, dealing with the frustrations of failed communications, these latter categories are essentially material and physiological, having

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[6] Devendra P. Varma, *The Gothic Flame* (New York: Russell & Russell, 1957), 130.

[7] TCL 89.

[8] TCL 126.

to do with disturbing presences and bodily (de-)composition. In contrast to Oedipa's experience of terror, which uplifts even as it disturbs, the moments of horror in the novel remind her of the tedious "death" which awaits her should her search fail.

The abject in particular is deployed in *The Crying of Lot 49* not only to evoke horror, but to further build upon the anxieties of interiority and exteriority discussed in the previous chapter. Whereas the sublime and the eerie are aesthetic categories ultimately defined by their generative powers, of setting in motion lines of speculation and investigation, the abject describes the limit-experience of violence at the threshold between what is self and what is other. The term as it is used here has its roots in Julia Kristeva's *Powers of Horror*, where it is defined as the horrified reaction to the blurring of subjective boundaries. Neither object nor subject, the abject appears both when the bodily periphery is in some way contaminated from outside and when the body's interior slips outward to become perceivable as other. For Kristeva, this experience fundamentally upends the perception of the self, because it disturbs the dividing wall between self and other both from without and from within: "If it be true that the abject simultaneously beseeches and pulverizes the subject, one can understand that it is experienced at the peak of its strength when the subject, weary of fruitless attempts to identify with something on the outside, finds the impossible within; when it finds that the impossible constitutes its very *being*, that it *is* none other than abject."[9] As Jerrold Hogle explains, this abjection functions both bodily and psychologically, as the "chaotic manifold deep in our unconscious is projected outwards into an 'abject', a site of the repulsively 'other', as though a fundamental otherness-from-ourselves within ourselves can appear entirely

[9] Julia Kristeva, *The Powers of Horror: An Essay on Abjection*, trans. Leon S. Roudiez (New York: Columbia University Press, 1982), 5.

outside us and look abhorrently alien."[10] According to Kristeva, the source of the abject is the awareness that "we are moving towards death from the moment of our birth, even as we also emerge from and partly retain elements from the dying bodies of our parents."[11] In *The Crying of Lot 49*, this abjection is expanded from the domains of the personal and familial to the social and technological, without losing the original sense of the term in the process. Everywhere, the novel's characters feel themselves not only moving toward death, but composed by dead matter and are invaded by the nonliving *things* in their technical environments.

As we shall see, the logic of horror in *The Crying of Lot 49* maintains the Gothic confusion about and transgression of inside and outside which drives its parallel plot of terror, but shifts emphasis from this transgression's productivity to its destructiveness. The horror of *The Crying of Lot 49* is deflationary, and instead of revealing the hidden meaning of things, it confirms Oedipa's suspicions that beneath the surface of things there lies nothing but a base, material death. As Hite wryly observes, "the fact that waste communicates is the joke" of the novel, and the messengers of Oedipa's revelation are presented as either the scraps of a vast inhuman system or the barely-surviving drifters of this fallen world.[12] It is in this cruel irony of prophecy residing in garbage that the novel's logic of horror is best encapsulated. The horror is not that Oedipa's revelation is a fantasy, but that it is entombed within matter, and made indistinguishable from the deadly forces from which it urges escape. Just as there are powers which speak to Oedipa through the city, the sea, and the earth, which work from without to recompose her to better participate in their alien communications, there are also the forces which decompose and

[10] Jerrold E. Hogle, "Abjection as Gothic and the Gothic as Abjection," in *The Gothic and Theory*, eds. Jerrold E. Hogle and Robert Miles (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 108.

[11] Hogle, "Abjection as Gothic," 108.

[12] Molly Hite, *Ideas of Order in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon* (Columbus: Ohio State University Press, 1983), 93.

destroy all those who attempt contact, scattering rather than enlarging the subject who happens upon them.

To make sense of this dynamic between waste and revelation, it is first necessary to expand upon the idea of communication in the novel. It is the argument of this chapter that Pynchon's treatment of communication, and the horror of being a human trapped within systems of communication, conforms to a distinctly posthuman conception of information and humanity's relationship to it. This account of the posthuman is formulated by N. Katherine Hayles as a disembodiment of information accompanied by a denigration of the embodied, which she summarises in four points:

> First, the posthuman view privileges informational pattern over material instantiation, so that embodiment in a biological substrate is seen as an accident of history rather than an inevitability of life. Second, the posthuman view considers consciousness [...] as an epiphenomenon, as an evolutionary upstart trying to claim that it is the whole show when in actuality it is only a minor sideshow. Third, the posthuman view thinks of the body as the original prosthesis we all learn to manipulate, so that extending or replacing the body with other prostheses becomes a continuation of a process that began before we were born. Fourth, and most important, by these and other means, the posthuman view configures human being so that it can be seamlessly articulated with intelligent machines.[13]

In other words, in Hayles' notion of the posthuman, the human mind is considered as interchangeable with information at large: the human body is conceived as a malleable and disposable vessel for this mind, and the biological organism is made subject to cybernetic mechanisms far beyond the measure of either human body or mind. The second of Hayles' points—that human consciousness is the effect of an outside—is

[13] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 2-3.

integral to the previous chapter's conception of the posthuman Gothic, and the third and fourth points will be of key importance to this chapter's argument. The first point, however, will need to be qualified to maintain a particularly Gothic approach to the posthuman. Far from disregarding material instantiation in flesh or machine as inconsequential to the information which passes through it, the horror of the posthuman Gothic is precisely that information can never be free from that which entombs it—and, conversely, the material world is never entirely free from the remnants of what has passed through it. If Hayles' posthuman sees information as essentially free, the posthuman Gothic demands the concession that everywhere it is in chains.[14]

In *The Crying of Lot 49*, the disembodiment of information, and its free passage outside and through the human subject, is coupled with the horrifying image of bodies rent by free-floating information, and information haunting the vessels through which it has passed. Throughout, the Gothic trope of live burial returns in a new and cybernetic form: no longer the "knock of live burial" of the writing subject which Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick identifies in the writings of Thomas De Quincey, but the entombment of information itself in the sarcophagus of the flesh.[15] Pynchon's cybernetically-inflected Gothicism here dramatises the limit-experiences of speculative posthumanism, which rejects Hayles' claim that we are already posthuman, while maintaining that the posthuman breakdown of distinctions between "autonomous human persons and 'heteronomous' things, [and] machines" will be "be significantly *weird*."[16] At the limits

[14] The horror of the materiality of information is returned to again in my examination of *Bleeding Edge* in Chapter Six. In that novel, the utopianism of the posthuman vision of free-floating information is all the more evident, and the puncturing of that dream all the more painful. In a crucial distinction with *The Crying of Lot 49*, however, *Bleeding Edge* never quite reaches the same heights of horror in the depiction of information *made flesh*, and instead retains a comparatively clear split between the realm of the body and the virtual voyages of the web.

[15] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (New York: Methuen, 1986), 95.

[16] David Roden, *Posthuman Life* (London: Routledge, 2015), 37.

of human cognition and perception, where Oedipa hears the fallen chorus of the outside, she also encounters misshapen horrors of a humanity enmeshed in machines, "threatening shapes of increasingly dehumanised environments, machinic doubles and violent psychotic fragmentation."[17]

Traces in the Machines

What is it like to experience the lapsing of the human into something other? Early in *The Crying of Lot 49*, the protagonist's husband Mucho Maas, working as a used car salesman, experiences a haunting by the past in which human traces persist in a kind of un-life. In parallel to Oedipa's own haunting by the uncanny fragments of Inverarity, Mucho discovers that in each vehicle resides some ghostly residue of its former owner. He encounters:

> [The] most godawful of trade-ins: motorized, metal extensions of themselves, of their families and what their whole lives must be like, out there so naked for anybody, a stranger like himself, to look at, [...] and when the cars were swept out you had to look at the actual **residue** of these lives, and there was no way of telling what things had been truly refused (when so little he supposed came by that out of fear most of it had to be taken and kept) and what had simply (perhaps tragically) been lost [...]—it made him sick to look, but he had to look. [...] Even if enough exposure to the unvarying gray sickness had somehow managed to immunize him, he could still never accept the way each owner, each **shadow**, filed in only to exchange a dented, malfunctioning version of himself for another, just

[17] Fred Botting, *Gothic* (New York: Routledge, 1996), 102.

> as futureless, automotive projection of somebody else's life. As if it was the most natural thing. To Mucho it was horrible. Endless, convoluted incest.[18]

Where Mucho expects to find only inanimate machines, he sees fragments of human life caught up in a mechanical process. The owners of the cars have their lives laid bare for Mucho, who is able to imagine them caught inside motorised shells. But they do not appear to Mucho fully-formed. They are not whole ghosts, returned from a previous life to make themselves known. In contrast to Oedipa's uncanny experience of Inverarity's spectre, which is concerned with the defamiliarising return of the familiar, Mucho experiences here what can only be described as *the weird*. As Mark Fisher writes, whereas the uncanny stems from the central metaphor of the home and its "strict inner-outer divisions," the weird is an intrusion by "that *which does not belong*."[19] While the uncanny is marked by an unwelcome repetition which is altogether too familiar, the weird is never merely the recurrence of something known and recognisable. As we shall see, it is this weird of intrusion of machines into human life, and the strange montage of fragments which persist within the machines, which shape Mucho's horrified flight from the caryard. Moreover, the weird entanglement of human and machine which Mucho encounters is characterised by two ambiguous and overlapping terms: *residue* and *shadows*. Both of these terms bear further reflection.

The medium by which Mucho is haunted is not some spectral substance, but the material "residue" and traces left by the car owners themselves. Mucho pieces together the lives of the motorists from the various scraps which have been discarded without notice or care. This residue is nothing out of the ordinary. In fact, it is quite the opposite,

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[18] TCL 8; emphasis mine.

[19] Mark Fisher, *The Weird and The Eerie* (London: Repeater, 2016), 10.

and it is the normality of it that haunts Mucho the most. The items that he finds are listed as

> clipped coupons promising savings of 5 or 10c, trading stamps, pink flyers advertising specials at the markets, butts, tooth-shy combs, help-wanted ads, Yellow Pages torn from the phone book, rags of old underwear or dresses that already were period costumes, for wiping your own breath off the inside of a windshield with so you could see whatever it was, a movie, a woman or car you coveted, a cop who might pull you over just for drill, all the bits and pieces coated uniformly, like a salad of despair, in a grey dressing of ash, condensed exhaust, dust, body wastes.[20]

These objects are defined not by their status as waste or garbage, but by their tenuous connection with a life departed from their presence. The cigarette butts speak of a mouth which once held them. The rags recall their lost utilities in clothing and cleaning, alongside the bodies that used to wear them. The layers of dust show the years that have passed by, storing each fragment in its own milieu. What should only be the forgotten remnants of a routine, refuse to give up the life momentarily imparted to them. These objects are not mere waste, but act as *weird traces and residue* of a life that has in all other ways departed, and their weirdness lies in the strange juxtapositions of various scraps which never quite make a whole. Similar in this respect to Inverarity's partial return, and Oedipa's dashed hopes of resurrecting him from memories, Mucho seeks out a reconnection with those lost lives which is made impossibly difficult by their fragmented form. As Manlio Della Marca suggests "this extract expresses a sensibility characterized by melancholy for a 'rusty,' heavy world which had been the last receptacle of memory. But this world, like that of Marx and Bauman, seems to be dissolving alongside the debris

[20] TCL 8.

of its past. Or even worse, all stored information, all the traces, the 'bits' of the past must be swept away in order to use the frame again."[21] The car owners are not dead, like Inverarity, but like him their lives are stored in scattered fragments which the Maas couple then attempt to reassemble in vain.

The detritus ranges from scraps discarded from acts of consumption to the waste of body and machine settled into dust. But what stands out among the list of items are the pieces of text that have been lost in the recesses of the vehicle. Coupons, stamps, flyers, ads, and torn pages all settle onto the inner surface of the car. Unlike the other waste, these scraps are not wholly empty of meaning in themselves. Contained in them piecemeal are the patterns of consumption and exchange in which their owners participated. Together, these scraps create a map of the lives in which they once took part, showing travel, jobs, and habits in their most pared-down form. A kind of automotive metadata jumps out at Mucho, who is perturbed by the intimacy of the kind of information left behind. When Mucho encounters this waste, he finds an abstract individual emerging from the bits and pieces of information that remain. In the car, the motorist imparts a "malfunctioning version of himself," which Mucho rediscovers as an "automotive projection of somebody else's life."[22] An infernal *copying* takes place, in which human life is partitioned into the machines that support it, and an image of the person takes the place of the person themselves.

David Seed has remarked on the potential influence of Marshal McLuhan on *The Crying of Lot 49* in the description of the cars as "motorized, metal extensions" of human

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[21] Manlio Della Marca, "Fluid Destiny: Memory and Signs in Thomas Pynchon's *The Crying of Lot 49*," in *Against the Grain: Reading Pynchon's Counternarratives*, ed. Sascha Pöhlmann (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), 255.

[22] TCL 8.

beings.[23] For Seed this passage mirrors McLuhan's claims that "the media have *extended*—his key word—the human consciousness into the environment."[24] Technology is not merely a tool exterior to its user, but an addition to the body and mind, which expands their capabilities. But what happens when this extension no longer adheres to the human, and in the decoupling takes something essential with it? The metal extensions which Mucho sees are not organs of other humans, but their severed limbs which have taken on lives of their own. Perhaps more telling is Seed's highlighting of McLuhan's "privileg[ing] of information in human life," which decentres the process from the human to the relation between human and machine.[25] Mucho, in a dark twist on McLuhan, rediscovers his fellow motorists as packets of information held hostage in unhuman vessels. Further still, what at first appears to be the inconsequential and anonymous transfer of information into waste is revealed to be all too intimate, as each motorist sheds something of their soul into the machine. Mucho catches a glimpse of what Franco Berardi calls the "bio-info machine" which "is no more separable from the body and the mind, because it is no more an external tool."[26] Beyond simply extending ourselves via

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[23] TCL 8.

[24] David Seed, "Media Systems in *The Crying of Lot 49*," in *American Postmodernity: Essays on the Recent Fiction of Thomas Pynchon*, ed. Ian D. Copestake (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003), 17.

[25] "Throughout *Understanding Media*, the work that bears most directly on *The Crying of Lot 49*, McLuhan stresses how. Pynchon too in *The Crying of Lot 49* describes motor cars as 'motorized, metal extensions' of their owners. McLuhan's new emphasis comes with his insistence that the media are means above all of information transfer. Predictably this conviction leads McLuhan to privilege information in human life: 'Under electric technology the entire business of man becomes learning and knowing.'" Seed, "Understanding Media," 17.

[26] Franco Bifo Berardi, *After the Future*, trans. Arianna Bove, Melinda Cooper, Erik Empson, Enrico, Giuseppina Mecchia, and Tiziana Terranova (Oakland: AK Press, 2011), 23.

mechanical media, we discover ourselves composed of and composing machines: "the Machine is us."[27]

The becoming-inanimate of human life, the disappearance of people in machines, isn't conceived by Mucho as a grand act of violence or revolutionary overthrow of an old order. He is far from the sudden and erotic transgression of body and automobile seen a few years later in *The Atrocity Exhibition* (1970) or *Crash* (1973) by J. G. Ballard. Rather, Mucho recognises the slow and distributed nature of the process. Little by little, "each owner, each shadow" loses pieces of themselves to a process far beyond their awareness or comprehension. Stephen Hock, writing of the broader significance of automobile culture in Pynchon's fiction, suggests that "the portrait of the freeway that Pynchon draws marks the freeway as a carrier of death and destruction in the service of modern capital and power."[28] I argue that the same is true of the cars themselves, which express a greater death of humanity itself. Mucho witnesses the fading of living bodies into *shadows*, haunting the world in strange presences and scattered fragments. What pushes Mucho over the line is the recognition that he is not exempt from this process. He too is

[27] "Digital and bio-technologies have turned the external machine of iron and steel into the internalised and recombining machine of the bio-info era. The bio-info machine is no more separable from the body and the mind, because it is no more an external tool, but an internal transformer of the body and of the mind, a linguistic and cognitive enhancer. Now the nanomachine is mutating the human brain and the linguistic ability to produce and communicate. The Machine is us." Berardi, *After the Future*, 23.

[28] Stephen Hock, "Maybe He'd Have to Just Keep Driving, or Pynchon on the Freeway," in *Pynchon's California*, eds. Scott McClintock and John Miller (Iowa City: University of Iowa Press, 2014), 202. The role of the car in producing pliable subjects is remarked upon by Gilles Châtelet, for whom road-culture is not only a matter of ideological indoctrination but the redoubling of capitalist society on an individual scale: "They form a perfectly docile mass, demanding only one thing: to drive freely [...] The domestication of gigantic human masses, the forging of thousands of psychologies of average men on wheels, 'highway mentalities', aping day and night the fluidities and competition of the Great Market, etching it into the landscape." Gilles Châtelet, *To Live and Think Like Pigs*, trans. Robin Mackay (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2014), 85.

becoming a shadow, usurped by a mechanical copy, leaving residue of his life wherever he goes.

This experience of becoming residue, of becoming a shadow, provokes Mucho's horror for two reasons: Firstly, it punctures his familiar sense of self by way of the violence done to other human subjects. As his story continues, "the endless rituals of trade-in, week after week, [...] were too plausible for the impressionable Mucho to take for long."[29] The fall of humanity from whole subjects into an amorphous mess of fragments and shadows is all too much for Mucho to bear, and so he quits the job. But for that time, he uncovers a weird (un)life at the heart of humanity, and the unsettling truth that what we take to be single and discrete people are only ever the shifting palimpsests of other inhuman lives. As Kelly Hurley describes these conditions in the *fin-de-siècle* Gothic novel:

> Within such a reality [...] bodies are without integrity or stability; they are instead composite and changeful. Nothing is left but Things: forms rent from within by their own heterogeneity, and always in the process of becoming-Other.[30]

The violence that Mucho uncovers is nothing particularly bloody, but no less unsettling for its bloodlessness. It is the twisting up of human lives with an outside or other that produces an abhuman subject: one which is discernibly human yet inflected by weird influences, intrusions, and irruptions. The abhuman, in Hurley's terms, marks the "ruination of the human subject" by forces both beyond it and within it, as it is rent apart and recomposed.[31] "The abhuman subject is a not-quite-human subject, characterized by

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[29] TCL 8.

[30] Kelly Hurley, *The Gothic Body: Sexuality, Materialism, and Degeneration at the* Fin de Siècle (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1996), 9.

[31] Hurley, *The Gothic Body*, 3.

morphic variability, continually in danger of becoming not-itself, or becoming other."[32] The prefix ab- signals this move away from the human, as something cast off from it, yet inextricably bound to the form to which it once belonged.[33] The prefix is also intended to carry connotations of Kristeva's abject, which flows out from between the subject and object, in the space which "disturbs identity, system, order. [Which] does not respect borders, positions, rules. The in-between, the ambiguous, the composite."[34]

Like the weird, the abject denies a marked distinction between the inside and the outside, or between a body and what threatens its integrity. It is this transgression of the self's composition and summoning forth of "the archaic processes of the non-yet-self" which, for Anne Williams, marks the abject as a key source of horror in Gothic fiction.[35] The discovery of a dead and bloodied body is a prototypical instance of this horrifying moment of shock, not only because it signals a violent danger, but because the body itself is, in this instance, an instance of abjection, of something cast away as so much dead flesh.[36] Mucho's cars haunt him in this register, as the discarded limbs and skins of a humanity totally abjected from itself. The weird and abject fold into one another, as the

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[32] Hurley, *The Gothic Body*, 4.

[33] "The topic of this book is the ruination of the human subject. [...] Within this genre one may witness the relentless destruction of "the human" and the unfolding in its stead of what I will call, to borrow an evocative term from supernaturalist author William Hope Hodgson, the 'abhuman.' The abhuman subject is a not-quite-human subject, characterized by morphic variability, continually in danger of becoming not-itself, or becoming other. The prefix 'ab-' signals a movement away from a site or condition, and thus a loss. But a movement away from is also a movement towards—towards a site or condition as yet unspecified—and thus entails both a threat and a promise." Hurley, *The Gothic Body*, 3-4.

[34] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 4.

[35] Williams, *Art of Darkness*, 76.

[36] "Thus the conventional sources of Gothic 'horror' (such as blood and decaying or newly murdered corpses) echo the 'abject.' Kristeva's theory suggests why the accidental discovery of a corpse is so potent and so familiar a source of horror. Not only does it serve as a sign of violence and murderous passions; but the dead body is also, as Kristeva remarks, the most dramatic example of abjection, of the 'cast off,' of waste." Williams, *Art of Darkness*, 75.

sense that *this does not belong* couples with the abject realisation that *this was once living*, feeding into one another with growing dread. In the caryard, Mucho looks upon the machines much as he might a pile of corpses. He observes the ways in which human life is discarded and distorted by the machines it occupies, and realises the extent to which those lives are mutilated by the machines which increasingly compose them.

NADA

This leads to a second, deeper point of horror, which lies in a barely formed question: "What if we are as 'dead' as the machines?"[37] Mucho's revelation is not that we, humans, are being erased by they, the machines. Rather, it is that "everything—human beings and machines, organic and nonorganic matter" are composed of the same dead stuff, which replicates itself in endless patterns without reference.[38] A cruel inversion of humanist philosophy takes place, by which the ghost in the machine is brought down to the level of base matter, and revealed as nothing more than a product of a greater mechanism. It is this that brings a shudder down Mucho's spine, as the daily deaths of his job reveal firstly the common fate of all the spectres scattered across a wasted world, and secondly the mute machinery working through his own soul. Escaping from the caryard, Mucho takes up the job of a disc jockey, but never entirely quietens his suspicions of the world that moves around him.

In perfect parallel to his wife's awakening, when Oedipa re-encounters Mucho later in the novel, he is in the middle a drug-induced epiphany. Under the influence of LSD, he believes himself to have come into contact with a multivalent chorus of love sung through the pop and muzak that now scores his life. Without hesitation, he comes

[37] Mark Fisher, *Flatline Constructs* (New York: Exmilitary, 2018), 2.

[38] Fisher, *Flatline Constructs*, 2.

"on like a whole roomful of people" to tell Oedipa of the revelation which has descended upon him over the airwaves.[39]

> That's what I am, [...] right. Everybody is. [...] Whenever I put the headset on now, [...] I really do understand what I find there. When those kids sing about "She loves you," yeah well, you know, she does, she's any number of people, all over the world, back through time, different colours, sizes, ages, shapes, distances from death, but she loves. And the "you" is everybody. And herself. Oedipa, the human voice, you know, it's a flipping miracle.[40]

Both Oedipa and Mucho experience revelation amidst waste, and seek out a redemptive voice amidst the cacophony, yet in Mucho's case the revelation appears as a mere hallucination. Mucho's revelation contains none of the eeriness or sublimity of Oedipa's encounters: everything happens at once, is communicated clearly, and Mucho is in no doubt that a miracle has been revealed to him. Whereas Oedipa's search brings her in contact with something outside herself, Mucho's trip turns him inwards, into a kaleidoscopic vision of oneness and self-sameness with the universe. If the haunting of the car yard reminds Mucho of the utterly inhuman forces which persist all around him, barely visible yet always ready to interrupt the world that he knows, then the revelation of the airwaves presents him with the perfect escape from that realisation. While the weirdness he experienced in his old life brings him in contact with objects, memories, and signs which did not belong, and upsets the normal order of things, the banality of the radio counteracts this dread with a universal sense of belonging. In Mucho's psychedelic bliss, nothing is out of place, and nothing comes through from outside to upset his cosmic home. What sounds at first like the ecstatic cry of William Blake that "everything that

[39] TCL 99.

[40] TCL 99.

lives is Holy" is in fact far closer to the hopeless mantra of Guy Debord's spectacle: "Everything that appears is good; whatever is good will appear."[41]

Yet, in Mucho's ecstatic assumption of the universe into a safe and familiar interior, he does not wholly escape the base material horror that lies outside. In another parallel to Oedipa, Mucho understands his awakening in primarily aesthetic and technological terms. "Because you hear and see things, even smell them, taste like you never could. You're an antenna, sending your pattern out across a million lives a night, and they're your lives too."[42] Even as he draws the outside into his private viewing theatre, he conforms to the core metaphor of Oedipa's search by envisioning himself as a human conduit for an impersonal Word. Through the electric sparks of love, something darker lurks beyond Mucho's understanding. He could not speak of it earlier, when the stench of decay was too close "for the impressionable Mucho to take for long."[43] But now, at the furthest remove from the cars, the dust, and the waste, at the highest point of abstraction from the bare abhuman remains of life, he is able to look back at what had haunted him all along.

> Let me tell you. The bad dream that I used to have all the time, about the car lot, remember that? I could never tell you about it. But I can now. It doesn't bother me any more. It was only that sign in that lot, that's what scared me. 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.

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[41] William Blake, *The Complete Poems*, ed. Alicia Ostriker (London: Penguin, 1997), 195; Guy Debord, *The Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (New York: Zone Books, 1994), 14.

[42] TCL 99.

[43] TCL 8.

> NADA. Just this creaking metal sign that said nada, nada, against the blue sky. I used to wake up hollering.[44]

Nothing. Death. At the heart of Mucho's revelation is not the love he so desperately clings to, but the nothingness which was first revealed in the caryard, and which continues to hang over him even as he disavows it. Within Mucho's dream of the caryard, the NADA sign exerts a weird influence. Far from the soft and welcoming revelation Mucho encounters on the radio, the sign is an incomprehensible and unassailable presence which shocks him with its bare absence of meaning. Its evil proclamation erupts into Mucho's world, without warning, to throw the mundane into sharp relief. Although it works in conjunction with the cars to drive Mucho from the lot, the sign differs from the waste in its content: while the waste signifies loss by way of fragmented wholes, the sign functions absolutely negatively, as the absence of any whole to which Mucho might return. This apparition of NADA is weird not only in Mark Fisher's sense that it is the appearance of something which does not belong, as the irruption of an outside force within the ordinary, but also that it is essentially an ontological shock. It doesn't merely estrange the world, as in the experience of the uncanny, but in its coupling of the mundane with that which is utterly other to it, it brings about the shock discovery that "*there is no World*. What we call *the* world is a local consensus hallucination, a shared dream."[45] The sign doesn't merely enter Mucho's dream to wake him in fright, but hangs over his everyday life as reminder of the dream-like nature of his reality.

Beneath it all, inhabiting the machines, driving his customers to and fro, and literally inscribed in the initials of the National Automobile Dealers Association, is a mute, metal nothingness. Mucho's reality is shattered by the intrusion of the weird,

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[44] TCL 100.

[45] Mark Fisher, *K-Punk* (London: Repeater, 2018), 325.

sending him in flight through fantasies of meaning and care which could distract him from the horror he can never forget. As she charts her own journey among inhuman presences and mute machines, Oedipa reflects on Mucho's hopeless escape:

> [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.[46]

Mucho's revelation is defined by three coinciding movements: he moves away from Oedipa; he moves away from her love; and he moves into himself. Whereas Oedipa searches for the cracks in her tower which may guide her toward an outside, which is to say that she moves through her individual fantasies toward some vast and collective enunciation, Mucho moves in the opposite direction, hopelessly into his own head. The love which he hears over the radio stands in dark contrast with the "direct, epileptic Word" which Oedipa finds among the drifters and relays of a forgotten, dying America.[47] Mucho's love hovers like a mirage, leading him ever away from the horror which he perceives inhabiting his world. As in Oedipa's fantasy of her "circular tower" of the mind, Mucho's revelation recalls the Gothic trope of live burial within the self, as he wanders further inward, entrapped within the "elaborate candy house of himself."[48] Although the candy house metaphor sacrifices something of the Gothic tenor of Oedipa's tower, it nonetheless retains the imagery of fairy tales in which children are lured to their deaths by their taste for the sweet and comforting. The horror of Mucho's narrative is then twofold: not only does he encounter annihilation in the car yard—figured in the decayed husks of the automobiles, the spectres of their owners, and the mantra of

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[46] TCL 105.

[47] TCL 81.

[48] TCL 13, 105.

nothingness which hangs overhead—but in his attempted escape from that life, he discovers new ways to imprison himself in his fantasies, to construct ever more elaborate dream-worlds to distract him from the horrific truth that his entire world lies suspended in the void. This horror persists throughout the novel, even as Oedipa's story remains largely in the domain of terror. As she speaks to her husband for the last time a "panic started to climb out of a dark region in her head," signalling to her the horror which awaits her should she fall from her tenuous search.[49]

Actors and Puppets

Leaving Mucho behind, we can return to Oedipa's search with a greater attention to those places where her fabulation falls away, and a horrific nothingness begins to occupy the heart of the novel. One such moment is found when Oedipa confronts the actor Randolph Driblette about the presence of Trystero in his performance of *The Courier's Tragedy*. Seeking for the next clue to propel her on her search, Oedipa could not be more disappointed by Driblette's response. Against Oedipa's intimations of a miraculous Word, Driblette offers a philosophy only of blind mechanical movement, in which there is no meaning, only performance.

> "You don't understand," getting mad. "You guys, you're like Puritans are about the Bible. So hung up with words, words. You know where that play exists, not in that file cabinet, not in any paperback you're looking for, but—" a hand emerged from the veil of shower-steam to indicate his suspended head— "in here. That's what I'm for. To give the spirit flesh. The words, who cares? They're rote noises to hold line bashes with, to get past the bone barriers around an actor's memory, right? But the reality is in this head. Mine. I'm the projector at the planetarium, all

[49] TCL 99.

> the closed little universe visible in the circle of that stage is coming out of my mouth, eyes, sometimes other orifices also."[50]

In contrast to Oedipa's expectant revelation of the Word, Driblette derides all meaning which resides in words, whether they appear singularly, in fragments, or spoken collectively in the night. But even as he denies words and their meaning, there remains a use of information in his philosophy. Whereas Oedipa formulates the Word as something which speaks from the outside to awaken something strange and otherwordly within, Driblette sees words as the mere surface of a much greater and more impersonal process. Although words may be present in his performance, they are mere incantations used in service of a deeper ritual. The role of the actor is not to recite words, or to transmit them from the knowing author to an unknowing audience, but to undergo a possession by something far deeper than those words: "To give the spirit flesh."[51] The actor is no speaking subject but a mere vessel, not for the Word, or even words, but for a spirit which pre-exists any semiotics or sign-system that would attempt to contain it.

If, in the city of San Narciso, Oedipa perceives around her vast systems of information which attempt to communicate with her, but which fail in that attempt, here she confronts the possibility of a far more alien type of information, which may possess and pass through without adding anything to that which it passes through. Without the compensatory revelation of terror, *The Crying of Lot 49* lapses into the domain of horror, in which the outside does not inflate or transform the inside, but merely possesses or annihilates it. The language of the abject returns, as in Kristeva's terms the "border between inside and outside" collapses, and the integrity of the body is undermined from

[50] TCL 53-4.

[51] TCL 54.

within.[52] Oedipa shows a wary fascination with Driblette's body, which appears to contain an entire universe, while sequestering its secrets away in its labyrinthine depths: "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."[53] Driblette's body becomes part of a much greater mechanism, serving as the machine from which an entire universe may be projected. His body is abjected as a series of organs—eyes, hand, orifices—which perform their respective roles in this projection, which although otherworldly in its own way remains grounded in its fleshly vehicle. What shocks Oedipa is not only Driblette's puncturing of her fantasies, but the perversity of his apparently voluntary abjection. But in his forfeiture of self, Driblette experiences, much to Oedipa's disgust, an ecstatic pleasure in his dissolution, or what Kristeva calls "that sublime alienation" that explains "why so many victims of the abject are its fascinated victims—if not its submissive and willing ones."[54] In contrast to Mucho's glimpses of human figures fading into machinery, unknowingly ceding some part of themselves to an inhuman process, Driblette casts himself into the role of a puppet, whose strings are pulled by some incomprehensibly distant will.

In the place of Oedipa's paranoid speculation, which attempts to posit a meaning attributable to the outside forces which she perceives, Driblette's philosophy engenders nothing except the interplay of inside and outside, without any meaning or reference. Instead of paranoia, which attempts to fashion a system sufficient to explain an increasingly senseless world, the primary affect of Oedipa's encounter with Driblette is anxiety. As Sianne Ngai writes, anxiety as an affect is "a matter of the very distinction

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[52] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 53.

[53] TCL 52.

[54] Kristeva, *Powers of Horror*, 9.

between inside and outside," by which the subject knows itself as something distinct from, yet emergent from, the world that it encounters.[55] For all the material which Driblette could furnish for Oedipa's paranoid construction, he leaves her with the same mute emptiness which haunts her husband, which reveals an inhuman order working through the human, but in terms that can never be made commensurable to the human form. Driblette is adamant: Oedipa's search is suspended in a void, caught up in words with nothing to ground their meaning. "But she couldn't let it quite go."[56] Oedipa demands a resolution to her anxiety, and a meaning given to the mute interpenetration of inside and outside. To this Driblette gives a still harsher response:

> "If I were to dissolve in here," speculated the voice out of the drifting steam, "be washed down the drain into the Pacific, what you saw tonight would vanish too. You, that part of you so concerned, God knows how, with that little world, would also vanish. The only residue in fact would be things Wharfinger didn't lie about. Perhaps Squamuglia and Faggio, if they ever existed. Perhaps the Thurn and Taxis mail system. Stamp collectors tell me it did exist. Perhaps the other, also. The Adversary. But they would be traces, fossils. Dead, mineral, without value or potential. [...] You can put together clues, develop a thesis, or several, about why characters reacted to the Trystero possibility the way they did, why the assassins came on, why the black costumes. You could waste your life that way and never touch the truth. Wharfinger supplied words and a yarn. I gave them life. That's it." He fell silent. The shower splashed.[57]

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[55] Sianne Ngai, *Ugly Feelings* (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2005), 211.

[56] TCL 54.

[57] TCL 54.

Driblette's deflationary account continues to draw parallels with Oedipa's search. As the structure of the search melts away it flows toward the sea. This is not the redemptive ocean by which Oedipa attempts to orient herself, but another equally dark and unknowing Pacific into which one can only dissolve—comically prefigured in Driblette's disappearance into the shower. Just as Oedipa's redemptive Pacific stands at the end of her search as the sublime surface that hides ever deeper and more hidden truths, Driblette's ocean is positioned at the edge of all speculation, where all meaning and memory vanishes into the dark. Whatever material may be salvaged from the edge of this abyss would be half-truths, fossils which preserve the shape of some living thing but which crumble into an undifferentiated earth. "Dead, mineral, without value or potential" — no longer the strangely living fragments of Mucho's caryard, but the finally deadened remains of what once was.[58] In Driblette's monologue, a commonality between Mucho and Oedipa's encounters is revealed. The Maas couple both detect in detritus certain hidden truths, which are communicated either in the language of terror or horror, but which in Driblette's account give way to the possibility of a greater horror. In hearing Driblette's monologue, Oedipa entertains the grim possibility that whatever meaning she or Mucho may find within the residue only belies its true nature as dead matter. This suspicion does not entirely foreclose Oedipa's search, but it does present a possible limit where her fantasy may come crashing down to earth.

For Driblette, any information which passes through us does not edify us, and even as some part of us is stored piecemeal in the fragments we are not preserved in any meaningful sense. The relation between inside and outside no longer takes the form of an escape, as it is for Oedipa, or an invasion, as it is for Mucho, but a total indistinction between two equally dead and meaningless zones. Deborah Madsen argues that in his refusal of "concealed meaning" for "subjective consciousness, [...] Driblette lives an

[58] TCL 54.

illusion of power, a delusion of self-determination" that places him at the centre of his world, as the projector from which everything else springs.[59] But this reading confuses Driblette's dismissal of Oedipa's attempts at meaning for an egoism on his part. Even as Driblette places himself at the centre of his cosmology, he denies himself all qualities beyond being a conduit for what flows from and through him. Driblette's lesson for Oedipa is not one of solipsism, but of abandonment of the self in an abject and sublime alienation from everything. Try as Oedipa might to assemble a coherent message from Driblette's performance, in the end everything sinks back into the tempest. As Stefan Mattessich writes, for the characters of Pynchon's novel, "to be a 'person' is to experience complicity in a world that effectively depersonalizes, reduces to caricature, to outline, to silhouette."[60] Driblette, as an actor and as a person, knows himself as a site where vast and formless powers take shape, for a moment, and evaporate once more into the background.

Bare Life

This loss of personhood is the source of horror which unites the experiences of Oedipa and Mucho, and which Mattessich argues is the core horror of Pynchon's body of work. "This displacement of the subject (character, author, and reader) to the negative spaces around what 'is,' to the molded (usually plastic) stencil of being, is what Pynchon attempts to represent in his fiction—a loss of substance, of affect, or reality."[61] The threefold loss of substance, affect, and reality defines the specifically posthuman character of Pynchon's Gothicism, in which the human subject is perpetually confronted

[59] Deborah Madsen, *The Postmodernist Allegories of Thomas Pynchon* (Leicester: Leicester University Press, 1991), 68.

[60] Stefan Mattessich, *Lines of Flight* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 43.

[61] Mattessich, *Lines of Flight*, 43.

with its mixed spectrality and base materiality, worlds of affects which surpass or escape its perception, and a loss of anything resembling 'reality' in the mess of weird intrusions and eerie hauntings. As Mattessich makes clear, the human figure in Pynchon's work fades into the surrounding landscape, and is in turn reshaped by the spaces through which it moves. What then remains of the human subject? Without substance, it haunts the landscape. Without affect, it numbly seeks understanding through the networks in which it now lives. Without reality, it disappears into divergent worlds. Human life is everywhere reduced to shadows and residue, or a kind of bare life which only just retains its human shape amidst the depredations of its world. It is this kind of humanity Mucho sees shattered among the machinery, and which Oedipa encounters wasting away in the urban interzones of America.[62]

On the trail of Tristero and WASTE, Oedipa is directed to "an old man huddled, shaking with grief she couldn't hear," whose alcoholism and age has brought him to the brink of death.[63] The old man, once a sailor, asks Oedipa to deliver one last letter for him via the WASTE network, while she stares onward, transfixed by the man's destitution and by the squalid, decayed mattress upon which he lies.

> What voices overheard, flinders of luminescent gods glimpsed among the wallpaper's stained foliage, candlestubs lit to rotate in the air over him, prefiguring the cigarette he or a friend must fall asleep someday smoking, thus to end among the flaming, secret salts held all those years by the insatiable stuffing of a mattress that could keep vestiges of every nightmare sweat, helpless overflowing bladder,

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[62] As shall be seen in the following chapter, this is not the last word which Pynchon has on the theme of humanity and its dissolution. While his early fiction, typified by *The Crying of Lot 49*, tends toward the unspeakable moments of horror and revelation, his later fiction takes a more nuanced approach which permits some degree of softness and hope.

[63] TCL 86.

> viciously, tearfully consummated wet dream, like the memory bank to a computer of the lost?[64]

The mattress repeats the role of Mucho's cars by storing up the remnants of human life, and by once again melding the functions of human and machine. The mattress is likened to the memory banks of a computer, but its functioning is bound up in the mishaps of the human body. Soaked not only with sweat, urine, and all manner of fluid, bodily or otherwise, the mattress is also said to contain some remnant of dreams and nightmares, of which nothing remains but their chance emissions onto the stinking pile. While Mucho's encounter with the inhuman recording of human lives is marked by an overbearing, hysterical confrontation with horror, Oedipa's contemplation of the mattress is far more deflated, and is characterised only by a quiet and pitiful despair. The horror is not only that people are reduced to inanimate fragments, but that each fragment hovers delicately on the verge of total destruction.

In added contrast to Mucho, whose obsession with the caryard fragments excludes all his customers from thought as mere ghosts in the making, Oedipa discovers reclining upon the mattress the sailor who introduces a living human being to the scene. As "that stuffed memory" of the mattress lies precariously on the verge of conflagration, it threatens to not only consume all the memory stored in its fibres, but also to consume the man who rests upon it.[65] The presence of the man redoubles Oedipa's shock at the scene, as the grand tragedy of memory entombed in decayed matter is bound up with the immediate and personal horror of a life lived on the brink of collapse. The sailor, at once

[64] TCL 87.

[65] TCL 88.

representing to Oedipa the redemption and the distance of the sea, is taken up by Oedipa in what James Nohrnberg has identified as the "central pieta" of Oedipa's story.[66]

> She was overcome all at once by a need to touch him, as if she could not believe in him, or would not remember him, without it. Exhausted, hardly knowing what she was doing, she came the last three steps and sat, took the man in her arms, actually held him, gazing out of her smudged eyes down the stairs, back into the morning. She felt wetness against her breast and saw that he was crying again. He hardly breathed but tears came as if being pumped. "I can't help," she whispered, rocking him, "I can't help." It was already too many miles to Fresno.[67]

The life held by the sailor, and mourned by Oedipa, is close to what political philosopher Giorgio Agamben calls "bare life". Unlike the political life of the citizen, defended by laws and customs, and the natural life outside the city, bare life is defined by its expulsion from the former and exclusion from the latter. Bare life is not natural life, because it is defined by its relation to politics and society, but neither is it properly political life, because it has been stripped of its politically and socially defined rights to life. This loss of political life, which is the lot of the outcasts with whom Oedipa begins to identify, is the crucial step that precedes the varieties of loss and despair that are inflicted upon the characters of the novel. The sailor, alongside Mucho's motorists and Driblette's actors, is denied access to a fully human form of life, and is perpetually reinscribed and defined by this loss.

Even as the sailor is held in Oedipa's arms, and whatever fragment of life that remains in him is affirmed and cradled, his very existence is marked by this relative

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[66] James Nohrnberg, "Pynchon's Paraclete" in *Pynchon: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Edward Mendelson (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1978), 159.

[67] TCL 87.

proximity to death. The necropolitical order in which the sailor lives is measured by the degrees of 'slow death' and 'slow violence' exerted over him as an individual, and upon whole populations lost in the mechanisms of death.[68] In contrast to the haunted mechanisms of Mucho and Driblette, the sailor and the mattress approach a far more permanent death, from which no return is possible. This presence of death in *The Crying of Lot 49* remains an instance of the weird, in the way it erupts into the novel and calls to attention the frailty of the world that is. Just as memories of the past remain trapped within the scattered fragments of Oedipa's world, each parcel of information is threatened by the inevitable decay of all things, and their eventual submersion in the undifferentiated flow of matter. The unlife of Mucho and Driblette's machines gives way to the unredeemable destruction of everything by the slow forces of entropy.

> [Oedipa] remembered John Nefastis, talking about his Machine, and massive destructions of information. So when this mattress flared up around the sailor, in his Viking's funeral: the stored, coded years of uselessness, early death, self-harrowing, the sure decay of hope, the set of all men who had slept on it, whatever their lives had been, would truly cease to be, forever, when the mattress burned. She stared at it in wonder. It was as if she had just discovered the irreversible process. It astonished her to think that so much could be lost, even the quantity of

[68] The posthuman state of life in *The Crying of Lot 49* approaches what Achille Mbembe has called necropolitics, in which death, dying, and the ability to die are made the primary markers of the political regime. As Mbembe writes, "in our contemporary world, weapons are deployed in the interest of maximum destruction of persons and the creation of *death-worlds*, new and unique forms of social existence in which vast populations are subjected to conditions of life conferring upon them the status of *living dead*." Achille Mbembe, "Necropolitics," *Public Culture* 15, no. 1 (Winter 2003): 40. Christine Quinan adds to these comments: "These deathworlds, which denote not only physical death but also social and political death, affect entire populations. [...] Similarly, slow death, and slow violence, that is to say the physical exhaustion and diminishment or elimination of certain human and non-human populations, is a defining mark of the contemporary era." Christine Quinan, "Necropolitics," in *Posthuman Glossary*, eds. Rosi Braidotti and Maria Hlavajova (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 271-2.

> hallucination belonging just to the sailor that the world would bear no further trace of.[69]

The sailor and mattress are united by their vast memories and their common precarity. "She knew that the sailor had seen worlds no other man had seen. [...] But nothing she knew of would preserve them, or him."[70] The sailor is one among the many drifters who swarm together at the novel's end to compose the silent, redemptive Word—yet without access to that chorus he stands alone, a fragile shell, in which untold numbers of fragments remain stored and incomplete, awaiting their final conflagration. As Manlio Marca suggests, "as in the car lot passage, there is almost an attempt to use junk as a means of creating a storage device which can resist the vaporization of memory. However, it is an attempt inevitably condemned to failure."[71] Unlike Oedipa, whose search puts her on the path of revelation, which to say a path capable of connecting and redeeming these losses, the other characters in the novel are caught in a fragmentary state. If for Oedipa the encounter with the sailor is another step toward the ineffable, for the sailor the encounter barely disturbs him from his long slide into oblivion. Marked at every turn by their slow approach to death, the sailor and mattress bring to the fore the tragedy of information in the novel, which could be free to flow out toward redemption, but everywhere is found to be locked up in vessels animate and inanimate alike. Mucho's revelation of the unlife of information is unsettling enough for him, but Oedipa encounters something more nefarious at work within this process of recording. Not only does Oedipa encounter a sign of the outside stored in some object, and a human positioned as part of the circuit, but she also considers the human body itself as a means of inhuman recording. As the sailor lies upon the mattress, leaving some residue of life to

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[69] TCL 88.

[70] TCL 89.

[71] Marca, "Fluid Destiny," 255.

remain in its rotted contours, he is also made an object of recording by forces far outside himself.

Pynchon here mirrors the "metonymic equation between tape-recorder and body" which Hayles identifies in the work of William Burroughs.[72] Although in this passage Pynchon resorts to the central metaphor of a computer's memory bank, rather than the tape recording, he performs the same anxieties around recording and bodily integrity which run through Burroughs' writing. According to Hayles, Burroughs "reasoned that if the body can become a tape-recorder, the voice can be understood not as a naturalized union of voice and presence but as a mechanical production with the frightening ability to appropriate the body's vocal apparatus and use it for ends alien to the self."[73] Beyond the role of the human subject as witness to these weird recordings, the human body itself becomes a site of recording, in which information is embedded in the flesh itself and exerts a disturbing influence over its movements. "Entwined into human flesh are 'pre-recordings' that function as parasites ready to take over the organism."[74] Far from being a means of communication, either between fellow humans or with an inhuman outside, information becomes a means of control, which for all its disembodied freedom of movement from and between bodies, causes ever-more unsettling contortions in the bodies through which it passes.

As Giorgio Mobili writes, in Pynchon criticism the body is largely "treated in passing, within the larger context of the world's succumbing to the forces of the inanimate—unquestionably, one of Pynchon principal underlying themes. In this framework, the body is viewed as the terrain where the ravages inflicted by the inanimate

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[72] Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 211.

[73] Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 211.

[74] Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 211.

appear most clearly."[75] What I wish to add here, following Mobili, is an account of the body in Pynchon's fiction which does not reduce it to the site of a larger conflict between the organic and the inanimate, but as a bundle of warring forces which already includes a potent mix of flesh, spirit, machine, and data. Alongside Mobili, I see in Pynchon's figuration of the body "a sensible Deleuzian interest—the hint to a dimension where language and the body partake of the same thick, material texture."[76] Beneath the mask of the subject lies a bodily existence rent by forces at once internal and external to itself, which serves on the one hand as a space into which signs of the outside transgress, and on the other as the volatile container for information stored ever-deeper within. As Dennis Yeo writes of the posthuman as *quasi*-human remnant: "More than just a liminal or abject being, the posthuman explores not the post life of our humanity, but the possible half-lifes which we may be compelled to inhabit because of technoscientific progress."[77] At the limits of dehumanisation, the human subject is reduced to its body, which carries on as an automaton, moving according to a hidden logic, recording what it can in incommunicable memory, and everywhere giving way to an inhuman form of life which operates according to its own mechanisms.

As Oedipa holds the sailor, she grasps in him "a trembling unfurrowing of the mind's plowshare," as he succumbs to the ravages of his illness.[78] Even as the bare horror of the man's life is revealed to her, Oedipa resists the despair which pushed her husband

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[75] Giorgio Mobili, *Irritable Bodies and Postmodern Subjects in Pynchon, Puig, Volponi* (New York: Peter Lang, 2008), 35.

[76] Mobili continues: "Thus, at the same time that he displays a language which never ceases violently to impinge on bodies and riddle them with scars and markings, Pynchon calls attention to the corporeality of a thick, 'irritable' language which exists itself as body and through the body, and visibly carries the material traces of the body's unruliness." Mobili, *Irritable Bodies*, 85-6.

[77] Dennis Yeo, "Being Virtual: The True (Posthu)man Show," in *Posthuman Gothic*, ed. Anya Heise-von der Lippe (Cardiff: University of Wales Press, 2017), 199.

[78] TCL 88-9.

over the edge. The horror that Oedipa encounters is offset by her singular need for generative contact with the outside, which leads her to embrace the dying man and to seek a place in the frayed chorus of the Word. But beneath her journey through the edifying shocks of terror, there remains that knowledge of horror—of an all-consuming outside, which doesn't only pass outside our perception, but warps our thoughts and contorts our bodies according to its incomprehensible will. Within *The Crying of Lot 49* two tendencies are in conflict: a terrifying conception of the outside as an escape from interiority, and its inverted and horrifying double of an outside which ruptures inward. Even as Oedipa follows this first path of contact with an outside, as argued in the previous chapter, most of the people she encounters succumb to the horror of finding themselves haunted, puppeteered, or scarred by the mechanisms that work through them.

A Community of Isolates

Amidst the horror, Oedipa searches for a way out. At every turn, she finds information and memory entombed within dying bodies, bodies merged with infernal machines, and a whole world on the edge of an abyss. "Oedipa senses just how much is squandered irretrievably if any person is let waste, prevented from recycling his or her 'information' back into the public world. She begins to feel the political need of 'a network...' [...] Her whole quest, in fact, stems from the same impulse: to recycle bits of information randomly scattered and lost, to sort clues instead of molecules into some system that 'mattered.'"[79] Information—its materiality, its obscurity, and its fragility—is once more figured as a source of horror, but now with the possibility of an exit from the torment. If the order of the world condemns memory to oblivion, Oedipa reasons, then another order,

[79] Peter L. Cooper, *Signs and Symptoms: Thomas Pynchon and the Contemporary World* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1983), 90.

and another "separate, silent, unsuspected world" may hold the key to salvation.[80] In contrast to the posthuman condition of disembodied information that has until now defined the novel, the WASTE network appears as a potential redemption of information—if only it may be sequestered away from the world at large. As we shall see, this trust in "information" as something which can ultimately be freed from its bodily vessels leads not into salvation, but toward an abdication and acquiescence to an inhuman system.

Oedipa's encounter with the sailor puts her in contact at last with the WASTE postal system, and all the hopes for another world which it represents. In contrast to the daily deaths of the surface America, Oedipa discovers, there are "God [knows] how many citizens, deliberately choosing not to communicate by U. S. Mail" or to submit to the ordering of information imposed by that system.[81] Although seemingly written in a salvific tone of escape from control, Pynchon's introduction of WASTE already presents its absurdity, as the escape from one of the United States' last truly public utilities is framed as an escape from the machinations of power entirely. Since the release of *Bleeding Edge*, and its dramatisation of the rise of search engines, social networks, and digital surveillance, the absurdity of WASTE is difficult to ignore.[82] Nonetheless, for all its apparent folly, the WASTE network functions as the (a)political heart of the novel, which must be interrogated to make sense of Pynchon's ambiguous depictions of information, escape, and horror.

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[80] TCL 86.

[81] TCL 86.

[82] The depiction of the early-2000's web in *Bleeding Edge* is taken up in detail in Chapter Six, in which I argue that the latter novel sees the posthuman fears of *The Crying of Lot 49* simultaneously confirmed and tempered by the rise of digital cultures and their own utopian follies.

In his book *Pynchon and the Political*, Samuel Thomas identifies in *The Crying of Lot 49* a nexus of political elements centred around the WASTE network. In Thomas' analysis WASTE, as an underground postal service, functions not only as a site of political community but as a "resistance formation" against the forces of government and control.[83] Following from Thomas' analysis, I understand the WASTE network not only as an escape route from post-war America, but as a product itself of the atomisation of society at the hands of capital. Citing Theodor Adorno, Thomas identifies in WASTE a kind of "society of isolates," who may attempt to reject society's norms and expectations, but are themselves subject to the isolating and individualising forces of capitalist society.[84] The focus of Thomas' account of WASTE is the story of Inamorati Anonymous, which bears recounting, and upon which I wish to develop Thomas' analysis according to the terms of this thesis.

Upon discovering WASTE's existence, Oedipa is directed to use the network to get in contact with Inamorati Anonymous, a help group for those in love, "the worst addiction of all."[85] This group, abbreviated hereafter as IA, was founded when

> a Yoyodyne executive living near LA and located someplace in the corporate root-system above supervisor but below vice-president, found himself, at age 39, automated out of a job. Having been since age 7 rigidly instructed in an eschatology that pointed nowhere but to a presidency and death, trained to do absolutely nothing but sign his name to specialized memoranda he could not begin to understand and to take blame for the running-amok of specialized programs that

[83] Samuel Thomas, *Pynchon and the Political* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 111.

[84] Thomas, *Pynchon and the Political*, 118-9.

[85] TCL 77.

> failed for specialized reasons he had to have explained to him, the executive's first thoughts were naturally of suicide.[86]

After much dithering, the executive decides upon a method of suicide. But, drenched in gasoline, with his lighter in hand, he is interrupted by his wife and an efficiency expert attempting a tryst in the next room. Abandoning his planned exit, the executive happens upon another mode of escape. He declares:

> "My big mistake was love. From this day I swear to stay off of love: hetero, homo, bi, dog or cat, car, every kind there is. I will found a society of isolates, dedicated to this purpose, and this sign, revealed by the same gasoline that almost destroyed me, will be its emblem." And he did.[87]

The strangeness of this account is highlighted by Thomas, who describes IA as "a club that never meets, a *society of isolates*, a voluntary form of group alienation [...] an experiment in communal solitude [...] a total contradiction."[88] The group, and WASTE as a whole, performs a kind of "*withdrawal* rather than a form of *resistance*."[89] In political terms, this withdrawal is precisely not a resistance to the world as it is, in all its injustice and tragedy, but a ceding of it to the forces of control. Thomas sees two ways of understanding IA. Firstly, as a rejection of love as something appropriated by economic forces, and thus as a liability. Or, as a projection of what society is becoming, "a miniature, dystopian version of Marcuse's one-dimensional world. A world of loveless isolates, of empty, prosthetic lives."[90] As Molly Hite makes clear, "the idea of a

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[86] TCL 78.

[87] TCL 80.

[88] Thomas, *Pynchon and the Political*, 121.

[89] Thomas, *Pynchon and the Political*, 122.

[90] Thomas, *Pynchon and the Political*, 126.

community of isolates is a paradox" founded upon the ambiguous nature of escape from an increasingly totalised society.[91] Hite continues, "either isolation is so complete that people can take no notice of one another, or a superior force coordinates individual realities so that solipsists move unknowingly and unwillingly toward a common goal in accordance with a preestablished harmony."[92] The withdrawal is never total, and since the refugees from this reality "could not have withdrawn into a vacuum," they must move into another reality system which binds them according to its own rules[93]

To return to the anonymous founder of IA, I wish to emphasise the manner in which this ambiguity between withdrawal and resistance dramatises not only the depoliticisation of modern life, but its concomitant dehumanisation. Most tellingly, the first step taken in his story is not a rejection of society, but his replacement in that society by a machine. His life prior to IA is one of increasing automation, in which his entire purpose is to sign his name on documents without care or understanding. Even before his outmoding he is more like a machine than a man. When his job is eventually automated, it is as if one machine has replaced another. In response, the unnamed executive does not undertake an active revolt against his situation, but passively retreats from the unbearable conditions thrust upon him. The potential Luddite in him surrenders. The cruel irony of his decision is voiced by the efficiency expert who interrupts his suicide:

> "Nearly three weeks it takes him," marvelled the efficiency expert, "to decide. You know how long it would've taken the IBM 7094? Twelve microseconds. No wonder you were replaced."[94]

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[91] Hite, *Ideas of Order*, 91.

[92] Hite, *Ideas of Order*, 91-2.

[93] TCL 86.

[94] TCL 79.

Even in dying, a computer could do better. Under the pressures of a mechanised society, the human spirit retreats. The IA founder doesn't dissolve into the machines like Driblette, the sailor, or the motorists, but he does cede something of himself to them. Unable to compete, he takes himself out of the equation. He elects not to die, but to fade into the background. By opting out, even as a form of resistance to love and its libidinal cooption by capitalism, the executive is not truly free from the wider forces at play. Rather, he embraces the isolation and alienation of humanity as its one last virtue, the one thing it can do well. In this manner, the apolitical communities of IA and WASTE work to make pliable the subject who seeks to resist the emerging mechanical order. As Philip Gochenour argues, "this order also requires the creation of a new subject to inhabit it. The order of corporate capitalism depends on the creation of subjects who perceive themselves as isolated monads in competition with one another."[95] Even as the executive and the WASTE community as a whole attempt an escape from the decidedly political and economic factors which drove them into exile, the supposed escape merely completes internally a process of dehumanisation begun from outside. The WASTE network plays into the "ultimate fantasy of Capital 'itself' [...] of cutting workers away altogether" to be free from the contingencies of all-too-human needs and political demands.[96]

Aside from being a community for the incommunicado, the WASTE network is doubly paradoxical for its figuration as an escape from malevolent forces by means of withdrawal further within those forces. Not only does it make claims to an exteriority defined by its reclusivity—a community of isolates—it attempts to chart out an independent interiority which is in fact determined by what lies outside. WASTE is no refuge for a recalcitrant humanity, but a network operated by those at the farthest limits of

[95] Gochenour, Philip. "Anarchist Miracles: Distributed Communities, Nodal Subjects and *The Crying of Lot 49*." *Pynchon Notes* 52-53 (Spring-Fall 2003): 43.

[96] Fisher, *K-Punk*, 603.

dehumanisation. The name of the network becomes quite literal: its users are the discarded trash of an American underworld, barred from entry to its official channels of communication "out of hate, indifference to the power of their vote, loopholes, simple ignorance," and in any case forced to retreat into their own "separate, silent, unsuspected world."[97] "It was not an act of treason, nor possibly even of defiance. But it was a calculated withdrawal, from the life of the Republic, from its machinery."[98] But this withdrawal, even as it sequesters these isolates away from the machinations of the visible world, is also what completes the processes of dehumanisation, disembodiment, and disintegration begun out there. Far from positing the possibility of a wholly independent form of human life, freed from the strictures and expectations of an increasingly dehumanised politics and economy, the WASTE network forebodes a coming state of existence inhabited by the "technologically mediated human, caught in a liminal state between a dehumanized reality and a virtual existence."[99] In Gothic fashion, the posthuman seeks exit from the dark castle of technical modernity—but with the outside in sight, the trapdoor slams shut and the means of escape become another source of imprisonment.

WASTE figures in *The Crying of Lot 49* as both utopia and as a distraction, as a rejection of a hideous world and as a literal instance of the waste which composes that world.[100] As much as its existence and purpose constitutes the core mystery of *The Crying*

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[97] TCL 86.

[98] TCL 86.

[99] Yeo, "Being Virtual," 200.

[100] The ambivalence of WASTE has not gone unremarked upon, even by those critics who see in it a more hopeful form of escape from the deadening powers of this world. As Paula Martín Salván argues, the community embraced by Oedipa at the novel's end is, "at the same time, inside and outside the system, linked to the Trystero in some way, but also part of the civil order it opposes." Neither a part of the system nor wholly outside of it, Oedipa's newfound community appears both as a utopian space of "excluded

of Lot 49's plot, it is only one among many failures by the characters and organisations of the novel to locate a genuine outside to their posthuman nightmare. From the horrors and ecstasies of Mucho's false gospel, through the concessions to the inhuman made by Driblette, the sailor, and Inamorati Anonymous, to the core conspiracy of WASTE and Tristero, Oedipa encounters all about her the wasted figures of those who attempted to either survive within or to escape from this reality and in one way or another met an obstacle in their path. Mucho's madness in the car yard parallels Oedipa's own paranoid search for meaning in a darkened world, just as his broadcast revelation recalls the collective enunciation of an outside which Oedipa hears whispered across the wires. Yet his wild flight from the horrors of machinery and death lead him only further into a dream-world maintained by that very machinery, and headed toward that same death that he cannot bear to face. The same fate awaits the actor who drowns himself in the vast Pacific, the sailor who sinks into a final drunken stupor, and the countless anonymous voices of the postal underground—as all find themselves face to face with the posthuman horror of a world ceded to the inhuman whims of machines. Everywhere in the novel, bodies become storage banks, minds become processors, and a great mass of bodiless information passes through them without distinction between human and inhuman life, animate or inanimate matter.

Yet, as we have seen in the previous chapter, this failure to escape is not total—or at least not for Oedipa. Even as the various characters she encounters embody different horrors and different failures to maintain a human form of life, Oedipa's own search leads not toward a questionable maintenance of the human status quo, but into the otherness and alienation that destroys those around her. The weirdness which runs through these encounters, which mangles humanity with machine, is not only an unpleasant source of

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middles" and, I argue, as a compromise with the powers that be. See: Paula Martín Salván, "Ideas of Community in *The Crying of Lot 49*," *Pynchon Notes* 56-57, no. 1 (2011): 84.

horror, but contains within it a sense of the outside which drives Oedipa on her search. As Mark Fisher writes, the strange contortions and assemblages of the weird are signs "that we are in the presence of the new. The weird here is a signal that the concepts and frameworks which we have previously employed are now obsolete [and] there is an enjoyment in seeing the familiar and the conventional become outmoded."[101] Even as the desire for an outside is cut off, left fragmentary and mutilated, *The Crying of Lot 49* performs what Robert Sklar dubs the "anarchist miracle" of showing the possibility of "another world's intrusion into this one."[102] This intrusion engenders all the Gothic feelings of terror and horror, as the world Oedipa knows is revealed as an illusion that hides beneath it the machinic programs, bodily contortions, and psychic pulsions which maintain the orderly façade. And yet, in the revelation of a horrific nightmare posthumanity, a crack is made in the collective dream which made it possible, and which makes all other worlds seem impossible. From out of this experience of horror emerges the novel's most subtle vision of utopia: not the mending or preservation of this world, but its long-awaited destruction in the onrush of the horrifying, incomprehensible new.

[101] Fisher, *The Weird and The Eerie*, 13.

[102] Robert Sklar, "An Anarchist Miracle: The Novels of Thomas Pynchon," in *Pynchon: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Edward Mendelson (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1978), 95.

Chapter Three

Denying the Machine: Luddites, Monsters, and Pynchon's Gothic Theory of Literature

Despite the critical celebration of Pynchon's novels and the scholarly attention paid to them, Pynchon's essays and reviews have been left comparatively unrecognised and under-read. Compared to his fictions, Pynchon's nonfictional writing have been received by critics as secondary, minor writings of only incidental importance to the author's primarily novelistic oeuvre. Worse still, the suspicion remains that Pynchon's nonfictional writings are not only of secondary importance, but present simplified or trivialised distillations of Pynchon's wide-ranging and complex narratives. If Pynchon's representations of technological horror tend to revolve around what might charitably be called a Manichaean struggle between 'Man' and 'Machine' (or, uncharitably, a reductive and simplistic opposition between these two terms), at first glance his nonfictions do little to dispel this appearance of dualism. In his 1984 essay on Luddism, Pynchon's citations of Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and Walpole's *The Castle of Otranto* (1764) as fictive means of "denying the machine" appear to replicate this binary, with the miraculous works of fantasy arrayed against the grim realities of the world. So too do his 1988 review of Gabriel García Márquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera* and 1997 preface to Jim Dodge's *Stone Junction* take as their respective central themes the lover's trials within the world of death and the writer's fight against a mechanized reality. The choice of Luddism itself as a topic appears to confirm what Pynchon scholars have long suspected, that the author's fascination with machines, of both the physical and psychological kinds, is rooted in a Gnostic abhorrence for the world as it is contrasted against the world as it could be.

The apparent simplicity of Pynchon's nonfiction, especially as it compares with the complexities of his fiction, is something I wish to challenge. Although today read merely as footnotes to his acclaimed novelistic output, Pynchon's main nonfictional writings occupy a singular place in his oeuvre at the turning point between his early fictions and the fictions following his post-*Gravity's Rainbow* hiatus. Alongside the nonfictions mentioned above, this hiatus period is also marked by introductions to Richard Fariña's *Been Down So Long It Looks Like Up To Me* (1983) and Pynchon's own short story collection *Slow Learner* (1984), and essay on sloth for the *New York Times Book Review* (1993), and liner notes for *Spike! The Music of Spike Jones* (1994). This is to say that throughout much of the seventies and the entirety of the eighties, Pynchon's publications were primarily nonfictional, and to miss the import of these writings is to miss nearly two decades of the writer's output. When resituated at the pivotal point in Pynchon's writing career between his two historical epics *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Mason & Dixon*—and in his writing hiatus between the release of the former in 1973 and *Vineland* in 1991—his nonfictions may be taken for more than their surface appareance as itinerant essays by a novelist on leave from his vocation.

Before addressing how Pynchon's nonfictions play into this thesis' wider understanding of the posthuman Gothic, I wish to make clear two key contentions regarding their place in his oeuvre. First, I will be taking as a given that Pynchon's nonfictions of the eighties and nineties are enriched by their place they occupy between his two main periods of novel writing. In these nonfictions, the terms which define the author's early fiction are taken up and transformed in ways that anticipate his later fiction. With this in mind, the present chapter also attempts to bridge the gap between the previous two chapters on *The Crying of Lot 49*, focused as they are on the various personal responses to contact with impersonal forces, and the following two chapters on *Mason & Dixon*, in which the anxieties which define the early novels become more

abstract, and the personal stakes of his characters more clearly align with a wider historical perspective. Second, I treat the nonfictions not only as incidental bridges between two periods of novel-writing, but as commentaries upon and attempts to resolve certain tensions within the early fiction. As much as these essays and reviews offer thematic bridges between the two halves of Pynchon's career, they are not to be taken as asides offered to the novels, and must be considered as active and dynamic works in their own right. In this sense, Pynchon's nonfictions lay the groundwork for the concepts and concerns further developed in the novels published after the author's novelistic hiatus.

The value of Pynchon's nonfiction has been considerably understated within Pynchon criticism, typified by remarks such as those made by Katie Muth that "it is hard, in the slim nonfictional margins of Pynchon's fiction, to find much that looks like building material" for his novels, although it "discloses a writer deeply engaged with his work and the occasions of its production and appearance."[1] Muth's ambiguous assessment, that Pynchon's nonfiction provides no explicit framework for his fictions but nevertheless discloses something of his methods, is one which I will not attempt to resolve. Instead, I suggest that the ambiguity of Pynchon's nonfiction, and especially of his nonfictional writings *about* fiction, demands closer inspection in the same terms as his notably ambiguous fictions. If Pynchon's nonfiction refuses to function as the building blocks of his fiction, or as grand revelations of the writer's practice, this is not to say that it does not comment in some roundabout way upon the stakes of that writing.

To return to the opening topic of this chapter, and the perceived simplicity of Pynchon's thematic oppositions between humanity and machine, I wish to show not only

[1] "We are accustomed to thinking about a novelist's nonfiction as interpretive scaffolding—as a statement of craft, ideology, or aesthetic theory. […] Nonfiction, in this view, provides the structures of meaning by which to better understand an author's novelistic work." Katie Muth, "Nonfiction," in *Thomas Pynchon in Context*, ed. Inger H. Dalsgaard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 27.

how his nonfictions comment upon that disjunction as a cause of writing but also how they problematise that very division. What at first appear to be light or even flippant overviews of the author's interests—whether they be Luddism, sloth, or love—nonetheless contain ambiguities and contradictions which do not so much work against Pynchon's stated intentions as reveal certain hidden meanings. To the end of drawing out these complexities I have put Pynchon's nonfictional writings in conversation with critics of the Gothic and the posthuman with whom he shares a complicated mistrust of technical novelty.

The essay that is the primary focus of this chapter is Pynchon's 1984 essay for the *New York Times Book Review* titled "Is It O.K. To Be A Luddite?" I focus upon this essay because it is both a text preeminently concerned with Pynchon's abiding suspicion of technology, and also because it is closest that Pynchon comes to putting forward a theory of literature. In a continuation on the main threads of this thesis, I argue that the technological and literary themes of this essay align in multiple ways with the overarching themes of the posthuman and the Gothic. In the essay Pynchon not only takes up a defense of the Luddite cause, but by his association of that cause with both the Gothic fictions of Walpole and Shelley and the technological dreams of immortality, he transforms Luddism into a far more ambivalent philosophy. In what follows, I argue that Pynchon's "Luddite" essay charts out the dialectical relationship between humanity and machines, producing progeny both monstrous and revolutionary, all the while functioning as both a speculative work of posthuman politics and a statement on Gothic aesthetics.

I wish to argue that in giving a contemporary voice to the Luddite cause, Pynchon simultaneously proposes both a Gothic aesthetics able, in his words, "to insist on the miraculous" and a paradoxically posthuman ethics able to "deny the machine at least

some of its claims on us."[2] These two notions, taken together "assert the limited wish that living things, earthly and otherwise, may on occasion become Bad and Big enough to take part in transcendent doings."[3] Following on from my examination of the "Luddite" essay, I turn to the nonfictions which immediately follow it in the years prior to *Mason & Dixon*'s publication. In those writings, the elements of the Gothic and the posthuman present in the "Luddite" essay are further problematised, even to the point of shrinking away into a darkened Romanticism or weary humanism. Finally, in the closing pages of this chapter, and as a premonition of the following chapters, I suggest that Pynchon's own fictions may in turn be read through the posthuman Gothic formula set out in his sporadic nonfictional writings.

Luddite Fiction as Gothic Fiction

The "'Luddite' skepticism that dominates Pynchon's politics" has been well-noted elsewhere, but nowhere is it clearer than in the 1984 essay just what a fraught and ambiguous conception of Luddism Pynchon adheres to.[4] Far from espousing a simply anti-technological position, Pynchon's essay is shot through with ambivalence, moving from the revolutionary hopes of Byron's poetry to the recuperation of those same energies to the ends of an eventual entente between humanity and machine. In one paragraph Pynchon suggests that "if the logistics can be worked out, miracles may yet be possible" and in another reveals that promise of perfection to be the scam of "an emerging

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[2] Thomas Pynchon, "Is It O.K. To Be A Luddite?" *The New York Times Book Review*, October 28, 1984. https://archive.nytimes.com/www.nytimes.com/books/97/05/18/reviews/pynchon-luddite.html. As a digitally archived copy of Pynchon's essay, page numbers are not available. The text is hereafter cited simply as OK.

[3] OK.

[4] Samuel Thomas, *Pynchon and the Political* (New York: Routledge, 2007), 146.

technopolitical order that might or might not know what it was doing."[5] In the space of the essay's final paragraph, Pynchon switches from an admonishment of the Military-Industrial-Complex's "permanent power establishment," to excitement at the "amazing and unpredictable" possibilities opened up by technological change, and back to the revolutionary proclamation of Byron with which he ends the essay:

> As the Liberty lads o'er the sea
> Bought their freedom, and cheaply, with blood,
> So we, boys, we
> Will die fighting, or live free,
> And down with all kings but King Ludd![6]

Pynchon's equivocation between these two positions of revolutionary Luddism and speculative utopianism has not gone unnoticed. As Pieter Vermeulen remarks, less than expressing a "Luddite rage against the machine," the end of Pynchon's essay "anticipate[s] the posthuman erosion of the borders between technology and human life" in which "our machines may themselves become operators of the miraculous."[7] For Christopher Coffman, too, this qualification of Luddite rage "points to the qualified

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[5] OK.

[6] Showing some restraint for his *New York Times* audience, Pynchon omits the following stanza, which leaves no doubt concerning the price paid for Liberty, and from whom that price is to be extracted:

> When the web that we weave is complete,
> And the shuttle exchanged for the sword,
> We will fling the winding sheet
> O'er the despot at our feet,
> And dye it deep in the gore he has pour'd.

Lord Byron, *The Works of Lord Byron*, vol. 7, ed. Ernest Hartley Coleridge (London: John Murray, 1905), 43.

[7] Pieter Vermeulen, "Pynchon's Posthuman Temporalities," in *The New Pynchon Studies*, ed. Joanna Freer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 69.

optimism of the former Boeing employee with regard to the separation of power and information technologies, and troubles any certainty in readings that understand Pynchon's attitude to technology as unmitigated pessimism."[8] If Pynchon's tentative optimism paradoxically dampens the essay's radical conjecture that Luddism is not only relevant but necessary to the present moment, this is not to say that it undercuts his professed Luddism entirely. Rather, if the essay refuses the simple image of the Luddite as technophobe, it remains to be seen what exactly a Luddite is or is to become in the age of the machine.[9]

In contrast to the "irrational fear and hatred of science and technology" of which it is often accused, Pynchon insists that Luddism is better understood as a politically and materially conscious revolt against the growing obsolescence of the human.[10] Pynchon reminds us that "the knitting machines which provoked the first Luddite disturbances had been putting people out of work for well over two centuries [...] Everybody saw this happening—it became part of daily life."[11] Far from being a momentary barricade on the road to progress, or counter-revolutionaries fighting an ever-losing battle against progress, Pynchon insists that the Luddites be considered both in the context of modernity and capitalism and as conscious actors who knew exactly where they stood in that long history of dispossession. What was clear then, as it is now, was that behind the mirage of progress stood an unholy alliance between the order of the day and the increasingly self-reliant machines. In this union of the propertied classes with rapidly advancing

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[8] Christopher K. Coffman, "Another Apocalypse: Digital Ecologies and Late Pynchon," in *The New Pynchon Studies*, ed. Joanna Freer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 127.

[9] Pynchon makes no secret of his disdain for the pejorative use of "Luddite" by the supposed revolutionaries of industrial capital, who deploy it "to call those with whom they disagree both politically reactionary and anti-capitalist at the same time" (OK).

[10] OK.

[11] OK.

machinery, the lives of workers became increasingly interchangeable with their machines in the eyes of the owners. Under this new regime, each machine represents a "concentration of capital" and a power to "put a certain number of humans out of work—to be 'worth' that many human souls."[12]

This equivalence between the machine and the human soul is not only poetic, but a reality of the class system against which the Luddites were pitted. As Andreas Malm notes, the "critical years of transition to steam were enclosed behind a law that made wilful damage to a coal mine or an engine *punishable by death*," meaning that the destruction of a machine was quite literally translated into the destruction of human life.[13] If the Luddites have been remembered by posterity as senseless technophobes, Pynchon's analysis hews far closer to that found in the labour histories of E. P. Thompson, who makes clear the violence waged *upon* the workers *prior to* their revolt. As Thompson writes, "the workers felt that the bonds, however ideal, which bound them to the rest of the community in reciprocal obligations and duties, were being snapped one after another. They were being thrust beyond the pale of the constitution."[14] Likewise, Pynchon's insistence that the revolt of the Luddites "was open-eyed class war" works to dispel the image of these workers as political reactionaries with their heads buried in the sand.[15] The

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[12] OK. Passages such as these recall Marx's satirical comments on the inability of the bourgeois economists to distinguish between workers and machine, and the capitalist's sinister desire to have done with the irritants who keep his beloved machines in motion: "Exploitation of the worker by the machine is therefore identical for him with exploitation of the machine by the worker. Therefore whoever reveals the real situation with the capitalist employment of machinery does not want machinery to be employed at all, and is an enemy of social progress!" Karl Marx, *Capital Volume I*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1976), 569.

[13] Andreas Malm, *Fossil Capital: The Rise of Steam Power and the Roots of Global Warming* (London: Verso, 2016), 224.

[14] E. P. Thompson, *The Making of the English Working Class* (New York: Vintage, 1966), 546.

[15] OK.

historical goals of the Luddites were never purely technical, as in the words of historians Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, the Luddite "resistance was never against technology as such, but against a particular technology and its ability to crush others, and we need to unfold the spectrum of alternatives that existed at each moment."[16]

Today the conflict continues as it ever has, not between human and machine, but between humanity and the inhuman forces of capital, industry, and war. In a paraphrase of Eisenhower's denunciation of the Military-Industrial Complex, Pynchon writes that there is "now a permanent power establishment of admirals, generals and corporate CEO's, up against whom us average poor bastards are completely outclassed."[17] The danger here is one reflected by Deleuze and Guattari a decade earlier, that there is now only one class with any true power to speak of: the servants of "the ravenous machine," who maintain it and feed from it, and against whom we are all effectively Luddites.[18]

Yet, in the face of this *longue durée* of industrialisation, Pynchon does not see a "simple unreasoning horror" among its victims, but the complex mixture of utopian hope and well-earned resentment, "the love/hate that grows up between humans and machinery."[19] On the one hand, Pynchon depicts the growing might of machines and their usurpation of humanity as their own category of (un)life, while on the other he envisions the myriad lost possibilities of a history which has produced technological marvels for ends more base. Such is the dynamic which Pynchon attributes to the earliest of Gothic novels, which were grounded, he suspects

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[16] Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz, *The Shock of the Anthropocene: The Earth, History and Us*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Verso, 2016), 261.

[17] OK.

[18] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 245.

[19] OK.

> in deep and religious yearnings for that earlier mythical time which had come to be known as the Age of Miracles. In ways more and less literal, folks in the 18th century believed that once upon a time all kinds of things had been possible which were no longer so.[20]

Pynchon's characterisation of modernity as the exit from an age of miracles recalls on the surface a Weberian disenchantment of the world and the desire "to dispel myths, to overthrow fantasy with knowledge."[21] But he does not allow this formulation of modernity to sit easily. What was once possible—the miraculous and the magical—is made impossible in its old form, while simultaneously being made possible in another. In fact, Pynchon's vision of modernity is far more akin to what has been described as the "Gothic Marxism" of Walter Benjamin.[22] In this view, the disillusionment of the Enlightenment was accompanied by the mystifying forces of capital, by which, in Benjamin's words, "a new dream-filled sleep came over Europe, and through it, a reactivation of mythic forces."[23] It is within this newfound sleep that the Gothic novel spins its most enticing dreams and most horrific nightmares, as it both recalls the earlier age of miracles while inhabiting a newly mystified era. As Leslie Fiedler writes, the Gothic form emerged "at a moment when everywhere rationalism had triumphed in theory and madness reigned in fact, [in which its writers] were plagued by a hunger for the inexplicable, a need of the marvelous which they could neither confess nor escape."[24]

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[20] OK.

[21] Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, ed. Gunzelin Schmid Noerr, trans. Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002), 1.

[22] Margaret Cohen, *Profane Illuminations: Walter Benjamin and the Paris of Surrealist Revolution* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1993), 11-2.

[23] Walter Benjamin, *The Arcades Project*, trans. Howard Eiland and Kevin McLaughlin (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1999), 391.

[24] Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (Normal: Dalkey Archive Press, 1997), 138.

To insist upon the miraculous, then, is an ambiguous act which at once restores past myths while delving ever-deeper into the unconscious mythologies of the present.[25]

Although Pynchon's key reference in regards to the miraculous is Horace Walpole and his germinal Gothic novel *The Castle of Otranto*, an equally fitting comparison is the late Romantic writer Thomas De Quincey, who in his *Suspiria de Profundis* describes dreams invaded by machinery. According to De Quincey, the "colossal pace" of technological development reduces us to a "fleshly torpor" as "the brain is haunted as if by some jealousy of ghostly beings moving amongst us."[26] In both De Quincey and Pynchon's accounts, machines are never merely technological, and in addition occupy an occult position within the rationalist logic of modernity. The practice of Gothic writing thus not only dramatises the horrors of modernity in a dreamlike style, but also works to uncover the occulted mechanisms of that modernity. "To name these horrors is also to perform a counter-magic to the sorcery of capital. For capital's great powers of illusion lie in the way it invisibilises its own monstrous formation."[27] Regarding the paradoxical magic of capitalist modernity, Pynchon proposes that machinery itself functions as a dark magic nestled at the heart of modernity's age of reason:

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[25] "Pynchon's extra-human and non-humanist world, in this view, is literally beyond belief. It renders beliefs and believability irrelevant, or at least places them at a distance from the preconditions of coherent reading. Such a world cedes no ground to any discourse that attempts to frame it within human truth-claims. Those claims are not thereby rendered meaningless or trivially relativized. The subjects within Pynchon's technological state are neither granted a blanket pardon for their bureaucratic participation in the atrocities of that state [...] nor treated to blanket credulity toward their systems of belief." William Millard, "Delineations of Madness and Science: *Mason & Dixon*, Pynchonian Space and the Snovian Distinction," in *American Postmodernity: Essays on the Recent Fiction of Thomas Pynchon*, ed. Ian D. Copestake (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003), 114-5.

[26] Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater, and Other Writings*, ed. Robert Morrison (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2013), 81-2.

[27] David McNally, *Monsters of the Market: Zombies, Vampires and Global Capitalism*. (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011), 114.

> What had once been true working magic had, by the Age of Reason, degenerated into mere machinery. Blake's dark Satanic mills represented an old magic that, like Satan, had fallen from grace. As religion was being more and more secularized into Deism and nonbelief, the abiding human hunger for evidence of God and afterlife, for salvation— bodily resurrection, if possible—remained.[28]

Pynchon posits that in our secular age the religious yearning for another world is not dispelled, but displaced. Into the void left by religion and the supernatural rush all the dubious hopes and fears of the technological, which promises to perform miracles of a far more material nature. If Pynchon's references to an "Age of Miracles" seem historically fanciful, this is not to say that this fantasy doesn't go some way in explaining the fascination afforded by the Gothic and its often spurious visions of the past. As Fredric Jameson has argued, the paired themes of salvation and resurrection are not religious in themselves, but are conceptual forms, "which, inherited, are reappropriated for wholly new meanings and uses that have nothing to do with the historical origins of their borrowed articulations. [...] Resurrection expresses the euphoria of a secular salvation otherwise inexpressible in material or social terms, religious language here offering the means of rendering a material possibility rather than the other way around."[29] What appears as an archaism in fact expresses a wish which cannot find be voiced in the language of the day. Paradoxically, Pynchon suggests, "the influence of religion on history is not so much nostalgic as it is futuristic," as within this complex of utopian

[28] OK.

[29] Fredric Jameson, *The Antinomies of Realism* (London: Verso, 2013), 196-7.

hopes and mechanical acceleration, we discover the past haunting the present and continuing to inspire dreams of the future.[30]

Frankenstein's Monster, or, the Posthuman Badass

For all its insistence upon the miraculous—in one form or another—the Gothic retains another purely negative aspect. Alongside its miraculous hopes for a world saved from the predations of capitalist modernity remains the Luddite desire to not only escape but destroy that which threatens human life. The dream-world of capitalism lapses into a nightmare, but in that moment of horror lies the possibility of waking from the dream at last. To illustrate the destructive powers of the Gothic, Pynchon turns to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* as a prototypically Luddite novel, which warns "of what can happen when technology, and those who practice it, get out of hand."[31] He writes that

> [*Frankenstein*] remains today more than well worth reading, for all the reasons we read novels, as well as for the much more limited question of its Luddite value: that is, for its attempt, through literary means which are nocturnal and deal in disguise, to *deny the machine*.[32]

What the Gothic novel's insistence upon the miraculous ensures is not a simple return to a mythic past or the inspiration of a new age of wonders, but a critique of the world as it is at present and a denial of the machine's control over that world. Such a task requires one to work through nocturnal, subterranean, and hidden means, as did the original Luddites

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[30] Justin M. Scott Coe, "Haunting and Hunting: Bodily Resurrection and the Occupation of History in Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*," in *The Multiple Worlds of Pynchon's* "*Mason & Dixon*," ed. Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds (Rochester: Camden House, 2005), 148.

[31] OK.

[32] OK.

"ahead of their time, using the night, and their own solidarity and discipline, to achieve their multiplications of effect."[33] Here Pynchon assigns definite political ends to the Gothic's ambiguously aligned aesthetics, and suggests that it is only by way of this darkened passage that true alternatives to the status quo may be expressed. To write in the Gothic style, is then, in Pynchon's terms as well as those of Gothic scholar Anne Williams, "not only to find new subjects, themes, and literary models, a change revolutionary in itself [...] It was also to subvert and reshape, indeed rebuild" the world anew.[34] By way of its profound negativity, its "aesthetics of pleasurable fear," the Gothic redoubles the strength of its critique of both a tyrannical past and an inhuman future.[35]

Pynchon's idiosyncratic hero of this Luddite fiction is the 'Badass,' who is powerful and dedicated enough to destroy that which would destroy them. The foremost example of the Badass in the essay is of course King Ludd, who Pynchon imagines using a "controlled, martial-arts type anger" to destroy the machines.[36] But perhaps more intriguingly, the Badass does not always originate from among a humanity beset by machines. Pynchon writes that "Victor Frankenstein's creature also, surely, qualifies as a major literary Badass."[37] Frankenstein's monster certainly fulfils the two, somewhat tongue-in-cheek criteria which Pynchon sets for the Badass—he's Big and he's Bad—although these descriptors perhaps raise more questions than they answer. The 'bigness' of the Badass (a term capitalised throughout the essay), is perhaps owed to their Gothic multiplication of effect mentioned above, and their larger than life appearance as heroes in contest with the world itself. What makes the Badass 'bad,' also appears to hinge on

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[33] OK.

[34] Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 180.

[35] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (New York: Methuen, 1986), vi.

[36] OK.

[37] OK.

their exaggerated ability: "Bad meaning not morally evil, necessarily, more like able to work mischief on a large scale. What is important here is the amplifying of scale, the multiplication of effect."[38] But this ability to work mischief on a large scale itself suggests a second meaning of 'bad,' not as a moral evil but a negative attitude, and a willingness to fight against the supposed goods upheld by an unjust society. In the context of *Frankenstein*, the 'badness' of the monster does not denote an innate evilness on his part, but his status as a perceived aberration rejected by the society which birthed him. Likewise, as David McNally suggests, "for radical liberals of the Wollstonecraft-Godwin variety, Luddite revolt and government-repression were merely different symptoms of the sickness inherent in Britain's system of monarchy, aristocracy and rule of the propertied."[39] If the Badass—whether Luddite or monster—is capable of wanton violence, it is a violence which has its precedent in the social world against which the Badass fights.

As a key example of the Badass, Frankenstein's monster also draws Pynchon's Luddism back to the core uncertainties of the Gothic. This Gothic quality begins not only with the social composition of the monster as an outcast, but his literal, bodily construction as a composite being. As David McNally has rightly observed, the bodily imagery of *Frankenstein* recalls the contemporary practices of medical experimentation and punitive mutilation exercised on the bodies of the English working class: "In aligning him with the surgeons, anatomists and grave-robbers reviled by the labouring poor, Shelley stamps a decidedly anti-working-class identity on Frankenstein. And, in the anatomist's assembly of the monster, she imaginatively reconstructs the process by which the working class was created: first dissected (separated from the land and their communities), then reassembled as a frightening collective entity, that grotesque

[38] OK.

[39] McNally, *Monsters of the Market*, 87.

conglomeration known as the proletarian mob."[40] That the monster speaks in the voice of a Byronic revolutionary is then of little surprise, as the body he has been given is nothing but a mass of limbs and organs stolen from the graves of the poor and hungry, now turned in revenge against the man who robbed them of peace in death.

As a monster, and as a technological construct, Frankenstein's creation merges the Luddite appeal to humanity with the posthuman fascination with the more than human, and by association reveals the demand for monstrosity at the core of Pynchon's essay. The Badass, whether in the form of King Ludd, King Kong, or Shelley's creature, is someone or something made monstrous by the order of the day—a man possessed by a "fit of insane rage" at the machines, or a machine hell-bent on the destruction of its creator—to whom all the powers of multiplied effect are made available.

> What gave King Ludd his special Bad charisma, took him from local hero to nationwide public enemy, was that he went up against these amplified, multiplied, more than human opponents and prevailed.[41]

The Luddite cause thus demands that we become superhuman, even monstrous, if it restores our power to strike back against these inhuman enemies. Jack Halberstam notes that "the monster's body [...] is a machine that, in its Gothic mode, produces meaning and can represent any horrible trait that the reader feeds into the narrative."[42] The term "machine" here not only denotes the monster's manufactured form—although composed of flesh instead of metal—but also his place in the text as a locus of a productive contradiction between the terms of the human (and all the monster's desire for human society) and the monstrous (and all the monster's hatred of that society). If contemporary

[40] McNally, *Monsters of the Market*, 95.

[41] OK.

[42] Jack Halberstam, *Skin Shows: Gothic Horror and the Technology of Monsters* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1995), 21.

Gothic studies place an undue emphasis on the utopia of monstrosity, and the celebration of alterity found in the monster, Pynchon's reading of *Frankenstein* recognises "the arena of monstrosity as a site of contestation, [and] a field in which different social accents and values contest one another."[43] If the monster is a Badass, and if Pynchon's Badass is monstrous, it is not of their own volition. Rather, they are states of being entered out of necessity, when the merely human is too limited a category to encompass or rescue the effluvia of society: its outcast, deprived, and surplus populations made the raw materials of industry and capital's expansion.[44]

The superhuman capabilities of the monstrous Badass also draws them closer the figure of the posthuman, in that their monstrosity never entirely severs them from a conception of the human, which needs to be defended by inhuman means. As George Haggerty has suggested, within the narrative of *Frankenstein*, the monster functions less as a figure of total separation from humanity than a negative image of humanity deprived. Ultimately, the violent travails experienced by Victor work to his intellectual benefit, as "the violence of the creature's vision of experience teaches Frankenstein finally what it means to be human. It teaches, that is, the horror implicit in life and the terror of all that lies beyond human understanding, translating a private Gothic experience into publicly horrifying terms. It is Frankenstein's own version of a mystical experience."[45] While in Haggerty's assessment the monster functions as a means of teaching Victor the values and limits of humanity, this all-too-human aspect of Shelley's novel has opened it to criticism

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[43] McNally, *Monsters of the Market*, 10.

[44] In this respect, Oedipa's aspiration to discern the composite Word in the mass relay of voices is made retrospectively Badass. Just as Frankenstein's monster is amassed from the mutilated bodies of the working poor, the roar of relays in *The Crying of Lot 49* is a conglomeration of voices severed from their desperate and destitute bodies.

[45] George E. Haggerty, *Gothic Fiction / Gothic Form* (University Park: Pennsylvania State University Press, 1989), 60-1.

from those who wish to escape the human altogether. "Unlike the hopes of Frankenstein's monster," writes Donna Haraway, "the cyborg does not expect its father to save it through a restoration of the garden; i.e., through the fabrication of a heterosexual mate, through its completion in a finished whole, a city and cosmos. The cyborg does not dream of community on the model of the organic family, this time without the Oedipal project. The cyborg would not recognize the Garden of Eden."[46] Unlike Haraway's cyborg, who rejects all hopes of a restoration of paradise, Pynchon's posthuman Badass dares to demand the realisation of this dream. Whereas Haraway casts the monster's revolt as ultimately a concession to the patriarchal terms of his creator, Pynchon adheres to the Promethean qualities of the tale, embodied in the monster's demand of his creator that salvation be granted and miracles be performed once more.

If they differ from the cyborg in their ultimate recapitulation of humanist values, the key figures of Pynchon's literary history nonetheless share with their cybernetic cousins their composite character: as both flesh and machine, and as conceptual fusions of the human with the inhuman. It is in this manner that Pynchon's essay pits two binaries against one another: the miraculous and the mechanical, and the human and the monstrous—but also proposes resolutions of those oppositions in the paradoxical figure of the Badass.

Provisionally, the key terms of "Is It O.K. To Be A Luddite" may be mapped onto a semiotic square (see Figure 1), beginning with the traditional humanity lost to the machines, and extrapolating non-human (monstrous) and non-machine (Luddite) positions from that binary.[47] Gothic fiction's appeal to the miraculous occupies the

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[46] Donna Haraway, "A Cyborg Manifesto," in *Manifestly Haraway* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2016), 9.

[47] On the function and significance of Algirdas Julien Greimas' semiotic square, see Fredric Jameson "Appendix A: The Greimas Square" in *Allegory and Ideology* (London: Verso 2019), 349-59.

utopian space of the complex term, in which the miscalculations of the machines may all be resolved in time, achieving at last in the union of humanity and machine all the dreams of "bodily resurrection."[48] This impossible unity of opposites functions as the core problem of Pynchon's essay, which dreams of this utopian restitution while continually complicating and undermining that dream. While the complex term describes the fusion of two incommensurable concepts, its opposite number, the neutral term, sits at the edge of this conceptual nexus, where the negation of negation allows new conceptual formations to become visible. In Pynchon's essay, the neutral term is occupied by the Badass, who is monstrously more-than-human, and able to harness this negativity of the Gothic to strike back against their simply inhuman foes. As neither human nor machine, the Badass is released from the strictures of those terms, and paradoxically freed to achieve miracles by negative means. In this manner we may see the hidden fault-lines of Pynchon's essay, and make some sense of what appear at first to be mere equivocations between a Luddite technophobia and a transhuman techno-utopianism. From within the binary conflict between humanity and machine, whole new worlds of posthuman dreams and Gothic nightmares take shape.

[48] OK.

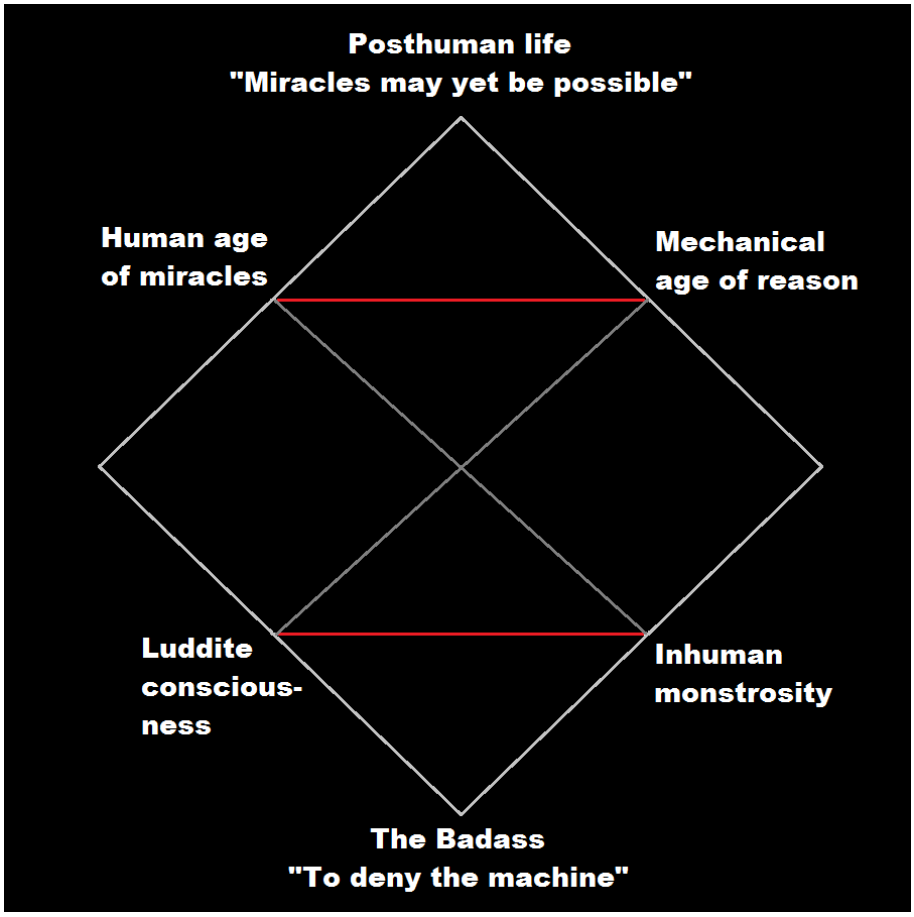

Figure 1. A semiotic square mapping the relations between the key terms of Pynchon's "Luddite" essay.

Later Nonfiction: A Romantic Turn?

But what of the Luddite cause today, over two centuries on from the birth of its Gothic defenders? Pynchon warns that any revitalised Luddism must come to terms with the changing face of technology, which is now "so user-friendly that even the most unreconstructed of Luddites can be charmed into laying down the old sledgehammer and stroking a few keys instead."[49] More problematic still, there remains the possibility that "if the logistics can be worked out, miracles may yet be possible" and that "the deepest

[49] OK.

Luddite hope of miracle has now come to reside in the computer's ability to get the right data to those whom the data will do the most good."[50]

In his turn toward the utopian, Pynchon draws close to the vision of a posthuman future described and critiqued by N. Katherine Hayles, in which we are seduced by the "fantasies of unlimited power and disembodied immortality" and doomed to fade into a cybernetic haze.[51] Occupying the impossible space in which human and machine are unproblematically united, this posthuman vision drifts into fantasy, and threatens to undermine the otherwise sombre assessment of Luddism and its continued relevance. If the "Luddite" essay spends some time expounding upon the monstrous powers of the Badass, in the end it returns back to the utopian dreams of uniting humanity and machine at last. Are we to believe that these Gothic antinomies are all to be resolved in time? As I argue below, this utopianism also defines the nonfictional works that Pynchon would write over the following decade, in which the dialectical negativity of the Badass is nowhere to be seen. This is not to say that the later nonfictions totally undermine the conceptual work of the "Luddite" essay, but that they instead turn to new figures and new solutions to the Luddite problem of humanity's relation to machine.

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[50] OK. As I argue in Chapter Six, this tentative optimism for digital solutions is ultimately undone in *Bleeding Edge*, wherein the dream of another world online is revealed as one more means of capture deployed by the powers that be.

[51] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 5. "In her book *How We Became Posthuman*, Hayles discusses how the model of the human since the Enlightenment has been subjected to alienation by cybernetic machines and artificial intelligence. Hayles brings together both scientific theories and fictional narratives of literature that equally construct ideas about the posthuman in the computer age. She discovers two tendencies. On the one hand, there is an apocalyptic narrative that indicates the fear of the loss of humanity, loss of control and the dissolution of the human self. [...] On the other hand, Hayles emphasizes (scientific and imaginary) stories that propose a contrasting vision of the human in relation to the contemporary technoworld: 'When the human is seen as part of a distributed system ... it is not a question of leaving the body behind but rather of extending embodied awareness in highly specific, local and material ways that would be impossible without electronic prosthesis.'" Patricia Pisters, "Body Without Organs," in *Posthuman Glossary*, eds. Rosi Braidotti and Maria Hlavajova (London: Bloomsbury, 2018), 75.

Pynchon's nonfictional writing after "Is It O.K. To Be A Luddite?" is infrequent, including a review of Gabriel García Márquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera* (1988), a second essay for the *New York Times Book Review* on the topic of Sloth (1993), and introductions for Jim Dodge's *Stone Junction* (1998) and George Orwell's *1984* (2003). In each of these works the global system of machines "which, more than any piece of machinery, was the real and major result of the Industrial Revolution" recurs in one form of another.[52] The mechanisation of death on a massive scale is the order of the day which Pynchon sees both Márquez and Dodge writing against in their novels of "corrupted romance."[53] The two novels under review are in Pynchon's terms "conscious projects of resistance, even of sworn opposition, to death," in their adoption of "Eros" as a principle of life against death.[54] Doubling as both a generic designation and a pursuit of love, romance is the watchword of these later nonfictions.

The renewed interest in romance, even of a corrupted type, is what sets Pynchon's nonfictional writings after "Is It O.K. To Be A Luddite" on separate paths from the aesthetic and political commitments of that essay. Most notably, whereas in 1984 Pynchon was glad to take on monstrous allies in a Gothic fusion of the human and inhuman, the essays that follow eschew this dynamic to cast their lot wholly with the human. The first victim of this shift is the "Luddite" essay's central figure, the badass, whose "ethic of machismo" is cast aside for more romantic fare.[55] Whatever powers of resistance the badass held in their amplifications of affect, and whatever ability to seize that amplification from the machines they may have possessed, the macho and monstrous

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[52] OK.

[53] SJ xi.

[54] Thomas Pynchon, "The Heart's Eternal Vow." *The New York Times Book Review*, April 10, 1988. https://www.nytimes.com/1988/04/10/books/the-heart-s-eternal-vow.html. As a digitally archived copy of Pynchon's essay, page numbers are not available. The text is hereafter cited as HEV.

[55] HEV.

is traded for the tragically human faith of the lover. In contrast to Pynchon's previous adoption of Frankenstein's monster as the blasphemous herald of Luddite revolt, García Márquez's protagonist Florentino stands as a new and decidedly unambiguous figure of humanity in its purest form. "Like the best fictional characters," Pynchon writes of Florentino, "he insists on his autonomy, refusing to be anything less ambiguous than human."[56]

If the new hero of Pynchon's ideal fiction is now more closely aligned with an old-fashioned humanism than any conception of the posthuman, this does not indicate that the driving force behind the fiction has at all changed. In the later essays as in the earlier, "love and the possibility of love's extinction are the indispensable driving forces" of worthwhile fiction.[57] While Pynchon's review of García Márquez stresses the importance of love all the more, it also stresses the danger of its extinction in even greater terms. Under assault from an inhuman outside, the human figure is stripped of everything but its "mere existence," and is left only with what Hannah Arendt names the "incalculable grace of love."[58] If in the "Luddite" essay Pynchon flirted with the possibility of miracles made real by technical means, here the only miracle—or the only miracle available—is that of human life itself and the desperate devotion of one fragile life to another.

What draws Pynchon to García Márquez is his daring "to suggest that vows of love made under a presumption of immortality—youthful idiocy, to some—may yet be honored, much later in life when we ought to know better, in the face of the undeniable. This is, effectively, to assert the resurrection of the body, today as throughout history an unavoidably revolutionary idea."[59] As in his "Luddite" essay, Pynchon reads fiction as a

[56] HEV.

[57] HEV.

[58] Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973), 301.

[59] HEV.

demand for the miraculous, the enchanted, and for the suspension of this world for something other. The lover and the badass are not so different in these terms: both duplicate the powers of affect to turn the world upside down, to sustain worlds apart in which undying love is possible, and in which the death march of history may be halted by a single act. As Pynchon writes of Florentino, "through a desolate landscape, he journeys into love and against time"—a time which inexorably dissolves the bonds of love but may be halted if only for a moment to push back against the day.[60]

If Pynchon's renewed emphasis upon love carries with it a Romanticised version of the Gothic miracle, his focus upon the desolation of García Márquez's landscape also retains something of his earlier concerns for the posthuman. The trials of the lover stand out against the background of an utterly loveless environment, which has been devastated and made inhuman by human hands. As Fredric Jameson has remarked of the peculiar ennui of late capitalism, "we must ponder the anomaly that it is only in the most completely humanized environment, the one most fully and obviously the end product of human labor, production, and transformation, that life becomes meaningless, and that existential despair first appears as such in direct proportion to the elimination of nature."[61] At the precise moment when the landscape is wholly a product of human action, the dread of an inhuman world becomes overbearing. Here something of the posthuman slips back into Pynchon's conceptual nexus, as the potential self-extinction of humanity by its own humanisation and domination of the earth. The posthuman in this sense no longer occupies the positive, utopian space that it did in the "Luddite" essay, but appears only in the negative, as the state of being which comes after the death of the human lifeworld. Further still, even as Pynchon's Romance narrative re-affirms the recalcitrant humanity of

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[60] HEV.

[61] Fredric Jameson, *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (London: Routledge, 1983), 240-1.

its protagonist, it also works to incorporate landscape and scene into the drama, to the extent that the environment itself becomes the motivating force of the narrative's events. As Jameson writes,

> we might say that in romance the category of Scene tends to capture and to appropriate the attributes of Agency and Act, making the "hero" over into something like a registering apparatus for transformed states of being, sudden alterations of temperature, mysterious heightenings, local intensities, sudden drops in quality, and alarming effluvia, in short, the whole semic range of transformation scenes whereby, in romance, higher and lower worlds struggle to overcome each other.[62]

In the Romance narrative, the world and environment take on a force of their own, displacing agency from characters onto the scene itself. In a manner not so different from Oedipa's transformation into circuitry, the hero of the Romance narrative becomes conductive of a higher order which speaks though them. In Pynchon's review of García Márquez, this position is taken up by Florentino in his performance of the role of lover, who speaks in grand terms of an ideal Love against the absolute powers of Death. He does this not only out of personal volition, but because something irreducibly human possesses him and drives him on his obsessive attempt to revive love in all its salvific power. The yearning for the true ideal of love found in Pynchon's review is thus isomorphic to the nostalgia for an age of miracles found four years earlier in the "Luddite" essay. Both yearn for a time now long mutilated by capitalist modernity, and, being unable to realise a return to that time, instead turn to the utopian promises of love and miracles.

[62] Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, 99.

Far from indicating a total transition from the Gothic to the Romantic, Pynchon's turn from the celebration of the monstrous badass to the adulation of the all-too-human lover marks a layering of Romantic hopes over Gothic fears at the precise moment when those fears are realised. While the "Luddite" essay ends on a note of ambiguous hope, "The Heart's Eternal Vow" balances between unapologetic faith and the void. Straying from the path of love, we descend "all the way downstream, into war and pestilence and urban confusions to the edge of a Caribbean haunted less by individual dead than by a history which has brought so appallingly many down, without ever having spoken, or having spoken gone unheard, or having been heard, left unrecorded."[63] Without love, without the forceful maintenance of life and memory, there is only the abyss of history from which the silent and defeated may have no return or recourse.

If the central terms of the "Luddite" essay are absent from Pynchon's later nonfictions, this is not to say that they are entirely supplanted by a new framework opposed to Luddite fiction and its posthuman Gothic style. Just as the Gothic appears in the earlier essay as a narrative space of dissent from the laws of a rationalised and mechanised world, in "The Heart's Eternal Vow" Romance appears as a similarly heterogeneous form opposed to the order of the day. In defence of "love's vernacular," Pynchon declares that "it is a daring step for any writer to decide [...] to take it, with all its folly, imprecision and lapses in taste, at all seriously—that is, as well worth those higher forms of play that we value in fiction."[64] If Romance today seems silly or misplaced, it is nevertheless, as Jameson remarks, "in the context of the gradual reification of realism in late capitalism that romance once again comes to be felt as the place of narrative heterogeneity and of freedom from that reality principle to which a now oppressive

[63] HEV.

[64] HEV.

realistic representation is the hostage."[65] In its own way, the form of Romance performs the same rejection of reality—or what amounts to a *denial of the machine*—as that which motivates Pynchon's prior adoption of the Gothic. Indeed, the turn toward Romance remains caught in the Gothic dynamics of reality and fantasy, dream and nightmare, as the Romantic flight into fantasy is beset on all sides by the horrifying reality of love's nullification. If Pynchon turns toward Romance as a fictive escape from the machine, it remains a *Dark* Romanticism which is ever-aware of the encroachment of "the bleaker interests of that consensus ever throbbing along [and] pleased to call itself 'Reality.'"[66]

Despite the changed terminology, the task of literature in Pynchon's later nonfiction is not particularly changed from "Is It O.K. To Be A Luddite?" but is put in the "service of an expanded vision, matured, darker than before but no less clement."[67] As the world grows darker, and the space open for action becomes ever slimmer, the mortal cry for the miraculous continues to ring out. Whether miracles may belong to machines or humanity alone is no longer of much concern, as the barest loving act is made impossibly miraculous by all the forces mounted against it. "Fiction and nonfiction alike are full of characters who fail to do what they should because of the effort involved. How can we not recognize our world? [...] Persisting in Luddite sorrow," all that remains now is "sinning against what now seems increasingly to define us—technology."[68]

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[65] "Romance now again seems to offer the possibility of sensing other historical rhythms, and of demonic or Utopian transformations of a real now unshakably set in place." Jameson, *Political Unconscious*, 91.

[66] SJ xi.

[67] HEV.

[68] Thomas Pynchon, "The Deadly Sins/Sloth; Nearer, My Couch, to Thee" *The New York Times Book Review*, June 6, 1993. http://movies2.nytimes.com/books/97/05/18/reviews/pynchon-sloth.html. As a digitally archived copy of Pynchon's essay, page numbers are not available. The text is hereafter cited as NMC.

Fiction / Nonfiction

Whether they are read as expressing Dark Romanticist or outright Gothic philosophies, Pynchon's nonfictions of the eighties and nineties are the clearest expressions of his approach to literature as both a reader of tales which demand the miraculous and as himself a fabulist of love in the time of machines. Given the overt statements on the significance of fiction and fantasy given by Pynchon in his sporadic reviews and essays, I argue that these writings deserve to have a closer attention paid to their complexities, and to the manner in which their concepts work to bridge the gap between the author's two main periods of novel writing. "Is It O.K. To Be A Luddite?" in particular warrants greater scrutiny, both for its manifesto-like quality as a defence of Luddite literature and for its apparent commentary on the goals of Pynchon's own writing. Written in the hiatus between *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973) and *Vineland* (1990), and published the same year as his retrospective short story collection *Slow Learner* (1984), the "Luddite" essay casts a new light on the generic conventions of his early works, and presages the new directions taken by the novels published later in his career. Likewise, if the nonfictions which follow "Is It O.K. To Be A Luddite?" seemingly undermine much of the conceptual work of that essay, they only do so to further lay out the author's intentions in writing and prepare the way for the novels then under preparation.

If Pynchon's nonfictions occupy a middle-ground between his early and late writings, what problems are present in the early fictions which these essays attempt to resolve? The answer, I wish to argue, may be found in Pynchon's changing attitudes toward humanity and machinery, and in particular the new place he affords to human agency within his later novels. From as early as *V.* (1963), Pynchon's fiction has expressed anxieties around the mechanisation of life and the ensuing "falling-away from

what is human."[69] As we have seen in Chapters One and Two of this thesis, this process of dehumanisation is most often presented in apophatic terms, as moments of mute revelation of a vast and inexpressible exterior to human life. In *The Crying of Lot 49*, Pynchon dramatises the discovery of the machine's occult mechanisms by way of a slow process of divestment, by which Oedipa loses herself and surpasses herself in the circuitries that engulf her. The totalising vision of the machine-as-divinity reaches its height in *Gravity's Rainbow*, in which "vast quantities of energy" flow from the world into "the System" so that it may "keep its own tiny desperate fraction showing a profit: and not only most of humanity—most of the World, animal, vegetable and mineral is laid waste in the process."[70]

If Pynchon's early novels readily engage in the Gothic's ambivalent mixture of abhorrence and fascination in their sublime descriptions of the machine, they also hold little of the Luddite potentiality demanded by the author in the following decades. Instead, Pynchon's fictions frame the decline of humanity into the machine in terms of inevitability, decadence, entropy, and a misanthropism which elevates the mechanical to a natural law even as its universal reign is lamented. As much as Pynchon's early fictions protest the assumption of the world into the System, and the coming apotheosis of the machine, they also illustrate the impossibility of exit from that System in its totality. Even as the System is revealed in all its horror, the refrain remains: "I would set you free, if I knew how."[71] Among the protagonists of Pynchon's early novels, Oedipa is unique in her ability to navigate the intricacies of the System, but perhaps only by going over to the other side and losing herself as a component in the machine. The only other alternatives are escape—as in Slothrop's self-demolition and exit from the novel itself—or a grim, if

[69] V 405.

[70] GR 419.

[71] GR 233.

defiant, commitment to humanity's fading light, as in Roger Mexico's doomed refusal to lose sight of what lies beyond the System ("They are in love. Fuck the war"[72]).

From beyond this pessimistic framework, Pynchon's nonfictions provide much needed nuance, and a way forward taken up by his later novels. As Inger Dalsgaard has noted, critics remain divided on whether or not "the closed determinism of Pynchon's earlier years may still haunt his recent work [and] whether his fiction allows for constructive/ist hope for a counterforce" able to combat the System face-to-face.[73] Even if the spectre of determinism still haunts his later novels, as they reiterate the themes of machinery and control, I argue that the form of the novels themselves have changed in a way that refuses the pessimistic conclusions of their precursors. In *Mason & Dixon* the insistence upon the miraculous finds voice in the Reverend Wicks Cherrycoke's demand for history to be written by "fabulists and counterfeiters" who might plumb the "Mnemonick Deep" of memory to deny the powerful their control of the narrative.[74] Throughout that novel, and as I will argue in the following two chapters, the style of Gothic romance is turned from merely describing the horrors and terror of the world toward attempting to deny some measure of the System's control over it. By the novel's end, the cry to deny the machine is raised against the "great single Engine, the size of a Continent" into which the whole globe is to be slowly assumed, forever damning

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[72] GR 42. *Gravity's Rainbow* does contain premonitions of Pynchon's later interest in the miraculous, and the miracle of love in particular, although one of the great cruelties of the novel is that it is a love idealised but never achieved by any of the main characters: "The whole point is that lovers always get together, isolation is overcome, and like it or not that is the one great centripetal movement of the World. Through the machineries of greed, pettiness, and the abuse of power, *love occurs*. All the shit is transmuted to gold. The walls are breached, the balconies are scaled—listen!" GR 447.

[73] Inger H. Dalsgaard, "Real Estate and the Internet," in *Thomas Pynchon in Context*, ed. Inger H. Dalsgaard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 165.

[74] MD 304-5.

humanity to an inhuman destiny.[75] Whereas each of Pynchon's first three novels end in silence—of the sublime and inhuman Mediterranean in *V.*; of the moment before an infinitely deferred revelation in *The Crying of Lot 49*; and in a sudden lacuna in the text itself in *Gravity's Rainbow*—the novels after his hiatus allow themselves some degree of closure, and an end (however ambiguous) to the nightmares they have traversed.

In this manner, Pynchon's own later fictions fulfils the demands of the Luddite novel, as they work by means of subterfuge, terror, and fabulation to both reveal the workings of the machine and to deny some part of its hold on the narrative, the reader, and the text itself. But if Pynchon's fiction fulfils the stated purpose of the "Luddite" essay, it is not in the typical sense of Luddism. Rather, drawing from the dark romances of Gothic fiction, Pynchon layers atop the Luddite's plea for humanity a perverse fascination with the monstrous system against which he protests—the machine is not only denied, but something of its power is summoned and turned back against itself. What Pynchon deploys in the service of King Ludd is a dark alliance between humanity and machine, to the benefit of both, and to the detriment of the masters and owners who profit from their squabbles. As William Millard writes, "Pynchon closes his Luddism essay with an explicit wish not for any renunciation of scientific progress, but for a revolutionary technological change," a change which admits the power of the monstrous and extra-human into the human itself.[76]

With some irony, Pynchon ends up on the same page as transhumanist philosopher Keith Ansell Pearson who declares that "when that perennial species, Luddites, declare that they are 'not into' technology, they need to be reminded that it is [...] more a question

[75] MD 772.

[76] Millard, "Delineations of Madness and Science," 93.

of technology being 'into' them."[77] As in Shelley's *Frankenstein*, the triumph of technology over its creators is figured by Pynchon not only as the ultimate vindication of Luddism, but the most potent conditions for its revival. As a technical creation, and as the amalgamated body of hanged workers, Frankenstein's monster is figured by Pynchon not as the nightmare image of technology run awry but a hopeful figure of the System's self-negation—destroyed by its own monstrous progeny. In García Márquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera*, too, Pynchon locates an ambiguous figure of resistance, whose undying love is defined by its opposition to the world at large, and its ceaseless movement against the tide of history. In both the Gothic and the Romance, Pynchon locates the need for miracles in fiction, and the necessity of demanding the miraculous of a world which works at every turn to make them impossible.

It is for these reasons that I dub Pynchon's style of Gothicism a posthuman Gothic, as it inhabits the interzone between the archaic and the futuristic, between the human and inhuman, and works by night, negativity, and subterfuge to imagine a world of miracles born from the dissolution of our own. Or, in the final, prophetic words of "Is It O.K. To Be A Luddite?:"

> If our world survives, the next great challenge to watch out for will come—you heard it here first—when the curves of research and development in artificial intelligence, molecular biology and robotics all converge. Oboy. It will be amazing and unpredictable, and even the biggest of brass, let us devoutly hope, are going to be caught flat-footed. It is certainly something for all good Luddites to look forward to if, God willing, we should live so long.[78]

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[77] Keith Ansell Pearson, *Viroid Life: Perspectives on Nietzsche and the Transhuman Condition* (London: Routledge, 1997), 152.

[78] OK.

With somewhat less giddy anticipation, Pynchon's later nonfiction continues in this Luddite spirit, looking forward to the day when miracles may yet become possible, and by the grace of love or otherwise the world will be turned upside down. Whether framed in terms of a monstrous negativity or a romantic affirmation of life, Pynchon's fiction returns to this Gothic nexus of integration and disintegration. In the chapters that follow, Pynchon's insistence upon the miraculous will find its expression in Dixon's attempts to recognise the enclosure of his world, Mason's sinning against the increasingly mechanised time of modernity, and finally in Maxine's persistence in Luddite sorrow amidst the glowing lights of the digital age.

Chapter Four

A Vector of Desire: Ecogothic Scenes and Spatial Machines in *Mason & Dixon*

As I have argued throughout this thesis, Pynchon's fiction may best be understood as participating in certain conventions of the Gothic genre by way of its recurrent imagery of humanity's dissolution into an inhuman environment. This posthuman Gothic, as theorised by critics such as Sean Bolton and Anya Heise-von der Lippe, may be distinguished from an earlier postmodern Gothic in the way it eschews that aesthetic's fears of *disintegration* by machines for a broader concern about the *integration* of technology and self. In Pynchon's fiction this integration is made manifest, as both his characters and readers become increasingly aware of their complicity in vast machineries of control, and the possibility that their seemingly autonomous sense of humanity was always already incorporated into a mechanical order. While previous chapters have discussed this order in specifically technical terms on a personal scale, this chapter and the next turn to the global scope of mechanical control, and the metaphoric expansion of Pynchon's mechanical imagery to encompass the higher orders of world systems, institutions, and territories.

If the anxieties concerning humanity's proximity to machines are already well-acknowledged in Pynchon's fiction, comparatively less examined is the role which nature plays in his novels as an additional, and no less inhuman force opposed to the force of the machines. This dynamic is apparent as early as Pynchon's first novel, which—despite its preoccupation with specifically mechanical threats—ends on a vision of nature's sublime wrath. In *V.*'s closing scene, situated off the coast of Malta, one of its protagonists succumbs to the inhuman reversion to the inert oneness of earth and sea. As Tony Tanner suggests:

> Just as the main characters move towards the rock of Malta, so more generally the human race seems to be hastening to return to 'rockhood.' It is part of the basic ambiguity of Malta as described in this book that while on the one level it is an image of an island of life under siege, attacked by the levelling bombs of the Germans, and constantly eroded by the sea, on another level it is an image of a central point of inanimate rock and death drawing people back to that inert state.[1]

A full thirty years later, in his historical novel *Mason & Dixon*, Pynchon returns to these images of landscape and desire. But whereas in *V.* the earth is figured as an inert mass into which all the dead and forgotten of history disappear, in *Mason & Dixon* the landscape overpowers the living not in its inanimate enormity, but in the surprisingly dynamic role in plays within human affairs. If the posthuman Gothic may be characterised by its dramatisation of humanity's loss of autonomy to nonhuman powers, *Mason & Dixon* charts out an environmentally-conscious space within this Gothic subgenre. As Christopher Coffman has shown, the natural world in Pynchon's fiction regularly appears "as a living source of beneficence and redemption," opposed to the mechanical structures which loom over the landscape.[2] In *Mason & Dixon*, too, the natural world is figured as a place in which the dreams of the human world may be realised, but it is also granted a darker aspect, as a zone which "appears to participate in a language of estrangement rather than belonging."[3] The ambivalence of nature in *Mason & Dixon* allows its Gothic elements to be read additionally as *ecogothic*, as Pynchon's anxieties over technological transformation are coupled with competing imagery of the dissolution of humanity into the natural and the geological worlds. As we shall see, this

[1] Tony Tanner, "*V.* and V-2," in *Pynchon: A Collection of Critical Essays*, ed. Edward Mendelson (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice-Hall, 1978), 25-6.

[2] Christopher K. Coffman, "Ecology and the Environment," in *Thomas Pynchon in Context*, ed. Inger H. Dalsgaard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 188.

[3] Andrew Smith and William Hughes, eds., *Ecogothic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 2.

dissolution takes place in opposition to Pynchon's usual theme of technical control, so that the novel embodies both the technological and ecological strands of the posthuman Gothic. Seen only in glimpses through the picaresque events of the novel, and only becoming properly visible in its final pages, *Mason & Dixon* tells the story of humanity's precarious place on an earth at war with a parasitic and global machine.

Pynchon's return to the birth of modernity in this novel doesn't only reiterate his typical concerns about machinery and control within another historical epoch, but situates them within a more identifiably Gothic context. By casting his gaze back to the Enlightenment, Pynchon offers an archaeological account of the historical processes already well-established by the time of his other novels. If the early novels *V.*, *The Crying of Lot* 49, and *Gravity's Rainbow* all exhibit preoccupations with a humanity made mechanical and a planet under the thrall of a global capitalist order, *Mason & Dixon* unearths the monstrous conditions which brought about that bondage. Not only is the "supposedly enlightened age" of *Mason & Dixon* "one in which madness abounds," thereby revealing the irrational which lurks even within the purportedly rational project of the Enlightenment, it is also one in which perfectly rational yet utterly inhuman forces run amok.[4] As David Cowart suggests, *Mason & Dixon* may be understood as "a 773-page expansion of sentiments previously articulated in Pynchon's 1984 article 'Is It OK To Be a Luddite?'" in which Pynchon writes large the defining ambiguities of that essay.[5] In this chapter and the next I wish to show that Pynchon doesn't only return to the themes and philosophy of his "Luddite" essay, but that *Mason & Dixon* also puts into practice the theory of Luddite literature identified in the previous chapter of this thesis, which is to say

[4] Ian D. Copestake, "'Our Madmen, our Paranoid:' Enlightened Communities and the Mental State in *Mason & Dixon*," in *The Multiple Worlds of Pynchon's* "*Mason & Dixon*," ed. Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds (Rochester: Camden House, 2005), 176.

[5] David Cowart, "The Luddite Vision: *Mason & Dixon*," in *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Thomas Pynchon*, edited by Howard Bloom (Broomall: Chelsea House, 2003), 264.

that the novel spins a Gothic tale which works by fantasy, exaggeration, and subterfuge to "deny the machine" which preys upon modernity and humanity.[6]

Just as in his "Luddite" essay Pynchon argues for the use of "literary means which are nocturnal and deal in disguise" to deny the machine by means subtle, deceitful, or extravagant, so too does *Mason & Dixon* contain seeds of this Gothic retelling of history against the grain.[7] Echoing these sentiments, the narrator, The Reverend Wicks Cherrycoke, declares: "Who claims Truth, Truth abandons. History is hir'd, or coerc'd, only in Interests that must ever prove base. She is too innocent, to be left within the reach of anyone in Power,— who need but touch her, and all her Credit is in the instant vanish'd, as if it had never been."[8] In his defence of the more fantastical elements of his tale, Cherrycoke sides himself with those who practice the "arts of the quidnunc, spy, and Taproom Wit" against the forces of power which would impose "one Version of the Truth" upon the fragile truths of history.[9]

Within this narrative nexus, the titular characters of the novel are "amphibii of the age" caught between worlds of "reason and magic," pushed in one direction by their positions as imperial subjects and professional commitments to a conquering rationality, and pulled in the other by their proclivity to speculation on conspiracies far darker than their Enlightenment trappings would otherwise reveal.[10] As David Cowart writes, "the paranoia of Mason and Dixon, at first the measure of their inconsequence, becomes the gauge of their sensitive resistance to rationalist excess. They come to see that their Line does a great deal more than signify where Pennsylvania ends and Maryland begins. They

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[6] OK.

[7] OK.

[8] MD 350.

[9] MD 349-50.

[10] Cowart, "The Luddite Vision," 267.

recognize in the Line an epistemic watershed, a boundary between dispensations."[11] Beyond the problematisation of Enlightenment rationality, this folding together of the spatial and the epistemic into a single boundary line is, I will argue, the core Gothic element within the novel. As Mason and Dixon journey into the wilderness they begin to discern the strange powers of the line which they chart: to mark the division between worldly possessions and to set in place the barriers between this world and those that lie outside.

The "Visto" which the pair cut through the forest ties together the novel's anti-Enlightenment Luddism with its ecogothic sensibilities in a single image. Figured as an intrusion of the measured world into the as yet unmapped and unconquered frontier, the line functions as both a marker of the Enlightenment's rationalisation of the earth and a site of violence against the inhabitants of that peripheral zone.[12] Of the two surveyors, the discovery of the truth of the line falls to Dixon, whose youthful interest in mapping is perverted by the greed of empire, and whose dramatic arc hinges upon his eventual disavowal of the global order which he helped to build.[13] Gradually, the line is revealed as a monstrous warping of space which, although fashioned by human hands, assumes a power of control over its makers. Variably described as a machine, a monster, and a conduit of power, it is the spatial construction of the line which leads *Mason & Dixon*

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[11] Cowart, "The Luddite Vision," 277.

[12] "Most importantly, even Mason and Dixon themselves come to understand their geographical acts as a colonial statement of imperialist aggression and superiority. Despite the fact that they have been hired to settle a political issue, they retain a belief in their autonomy, as if embarking on a rational, independent pursuit of knowledge in the ideal of the Enlightenment that just happens to be paid for by people in power." Sascha Pöhlmann, "Geographies and Mapping," in *Thomas Pynchon in Context*, ed. Inger H. Dalsgaard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 71.

[13] While this chapter is focused primarily upon Dixon's narrative and his understanding of the spatial conquest of the earth, the following chapter mirrors these themes in Mason's discovery of the additional temporal dimension to the Enlightenment subjugation of the world.

toward a Gothic account of nature, the earth, and the capture of planetary systems. In its orientation to the "disturbing and unsettling aspects of our interactions with nonhuman ecologies," I argue that *Mason & Dixon* provides an account of space, nature, and humanity which aside from conforming to the posthuman Gothic terms of previous chapters also ventures into a specifically ecogothic territory.[14]

Vectors of Desire

Set in the middle years of the eighteenth century, a decade prior to the American Revolution, the novel follows the travels of the astronomer Charles Mason and the surveyor Jeremiah Dixon. Over the course of the novel, the duo journey into the American continent to chart the border between several colonies which would, a century hence, be the front-line of the American civil war. As events progress, the duo come increasingly to face the dark forces that inhabit their supposed era of Enlightenment. More specifically, the protagonists learn that "hating and shunning reason, and favoring and embracing reason are forever linked, forming the necessary bond between the irrational and the rational," and that the stated goals of Enlightenment are but one side of a Janus-faced process of monstrous rationalisation.[15] They discover that it is not the sleep of reason which begets monsters, but this age of reason itself which begets the monstrous systems of control typical of Pynchon's cosmos.[16] As Stefan Mattessich has argued, the

[14] Dawn Keetly and Matthew Wynn Sivils, eds., *Ecogothic in Nineteenth-Century American Literature* (London: Routledge, 2018), 1.

[15] Jason T. McEntee, "Pynchon's Age of Reason: *Mason & Dixon* and America's Rise of Rational Discourse," *Pynchon Notes* 52-53 (Spring-Fall 2003): 202-3.

[16] To borrow Deleuze and Guattari's phrase, we might say that in Pynchon's vision "it is not the slumber of reason that engenders monsters, but vigilant and insomniac rationality." Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, trans. Robert Hurley, Mark Seem, and Helen R. Lee (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 112.

novel is preeminently concerned with the "technological drive to master the processes of life," and in turn functions as "a narrative analysis of this desire, this drive, and correlative concepts of transparency, truth, reason, synthesis, and control."[17]

This drive to mastery takes the form of a mechanical re-organisation of the earth's surface to advance the causes of capital and empire. Reflecting on his youth in the countryside, Mason recalls the reshaping of the landscape to accommodate waterworks:

> Living in a Paradise, they chose to enact a Purgatory [...] the Flow of Water through Nature, along a Gradient provided free by the same Deity, [was] re-shap'd to drive a Row of Looms, each working thousands of Yarns in strictest right-angularity,— as far from Earthly forms as possible.[18]

The idyllic home of the young Mason is transformed from a world of natural harmony to one of mechanical rigour, in which the very flow of a river is contorted to better suit growing industry. This technological domination of nature is paralleled in Dixon's recollections of his own training as a surveyor. Whereas Mason's reflection considers the loss of an idyllic nature, Dixon summons his own idyll in the form of a secondary world overlaid upon the one he inhabits.

> He must, if one day call'd upon, produce an overhead view of a World that never was, in truth-like detail, one he'd begun in silence to contrive,— a Map entirely within his mind, of a World he could escape to, if he had to.[19]

Although framed as youthful fantasy—of escaping his newfound profession to chart a fictive universe—it is precisely this secondary world which Dixon's work as a surveyor produces. Charting out the borderlines of empire, reducing the earth to a mapped globe,

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[17] Stefan Mattessich, *Lines of Flight* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 231-2.

[18] MD 207.

[19] MD 242

Mason and Dixon unwittingly partake in the rationalisation of the earth which marks the birth of modernity and the end of their youthful idylls. As argued by Pedro García-Caro, these passages reiterate the main themes of Pynchon's "Is It O.K. To Be A Luddite?" essay not only by returning to the topic of originary struggles over space and control in the era of industrialisation, but because, "in his evocation of the origins of Luddism, Pynchon openly establishes the social consequences of technologies, old and new, to certain economic practices."[20] Echoing Adorno and Horkheimer, García-Caro suggests that Pynchon's Luddism demands an open-eyed encounter with the nexus of rational, pre-rational, and irrational elements which compose the logic of the Enlightenment.[21]

In Pynchon's novel, this dialectic of Enlightenment rests upon the extended metaphor of waking and dreaming and the ensuing troubling of that binary as waking life falls into fantasy and the deepest slumbers rise to shape daylight reality.

> I hope you are prepar'd for the possibility, that waking Philadelphia is as sacred as anything over here will ever get, Dixon,— observe you not, as we move West, more and more of those Forces, which Cities upon Coasts have learn'd to push away, and leave to Back Inhabitants,— [...] We trespass, each day ever more deeply, into a world of less restraint in ev'rything,— no law, no convergence upon any idea of how life is to be,— an Interior that grows meanwhile ever more

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[20] Pedro García-Caro, "'America was the only place...:' American Exceptionalism and the Geographic Politics of Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*," in *The Multiple Worlds of Pynchon's* "*Mason 7 Dixon*," ed. Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds (Rochester: Camden House, 2005), 109.

[21] "In this sense, his [Pynchon's] political agenda may belong to another version of Enlightenment, Enlightenment inside Enlightenment: we need to know, to liberate ourselves, to get out of the immaturity of the Enlightenment itself." García-Caro, "American Exceptionalism," 109. The enlightened overcoming of the Enlightenment proposed here possesses more of a utopian character than the present reading of *Mason & Dixon* allows, but is of interest for its nesting of Enlightenments within Enlightenments. In the Gothic fashion, we may wonder how deep these recursions go, and if there is ultimately an stable, rational ground upon which this process might rest.

> forested, more savage and perilous, until,— perhaps at the very Longitude of your 'City,'— we must reach at last an Anti-City,— some concentration of Fate,— some final condition of Abandonment,— wherein all are unredeemably alone and at Hazard as deep as their souls may bear,— lost Creatures that make the very Seneca seem Christian and merciful.[22]

Although at first this passage appears to replicate the familiar vision of the Enlightenment, in which a waking European consciousness stretches itself across a darkened globe, this waking mind quickly grows uneasy in its "trespass" into "a world of less restraint in ev'rything." Far from possessing a rational agency over its motions, these European trespassers encounter an utterly alien, "savage and perilous" existence which is nevertheless more free than its enlightened counterpart. Possessing "no law, no convergence upon any idea of how life is to be," the frontier wilderness, for all its hazards, figures into the novel as an anarchic space of possibility, analogous to the Zone of *Gravity's Rainbow* and the deep web of *Bleeding Edge*. At the heart of this deep wilderness stands the double of the western polis, "an Anti-City" so abandoned by reason, or so crowded with all which "Cities upon Coasts have learn'd to push away," that its appearance may be spoken only in negative terms: the unchristian and unmerciful other of "waking Philadelphia" and its mother country.

This negative, unknown space of the unmapped frontier functions as both an object of desire—a zone to be explored and captured—and as an unsettling presence within the Enlightenment imaginary. It is a space which seems to defy the powers of reason both in its persistent existence outside of colonial control and as the location of all which reason desires but cannot admit. The postulated Anti-City at the heart of America is thus caught in an unresolvable dream-logic, as both the terrifying double of the coastal

[22] MD 608-9.

settlements and as the place where all the fantasies refused by reality may yet take root. In *Mason & Dixon* the frontier "demarcates a zone of rupture into which we can place the phantasmic portion of the world," as this "unknown world acts like a safety valve for the known world, releasing into an imaginary place all that we have not yet managed to pacify, all that is still heterogeneous and illegitimate."[23] What binds the waking world of the Enlightenment to its dreaming double is this movement of desire, which simultaneously compels the rational mind to search ever further beyond itself for an irrational exterior delineated only from within. The frontier, and the surveyors' line, functions as a perfectly irrational tool of reason, which reduces a continent to a territory while exercising an irresistible pull upon the supposedly rational subjects caught in its path. In what is perhaps the most analysed passage of the novel, Pynchon's narrator speculates upon the unconscious geographies that draw the old world of Europe toward America, and by what mechanisms the nascent nation drives ever westward.

> Does Britannia, when she sleeps, dream? Is America her dream?— in which all that cannot pass in the metropolitan Wakefulness is allow'd Expression away in the restless Slumber of these Provinces, and on West-ward, wherever 'tis not yet mapp'd, nor written down, nor ever, by the majority of Mankind, seen, — serving as a very Rubbish-Tip for subjunctive Hopes, for all that may yet be true, — Earthly Paradise, Fountain of Youth, Realms of Prester John, Christ's Kingdom, ever behind the sunset, safe til the next Territory to the West be seen and recorded, measur'd and tied in, back into the Net-Work of Points already known, that slowly triangulates its Way into the Continent, changing all from subjunctive to declarative, reducing Possibilities to Simplicities that serve the ends of Governments, — winning away from the realm of the Sacred, its Borderlands one

[23] François Bonnet, *The Infra-World*, trans. Amy Ireland and Robin Mackay (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2017), 60-1.

> by one, and assuming them unto the bare mortal World that is our home, and our Despair.[24]

What process is this? It begins not with the real America, but with all that America could be for its European settlers. The Western frontier framed as the materialisation of all the Old World's dreams. Beyond the horizon lie the lands which have hitherto only been told of in myth. In its most abstract sense, America here functions as a vector of desire for all that cannot be found in the swiftly modernising metropole. Crucially, this movement of desire is envisioned not as mere fantasy or pretext, but as the realisation of fantasy in material reality. As Leslie Fielder remarks of the frontier myth, "the American writer inhabits a country at once the dream of Europe and a fact of history; he lives on the last horizon of an endlessly retreating vision of innocence [and] the margin where the theory of original goodness and the fact of original sin come face to face."[25] Like many American writers before him, Pynchon figures the frontier as a space of miracles and sin, in which the drama of the fall is re-enacted alongside dreams of redemption. As Justin Coe writes: "the Line that Mason and Dixon draw onto (and into) the continent's space in turn draws their desires, and especially Mason's desire for an afterlife, closer to the pre-personal depth of the age of faith, in which miracles such as bodily resurrection and the transfiguration of flesh into spirit are possibilities rather than mere theological necessities."[26] Journeying westward, the dreams of one world are supposed to be realised in another, and all that is desired rendered in flesh, blood, stone, and water.

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[24] MD 345.

[25] Leslie Fiedler, *Love and Death in the American Novel* (Normal: Dalkey Archive Press, 1997), 27.

[26] Justin M. Scott Coe, "Haunting and Hunting: Bodily Resurrection and the Occupation of History in Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*," in *The Multiple Worlds of Pynchon's* "*Mason & Dixon*," ed. Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds (Rochester: Camden House, 2005), 150.

However, this is only the beginning of the process, and the journey's intended end is never realised. As much as Pynchon plays into the mythic imagery of the American frontier, he ultimately subverts its utopian thrust by saddling it with a much darker vision of reality. What the drive toward the west entails is not the actualisation of possibility, but its foreclosure. The desire that courses along this vector, seeking eternal life, riches, and pleasure, is but the motor that drives an altogether nightmarish mechanism. What follows this line into the continent is a vast "Net-Work of Points already known" which changes "all from subjunctive to declarative, reducing Possibilities to Simplicities that serve the ends of Governments."[27] Beneath this expanding territory, there remains "the 'ghost' of a spatiality that disappears beneath our interpretative tools."[28] Ever-westward, "the realm of the Sacred, [and] its Borderlands" retreat "to seek another Space" still further from the deadening eyes of Empire.[29] As Jeffrey Howard remarks, "as unknown geographical spaces are explored and demarcated, the possibilities of miraculous events in these areas disappear."[30] Ultimately, "we are left uncertain with the impure knowledge of whether this European-contrived nether-kingdom is an embodiment or a fantasy of moral corruption," as desire, dream, and nightmare become intertwined in a common process of capture and control.[31]

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[27] MD 345

[28] Mattessich, *Lines of Flight*, 240.

[29] MD 345, 741.

[30] Jeffrey Howard, "The Anarchist Miracle and Magic in *Mason & Dixon*," *Pynchon Notes* 52-53 (Spring-Fall 2003): 167.

[31] Coe, "Haunting and Hunting," 156.

Gothic Spaces

In this brief example of spatiality in Pynchon's novel, I wish to emphasise two things. Firstly, the manner in which the spatial expansion of this imperial "Net-Work of Points" takes on the qualities of the Gothic line. Borrowing from the theorisation of Gothic architectural ornamentation as developed by Wilhelm Worringer and passed on through the works of Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, the Gothic line is at its simplest a "geometric form" which in its intricate, abstract, and non-representational folds brings to light the inorganic vitality of the supposedly inert stone and "the basic morphological law common to the living and the non-living kingdoms."[32] In Deleuze and Guattari's hands, the Gothic line is extracted from stones of Worringer's Gothic cathedrals and located as far afield as in the abstract formations of space in expressionist cinema and the territorial wanderings of nomadic bands. "This streaming, spiraling, zigzagging, snaking, feverish line of variation liberates a power of life," it "endows things with a non-organic life [and] potentialises space, whilst making it something unlimited."[33] To return to *Mason & Dixon*, it is this uncontrolled potentiality of space which is most salient to the novel's depiction of the line. As the line moves into the continent, all the movements of populations, armies, goods, and capital that follow it and intersect with it are understood at their most abstract as lines of movement. Although the line is cut at a straight line, the paths of those who follow it constantly diverge and wander, spiralling around the central line as if in orbit, and turning the line from a one-dimensional vector into a nexus of

[32] Andrea Pinotti, "Gothic as Leaf, Gothic as Crystal," in *Ruskin and Modernism*, eds. Giovanni Cianci and Peter Nicholls (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2001), 23.

[33] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 399; Gilles Deleuze, *Cinema I*, trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Barbara Habberjam (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1986), 111.

forces. They meet, they connect, and they branch off, endlessly criss-crossing and inscribing ever-greater territories upon the earth.[34]

Second, and flowing on from the first point, is the pure mechanism of this process of spatial capture. The network of lines triangulates its way across the continent without any clear intent. At most it is driven by some mass accumulation of desire, but without any singular will at its core. As the line propels flows of energy along its surface, it takes on the form of a mechanism which is both fuelled by desire and which manufactures the desire required for its functioning. "The fuel that drives this machine is desire, though desire is shaped and orchestrated by its insertion into this megamachine."[35] Having begun with the individual dreams of escape into some idyll of the distant past or hidden in the recesses of the imagination, we now encounter the collective desire which lies at the heart of *Mason & Dixon*, which harnesses the need for miracles to expand ever more widely the domain of a profane reason. Even as the novel offers dreamlike images of the world to the west of the frontier, these dreams are perpetually harnessed to the line, the single place upon which their ambitions intersect, and the Gothic monster which lures wayward dreamers into its maw. In Pynchon's Enlightenment, the sleep of reason begets monsters, but the workings of sleep and reason are barely extricable from one another, and the

[34] "Line is neither that which divides an otherwise formless space (as in pure abstraction), nor does line merely trace the already divided and organised space of the world (as in the empathy of organicism). There is not a space (a Newtonian absolute) that is then divided by line, for it is through the variations and wanderings of line that spaces unfold." Claire Colebrook, "The Gothic Sublime," in *William Blake's Gothic Imagination*, ed. Chris Bundock and Elizabeth Effinger (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2018), 90.

[35] Kenneth Surin, "Socius," in *The Deleuze Dictionary*, rev. ed., edited by Adrian Parr (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 259. On the State as a megamachine on the grandest scale, see Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 428.

monstrous fruit of their union works tirelessly to capture all dreams of escape within its inhumanly rational folds.[36]

The spatial imagery of *Mason & Dixon* doesn't only evoke the Gothic and inhuman in its anti-rationalism, but also directly evokes the figuration of space in prior works of Gothic writing. As Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick has noted, the disparate elements of the Gothic formula are all conjoined by certain spatial characteristics: "In the Gothic novel the dream, the imprisonment, [and] the suppression of language become potent by a relation of correspondence to a reality outside the dream, the life surrounding the prison, [or] the same word present in other minds. 'Correspondence' is distinguished from direct communication, which is seen as impossible; instead it moves by relation of counterparts and doubles, and is subject to dangerous distortions and interferences."[37] If the Gothic seems at first to replicate various unrelated tropes purely out of habit—the dream becomes a nightmare, the heroine is imprisoned, language fails to describe what she sees, and so on—Sedgwick argues that each of these tropes in fact replicates the same spatial dynamics of privation within the various overlapping psychological, physical, and narrative spaces of the Gothic text.

Nowhere is this spatial equivalence between "sleep, dreams, live burial, the unspeakable, [and] the sublime of privation" clearer, Sedgwick suggests, than in the

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[36] The dream-logic of the novel is redoubled and turned back upon itself one last time late in the novel, when an Indian encountered on the line rebukes the surveyors for their guileless belief in the power of their dreams. In a Gothic twist upon the earlier passages, the dreamers find their gaze returned, and themselves made subject to the dream of the other. "Listen to me, Defecates-with-Pigeons. Long before any of you came here, we dream'd of you. All the people, even Nations far to the South and the West, dreamt you before ever we saw you,—we believ'd that you came from some other World, or the Sky. You had Powers and we respected them. Yet you never dream'd of us, and when at last you saw us, wish'd only to destroy us. [...] Now you begin to believe that we have come from elsewhere, possessing Powers you do not—Those of us who knew how, have fled into Refuge in your Dreams, at last. Tho' we now pursue real lives no different at their Hearts from yours, we are also your Dreams" (MD 663).

[37] Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (New York: Methuen, 1986), 40.

hallucinatory writings of Thomas De Quincey and those of his long-time admirer Jorge Luis Borges.[38] Under the influence of opium, and inspired by the impossible spaces of Giovanni Battista Piranesi's *Imaginary Prisons* (see Figure 2), De Quincey would describe the space of his dreams as having a recursive, prison-like quality, in which space is distended and divided in such a way that it is both immensely vast and suffocatingly claustrophobic. In Sedgwick's analysis, the claustrophobia of De Quincey's visions extends to the very language which he uses to describe—or fail to describe—their unspeakable depths. "A darkness within a darkness, a tempest within a tempest, a murder within a slaughter, a tragedy within a tragedy"—ever object, event, and point in space circles in upon itself, so that the subject of De Quincey's visions is caught in an endless recursion of inside and outsides, none of which ever properly reach the surface or the bottom of that space.[39] In Borges' stories, the linguistic nature of this imprisonment is made an explicit part of the narrative itself. In "The Library of Babel" (1941), Sedgwick argues, the orderly yet indecipherable structure of the library possesses "the flavor of the Piranesian Gothic in the contrast between the wretchedly confined spaces for satisfying one's human needs and the infinite spaces that cannot be domesticated."[40] Although intelligible in the abstract, as a universe composed entirely of symbols, in actuality the library is a nightmare without an inner meaning or an outer limit to its terror.

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[38] Sedgwick, *Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, 40.

[39] Sedgwick, *Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, 41-2.

[40] Sedgwick, *Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, 52. Ultimately, however, Sedgwick suggests that Borges' fiction moves beyond the Gothic dynamic because it nevertheless deals with semiotic structures which would be cut short in the Gothic. "The real vertigo of the story [...] is not in its Gothic spaces but its postulating of a semiotic situation of dizzying instability, one in which the pure *fact* of meaning exists in the absence of any reason to mean or to interpret, or any context for meaning or interpreting" (53). "The way Borges' writing is self-reflexive seems to carry out De Quincey's gestures toward self-reflexiveness. Borges' performances are De Quincey's possibilities: Borges can tell use how to complete the gestures, but De Quincey, in turn, must tell us why he does not do so" (49).

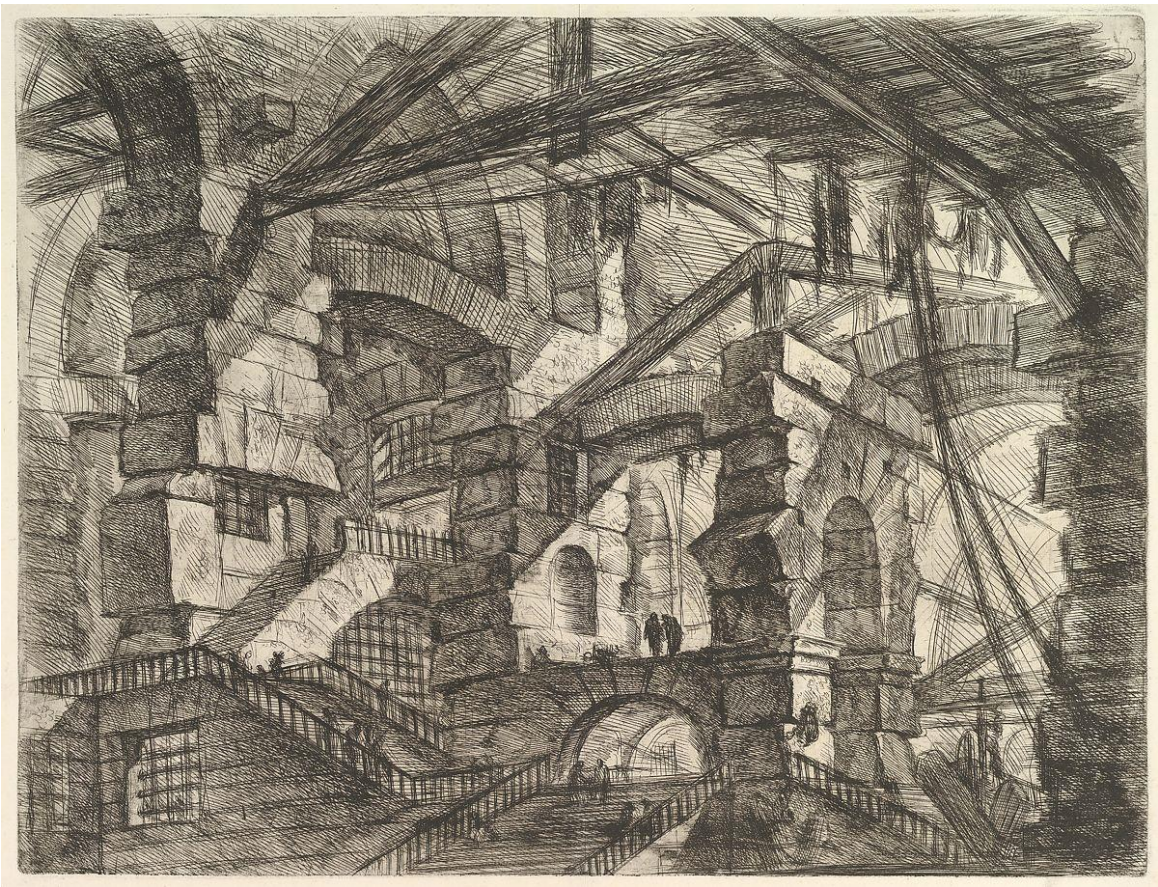

Figure 2. Giovanni Battista Piranesi, *The Gothic Arch*, c. 1749-58. Etching, 41.0 × 54.0 cm. Melbourne, National Gallery of Victoria. https://www.ngv.vic.gov.au/explore/collection/work/28341/.

It is via the infinite library that we may work circuitously back to Pynchon, who cites Borges by name in *Gravity's Rainbow* in a passage which functions as both an obvious homage and a partial historicisation of Borges' labyrinthine fictions. Presaging the language which he will use to describe the North American frontier in *Mason & Dixon*, Pynchon describes the pampas of Argentina as a space of freedom swiftly enclosed in a prison of roads and fences:

> In the days of the gauchos, my country was a blank piece of paper. The pampas stretched as far as men could imagine, inexhaustible, fenceless. Wherever the gaucho could ride, that place belonged to him. But Buenos Aires sought hegemony over the provinces. All the neuroses about property gathered strength,

> and began to infect the countryside. Fences went up, and the gaucho became less free. It is our national tragedy. We are obsessed with building labyrinths, where before there was open plain and sky. To draw ever more complex patterns on the blank sheet. We cannot abide that *openness*: it is terror to us. Look at Borges. Look at the suburbs of Buenos Aires. The tyrant streets, the warrens of rooms and corridors, the fences and the networks of steel track, the Argentine heart, in its perversity and guilt, longs for a return to that first unscribbled serenity... that anarchic oneness of pampas and sky...[41]

Two notably Gothic qualities of space spring out of this passage: First, there is the horror of the labyrinth, which is endlessly divided, made impassable, and entombs city and country alike in a recursive network of fenced-off properties. Second, before and beneath the labyrinth is the "terror" of the open plains which, being without limits, evokes its own sense of vertigo—although in this case a vertigo directed along a horizontal axis, toward the horizon and its "anarchic oneness" of land and sky. Pynchon's citation situates his own novel within the labyrinthine literary tradition of which Borges is emblematic, but it also suggests that the spaces described in Borges' stories are not simple literary inventions. The horror of the labyrinth and the terror of the open space are, Pynchon suggests, to be found first in the historical tragedies of Argentina and secondly in Borges' literary renditions of that nightmarish history. In a sense, Pynchon historicises Borges, by reading his predominant themes as symptoms of a sickened and imprisoned colonial landscape. In doing so, Pynchon also suggests a historical reading of his own fictions, including his next major foray into the questions of colonialism, space, and the universal labyrinth. From De Quincey via Borges and *Gravity's Rainbow*, *Mason & Dixon* inherits a particular form of Gothic space, but not merely as a fictional device or incidental source of horror. The Gothic spatiality of these fictions is, by Pynchon's own account, an

[41] GR 267-8.

expression of the very real horrors of colonial history. When De Quincey remarks, "nor did I, by waking, feel that I had reascended," we may imagine Pynchon's retort: Of course not; history is a nightmare from which we have not yet awoken![42]

Apparatus of Capture

Having descended into the dream-space of the frontier, which swiftly lapses into a nightmare of historical proportions, it remains to be seen how its contours are shaped, what people inhabit that dreamscape, and to what ends they are driven into its folds. As I have argued, what Pynchon's dream-logic of the Enlightenment accomplishes is a consciousness of the frontier and the line as spaces which are simultaneously manifestations of a geometric rationalisation of the globe and zones in which the individual human fades into a background melange of material forces. The human subject, for all its purported agency, becomes implicated in processes far beyond its control. As the will of each individual person becomes indistinguishable from the collective formations of desire in which it takes part, local accumulations of desire emerge as suprahuman beings composed of human bodies.

The line is itself conceived as a "great invisible Thing that comes crawling Straight on over [all] Lands, devouring all in its Path" driven by its alien "Will to proceed Westward."[43] The surveyors and their band of woodsmen are "temporarily collected" into a beastly entity which surpasses any one of them individually, while embodying a will which supersedes their own.

[42] Thomas De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater, and Other Writings*, ed. Robert Morrison (Oxford: University of Oxford Press, 2013), 67.

[43] MD 678.

> A tree-slaughtering Animal, with no purpose but to continue creating forever a perfect Corridor over the Land. Its teeth of Steel,— its Jaws, Axmen,— its Life's Blood, Disbursement. And what of its intentions, beyond killing ev'rything due west of it?[44]

If the frontier itself exerts the pull of desire upon the dreams of these European interlopers, it is not a desire which remains free for long. The appearance of butchery in this passage belies the precision with which the band cuts their line through the forest, stripping it of all the "symbolic density" that has provoked imaginations for millennia.[45] Regimented into the shape of a monstrous yet perfectly rational creature, the at least nominally negotiable desire of each individual is made subject to an uncompromising thirst for expansion across the earth and organisation of all flows. As in Hayles' formulation, this posthuman being refuses distinction between the will of any single human and the vast agglomerations of desire which course through them.

> They submit, [...] to the preemptive needs of the Manoeuvre,— a Soldier's Faith at last must rest in the Impurity of his own desires. [...] Who is unique? Who is not own'd by someone? What do any of their desires matter, if they can be of no use to the Manoeuvre, where all is timed from a single Pulse, each understanding no more than he must,—[46]

The imagery of these two passages is decidedly monstrous, as a multitude of bodies are incorporated into a single "tree-slaughtering Animal" or into a regiment whose motions are "timed from a single Pulse." The animal and the bodily are here framed as both less than human—as abdications of individual human wills—and as more than human, as they

[44] MD 678-9.

[45] Robert Pogue Harrison, *Forests: The Shadow of Civilization* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992), 121.

[46] MD 551.

surpass any particular human in strength, size, and will. Although each ventures into the frontier for his own motives, each member of the party misunderstands his place in the aggregate history of the continent. As a single point on a continental vector of desire, or as a mere organ in the great forest-devouring beast of the line, each is only a part of that great manoeuvre which shapes all desires and machines all wills before they may speak their individual wants. As a part of these monstrous agglomerations, each person is subject to a process of capture which begins with their seemingly individual desires and ends with the machining of their every movement to suit the ends of the collective body. As a far more knowing and nefarious character remarks later in the novel:

> The Model [...] is Imprisonment. Walls are to be the Future. [...] As a Wall, projected upon the Earth's Surface, becomes a right Line, so shall we find that we may shape, with arrangements of such Lines, all we may need, be it in a Crofter's hut or a great Mother-City,— Rules of Precedence, Routes of Approach, Lines of Sight, Flows of Power.[47]

Pynchon's novel here approaches the themes of the Gothic from two angles: first, in its problematisation of Enlightenment rationality; and second, in its preoccupation with the folding and enclosure of space. While Dixon fantasises of escape from this world into another, that very drive to an exterior space reproduces the conditions of his enclosure, as that other world is made real in the arbitrary territorial lines imposed upon the earth. The prototypical Gothic nightmare, as identified by Sedgwick, is one of "privation and immobilization," the experience of "submergence under a massive space" and the forced enclosure within an ever-shrinking interior space.[48] *Mason & Dixon*'s depiction of the Enlightenment returns to this central Gothic image of an escape from one prison into a

[47] MD 522

[48] Sedgwick, *Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, 37.

greater bondage, as the forces of control feed upon all desires for exteriority all the while forcing the world into ever more tightly controlled inner spaces.

This capture of the earth in a planetary prison-house doesn't merely replicate the Gothic tropes of live burial, unjust punishment, and deadly authority, precisely for the reason that the cause of this imprisonment cannot be traced back to any single will: although scoundrels and patriarchs abound in the novel, none occupy the central role of the Gothic villain. Instead, it is the Gothic contortion of space itself which operates on the lives of the novel's characters and binds them in "a machinic enslavement which, no longer refer[s] to an emperor or a transcendent figure, [and] is made all the more cruel by its impersonality."[49] The line in this sense functions as what Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari call an apparatus of capture, which works by the impersonal means of spatial transformation to direct flows of energy and desire to suit the reigning powers of the day. Capture in this sense is "an introjection and determination of an outside as well as the engendering of the outside qua outside of the apparatus," which is to say that it both imposes itself from outside while at the same time delineating this determining outside from the determined interior.[50] As in Sedgwick's spatial account of the Gothic, the division between inside and outside is made all the more significant for its porosity, as the incursions of outside forces both structure their own exteriority and engender anxious obsessions with the delicate periphery.[51] It is in this context that the potency of the line

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[49] Alberto Toscano, "Axiomatic," in *The Deleuze Dictionary*, rev. ed., ed. Adrian Parr (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 23. Regarding machinic enslavement and its distinction from social subjection, see Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 456-7.

[50] Alberto Toscano, "Capture," in *The Deleuze Dictionary*, rev. ed., ed. Adrian Parr (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 44. The outside of the apparatus of capture is further discussed by Deleuze and Guattari, *A Thousand Plateaus*, 360.

[51] "For characters within these conventions, to be active is either to impose an arbitrary barrier or to breach one, a breach that is transgressive and attended by violence at the threshold." Sedgwick, *Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, 34.

emerges from the mere fantasies and dreams of the colonists to function in clearly political terms: in its division of the continent, the line functions as both an inroads and a barrier, which in turn function at multiple levels of the material, ideological, and libidinal to reshape the earth.

> Deleuze and Guattari insist any given social formation restricts or structures movements or flows. They claim that these flows are not just the flows of money and commodities familiar to economists, but can be seen at a variety of levels: the movement of people and traffic in a city, the flows of words that are bound up in a language, the flows of genetic code between generations of plants, and even the flow of matter itself (the movement of the ocean, electrons moving in metals, and so forth).[52]

Although often read as an anti-political manoeuvre in its abstraction from the human scale of things, Deleuze and Guattari's vision of the world in flux has also been convincingly read not as a mystification of political agency but a recapitulation of a materialist politics and the need to understand the necessary material conditions for political action.[53] As Nicholas Thoburn suggests, the writings of Deleuze and Guattari function as an "*intensification* of Marx" and the Marxian questions concerning production, "a production which is the plane of all of the processes, flows, and constraints of politics, economics, ideas, culture, desire, and so on."[54] Far from abandoning political stakes, Deleuze and Guattari insist that the political cannot be conceived apart from the material

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[52] Jonathan Roffe, "Capitalism," in *The Deleuze Dictionary*, rev. ed., ed. Adrian Parr (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2010), 40.

[53] The most notable of these critiques have been made by Alain Badiou, *Deleuze: The Clamor of Being*, trans. Louise Burchill (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2000); Slavoj Žižek, *Organs Without Bodies* (London: Routledge, 2004); Peter Hallward, *Out of This World* (London: Verso, 2006).

[54] Nicholas Thoburn, *Deleuze, Marx and Politics* (Oxfordshire: Routledge, 2003), 11.

world at large, lest we ignore the complex systems of capture and cooption which *precede* and *predetermine* the formation of the political subject.[55]

In Pynchon, this re-insertion of the material into the political is thematised in geological terms. Throughout *Mason & Dixon*, the discussion of power centres on the recurring motif of the geographic line. Political boundaries, representations of those boundaries upon maps, the movements of people, the physical lines which they create, all are manifestations of a hidden force that works within and through the various materials of the earth. Empires are shown to rise and fall based on their situation upon these lines. In the distant past

> [The Romans] were preoccupied with conveying Force, be it hydraulic, or military, or architectural,— along straight Lines. The Leys are at least that old,— perhaps Druidic, tho' others say Mithraic, in origin. Whichever Cult shall gain the honor, Right Lines beyond a certain Magnitude become of less use or instruction to those who must dwell among them, than intelligible, by their immense regularity, to more distant Onlookers, as giving a clear sign of Human Presence upon the Planet.[56]

In Pynchon's vision of history, the success of empire is due not to destiny or historical necessity, but to the mobilisation of imperial forces upon a conquered and encoded environment. In the novel's present the same energies are described in the mystical terms of telluric magic, which flows across the earth's surface via geometric ley lines. This

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[55] Of the State's manufacture of pliable subjects Deleuze and Guattari write that it "makes the mutilation, and even death, come first. It needs them preaccomplished, for people to be born that way, crippled and zombielike." This is to say that we are not born free and then enslaved, or that we retain an autonomous inner existence separable from our political subjection, but that the production—or manufacture!—of subjectivity necessarily comes first. See: *A Thousand Plateaus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1987), 425.

[56] MD 219.

focus upon telluric energy is of course fantastical, but it belies the practical forms of power in the novel. This energy, whether magical or otherwise, is harnessed through the creation of monuments, roads, and other human alterations to the material world—in other words, the capture of space is explained in occult terms even as it manifests in all too material forms. The incoherence of the occult and the material elements of these passages takes Pynchon back into the heart of the posthuman Gothic, in which the distinction of an inside from the outside, a self-will from an other-will, becomes impossible to decide. At its most extreme, this lack of distinction between the motions of human history and the occult powers of the earth evacuates the political charge of the novel, as the earth itself takes its place as the central and sole agent of history. Yet, amidst Pynchon's fantastical asides remains the core understanding of power as a real and physical mechanism, which is to some extent directed by the powers of the day while exerting its own geological will over those who plumb its depths.

In Pynchon's novel the American continent is not a pristine wilderness so much as it exists within territories alien to the European mind. Thus its colonisation is not simply a process of absorption, but of distortion into a form that is agreeable to settler society. In their journey westward the surveyors smooth out the land before them. They remove the marks of previous civilisations and cut through the settled spaces of indigenous peoples. The unmapped space of the frontier, where competing territories collide and lose control, is not detrimental to the efforts of the coloniser, but rather acts as the first step in transferring space from one territory to another. "The Mason-Dixon Line is an important symbol of these interconnected processes of control and commerce: in its westward movement it represents the process of control whereby the continent will be taken from its indigenous inhabitants and put to the uses of its colonizers; in separating north from south, the place where human beings generally are not bought and sold from the place

where they are, it represents the ultimate and hateful ends of commercialism."[57] The advance of the line is a mixed process of release and capture, as the colonists demolish all that is unassimilable to their reality, opening the space before them for the better mobilisation of imperial militaries and capitalist commerce, while reshaping the space behind them to maintain the encroaching orders of empire and capital.[58]

In Deleuze and Guattari's account, capitalism's insatiable drive for expansion constantly dredges up from the depths of the past the most Gothic of horrors: feudal rights are scrapped to make way for ever more privatised forms of property; the strictures of the family are cast aside as patriarchy is reaffirmed for the sake of order; all that was solid melts into air, all that was holy is profaned, but only to enchain the earth in a greater bondage. "They recode with all their might, with world-wide dictatorship, local dictators, and an all-powerful police, while decoding—or allowing the decoding of—the fluent quantities of their capital and their populations. They are torn in two directions: archaism and futurism, neoarchaism and ex-futurism."[59] But because capital depends upon the moment of deterritorialisation and decoding to capture ever more of the earth, this process of capture cannot be without moments of slippage or explosion, where the flows freed by capital evade its grasp. "Not only do flows continue to evade and even overpower the axiomatic, but the global and non-qualified subjectivity of capital never attains absolute

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[57] Robert L. McLaughlin, "Surveying, Mapmaking and Representation in *Mason & Dixon*," in *American Postmodernity*, ed. Ian D. Copestake (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003), 184.

[58] Beyond its clear function in the redrawing of colonial boundaries, the unsettling atmosphere of the line grows as it becomes apparent just what those boundaries will come to represent. "The surveyors' work itself is a contracted product of a property system, and Pynchon takes interest in the pair's history because it combines scenes of freedom's development with the well-known future of the boundary they draw: the division between South and North, between a cotton economy built on slavery and its often complicit northern neighbors." Jeffrey Severs, "Capitalism and Class," in *Thomas Pynchon in Context*, ed. Inger H. Dalsgaard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 200.

[59] Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*, 260.

deterritorialisation."[60] In *Mason & Dixon* too, the line is opposed not by an opposing structure, or a stricter possession of the earth's flows, but by precisely that which evades capture, and which may seep below the surface territories to pool resources deep within the earth.

Telluric Forces

As the earth succumbs to deeper and deeper "geometrick Scars," and all movement across it is increasingly structured, somewhere below the surface lurks another power no less inhuman.[61] *Mason & Dixon* is positioned in a Gothic lineage not only by its ambiguous depiction of Enlightenment values—which speak of freedom while reducing the world to a prison-house—but also in its evocation of orders outside that rationalist world. Scattered throughout the pages of Pynchon's novel are hints of an archaic challenge to the newly born modernity. As the titular duo venture further into the American continent, they encounter the artefacts of cultures which live both exterior to the growing bondage of empire and in accordance with the laws of an earth far older than they may know. Principally, the novel returns to the image of the American Indian mound as the symbol of a past whose power remains uncannily preserved in the earth. A member of the surveying expedition recounts:

> when you go out there and talk to them about it, [...] the Indians tell you that the Serpent, as the other earthworks unnumber'd of that Country, was already ancient, by the time their own people arriv'd. Indians speak of a race of Giants, who built them.[62]

[60] Toscano, "Axiomatic," 23.

[61] MD 257

[62] MD 595

More troubling for the party, one such structure lies directly in the path of the line, spurring discussions of telluric currents, ley lines, and the possibility of a geologic conspiracy to direct earthly power ever-westward. Lapsing from their reasoned positions as men of science, the protagonists turn increasingly to speculations of an occult nature, wherein their charting of the line takes on a far darker import. Cryptically, the serpent mound and its fortuitous position upon the line is described in a short verse as:

> A 'Force Intensifier,' as 'tis styl'd,
> A geomantic Engine in the Wild,
> Whose Task is sending on what comes along,
> As brisk as e'er, and sev'ral Times as strong.[63]

What force the line directs and the mound accelerates is not directly named, but both structures lead the narrative away from a merely colonial or Enlightenment setting toward themes of subterranean and pre-human forces at work in and through the world. The line that Mason and Dixon chart takes on an importance beyond its historical reality, and assumes cosmic powers within the text. Built upon a vein of geomantic power which preceded its construction by millennia, the line functions as more than an incursion of imperial territories into the unbound continent. This occult figuration of the line draws as much from archaic beliefs in the mystical currents of the earth as it does from contemporary beliefs of the New Age. But even as Pynchon draws inspiration, and much humour, from the spiritualist fantasies of the American counterculture, the historical weight of the novel inevitably brings its telluric imagery back down to a bloodied and darkened earth. As a conduit for the powers of empire and industry—pithily described by one character as "what we call *Sha*, or, as they say in Spanish California, Bad Energy"—the line is spoken of in primarily occult terms, as a ritual marking upon the surface of the

[63] MD 600.

earth, composed of "Geometry and slaughter," which might funnel the flows of desires, bodies, and resources from across the Atlantic further westward into the frontier.[64]

The line does not proceed unimpeded, and in its path encounters a great American Indian trail, passing from north to south in perfect contradistinction to the lateral course of the line. Like the line, the trail appears to funnel certain unseen powers which resist the encroaching boundaries of empire. As a member of the band remarks: "Mr. Mason, they [the Indians] treat this Trail as they would a River,— they settle both sides of it, so as to have it secure,— they need the unimpeded Flow. Cutting it with your Visto would be like putting an earthen Dam across a River."[65] The human stakes of spatial control are made clear: territorial capture is more than the redrawing of a map, and entails the severing and redirecting of the flows which course through those lands. In this sense, the plot of *Mason & Dixon* is situated upon a "double axis, its Western projection, and its North-South divide," which geographically maps the "two main fault lines on which the historical narratives of the American nation have dwelled since before the time of its independence: two geographical axes and two subjugated groups, Native American and African slaves."[66]

It is the discovery and cutting of the trail which takes up much of the book's last act, as the characters weigh up the cost of severing such a potent flow of life across the continent. Strange occurrences manifest on the periphery of this boundary, as the European trespassers both perceive a form of life incommensurable with their own, and feel themselves pulled into the dark underworld that escapes their enlightened universe:

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[64] MD 542, 551.

[65] MD 646.

[66] García-Caro, "American Exceptionalism," 103.

> Watching an Indian slip back into the forest is like seeing a bird take wing,— each moves vertiginously into an Element Mason, all dead weight, cannot enter. The first time he saw it, it made him dizzy. The spot in the Brush where the Indian had vanish'd vibrated, as an eddying of no color at all. Contrariwise, watching an Indian emerge, is to see a meaningless Darkness eddy at length into a Face, and a Face, moreover, that Mason remembers.[67]

Although Pynchon by no means falls on the side of the colonists, his novel explicates their fear of all that goes unmeasured and unnamed by the annals of their history. Outside their boundary-line, or observed from across the trail, lies an immense and unmeasured world in which humanity recedes into nature.[68] As Claire Colebrook writes of the Gothic uncertainties in the poems of William Blake: "We are poised between abstraction and empathy, between a world that is so terrifyingly other as to require rigid lines imposed in a geometrical manner [...] and a world that is already thoroughly organic and humanised, benevolent, with nothing disruptive or variable."[69] But in Pynchon's fiction both sides of this dynamic are given a terrifying quality: to be enclosed in a universal jailhouse or to be submerged in the darkness outside its walls.

As the territory of the line becomes increasingly claustrophobic, and the strange presences outside increasingly overt, the novel approaches some sense of the sublime in

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[67] MD 647.

[68] The fear of the forest itself has its precursors in Gothic literature, in which it is just as often imbued with its own powers over those who trespass, and which it shares with those who would commune with it. "The manifestation of the Gothic forest as a living threat can essentially be read in two ways. On the one hand, it is an embodiment of ecophobic dread that not only reflects, but potentially teaches fear and hatred of this environment. It is something that *should* be ordered or destroyed. But on the other hand, it potentially signifies the re-enchantment of Nature through terror. If we return to this idea that we now live in a world where both myth and Nature are 'dead,' then surely the image of the *living* environment is importantly provocative." Elizabeth Parker, *The Forest and the EcoGothic* (London: Palgrave Macmillan, 2020), 133.

[69] Colebrook, "The Gothic Sublime," 106.

both its Romantic and Gothic varieties. In his seminal work on *The Romantic Sublime*, Thomas Weiskel proposes that "the essential claim of the sublime is that man can, in feeling and in speech, transcend the human, [although] what, if anything, lies beyond the human—God or the gods, the daemon or Nature—is matter for disagreement."[70] By filling "the mind so entirely [...] with its object, that it cannot entertain any other, nor by consequence reason on that object which employs it," in Edmund Burke's terms, the sublime is typified by the suspension, "with some degree of horror," of reason for those who experience it.[71] But this suspension of reason, and the discomfort which it causes, is only the first impression left by the sublime. In Kant's terms, when this "momentary inhibition" is lifted, and the mind's faculties return to order, the powers of the mind are redoubled in their transcendence of the sublime's temporary limitation.[72] In short, the Romantic sublime functions as an aesthetic apotheosis, which draws the human mind upwards toward those things beyond itself. Although at first confounding, terrifying, or even painful, the sublime in its Romantic form ultimately settles upon a heightened form of aesthetic pleasure.

Such a feeling of momentary disempowerment and eventual expansion occurs out in the wilderness, where the inns grow scarce, and nature's enormity becomes inescapable. There the surveyors make camp,

> knowing that for an unforeseeable stretch of Nights, they must belong to this great Swell of Forested Mountains, this place of ancient Revenge, and Beasts outside the Fire-light,—the sun this particular evening as if in celestial Seal, spreading

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[70] Thomas Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1976), 3.

[71] Edmund Burke, *A Philosophical Enquiry into the Origin of Our Ideas of the Sublime and Beautiful*, ed. Adam Phillips (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1990), 53.

[72] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, ed. Paul Guyer, trans. Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), 128.

> into a Glory, transgressing all Metes and Bounds, filling the Trees, lighting the Animals, their flanks averted, wash'd in its oncoming Flow, bringing to human faces a precision approaching purification, goading each soul, as if again and again, ever toward the Shambles of Eternity. The Axmen stand beneath it, no less bruised, worn or hungry than from any other day, blinking, turning away, then returning to this Radiance that flares from behind edges of Shapes uncertain,—the Creation they believe they know,—re-created.[73]

Beholding an environment which transgresses "all Metes and Bounds" the party is reduced to senselessly "blinking, turning away, then returning" as they struggle to take in the vast transformation of the world which takes place before their eyes. "The Creation they believe they know,—re-created" according to its own whims, is revealed to them as an object of aesthetic pleasure. In this fashion, the sublime imagery of Pynchon's novel decentres the human subject from its place of mastery, while still depending upon the human spectator to ground the aesthetic experience. In Weiskel's terms, the "sublime response saves our humanity from 'humiliation,'" by incorporating a vast and threatening outside back into the bounds of the human subject in the form of a challenge to be overcome.[74] The sublime in this sense contains a moment of contemplation of a world outside us and without us, which is then returned to a human perspective with the spoils. The axmen, "wash'd in its oncoming Flow," are pushed inexorably beyond the bounds of the world they thought they knew, "toward the Shambles of Eternity," without totally losing themselves in that radiant enormity. "Later, not all will agree on what they have seen," but nevertheless the tools are picked up once more and the line's progress continues apace.[75] Far more troubling for the aesthetic tourist, and more apt for the study

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[73] MD 485.

[74] Weiskel, *The Romantic Sublime*, 95.

[75] MD 485.

of posthuman aesthetics, is the Gothic sublime, in which this sublime moment of transcendence fails to take place.

As Vijay Mishra has argued, while "the Romantic sublime, finally, has the triumphant [human] subject," the Gothic sublime is "the voice from the crypt that questions the power of reason [and] destabilizes the centrality of the ego."[76] The human subject slips from its place of mastery over nature, and is itself made an object of a darkly sublime universe. Beyond all the territories of colonial reason "lies Wilderness, where quite another Presence reigns, undifferentiate,— Thatwhichever *precedeth* Ghostliness..."[77] It is this journey into wilderness, and into a domain not yet captured by the ravenous machines of empire and capital, which leads *Mason & Dixon* toward this sense of the Gothic sublime in a specifically posthuman and ecogothic mode. This Gothic sense of the sublime doesn't only reduce nature to an aesthetic object to be scrutinised and wondered at, but reaffirms the inhuman majesty of a world which is *not for us*.

Spatial Leaks

It is toward this natural outside that Pynchon's novel increasingly turns to make sense of the inhuman rationalism of the line. What exists outside the growing networks of empire, capital, and reason is not simply conceived as uncivilised or unenlightened, but as modes of thought and existence which defy the reigning laws of the day. As the narrator remarks: "These times are unfriendly toward Worlds alternative to this one. Royal Society members and French Encyclopaedists are in the Chariot, availing themselves whilst they may of any occasion to preach the Gospels of Reason, denouncing all that once was Magic." To rediscover what has now become foreign, he remarks, "one must turn to

[76] Vijay Mishra, *The Gothic Sublime* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 38, 17.

[77] MD 491.

Gothick Fictions, folded acceptably between the covers of Books."[78] What I wish to argue is that *Mason & Dixon* itself functions as one of these Gothic novels, which hides a forbidden magic within its many pages.

As the line, this "conduit for Evil," extends across the American landscape it takes on an inhuman power of control over the lives of those propelled along its trajectory.[79] Although an instrument for rationalising the earth, and driving from the world all that has been decreed unfit for an enlightened age, it also delineates and thus defines the borders of a vast and boundless universe which persists outside. The party constantly encounters sublime images of a nature "transgressing all Metes and Bounds" which, in typical Gothic fashion, are not experienced as "the subject's capacity to feel and think beyond reason, but the invasion of reason from elsewhere."[80] Whether beholding the majesty of the colonial line or the impenetrable murk of the lands beyond, the surveyors realise that what they see is but the surface of a vast and unknown war for control of the earth. In these moments of realisation, the novel descends below the outer scars of battle to speculate on the subterranean spaces which may yet reveal the secrets of this occulted conflict.

> A Knowledge of Tunneling became more and more negotiable, as more of the Surface succumb'd to Enclosure, Sub-Division, and the simple Exhaustion of Space,— Down Below, where no property Lines existed, lay a World as yet untravers'd.[81]

If the bulk of *Mason & Dixon*'s nature imagery falls into an ecogothic aesthetic—preoccupied with nature's dual role as unwilling captive of modern industry and avenging

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[78] MD 359.

[79] MD 700.

[80] MD 485; Colebrook, "Gothic Sublime," 93.

[81] MD 233.

presence of that which cannot be captured—the subterranean passages of the novel are more akin to what might be dubbed a *geogothic*. Not only outside the territories of empire but deep down below lie powers as yet unclaimed by the machineries above. Whereas the American continent is figured as a threatening exterior precisely because it is populated and traversed by those who would resist the encroaching bondage of empire, this space "Down Below" is threatening because it remains "untravers'd" by any human means.[82] In these brief moments, the novel approaches what the philosopher of horror Eugene Thacker has called the planetary perspective, looking in on humanity from the "fuzzy domain of the not-human, or that which is not-for-us."[83] Whereas the science of Enlightenment and empire perpetually works to expand the world-for-us outward into the as yet unexplored world-in-itself, there always remains this other world occupied by those things which "are not accounted for, that are not measured, and that remain hidden and occulted. [...] This remainder, perhaps, is the 'Planet.'"[84]

If something of the surface apparatus of capture exists down there, it is in a far more precarious position, as it burrows into uncharted regions where the earth is at a distinct advantage—and without any choice in the matter, having been forced to delve deep out of the "simple Exhaustion of Space" above. If the ecogothic character of *Mason*

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[82] The terror of the descent, and the impenetrable depths of the geological sublime will recur in *Bleeding Edge*. In that later novel, the geological imagery developed in *Mason & Dixon* is transposed into the digital space of the internet, and used to describe the layers of hidden, encrypted, and forgotten sites of the early twenty-first century web. This Gothic figuration of digital space will be taken up again in Chapter Six.

[83] In Thacker's terminology, "Planet" becomes the emblem of the incommensurably inhuman portion of the world, as opposed to the known and as-yet-unknown worlds of human experience and reason. "The world-for-us is simply the *World*, the world-in-itself is simply the *Earth*, and the world-without-us is simply the *Planet*." The first of these terms is the phenomenological world, the second is the world revealed or soon to be revealed by our scientifically- and technologically-expanded powers of reason, while the third term is the horrifying remainder which exists permanently outside our ken. Eugene Thacker, *In the Dust of This Planet* (Alresford: Zero Books, 2011), 6.

[84] Thacker, *In the Dust of This Planet*, 7.

& Dixon adheres to scenes of capture and the degradation of natural environments, the geogothic comes into view when nothing remains but the bare earth of stone and darkness ready to swallow up its would be masters.[85] Here the novel descends below the surface and its contest between natural, human, and machine life, into a domain which cannot be claimed because it rests upon its own geometric principles opposed to those which triangulate the surface.

In the final pages of the novel, the aged Dixon experiences a transport to this other world, presaged by the axman Stig in his "tales of a great dark Cavity up there [in the far North], mirror'd overhead, as by a Water-sky,— Funnel-shap'd, leading inside the Earth... to another World."[86] Derided in these earlier pages by Mason as "a proven Lure and Sanctuary to all, that too lightly bestow their Faith," this "Hollow Earth" becomes the subject of Dixon's final revelation about the nature of the world and his role in its making.[87] On the Norwegian coast, two years after the charting of the line, Dixon is visited by a strange man who takes him on a journey, reminiscent of an alien abduction, on a flight northward.

> Nor, as things turn'd out, would it be a Journey to the North Pole. The Pole itself, to be nice, hung beyond us in empty space,— for as I was soon to observe, at the top of the World, somewhere between eighty and ninety degrees North, the Earth's Surface, all 'round the Parallel, began to curve sharply inward, leaving a great circum-polar Emptiness, [...] directly toward which our path was taking us, at first gently, then with some insistence, down-hill, ever downward, and thus,

[85] "The ancient life on the 'surface' of nature could still obtain what it needed from the waste and excretions of elemental forces and substances. But we are making our way inside the world, and in response it is pressing down upon us with equivalent force." Alexander Bogdanov quoted in McKenzie Wark, *Molecular Red* (London: Verso, 2015), 105.

[86] MD 603.

[87] MD 603

> gradually, around the great Curve of its Rim.— And 'twas so that we enter'd, by its great northern Portal, upon the inner Surface of the Earth. [...] The Ice giving way to Tundra, we proceeded, ever downhill, into a not-quite-total darkness, the pressure of the Air slowly increasing, each sound soon taking on a whispering after-tone, as from a sort of immense composite Echo,— until we were well inside, hundreds of miles below the Outer Surface, having clung to what we now walked upon quite handily all the way, excepting that we arriv'd upside-down as bats in a belfry...[88]

Here the sublime is no longer found in a darkened landscape of forests and mountains, but firstly in the desolate expanse of the tundra and secondly in a great unsettling opening at the top of the planet. The Gothic imagination of the polar regions stretches back at least as far as Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) and Poe's *Narrative of Arthur Gordon Pym* (1838), if not to the Antarctic voyage of Coleridge's mariner (1798). As Catherine Lanone has argued, these "proto-ecocritical" Gothic texts imagine the lands of the far north as regions "best left alone, lest they might prove home to mankind's most monstrous progeny rather than a haven for conquerors."[89] Similarly, in Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick's account, the arctic landscape of *Frankenstein* is read as the most pared down image of the novel's subtext: "the tableau of two men chasing one another across a landscape," in which the nature of their pursuit is undecidedly either "murderous or amorous."[90] In *Mason & Dixon* too the arctic figures as both a final hiding place for those made monstrous and the natural terminus for Dixon's tragic narrative of desire perverted by power. What Dixon had fantasised of in his youth, "a World that never was, in truth-like detail," and which he in

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[88] MD 739.

[89] Catherine Lanone, "Monsters on the Ice and Global Warming," in *Ecogothic*, eds. Andrew Smith and William Hughes (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013), 30.

[90] Sedgwick, *Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, ix.

his adulthood had unwittingly worked to erase and reduce from "Possibilities to Simplicities that serve the ends of Governments," is at last revealed to him in the barren, uncharted ice of the Arctic.[91]

At the north pole, where the longitudinal lines of the globe meet in "terminal Geometry," Dixon sees the place where the ground itself gives way and the earth's surface twists upon itself in subterranean shadows.[92] Less a journey into the underworld than a revelation of the world literally turned upside down, Dixon's voyage leads him to the unmapped and perhaps un-mappable realm of all which has been forced out of his world by territorial capture, time-keeping, and the strictures of Enlightenment reason.[93] Where other writers have conceived of this geogothic descent as a journey into the deep time of the human organism, "the geological scene [as] a schizoanalytic trauma-map of the human body" or the interior as "terrestrial inner nightmare, nocturnal ocean" of the unconscious, Pynchon figures the earth's interior as another sort of psychic landscape.[94] Rather than representing the subterranean world as an analogue of the unconscious and its repository of pre-conscious drives, Pynchon depicts it as a pure dream-space in which the laws of the outer world are literally inverted.

In this vein, Stefan Mattessich has read the inner world as a place that collapses opposites "such as outside and inside, real and imaginary, descent (subjection to gravity)

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[91] MD 242, 345.

[92] MD 738.

[93] For a fruitful study of the subterranean as the guiding metaphor of Pynchon's work, see Evans Lansing Smith, *Thomas Pynchon and the Postmodern Mythology of the Underworld* (New York: Peter Lang, 2012). However, as Smith's account focuses primarily upon the modernist theme of the descent through a lens of mythological symbolism—as opposed to the Gothic spatial dynamics of interiors, exteriors, and depth—it is of only tangential relevance to this thesis.

[94] Mark Fisher, *Flatline Constructs* (New York: Exmilitary, 2018), 86; Nick Land, *Fanged Noumena* (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2011), 498.

and ascent (release from gravity), place and nonplace [...] in which things appear doubled and inverted, transposed into upside-down images that function to (re)produce symbolic order."[95] Not only does the surface of the earth turn in upon itself, and the inhabitants of the inner world live according to inverted moral and cosmic laws to the world above, but that inversion of the world nevertheless functions to maintain both inner and outer worlds in contradistinction to one another. At its most basic level the inner world is posited as an interior zone within the earth which houses all that cannot exist on the surface, and yet it simultaneously functions as the absolute exterior of that surface world: a place in which all those subjunctive possibilities cut short in the world above are made real in their displacement to the hidden hollow of the earth. But this escape is only temporary. As the entire globe is brought under control the interior space will also disappear, and the magical nations who have settled there will be forced to find another space outside. The people of that inverted world tell Dixon of their plight.

> "Once the solar parallax is known," they told me, "once the necessary Degrees are measur'd, and the size and weight and shape of the Earth are calculated inescapably at last, all this will vanish. We will have to seek another Space." No one explain'd what that meant, however...? "Perhaps some of us will try living upon thy own Surface. I am not sure that everyone can adjust from a concave space to a convex one. Here have we been sheltered, nearly everywhere we look is no Sky, but only more Earth.— How many of us, I wonder, could live the other way, the way you People do, so exposed to the Outer Darkness? Those terrible Lights, great and small? And wherever you may stand, given the Convexity, each of you is slightly *pointed away* from everybody else, all the time, out into that Void that most of you seldom notice. Here in the Earth Concave, everyone is pointed *at* everyone else,— ev'rybody's axes converge,— forc'd at least thus to

[95] Mattessich, *Lines of Flight*, 244.

> acknowledge one another,— an entirely different set of rules for how to behave."[96]

At the heart of the world, hidden from the prying eyes of the would-be rationalists and conquerors above, is a subterranean utopia which operates by its own laws of spatial order and geometric alignment. The Gothic thematics of depths are here reversed, as the interior becomes the home of light and possibility, while the exterior is revealed in its dangerous proximity to an "Outer Darkness" and the starry "Void that you seldom notice." What is repressed in these further reaches of the planet is not a trauma unable to be expressed on the surface, but precisely all that is hopeful and miraculous that cannot be given a voice in the age of reason.[97] The surface, with its endless tumult of territorial lines, becomes a scarified outer layer to the still thriving organism beneath. Even as the earth is remade and its magical refuges purged one by one, this "Earth Concave" presents a final challenge to the traumatic modernity of the outer world. Down there, another order of space remains—which like the networked lines of the surface exerts a preconscious influence over the thoughts and desires of those who inhabit it. In the world turned upside down, each person finds themselves pointed not outward to the abstractions of Enlightenment reason—or else to the void of space beyond—but inward to one another, so that a glance in any direction leads their eyes toward either their fellow creatures or the Earth that encloses them. As the novel's spatial thematics lead ever deeper into the earth, from territorial markings to the earthly flows and telluric forces beneath, at the point that

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[96] MD 741.

[97] As is argued in the following chapter, this simultaneous expulsion and enclosure of the "irrational" by the rationalisation of the earth is replicated in the novel's thematisation of time as well as space. While Dixon discovers that the space of the earth is doubly-occupied along a vertical axis—with its mirrored inhabitants standing foot-to-foot, as it were—Mason discovers that time itself has become doubly-occupied on a lateral plane, with inhabitants dwelling side-by-side but days apart.

it reaches its most subterranean nadir the perspective is flipped and every direction points upwards to a shared planetary home.

The journey into the interior of the earth not only inverts the dynamics of interior and exterior, the rise and the fall, but the lateral consciousness of horizons both literal and figurative. As a space in which every horizon leads upwards to encompass the entire world before circling back to the spectator, the interior world instils in its inhabitants a geological consciousness, in which it is impossible to conceive of oneself except as one point in this great convergence of axes. This lies in stark contrast to the territorial, abstracting, and ecocidal mentalities of the surface, typified by a wish to escape the horizons that bound us.

> "Earthbound," Emerson continued, "we are limited to our Horizon, which sometimes is to be measur'd but in inches.— We are bound withal to Time, and the amounts of it spent getting from one end of a journey to another. Yet aloft, in Map-space, origins, destinations, any Termini, hardly seem to matter,— one can apprehend all at once the entire plexity of possible journeys, set as one is above Distance, above Time itself."[98]

The irony of *Mason & Dixon*'s historical narrative is that the earthbound horizon is never escaped, and all attempts to float away in map-space only serve to intensify forces of control and capture. As in Sedgwick's account of the Gothic's preoccupation with bounded interior spaces, the attempt at escape more often reveals that the "conditions outside the imprisoning wall simply duplicate conditions within" in a series of nested labyrinths.[99] In Pynchon's novel, this Gothic drama works through some of his most human characters to reveal essentially inhuman agencies operating by psychological,

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[98] MD 505.

[99] Sedgwick, *Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, 21.

economic, ecological, and geological means to re-engineer the earth and all its denizens. More than by any individual, the course of the novel is determined by the agglomeration of metal, maps, and earth which compose the nexus of territories of which the titular Mason-Dixon line is a single vector.

The mechanical imagery of Pynchon's earlier novels does not shrink from view, but here attains global proportions as the vast systems of empire and capital are figured as machinings of the earth itself, as mechanisms build into geographical space of the earth's surface. If human agency does remain in *Mason & Dixon*, it is as a mass of migrating populations and collective desires which flow according to the deep structures of terrestrial space. The novel's main tension is in these terms reducible to a conflict between the pre-conscious desire for another world, which is always collective and subjectless, and the inhuman reduplication of the world in maps and territories. As we shall see in the next chapter, this division of earthly desire and inhuman rationality is continued from the domain of space into structures of time, which are likewise bound to a mechanical order of production and accumulation.

Just as Pynchon's other fictions have dramatised the mechanical enslavement of the human body and mind in myriad ways—from the psychedelic brainwashing of *Gravity's Rainbow* to the digital rewiring of drives in *Bleeding Edge*—I argue that *Mason & Dixon* expands this posthuman Gothic anxiety around psychic autonomy and bodily integrity into a specifically environmental space. The novel abounds with imagery of a world which is itself made into a kind of machine composed of territories, pathways, and barriers which enclose and encode the movements of those living souls caught within. The space on the frontier takes on the tangled, bottomless, Gothic qualities of Piranesi's *Imaginary Prisons*, which instilled in Thomas De Quincey his nightmares of a spatial

"power of endless growth and self-reproduction."[100] As Sedgwick would remark of De Quincey's encounter with the Gothic space of Piranesi's prints, "the incoherent, indefinite, apparently infinite space depicted" contains elements of the sublime, but in a darkened aspect: with no way to "construct in imagination the shell that would delimit this inside from a surrounding outside," the space appears to engulf without end, and to fashion a prison which, lacking a definite inside or outside, allows no means of escape.[101] In *Mason & Dixon* too, the Gothic qualities of space shape the entire earth into a monstrous prison-house. But even as this nexus of control triangulates its way across the globe, and attempts to harness the forces of the earth to its own ends, at some point it bottoms out and an as yet untraversed abyss opens up beneath our feet. Pynchon maps not only the totalising order of an emerging world capitalism, but seeks out those hidden crevices which lead ever-deeper down to all that has been denied existence in this world, but which may one day spring from the earth to reclaim its half-forgotten rights to existence.

[100] De Quincey, *Confessions of an English Opium-Eater*, 70.

[101] Sedgwick, *Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, 26.

Chapter Five

Outside of Time: The Gothic Folds of Time in *Mason & Dixon*

I began the previous chapter with the question of space and spatial capture in *Mason & Dixon*, before following this theme on to its complex interplay with questions of history and ecology. In parallel to those themes, this chapter follows another process of capture to uncover the mechanisms from which it arises and the forces which it begets. Whereas the dynamic of the previous chapter was between an abstract topography and the ghostly space over which it maps, this chapter takes as its object Pynchon's dramatised account of the emergence of modern temporalities in *Mason & Dixon* and the hidden orders of time which murmur beneath the novel's surface. I have begun my discussion of *Mason & Dixon* not with time, but with space, partly for the clear historical import of its seizure, but also for its role in grounding the discussions of time in the novel. It is stated clearly by one of Pynchon's characters that "Time is the Space that may not be seen," and by another that "the Battle-fields we know, situated in Earth's three Dimensions, have also their counterparts in Time."[1] If time is merely an uncharted, or unchartable, dimension of space, then the processes driving the slow appropriation of space in the previous chapter must take on another level of complexity.

David Cowart suggests that what lies at the heart of this spatio-temporal mechanism is, "as long-time Pynchon readers know, [an] absence of any rationale, a nothingness, an emptiness, the triumph of death and entropic principle."[2] Such a reading would be typical of Pynchon's early novels and their notable obsession with entropy, as in

[1] MD 326, 190.

[2] David Cowart, "The Luddite Vision," in *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Thomas Pynchon*, ed. Harold Bloom (Broomall: Chelsea House, 2003), 270.

The Crying of Lot 49's revelation of NADA and Oedipa's ecstatic annihilation in cosmic background noise (see Chapters One and Two). Yet in *Mason & Dixon* this is not entirely the case, as entropy is met by another power in the temporal order, which works to postpone its inevitable decay. As we will see, time in *Mason & Dixon* does not follow a simple trajectory; it neither accelerates toward a technological singularity nor subsides under entropic pressure. Just as the spatial structures examined in the previous chapter curve and fold back upon themselves, sequestering hidden spaces and enclosing captured territories, the structure of time likewise twists and turn to produce all manner of doublings, hauntings, and dead-ends.

Still the question remains: What battles may be waged in time, and—knowing who and what have profited from our historic battles over space—what power could possibly reign temporally as well as spatially? What is at stake in this question goes beyond the early Pynchon's preoccupations with entropy and universal death, as it has more to do with the struggles and fates of human beings caught in a universe at least partly of their own making. Humanity isn't merely annihilated by the long span of time, but enmeshed within various temporal orders of different scales, speeds, and levels of accessibility to the rational human subject. Whereas Pynchon's early works harbour a kind of nihilistic resignation to the entropic powers of time, typified by the natural desolation of *V.* and the predestined freefall of the rocket in *Gravity's Rainbow*, in *Mason & Dixon* time is not merely a charnel house but a battlefield, with its own bunkers, ruins, and redoubts in which some shelter may be taken and by which some small patch of ground may be reclaimed.

On a narrative level, the novel openly toys with questions of time and history, and often flouts the conventions of the historical novel. In typical Pynchonian fashion, the novel diverges from history at almost every turn, as the ostensibly historical protagonists find themselves talking with dogs and mechanical ducks, embroiled in Jesuit conspiracies,

abducted by UFOs, and smoking pot with George Washington. Pynchon's parodic style foregrounds the importance of time, or as Elizabeth Hinds argues, "with its anachronisms, the novel executes a time that never existed, for all of its accurate historical representations."[3] Further still, Stefan Mattessich suggests that "time dissimulated in language [...] is the subject of this book because it is the principal preoccupation of Pynchon's fiction."[4] Here I wish to go a step further, beyond the thematic presentations of time in the novel, to instead look at the structure of time that Pynchon presents. Beyond its anachronisms and historical in-jokes, *Mason & Dixon* develops a complex depiction of modern and post-modern temporalities irreducible to the ironic juxtaposition of the book's present with its historical setting. Looking back from the late twentieth century and the supposed end of history, gazing into the birth of modernity, the novel refuses to present a clear line of progress from there to here. Instead, we catch glimpses of temporalities other than our own, and we find our own conceptions of the world upset by strange twists in time.

The question of time and temporal order is not new to Pynchon, and in an essay published in the *New York Times Book Review* only a few years prior to *Mason & Dixon* he puts forth an account of modern temporalities and their rise in terms that are at once idiosyncratic and in clear conversation with both his previous nonfiction (as discussed in Chapter Three) and with the soon to be published *Mason & Dixon*. What is curious about this essay, titled "Nearer, My Couch, to Thee" (1993), is its focus not directly upon the social structuration of time but the possibilities of moving against and hindering those structures by way of the mortal sin of sloth. Sloth, or *acedia*, was once the sin of indolence and laxity which drew the faithful from their duties to God, but in Pynchon's

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[3] Hinds, "Introduction: The Times of *Mason & Dixon*," in *The Multiple Worlds of Pynchon's* "*Mason & Dixon*," ed. Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds (Rochester: Camden House, 2005), 14.

[4] Mattessich, *Lines of Flight* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 12.

account the term has since been secularised to describe a sin not against God but against a more earthly order. Not only is sloth secularised as a worldly rather than spiritual indolence, it is also given a profane meaning as a sin against an economic rather than theological order. In this new regime, writes Pynchon:

> Spiritual matters were not quite as immediate as material ones, like productivity. Sloth was no longer so much a sin against God or spiritual good as against a particular sort of time, uniform, one-way, in general not reversible—that is, against clock time, which got everybody early to bed and early to rise.[5]

If sloth has a new meaning and a new use in the modern era, it is because it has become detached from the divine and integrated into a new perception of time which marches to a mechanical beat. More than anything else, sloth has been borne into the modern era as a sin against the time of productivity—the time of work—as a way of being which slows production and exercises a pull back against the ever-accelerating pace of modernity.

Here as in other works on the historical perception of time, Pynchon emphasises that "time is a *social* phenomenon," and that "therefore time is also political."[6] As Stavros Tombazos paraphrases from Marx's *Grundrisse*, "every economy is in the end an economy of time," and so too does Pynchon highlight the economic underpinnings of this shifting organisation of time.[7]

> Between Franklin's hectic aphorist, Poor Richard, and Melville's doomed scrivener, Bartleby, lies about a century of early America, consolidating itself as a Christian capitalist state, even as acedia was in the last stages of its shift over from

[5] NMC.

[6] Jonathan Martineau, *Time, Capitalism, and Alienation* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2016), 3, 5.

[7] Stavros Tombazos, *Time in Marx* (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2014), 13. Marx's own phrase is "Economy of time, to this all economy ultimately reduces itself." Karl Marx, *Grundrisse*, trans. Martin Nicolaus (London: Penguin Books, 1973), 173.

> a spiritual to a secular condition. [...] And Sloth, being continual evasion, just kept piling up like a budget deficit, while the dimensions of the inevitable payback grew ever less merciful.[8]

Against this new and pre-eminently capitalist and American form of time, Sloth is presented as a shadow of the time of production, with which it shares a logic that it so perversely turns on its head. But Pynchon establishes another subtle relation between the Slothful and their time, in which "every second was of equal length and irrevocable, [and] not much in the course of its flow could have been called nonlinear, unless you counted the ungovernable warp of dreams."[9] In Slothful reverie we both evade the time of production, while simultaneously furnishing it with new desires, imagined objects, projects, and dreams.

> It is of course precisely in such episodes of mental traveling that writers are known to do good work, sometimes even their best, solving formal problems, getting advice from Beyond, having hypnagogic adventures that with luck can be recovered later on. Idle dreaming is often of the essence of what we do. *We sell our dreams. So real money actually proceeds from Sloth*, although this transformation is said to be even more amazing elsewhere in the entertainment sector, where idle exercises in poolside loquacity have not infrequently generated tens of millions of dollars in revenue.[10]

As in the previous chapter's analysis of *Mason & Dixon*'s frontier dream, the desires of escape and refusal are here turned back on themselves and made to serve another motive. Whereas the frontier is figured as a dream-space at a remove from the mundane world,

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[8] NMC.

[9] NMC.

[10] NMC; emphasis mine.

pushed away from waking eyes even to the ends of the earth, here Sloth is presented as a *time of dreams* which works both within and against the reigning order of time. As Katie Muth has suggested, Sloth in Pynchon's hands becomes "the double-edged freedom to reject God, capital, and new media technology," which has nevertheless in its "laudable and ungovernable warp [...] become the dominant mode in contemporary media."[11] Despite or perhaps because of Sloth's disruptive inertia, the oneiric and the economic become intertwined in their cohabitation of two sides of a single temporal order, which at once draws wealth from darkness and halts production with dreams.[12]

As we shall see, this dynamic between modern, capitalist time and its underbellies recurs in *Mason & Dixon*, which follows "Nearer, My Couch, to Thee" as an idiosyncratic account of time's conquest by capital. While the previous chapter tended to follow Dixon in his journeys both real and imagined through the earth, this chapter takes up his partner as the principal locus of the novel's temporal themes. While it falls to Dixon to rediscover the spaces lost to the projects of rationalism and Enlightenment—and to realise that the losses are at least partly by his own hand as a colonial surveyor—it is Mason's lot to discover the parallel processes of capture working in time. It is for this reason that this chapter begins with a brief study of Mason's melancholic character, as a man afflicted by his own despondent acedia, and the more explicitly Gothic nature of his melancholy: the persistent haunt of his wife Rebekah. From there, the bulk of this chapter follows Mason on his journeys through time, his revelation of its occulted mechanisms, and his ruminations on the fate of all those lost in the circuits of modern time.

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[11] Katie Muth, "Nonfiction," in *Thomas Pynchon in Context*, ed. Inger H. Dalsgaard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 26, 25.

[12] The ambiguity of Sloth and the possibility of its cooption are also made clear when Pynchon turns its pejorative force against those who industriously follow orders: "Who is more guilty of Sloth, a person who collaborates with the root of all evil, accepting things-as-they-are in return for a paycheck and a hassle-free life, or one who does nothing, finally, but persist in sorrow?" NMC.

Mason's Melancholy Haunt

Early in their American journey, Mason and Dixon make a stop in Lancaster, Pennsylvania to satisfy a morbid curiosity concerning the "inhuman murder of 26 Indians, Men, Women and Children, leaving none alive to tell" by the frontiersmen of that town a month prior. Sneaking out of the camp while Dixon sleeps, Mason visits the site of the massacre.[13] "He is not as a rule sensitive to the metaphysickal Remnants of Evil,— none but the grosser, that is, the Gothickal, are apt to claim his Attention," yet something still perceptibly haunts those grounds where the blood was spilled. Later recounting the experience to Dixon, Mason remarks on the persistence of the past in that place, and of the deadly orders of time and memory which flow across the bloodied American continent.

> "Acts have consequences, Dixon, they must. These Louts believe all's right now,— that they are free to get on with Lives that to them are no doubt important,— with no Glimmer at all of the Debt they have taken on. That is what I smell'd,— Lethe-Water. One of the things the newly-born forget, is how terrible its Taste, and Smell. In Time, these People are able to forget ev'rything. Be willing but to wait a little, and ye may gull them again and again, however ye wish,— even unto their own Dissolution. In America, as I apprehend, Time is the true River that runs 'round Hell."[14]

Just as *Mason & Dixon*'s historical drama returns to dreams and sleep as central metaphors for the spatial structure of the novel, here memory and forgetting are figured as the core temporal concepts. As shown in the previous chapter, the open space of the frontier is depicted by Pynchon in terms of a dream-space which is at once perceived and

[13] MD 341.

[14] MD 346.

dissipated by the measuring eyes of the Enlightenment. This dynamic, typified by the narrator's soliloquy to the dreamt frontier found on the page prior to the above passage ("Does Britannia, when she sleeps, dream?"[15]), is coupled here with a logic of time and memory which affirms the persistence of lives, dreams, and worlds in one form or another even after they have been extinguished. The founding of America upon the assorted cruelties of the frontier is said to have consequences, in one form or another, in this life or the next. But there is also a continual deferment of these consequences, which are forgotten in time and left to accrue interest like a grand spiritual debt. The waters of Lethe wash over America's settlers, but it does not cleanse the blood from their hands. Their debt is compounded by this perpetual forgetting, allowing the debtors to be drawn once again toward their damnation, knowing never what they do. But still the sites of massacre remain, and although "Time is the true River that runs 'round Hell," its course traces a spiral toward the pit and the final judgement of the debt owed.

As we will see, this logic of debt and deferral recurs among the temporal mechanisms of *Mason & Dixon*, but it is necessary to begin here with the logic of the haunt which informs the novel's melancholy meditations on time. What Mason suggests of the massacre site is that it remains inhabited by forces forgotten—or never truly perceived—by those who even now carry the moral debt accrued at that place. As Mark Fisher writes of the spatio-temporal nexus of the haunt, "space is intrinsic to spectrality, as one of the meanings of the term 'haunt' —a place—indicates. Yet haunting, evidently, is a disorder of time as well as of space. Haunting happens when a space is invaded or otherwise disrupted by a time that is out-of-joint, a dyschronia."[16] Not only is the frontier presented in *Mason & Dixon* as a disturbing fold in the space of the continent, and a confusion of coordinates between the realms of fantasy and reason, it is also a vast

[15] MD 345.

[16] Mark Fisher, *K-Punk* (London: Repeater, 2018), 171.

disturbance in time which both marks a place of disaster and harkens to the day of reckoning that never seems to arrive.

It is this very question of the end of days which brings Mason to the bloodied grounds as he grapples with a far more personal haunt. Reflecting on his recently deceased wife Rebekah, Mason's mind wanders to "Bodily Resurrection, which unhappily yet requires Death as a pre-condition."[17] In the dead of night, the "insomniack" Mason reasons that "yet must the Sensorium be nourish'd [...] as the Body, with its own transcendent Desires"—desires which must pass by way of death to reach their imagined end of "Eternal Youth."[18] Camped near to the site of the massacre, Mason imagines Rebekah returned to him, as she has done and will do several times over the course of his American voyage. He recollects her first visitation, on the desolate island of St Helena, itself now a ghost of the idyll it had been before human hands laid it bare.

> And here it is, upon the Windward Side, where no ship ever comes willingly, that her visits begin. At some point, Mason realizes he has been hearing her voice, clearly, clean of all intervention— 'Tis two years and more. Rebekah, who in her living silences drove him to moments of fury, now wrapt in what should be the silence of her grave, has begun to speak to him, as if free to do so at last, all she couldn't even have whispered at Greenwich, not with the heavens so close, with the light-handed trickery of God so on display.[19]

In Rebekah's return, presence and absence become confused, not only in the paradoxical return of one who has passed but in the eerie freedom which she now possesses. All that could not be spoken in life, and certainly not in death, now whispers forth from the

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[17] MD 346.

[18] MD 345.

[19] MD 163-4.

phantom to be taken in by the perplexed Mason. Rebekah's haunt crystallises the irony of eternal youth and bodily resurrection—which are only achievable on the condition of death—in which eternity and nullity comingle. Faced with this conundrum, Mason is plunged from the quiet mourning for his wife into a bewildering melancholy which refuses all resolutions to its morose fixation on the past.

The cardinal sin of the melancholic is a familiar one: it is "*acedia*, indolence of the heart. The slow planetary orbit of the lusterless Saturn made it possible to establish a relation between this slothful condition and the melancholic," who is not only afflicted by the inability to let go of what is lost, but is also unable to decide upon the nature of what is lost and what remains.[20] Rebekah's appearance, like that of the famous ghost in *Hamlet*, throws Mason into a crisis of reason, a desperate need to make sense of what he sees, and a slothful hesitance to make a decisive judgement on the power of his faculties.[21] Sent to St Helena by the Royal Society on a scientific mission to observe the

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[20] Walter Benjamin, *Origin of the German Trauerspiel*, trans. Howard Eiland (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 2019), 160. As we shall see, the tension of the Rebekah subplot revolves around a failure to mourn, and the ensuing perpetuation of melancholia in its place. As Sigmund Freud writes, "mourning impels the ego to give up the object by declaring the object to be dead and offering the ego the inducement of continuing to live," whereas in melancholia "this path is blocked" and "everything to do with these struggles [...] remains withdrawn from consciousness." As Rebekah's memory grows fainter, her spirit grows more insistent that Mason awake from his reverie, make conscious sense of his loss, and find some way to move on. See: Sigmund Freud, *The Standard Edition of the Complete Psychological Works*, ed. James Strachey, vol. 14 (London: Hogarth Press, 1955), 257.

[21] As Celia Wallhead has noted, Mason shares multiple features with Hamlet: "he may not be of the upper classes—indeed, this is one of the bones of contention regarding his professional ambitions—but he is a leader and a man of education and wit, though his metaphysical longings entice him towards madness and suicide, as he is emburdened with a deep melancholy stemming from bereavement, loss of love, the hauntings of a ghost, indecision, even cowardice, and, most acutely, frustrated ambition." Celia Wallhead, "*Mason & Dixon* and *Hamlet*," *Orbit: A Journal of American Literature* 2, no. 2 (2014): 3-4. Of these traits, Mason's indecision marks him especially as a melancholic successor to Hamlet. As Deleuze would remark, Hamlet's indecision singles him out as a poetic precursor of the bourgeois philosophy of Kant, in which the self is made a passive subject of time. "Hamlet is the first hero who truly needed time in order to act, whereas earlier heroes were subject to time as the consequence of an original movement (Aeschylus) or an

transit of Venus, Mason feels himself lifted from the surface of the earth by the dreamlike and impious pull of more than one planet.

> He tries to joke with himself. Isn't this suppos'd to be the Age of Reason? To believe in the cold light of this all-business world that Rebekah haunts him is to slip, to stagger in a crowd, into the embrace of the Painted Italian Whore herself, and the Air to fill with suffocating incense, and the radiant Deity to go dim forever. But if Reason be also Permission at last to believe in the evidence of our Earthly Senses, then how can he not concede to her some Resurrection?— to deny her, how cruel![22]

If Mason inhabits an age of reason, then it is an age out of joint with itself, in which reason both dispels figments of the imagination while giving permission to the disordered senses to manufacture new and more puzzling fantasies. As Walter Benjamin writes of the century prior to Mason's own, "for an age intent at all costs on disclosing the sources of occult insight into nature, the image of the melancholic posed the question: How could it succeed in intercepting intellectual and spiritual energies from Saturn without falling prey to madness?"[23] Which is to say not only that the melancholic is one who treads the line between genius and madness, but that at a more mundane level the individual afflicted by acedia is unmoored from the doctrines of reason and is left to wander from one possibility to the next without settling upon a new and fixed ground to reason.[24] As

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aberrant action (Sophocles). [...] Time is no longer the cosmic time of an original celestial movement, nor is it the rural time of derived meteorological movements. It has become the time of the city and nothing other, the pure order of time." Gilles Deleuze, *Essays Critical and Clinical*, trans. Daniel W. Smith and Michael A. Greco (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 28.

[22] MD 164.

[23] Benjamin, *Origin*, 155.

[24] In their Saturnine wanderings and wavering acedia, the melancholic find themselves suspended above the earth, not unlike Dixon's dreams of floating "aloft, in Map-space" (MD 505). Unlike Dixon, however,

Stephen Baker suggests, *Mason & Dixon* "dramatizes the deceptions and self-deceptions of modern, enlightened rationality […] that its status as an autonomous and unsullied mode of thought is an illusion, an expedient pretence. Irrational superstition is here presented as the negative truth of rational discourse."[25] It is in this dynamic of failed enlightenment and lost reason that the disjointed temporality of the haunt is located, as in Baker's words, "*Mason & Dixon* makes us feel how even absent history hurts."[26]

History and the Dead

Rebekah's apparitions instil in Mason neither a superstitious belief nor a reactive turn toward reason, but only lead him further on his melancholic refusal of clarity, "driving him further from the World than he has already gone," as if in "one of those clear little Dreams that lead us into the crooked Passage-ways of Sleep,—tho' he would insist, as ever to Dixon, that he was not sleeping at the time of the Visit."[27] As Tiina Käkelä has noted, "Pynchon's ghosts never bring about the horror effect characteristic of the Gothic genre"—although, as I have argued, horror is hardly the only element of the Gothic relevant to Pynchon's writing—"instead, the ghosts often evoke a sense of unfinished

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Mason does not look down upon the earth, but ever further into the stars. "The melancholic character, a totally 'vertiginous being,' instead of contemplating the objective world, so that his or her mind is embalmed, hystericizes it; he or she transforms the world into symptoms of his or her own repressed desire." Vijay Mishra, *The Gothic Sublime* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 86.

[25] Stephen Baker, *The Fiction of Postmodernity* (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2000), 132. Baker also suggests that Pynchon's newfound depth of characterisation, at least of the two titular protagonists, goes hand-in-hand with this examination of enlightenment subjectivity: "Their characterisation, like Mason's grief-ridden Melancholia, seems to remain tied to a past whose loss can never be undone, and whose scared legacy cannot possibly be ignored. The realist depth and consistency of the characterisation are indicative of both the loss of an older idea of the subject and subjectivity, and the acceptance that that idea was always illusory and ideological anyway" (134).

[26] Baker, *Fiction of Postmodernity*, 136.

[27] MD 164, 409.

business and a need for communication."[28] In contrast to the outright terrors and horrors of *The Crying of Lot 49*, the Gothic of *Mason & Dixon* appears far more muted, concerned less with moments of shock than with the quiet tragedy of people trapped in the nightmare of history. It is in his deepest reveries that Mason can hear Rebekah emerge from the past and speak in her own words, not of the realms beyond the veil but of the earth which Mason inhabits yet cannot bear to return to from his melancholy heights.

> "Look to the Earth," she instructs him. "Belonging to her as I do, I know she lives, and that here upon this Volcanoe in the Sea, close to the Forces within, even you, Mopery, may learn of her, Tellurick Secrets you could never guess."[29]

Rebekah's appearance, sent to Mason's side by a god, devil, or his loneliness, gives voice to another, earth-bound, side of melancholy. Speaking from outside the world, this melancholy voice finds itself inextricably a part of the material nature to which it once again turns its gaze. As in Walter Benjamin's account of Baroque melancholy, the saturnine despair for the transience of the world finds its way to the imagery of the natural world as an emblem of that despair. "Nature appears to them [the melancholy] not in the bud and blossom but in the overripeness and decay of its creations. Nature looms before them as eternal transience."[30] This turn to nature also carries the melancholic back from abstraction to an earthly consciousness, which although it gazes toward the stars cannot be anything except immersed in the ruin and rot of natural history.[31]

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[28] Tiina Käkelä, "Death and Afterlife," in *Thomas Pynchon in Context*, ed. Inger H. Dalsgaard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 266.

[29] MD 172.

[30] Benjamin, *Origin*, 190.

[31] On the concept of natural history as it was conceived by Benjamin and later developed by Theodor Adorno, Susan Buck-Morss offers a strong summary. "Whenever theory posited 'nature' or 'history' as an ontological first principle, this double character of the concepts was lost, and with it the potential for critical negativity: either social conditions were affirmed as 'natural' without regard for their historical becoming,

In this reflection upon nature's sublime ruin, melancholy approaches its own form of historical consciousness, which may see the players of history dancing from their strings in all their contingency and frailty. Through Rebekah's ghost, Mason is put once more in contact with the living, and is made all the more aware of the presence of those who once lived, as shades now haunting the earth.

> She occupies now an entirely new angular relation to Mercy, to those refusals, among the Living, to act on behalf of Death or its ev'ryday Coercions,— Wages too low to live upon, Laws written by Owners, Infantry, Bailiffs, Prison, Death's thousand Metaphors in the World,— as if, the instant of her passing over having acted as a Lens, the rays of her Soul have undergone moral Refraction.[32]

If Mason's melancholy indolence draws him away from worldly affairs it is only for his slothful experience of lost time to draw him back to a more contemplative attachment to the world of things and people. "Melancholy betrays the world for the sake of knowledge. But its persevering absorption takes the dead things up into its contemplation in order to save them."[33] As Justin Coe suggests, this ethical quality of melancholy and the haunt is already to be found in Pynchon's essay on Gabriel García Márquez, whose world is described by Pynchon as "haunted less by individual dead than by a history which has brought so appallingly many down, without ever having spoken, or having spoken gone unheard, or having been heard, left unrecorded."[34] Commenting on this passage, Coe writes that "Pynchon's record itself exists in the interstices of Paul's situating of the promise of redemption in the raising of the dead, offering that promise in a new,

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or the actual historical process was affirmed as essential." Susan Buck-Morss, *The Origins of Negative Dialectics* (New York: The Free Press, 1977), 54.

[32] MD 171.

[33] Benjamin *Origin*, 162.

[34] HEV.

transubstantiated form which holds all hope in abeyance but invests it with such power that it cannot be ignored."[35] From the devastations of death and loss the melancholic wander in indolence toward the possibilities of redemption and resurrection, but only in their own time, and only in the knowledge that this time of redemption itself moves at its own pace outside the orderly events of history. This truth can only be spoken elliptically by Rebekah, who encourages Mason to let her depart at last, so that she may rise to eternity and he may find his own way, in his own time. But to learn this lesson Mason must continue on his journey, with Rebekah's apparitions growing ever-fainter as she too lapses into the realm of the forgotten dead.

> "I've betray'd you," he cries. "Ah,— I should have—"
>
> "Lit Candles? I am past Light. Pray'd for me ev'ry Day? I am outside of Time. Good, living Charles,...good Flesh and Blood...." Between them now something like a Wind is picking up speed and beginning to obscure his View of her. She bares her Teeth, and pales, and turns, drifting away, evaporating before she is halfway across the slain Forest. [...] Great Waves of Melancholy, syncopating the Atlantick Counterparts not far away, surge against him. They might drown him, or bear him up,— he lies not caring, and fails to find Sleep again.[36]

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[35] Justin M. Scott Coe, "Haunting and Hunting: Bodily Resurrection and the Occupation of History in Thomas Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*," in *The Multiple Worlds of Pynchon's* "*Mason & Dixon*," ed. Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds (Rochester: Camden House, 2005), 165.

[36] MD 172.

Folds in Time, I: Tempus Incognitus

"I am outside of Time."[37] With these words Rebekah doesn't only remind her husband of her otherworldly nature, and her lack of need for any worldly sacrifice in her name. She also gestures toward a wider scope of existence beyond the temporal, or beyond the earthly, economic, and historical temporalities known to Mason as time. More to the point, the thematics of the haunt are not the only temporal order depicted in *Mason & Dixon*, and on top of the haunt's familiar Gothic image of a past returned to the present develops an entire topography of time. If the haunt suggests a linear temporal timeline upset by the persistence of the past beyond its expiry date, the overarching shape of time in the novel is far more complex, with temporal ruptures travelling laterally between parallel times and askew through looping circuits of time.

This topography is most apparent in the sequences which deal with the eleven days lost in the 1752 switch to the Gregorian calendar, in relation to which the Julian calendar had fallen so many days behind.[38] It is this change that incites the characters of the novel to speculations on the nature of time, where the missing days have gone, and whether the conversion was brought about for ulterior motives. Perhaps most bizarre of these sequences, is one in which Mason recounts his own experience of the change, or rather his failure to make it, and the time he spent in those non-existent eleven days. Having returned from his sojourn out of time, Mason explains that on

> Midnight of September second, in the unforgiven Year of 'Fifty-two, I myself did stumble, daz'd and unprepared, into that very Whirlpool in Time,— finding myself in September third, 1752, a date that for all the rest of England, did not exist,— *Tempus Incognitus*. [...] Yet soon enough I discover'd how alone 'twas

[37] MD 172.

[38] Martineau, *Time*, 111.

> possible to be, in the silence that flow'd, no louder than Wind, from the Valleys and across those Hill- villages, where, instead of Populations, there now lay but the mute Effects of their Lives,— [...] tho' some where else, in the World which had jump'd ahead to the Fourteenth, they continued to tick onward, to be re-wound, to run fast or slow, carrying on with the ever-Problematick Lives of the Clocks....[39]

Not only figuratively but now literally displaced from time, the melancholic Mason discovers a *Tempus Incognitus*, an unknown time, but a time inextricably linked with our own. It is against our own time that this other time is constructed, and so to get a sense of what composes the *Tempus Incognitus* the originary timeline from which Mason departed must first be characterised.

What Mason leaves behind when he enters the whirlpool in time is a time structured by "the ever-Problematick Lives of the Clocks," which regiment and organise our moments into a fixed and linear line. Discussing the emergence of European modernity, Anna Greenspan states that "this new temporality [...] rested on synthesising the twin poles of modern time, the Gregorian calendar and the mechanical clock, thereby melding empty abstraction (the ubiquitous ticking of the clock) with a calendric, directional pull."[40] This is the structure of time which Walter Benjamin calls "homogenous, empty time" which is infinitely subdivisible into identical units of time—the ticking of a clock or the days of a calendar—which march endlessly from one point to the next.[41] It is this mixture of abstract units and forward momentum that informs the logic of Western modernity, by which inevitable progress from one state to the next is

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[39] MD 556.

[40] Anna Greenspan, *Shanghai Future* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 70.

[41] Walter Benjamin, *Illuminations*, ed. Hannah Arendt, trans. Harry Zohn (New York: Schocken Books, 1968), 261.

written into the perception of time itself. The setting of Pynchon's novel places it at a moment in history when this homogenous and linear conception of time was still in its infancy, but already well on its way to ascendency alongside the rising bourgeois class and their need for abstract and absolute measurements of time. As Anthony Aveni writes of this transitional phase in the social history of time, new technologies and new philosophies of time were demanded by the "desire for precision and regulation that had stemmed from medieval ecclesiastical concerns and [were] later fueled by the rise of the merchant class. Time's line became more continuous than discontinuous and, like the mechanical clock, was engraved with a carefully tooled set of fiducial marks to quantify its course."[42]

But all is not well for the continuous conception of time in Pynchon's novel. Although this clock-time "continued to tick onward, to be re-wound, to run fast or slow," its dominance of the temporal order casts a shadow of other times outside of itself.[43] Mason does not experience time travel, in the sense of a journey to the past or future, but discovers another present that sits alongside his own. The missing eleven days present a rupture in the logic of modernity, by which the sequence of homogenous, empty time is folded upon itself, or in which particular units of time are blasted out of the continuum. This confusion of the temporal order recalls Fredric Jameson's remarks on the nature of time in postmodernity, which annihilates the capacity to "unify the past, present, and

[42] This quantification of time also lends itself to Pynchon's recurrent interest in machinery and its domination even of our perception of the world. As the measurement of time became increasingly mechanised, mechanical explanations seemed evermore reasonable for describing the world at large. "As mechanism replaced animism in the Enlightenment, and mechanistic determinism became the preferred form of reasoning, the world machine offered the most felicitous explanations about the history of the universe." Anthony Aveni, *Empires of Time: Calendars, Clocks, and Cultures* (London: I.B. Tauris & Co., 1990), 157.

[43] MD 556.

future of our own biographical experience or psychic life," resulting in a "schizophrenic" experience of time as a series of "pure and unrelated presents."[44]

As the dominance of modern time grows more complete, it comes increasingly to face its hideous doubles, of which the postmodern is today the most recognisable. Unlike the modern conception of time as a linear and continuous sequence of moments, the postmodern is a broken schizoid time in which the interchangeable moments of homogenous, empty time are shuffled and scattered. Although time still passes, the fiducial marks of modern time have lost their meanings, and the postmodern appears as an endless eddying without a sense of direction. Such a temporal stasis finds its clearest expression in the tomb worlds of Philip K. Dick's fiction. Writing of the desolate landscape inhabited by the televisual prophet Mercer of *Do Androids Dream of Electric Sheep?*, N Katherine Hayles describes this schizophrenic universe as one in which "the ego has become so distended, so inflated, that it blocks out everything else [and] time stops because nothing new can happen."[45] Tangentially, but suggestively for this thesis' proposed overlap between Gothic conventions and posthuman thematics, Hayles notes that this timeless psychic wasteland is always associated in Dick's fictions "with a deep confusion of inside / outside boundaries" as the schizophrenic experience annihilates the stable interiority of the subject just as it engulfs all possible outsides into this inner tumult.[46]

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[44] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 27. Mark Fisher's comments on this same passage are also worth considering: "Late capitalism's 'post-literacy,' meanwhile, points to 'the absence of any great collective project.' What results, according to Jameson, is a depthless experience, in which the past is everywhere at the same time as the historical sense fades; we have a 'society bereft of all historicity' that is simultaneously unable to present anything that is not a reheated version of the past." Fisher, *K-Punk*, 49.

[45] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 176.

[46] Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 176. Christopher Palmer has also written of the "juxtaposition of blockage and disintegration" which "sums up the terror of the postmodern condition as it is created in

As in Jameson's diagnosis of postmodern time, in *Mason & Dixon* the modern conception of linear time folds back on itself, but here it does not culminate in a synchronicity of indiscernible presents. In contrast to the empty isolation of Dick's tomb worlds, Pynchon's missing days are eerie precisely for their signs of life and their active if occluded connections with the main timeline. Spying upon the abandoned houses of his own time and puzzling at the cries which echo through the motionless London streets, Mason is not set adrift in an eddy of time but is made to chart a course roughly parallel to that which he had just left. Rather than a postmodern stasis, Pynchon instead presents a Gothic architecture of time, a "tangled temporality" in which the "future does not wait for us as a brightly lit beacon up ahead."[47] Like the Gothic ornamental line, the timeline of Pynchon's novel spirals into itself, collecting and overlaying multiple temporalities without giving them clear coordinates or reducing them to a single blurred moment. While modern time charts a progress into the future, and postmodern time loops in an endless present, this Gothic time spirals and splits into a mess of temporalities that intertwine according to only some arcane geometry.

Folds in Time, II: Plantations in Time

What hides in these folds of time? Just as the American west holds in space all that cannot exist in the age of reason, this *Tempus Incognitus* harbours a clamour of dark figures and eerie cries. Mason describes the alternate London of the missing days as a realm which makes up for its perceived emptiness with a tumult of invisible forces.

Dick's novels of the fifties and sixties, taking control of their very forms." Dick's oscillation between images of "dissolution and of claustrophobic blockage" engender similar feelings to the Gothic—itself a form which wavers between collapse and catatonia—although these elements are altered by their situation in the historical moment of postmodernity. See, Christopher Palmer, *Philip K. Dick: Exhilaration and Terror of the Postmodern* (Liverpool: Liverpool University Press, 2003), 28.

[47] Greenspan, *Shanghai Future*, 74.

> ‘Twas as if this Metropolis of British Reason had been abandon’d to the Occupancy of all that Reason would deny. Malevolent shapes flowing in the Streets. Lanthorns spontaneously going out. Men roaring, as if chang’d to Beasts in the Dark. A Carnival of Fear. Shall I admit it? I thrill’d. [...] anything, inside this Vortex, was possible.[48]

The construction of another time is here posited as a kind of escape from the reigning order, yet never in anything but ambiguous terms. Still other inhabitants are posited within the missing eleven days. Mason recounts that in the service of some unknown power, a nation of pygmies were sent “to colonize th’ Eleven Days” and to establish “an entire Plantation in Time.”[49] For these temporal settlers, the missing days are “all an Eden” to be populated and exploited anew by “they and their Generations.”[50] Here, the Gothic curvature of time approaches the more familiar literary notions of the Gothic, as its topography has weird doubling effects and creates eerie agencies, “which coalesce in the sense of being haunted and hunted, chased by strange beings across the border of a doubly occupied time.”[51] Although unknown to us, this other time still feeds us, as it is incorporated into some vast extra-temporal economy. Like ghosts barely perceived, these travellers cohabit in space although separated in time, and in so doing double the potential productivity of the spaces, objects, and domiciles shared across the eleven days.

> Arriv’d they cannot say how, nor care, they sleep in our beds, live in our Rooms, eat from our Dishes what we have left in the Larders, finish our Bottles, play with

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[48] MD 559-60.

[49] MD 196.

[50] MD 196. “‘Aye and recall,’ Mason’s Phiz but precariously earnest, ‘where you were, eleven days ago,— saw you anyone *really foreign* about? Very short, perhaps? Even... Oriental in Aspect?’”

‘Well,— well yes, now that you,—’” (MD 197).

[51] Coe, “Haunting and Hunting,” 161.

> our Cards and upon our Instruments, squat upon our Necessaries,— the more curious of them ever pursuing us, as might Historians of Times not yet come, by way of the clues to our lives that they find in Objects we have surrender'd to the Day, or been willing to leave behind at its End,— to them a mystery Nation, relentlessly being 'British,' a vast Hive of Ghosts not quite van-ish'd into Futurity....[52]

The introduction of the pygmy colonists into the timeslip subplot continues and alters the Gothic thematics of the haunt firstly by inverting it, as these time-travellers come to perceive the British as the ghosts of an ever-elusive futurity, and secondly by grounding it in a material and economic relation between times.[53] The inverted haunt and the becoming-ghost of the British refuses a clear distinction between times, as neither the days prior nor hence may be perceived as originary or derivative: the past is not something unreal which breaks into an essentially real present, but is only another branch in the Gothic architecture of time. As Justin Coe remarks, "the inhabitants of both worlds are temporalized only in the relationship between being faithful and being followed, which coalesce in the sense of being haunted and hunted, chased by strange beings across

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[52] MD 196.

[53] In the apparent absurdity of this subplot, Pynchon also engages in the somewhat lighter tropes of fantasy. Just as the novel's spatial plot leads into a utopian netherworld, here the novel lapses into what might be termed, borrowing Helga Nowotny's phrase, a *uchronic* fantasy. Just as utopia is the space which is not, uchronia is an idealised time that lies apart from our own. The fantastic elements of Pynchon's digression into the eleven days do not therefore undermine the Gothic character of the novel, but show the impulse which the horrors of this world exercise on the utopian/uchronic imagination and its need for escape. As Nowotny writes of this temporal exit: "In Western industrialized countries, escape attempts are being tested, where the pressure of time is intensifying, and uchronias invented which are intended to lead out of Western time. [...] Uchronias, like utopias before there, have a central social function to fulfil: they contain proposed solutions to particular unsolved problems in a society." Helga Nowotny, *Time: The Modern and Postmodern Experience*, trans. Neville Plaice (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), 132, 139.

the border of a doubly occupied time."[54] Two times inhabit the one earth, shifting past one another—the one attempting to grasp the other and triangulate it into a fixed series of points, and the other eliding perception, sinking ever back into the maelstrom, yet it is impossible to say which time is doing the perceiving and which eludes that perception.

This mutual constitution of times leads from the Gothic theme of the haunt to that of the double. Mirroring in time what the novel's scenes of the earth's interior achieve in space, the discovery of another time and its weird inhabitants throws into question the independence of Mason's native time by tying it inextricably to its double. As William Millard writes, "Doppelgängers [...] are a dark Gothic or Romanticist device, an inescapable reminder for the mirror-maddened modern self of both its uniqueness and its interchangeability, its capacity for transcending (or delaying, or deferring) death and its inevitable susceptibility to death. Pynchon's recurrent twinning suffuses the book with an aroma of the uncanny and a consciousness that nothing solitary, whether person or idea, will stand."[55] The horror of the double is not the horror of seeing a reflection of oneself, but of discovering oneself as a reflection of this alien other.

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[54] Coe, "Haunting and Hunting," 161.

[55] Beyond the temporal doubling of the pygmies, it is worth quoting Millard's full inventory and commentary on the novel's "recurrent twinning:" "Pynchon gives us not only Mason and Dixon themselves but Pitt and Pliny, Hsi and Ho, Eliza and Zsuzsa, Father Zarpazo and Captain Zhang, Mason's sons William and Doctor Isaac, and Franklin's interns in the electrickal arts Molly and Dolly, not to mention Dixon's early reference to 'two sorts of drinking Folk [...] Grape People and Grain People.' Abstract concepts, memes, and narrative channels, likewise, often appear in pairs: science and mysticism, sky ('as above') and earth ('so below'), Pennsylvania and Maryland, slave and free, Stig's 'Yingle' and 'Yangle,' Zhang's *chi* and *sha*, the alternative endings of the story of Hsi and Ho, and, in Maskelyne's quotation from Kepler, Astrology as 'Astronomy's wanton little sister, who goes out and sells herself that Astronomy may keep her Virtue.' If conceptual bifurcation is the elemental act of the rational mind, uncertainty over whether the thing divided would be better left whole is most acute when the similarities on either side of the line are strongest, and hence any twin is also a menace, a harbinger." William Millard, "Delineations of Madness and Science: Mason & Dixon, Pynchonian Space and the Snovian Distinction," in *American Postmodernity: Essays on the Recent Fiction of Thomas Pynchon*, ed. Ian D. Copestake (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003), 101.

More than the shock of meeting one's doppelgänger, the scenes of temporal doubling point to a greater horror: economics. The connection between the split times and their inhabitants is never personal—the pygmies and the British only incidentally become each other's shadows—and is instead held together by a decidedly economic relation. Living in the same homes, eating from the same bowls, and tilling the same fields, the inhabitants of the two times are joined by their parallel acts of labour and their times are conjoined in the extraction of value from their work. Sent by some unknown benefactor to colonise the missing eleven days, the pygmies establish "an entire Plantation in Time" which binds their lives and those of Mason's countrymen to a single trans-temporal order.[56] What first appears as an escape from modern time into the raucous tumult of a haunted London, is in fact folded into a deeper logic of capitalism, as the halts and starts of other times find themselves in the service of the same laws of production and accumulation. Multiple temporalities become visible, but all are incorporated into a single economic order, which feeds upon these breaks, and propels itself along vectors of desire for escape.[57]

Infinite Debt and the Undying Machine

What is this emerging order, which feeds upon the Gothic folds of time? Like that vast network which triangulates its way through the space of the frontier, this temporal order

[56] MD 196.

[57] Recalling the place that this Gothic folding of time has alongside the homogenous, empty time of capitalist modernity, we may consider it a time that is not wholly exterior to the latter. "It is not that there is another time, corning from who-knows-where, that would substitute for chronological time; to the contrary, what we have is the same time that organizes itself through its own somewhat hidden internal pulsation[s]." Giorgio Agamben, *The Time That Remains*, trans. Patricia Dailey (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2005), 82. The suggestive presence of messianic, kairotic time in Pynchon's fiction is beyond the scope of this thesis, but has been examined in depth by Gary Thompson, "The Kairotic View of History in Thomas Pynchon's Novels," *Orbit: A Journal of American Literature* 7, no. 1 (2019).

functions as a machine to further the goals of a particular political class. Among the characters of the novel, there are intimations that the theft of the eleven days is a Catholic plot to steal time from the English, or to harness geocosmic forces for some Jesuit scheme. There is a grain of truth here, but directed precisely away from where power truly resides. The truth is far more direct, and is stated in no uncertain terms when Mason reflects upon the changes wrought on his home by the burgeoning forces of capital and empire.

> I discover'd the Rulers who do not live in Castles but in housing less distinct, often unable to remain past Earshot of the Engines they own and draw their Power from. [I saw] the coming of the hydraulick Looms and the appearance of new sorts of wealthy individual, the late-come rulers upon whom as a younger person I spied, silent, whilst holding savage feelings within.[58]

What Mason sees emerging in his time is the vast construction of industrial capitalism.[59] Time and space alike are appropriated for the ends of production and accumulation by this new class. Time is measured according to a mechanical rhythm, which comes to dominate and dictate the temporalities of nature and labour. As Christophe Bonneuil and Jean-Baptiste Fressoz write, this "continuous time of industrial capitalism [...] was then projected onto cultural representations of the future, conceived as a continuous progress unfurling to the rhythm of productivity gains."[60] From Mason's perspective it is clear that

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[58] MD 313.

[59] For an analysis of the spatial changes wrought upon Mason's youthful idyll, see the previous chapter.

[60] Christophe Bonnueil and Fressoz Jean-Baptiste, *The Shock of the Anthropocene*, trans. David Fernbach (London: Verso, 2016), 203. In making clear the political stakes of his narrative, the accuracy of Pynchon's historical account slips in its depiction of the forces at play in the rise of industrial capitalism. As Andreas Malm has shown in *Fossil Capital* (London: Verso, 2016), the shift from agrarian to industrial capitalism in Britain depended not on hydraulic power, as Pynchon seems to suggest, but the mobile and piecemeal industry of the steam engine. More specifically, it was this transition from the communal work of dam-building to individually-owned machinery which fed the changing consciousness of time and work at the

the great transformations in space and time to which he is witness lend themselves primarily to the profit of a particular economic class. He declares the victors of his era as the

> Projectors, Brokers of Capital, Insurancers, Peddlers upon the global Scale, Enterprisers and Quacks,— these are the last poor fallen and feckless inheritors of a Knowledge they can never use, but in the service of Greed. The coming Revolution is theirs [...] and Heaven help the rest of us, if they prevail.[61]

The "Net-Work of Points" that swallows the American continent and the "Plantation[s] in Time" which funnel the resources of another world into our own are both revealed as mechanisms for control by an emerging capitalist class.[62] As Keith Ansell Pearson writes of this newly emergent time of capitalist production and exchange: "In an agrarian economy the coalesced forces of tradition which fetter all movement are nourished by a cyclical time. By contrast the irreversible time set into motion by the bourgeois economy eradicates all vestiges of tradition around the entire globe. [...] The unfolding of economic time means that mankind is subjected to the 'time of things', the mass production of objects produced according to the law of the commodity."[63] From the economic recomposition of time also arose a new philosophical discourse to give reason for the accelerating pace of change: "With the Enlightenment, there also arose the need for time; for it was necessary to make up the delay of reason. There was only one means of making it up, that of speeding up proceedings. [...] Everything seemed possible, if only it had time

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end of the eighteenth century. With his focus directed more toward the industrial wreckage of landscape than its mutilation of human lives, Pynchon's elegy for a pre-industrial Britain could be said to favour an environmental mode over a broader ecological perspective.

[61] MD 487-8.

[62] MD 345, 196.

[63] Keith Ansell Pearson, *Viroid Life* (London: Routledge, 1997), 158.

enough, it would be said later."[64] As the landscape is captured by coalmines and waterworks, and time is regimented to the rhythm of the factory machines, the whole world is bent to the law of the bourgeois inheritors of the earth.

Yet Pynchon's Gothic account of time also subverts these new masters as much as it describes their origins. The inorganic curvature of time gives rise to an utterly inhuman machine, which if powered by little more than desire, is bound to the will of no one class, let alone any single conscious master. The rising industrialist class are described as nothing more than "the last poor fallen and feckless inheritors of a Knowledge they can never use, but in the service of Greed," who can but haphazardly deploy themselves in the service of this dark agency.[65] The capitalist, as Deleuze and Guattari make clear, "is the first servant of the ravenous machine," a machine that is described by a cynical and aged Mason at the end of the novel.[66]

> 'Tis a Construction, [...] a great single Engine, the size of a Continent. [...] Not all the Connexions are made yet, that's why some of it is still invisible. Day by day the Pioneers and Surveyors go on, more points are being tied in, and soon becoming visible, as above, new Stars are recorded and named and plac'd in Almanacks—"[67]

It is an engine constructed from the capture of space and the folds of time, to perpetually extract ever-greater flows of production from those caught in its labyrinth. The machine

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[64] Nowotny, *Time*, 45. On advent of modern perceptions of time in the Enlightenment, see Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On The Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe (New York: Columbia University Press, 2004).

[65] MD 487-8.

[66] Gilles Deleuze and Felix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1983), 254.

[67] MD 772.

at the heart of *Mason & Dixon* displays precisely the inorganic liveliness of the Gothic architectural line: it twists and turns with a power of life that surpasses us, engulfs us, and forces us to reckon with that which is outside ourselves and is in the end "not immediately dependent on us."[68] In the last resort, this machine "that bears us along so relentlessly" is, as the narrator describes it, governed by "no Driver,... no Horses,... only the Machine."[69] Behind the incessant progress of modern time lies this self-driving and self-moving motor, which with each circuitous passage accelerates the whole machine forward into an uncertain future.

And yet there is a final turn of the screw. Looking back to the construction of this Gothic machine, Pynchon's novel demands recognition of a world other than the one which has come into being. The mechanisms of the machine are encountered in miniature midway through the novel in the form of a perpetual motion machine, which powers a watch. How does this device function? Its inventor explains:

> 'Tis a Law of the Universe,— *Prandium gratis non est* [There is no free lunch] [...] the Solution ever depends upon removing time-rates from questions of storing Power. With the proper deployment of Spring Constants and Magnetickal Gating, Power may be borrow'd, as needed, against repayment dates deferrable indefinitely.[70]

Not only does the present curve in upon itself, as a dynamo of production, but the future collapse of the system is endlessly deferred. As Mason describes the occult nature of the missing days:

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[68] Wilhelm Worringer, *Form Problems of the Gothic*, trans. Michael Bullock (Chicago: Ivan R. Dee, 1920), 47-8.

[69] MD 361.

[70] MD 317.

> Here, [...] purely, as who might say, dangerously, was Time that must be denied its freedom to elapse. As if, for as long as The Days lay frozen, Mortality itself might present no claims.[71]

The watch, like the eleven days, "borrows against the future to run perpetually in the present, thereby creating disequilibrium between the power put into the watch and the energy it expends; in short, it runs on credit."[72] Infinite debt and endless deferral keep the machines in a "transitional time" that is "prolonged into infinity and renders unreachable the end that it supposedly produces."[73]

Within the fanciful fiction of the watch, Pynchon gives an image of the capitalist fantasy of perpetual motion writ small. The watch, like capital, functions by means of legerdemain—of shifting around the appropriate pieces so that none may cease circulation, and that the cessation of motion be deferred indefinitely. Whereas previous modes of production met their limitations at a local scale, the uniquely liquid properties of capital have allowed it to overleap all perceived limits and for capitalism at large to postpone collapse by drawing an ever-wider net across the globe.[74] But "from the fact that capital posits every such limit as a barrier and hence gets *ideally* beyond it, it does not by

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[71] MD 194-5.

[72] Mitchum Huehls, "'The Space that may not be seen': The Form of Historicity in *Mason & Dixon*," in *The Multiple Worlds of Pynchon's* "*Mason & Dixon*," ed. Elizabeth Jane Wall Hinds (Rochester: Camden House, 2005), 26.

[73] Agamben, *Time That Remains*, 69-70.

[74] "Capital always tries to overcome its limitations through the development of productive forces, new technologies, and international commerce, but, precisely as a result of such continuous attempts to expand its scale, it reinforces its tendency to exploit natural forces (including human labor power) in search of cheaper raw and auxiliary materials, foods, and energies on a global scale." Kohei Saito, *Karl Marx's Ecosocialism: Capital, Nature, and the Unfinished Critique of Political Economy* (New Delhi: Dev Publishers, 2018), 96.

any means follow that it has *really* overcome it."[75] By the end of the novel the spectre of *global* capital becomes visible, and the unleapable limits of the planetary system likewise come into view. Perpetually on the edge of collapse, the global and pocket machines whir onward, each moment delaying or buying off the inevitable. And yet the end remains in sight, because the "great single Engine" is perpetually folding its outside—all other times and spaces—inward as fuel for further expansion.[76]

In the end, Mason recognises the machine as one last way of cheating death, of delaying the inevitable, and accruing a vast debt, the interest of which is paid in earthly suffering. Having glimpsed the machine in all its inhuman monstrosity, Mason lapses into a final melancholic vision of the earth's subjugation and history's long curve toward death.

> To Mason was it Purgatory,— some antepenultimate blow. What fore-inklings of the dark Forces of Over-Throw that assaulted his own Mind came visiting?— small stinging Presences darting in from the periphery of his senses to whisper, to bite, to inject Venoms... Beings from the new Planet. Infesting— Mason has seen in the Glass, unexpectedly, something beyond simple reflection,— outside of the world,— a procession of luminous Phantoms, carrying bowls, bones, incense, drums, their Attention directed to nothing he may imagine, belonging to unknown purposes, flowing by thick as Eels, pauselessly, for how long before or after his interception, he could never know. There may be found, within the malodorous Grotto of the Selves, a conscious Denial of all that Reason holds true. Something that knows, unarguably as it knows Flesh is sooner or later Meat, that there are Beings who are not wise, or spiritually advanced, or indeed capable of Human

[75] Marx, *Grundrisse*, 410.

[76] MD 772.

> kindness, but ever and implacably cruel, hiding, haunting, waiting,— known only to the blood-scented deserts of the Night,— and any who see them out of Disguise are instantly pursued,— and none escape, however long and fruitful be the years till the Shadow creeps 'cross the Sill-plate, its Advent how mute. Spheres of Darkness, Darkness impure,— Plexities of Honor and Sin we may never clearly sight, for when we venture near they fall silent, Murdering must be silent, by Potions and Spells, by summonings from beyond the Horizons, of Spirits who dwell a little over the Line between the Day and its annihilation, between the number'd and the unimagin'd,— between common safety and Ruin ever solitary...[77]

Falling deep into his senescent reverie, the aged Mason comes at last to a nightmare vision of a universe which cannot but sink into the darkness which surrounds it and succumb to the cosmic forces of time. Everything and everyone is trailed by a shadow, an image of what is to come: flesh becomes meat, honour is bound with sin, and the day is followed by its annihilation. Dubbing these conceptual pairs "the number'd and the unimagin'd," Mason's vision reiterates one last time upon the novel's ongoing theme of the Enlightenment measurement of space and time versus the exterior forces excluded from that domain. In the closing pages of the novel this dynamic is put in a new light: no longer shall the numbered spaces and times march triumphant across the earth, for in the last resort all that remains unimagined will flood back to make a ruin of it all. There is a thin line "between common safety and Ruin ever solitary," and from the beginning to the end Mason listens in his melancholy to the wraiths and revellers inhabiting spaces and times just beyond this one. Just over the horizon lies a Paradise free from the law of empire and the servitude of capital. Barely visible through the cracks in time we can see worlds of madness, frivolity, and escape. These other times and spaces are always being

[77] MD 769.

subsumed by the reigning order, and still others are formed on its borders, to be pushed ever backwards into the darkness outside. In short, *Mason & Dixon* reads modern history as cosmic horror.

When Time Catches Up

As discussed in the previous chapter, the spatial capture of the earth is presented in *Mason & Dixon* in terms best encompassed by the Gothic subgenre of the ecogothic—or perhaps further still, geogothic—and so too does the regimentation of time lead toward its own ecogothic scenes. As time turns in upon itself and the hour of reckoning approaches, the globe is assumed into a process it is unable to sustain, and across its face wastelands begin to spread. Occupying a central place in the novel's early plot, the island of Saint Helena offers a microcosm of both the novel's wider theme of capture and of the coming catastrophe towards which Pynchon gestures. Historically, Saint Helena figured into the European colonial imagination as an oceanic Eden untouched by human hands, but within a century of its colonisation was reduced to a treeless rock afloat in the South Atlantic. "Until the mid seventeenth century," and the time of its appearance in Pynchon's novel, "the few accounts of deforestation on St Helena were still outshone by accounts of the island as a paradise or even as social Utopia," with the increasingly apparent reality of its ecological degradation coming to symbolise the fall from paradise.[78] Introducing Mason to the island, Nevil Maskelyne describes the spirit which inhabits it and its inhabitants:

> "Serpent, Worm, or Dragon, 'tis all the same to It, for It speaketh no Tongue but its own. It Rules this Island, whose ancient Curse and secret Name, is Disobedience. In thoughtless Greed, within a few pitiable brief Generations, have

[78] Richard H. Grove, *Green Imperialism* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), 99.

> these People devastated a Garden in which, once, anything might grow. Their Muck-heaps ev'rywhere, Disease, Madness. One day, not far distant, this the last leaf of the Old-Father-Never-Die bush destroy'd, whilst the unremitting Wind carries off the last soil from the last barren Meadow, with nought but other Humans the only Life remaining then on the Island,— how will they take their own last step,— how disobey themselves into Oblivion? Simply die one by one, alone and suspicious, as is the style of the place, till all are done? Or will they choose to murder one another, for the joy to be had in that?"[79]

The island, once "a Garden in which [...] anything might grow" is reduced from a space of pure possibility to one of utter poverty. With this exhaustion of the island's space comes a concomitant exhaustion in time.[80] Eventually the day must come, and Maskelyne is sure that it is "not far distant," when this land will lose all ability to support its inhabitants, when life will cease to realise itself on its surface. On that day, "the last soil from the last barren Meadow" will be carried off on the wind, and the people will find themselves standing in a desert. Having despoiled the garden, humanity will once again find paradise taken from it, and it will turn upon itself as the last source of fuel for the fires of its relentless consumption. The soil which they cultivated existed long before they

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[79] MD 135.

[80] "Persistent attempts had been made to improve and develop the island as a profit making plantation economy. These had been dependent on the kind of intensive and unsustainable agriculture permitted by the use of slave labour. This had by 1715 been shown to exert a most unexpected consequence in the form of rapid deforestation, firewood shortage, drought and soil erosion. The migration and resettlement proposal was itself an indicator of this deterioration, and the comparison made between a ruined St Helena and the wild 'Paradise' of Mauritius was quite explicit. Indeed, as late as 1715 Mauritius had remained a fertile paradise by comparison with St Helena. It had been abandoned by the Dutch in 1710 and was colonised by the French only in 1721, a full six years after Pyke's appeal to the Directors. The language in which Mauritius is described indicates the resilience of the paradisal image of the island colony, a setting that could provide a new beginning and an economic redemption for men who had despoilt an erstwhile Garden of Eden *in only one generation*." Grove, *Green Imperialism*, 117; emphasis mine.

arrived on the island, but only the desert will remain to attest to their passing. Both Eden and apocalypse are recreated in miniature, and from beginning to end the inhabitants of the island fall prey to the "Serpent, Worm, or Dragon" which drives them to their doom.[81] The entire history of the fall is condensed into the space of the island and temporally into the span of scarcely two centuries.

The earth's rejection of its bondage is a theme repeated in Pynchon's work following *Mason & Dixon,* where it functions as both a point of horror and as a moral lesson. The hellscapes of modern industry and war double as depictions of a terrible past, and as portents of a coming collapse. In *Inherent Vice*, the hippie Sortilège, who is "in touch with invisible forces and could diagnose and solve all manner of problems, emotional and physical," gives her prognosis of humanity's relationship with the earth.[82]

> "They're destroying the planet," she agreed. "The good news is that like any living creature, Earth has an immune system too, and sooner or later she's going to start rejecting agents of disease like the oil industry. And hopefully before we end up like Atlantis or Lemuria."
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> It was the belief of her teacher Vehi Fairfield that both empires had sunk into the sea because Earth couldn't accept the levels of toxicity they'd reached.[83]

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[81] The reference to the serpent in this passage also recalls August Kekulé's dream of the Great Serpent described in *Gravity's Rainbow,* and the massive throughput of energy required to keep the "System" in motion: "Taking and not giving back, demanding that 'productivity' and 'earnings' keep on increasing with time, the System removing from the rest of the World these vast quantities of energy to keep its own tiny desperate fraction showing a profit: and not only most of humanity—most of the World, animal, vegetable and mineral is laid waste in the process. The System may or may not understand that it's only buying time. And that time is an artificial resource to begin with, of no value to anyone or anything but the System, which sooner or later must crash to its death, when its addiction to energy has become more than the rest of the World can supply, dragging with it innocent souls all along the chain of life." GR 419.

[82] IV

[83] IV 105.

Here the desolation of the earth is not achieved solely by the power of industrial capitalism, but in an animist twist is equally an act on the part of the planet to deprive humanity of the resources which sustain it.[84] The scarification of the earth's surface awakens it to the parasites feeding upon it, and sets in motion the process by which it will cleanse itself of the disease. When humanity oversteps its bounds, it is not the planet itself which is destroyed, but the world in which that humanity lives. The catastrophe comes about, as on Saint Helena, through the suicidal destruction of the human environment. At its most extreme, this loss of habitat mirrors the sinking of Atlantis and Lemuria into the sea, yet it is now to be achieved on a global scale.

The temporal dimensions of this catastrophe are made apparent in *Against the Day*, which gives voice to a future people whose utter desolation of the planet has left them without any possible place in the universe. They no longer seek new lands to exploit, and turn instead to the only world in which a future remains possible: their past. Their spokesperson declares:

> "We are here among you as refugees from our present—your future—a time of worldwide famine, exhausted fuel supplies, terminal poverty—the end of the capitalistic experiment. Once we came to understand the simple thermodynamic

[84] On the agency of nonhuman objects and the earth-system as co-actor in climate change, see Jane Bennett's *Vibrant Matter* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2010). The convergence of materialist eco-science and animist belief structures is also discussed in Donna Haraway's *Staying With The Trouble* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2016), in which the author positively cites Eduardo Vivieros de Castro's remark that "Animism is the only *sensible* version of materialism" (88). A compelling critique of these views may be found in Andreas Malm's *Fossil Capital* (London: Verso, 2016) and *The Progress of This Storm* (London: Verso 2018). The first of Malm's objections is that the flat ontologies and broad sense of agency of the above theorists effectively dilutes blame for environmental catastrophe by positing such absurdities as an ill-defined "will" on the part of coal to be burned. The second relevant objection is that "new" materialism's ejection of old materialism's political perspective effectively jettisons all sense of historical perspective, and reifies present economic relations as natural traits of a "humanity" which must be overcome (see Timothy Morton's *Dark Ecology*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2016, for the specious attribution of modern ecological disasters to the ever-persistent logic of the Neolithic revolution).

> truth that Earth's resources were limited, in fact soon to run out, the whole capitalist illusion fell to pieces. Those of us who spoke the truth aloud were denounced as heretics, as enemies of the prevailing economic faith. Like religious Dissenters of an earlier day, we were forced to migrate, with little choice but to set forth upon that dark fourth-dimensional Atlantic known as Time."[85]

As it quickly becomes apparent, to the Chums' horror, the possibilities of this future world are well and truly exhausted. The perpetual motion machine has stopped, and time—in the form of Pynchon's oldest obsession, entropy—has finally caught up with capital's grand illusion. Yet the spectre of a coming collapse is not presented as a cause for worry about the future itself, and instead is a more pressing concern for the present—the present of the novel, and the present of the novel's readers. As Pieter Vermeulen suggests, "it might be tempting to read this description of the Trespassers' present as our future (rather than our present), and thus as a devastation we can still avoid. The problem here is that the warped temporality of the novel does not allow such consolation: the world around 1900 *is already* the future world, just as our Anthropocene present is *already* the Trespassers' dystopian reality."[86] With one last magic trick up its sleeve, this nightmarish future—our present?—now works anachronously to draw sustenance from a world which for it has long since been sucked dry. Holding back their empathy, the Chums of Chance darkly consider possible ulterior motives of their visitors through time:

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[85] ATD 467.

[86] "Once we know that (and we now do), *we are already dead*. *Against the Day*'s unsettling combination of emptiness and overcrowding and its destabilization of the relation between the human and its environments convey an awareness that as inhabitants of a climate changed world we are, strictly speaking, already the living dead." Pieter Vermeulen, "Pynchon's Posthuman Temporalities," in *The New Pynchon Studies*, ed. Joanna Freer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 78.

> "And suppose it isn't that," said Randolph. "Suppose they're not pilgrims but raiders, and there's some particular resource here, that they've run out of and want to seize from us, and take back with them?"
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> [...]
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> "But imagine *them*," Lindsay in stricken tones, as if before some unbearable illumination, "so fallen, so corrupted, that we—even we—seem to them as pure as lambs. And their own time so terrible that it's sent them desperately back—back to us. Back to whatever few pathetic years *we* still have left, before ... whatever is to happen..."[87]

Like the settlers who arrived in America to despoil new lands, the fugitives from a dying world seek out a younger time. But this sequence is not merely an exercise in science fictional speculation on the conceit of time travel. Rather, the desire of these future travellers to live in the past functions as a metaphor for the way in which the future *already* feeds upon the past. This future grows out of the present like a parasite, sucking ever greater flows of energy into its construction. We too live upon the efforts of the past, even as we toil to build the future higher. Today's prosperity is bought at the price of a terrible past, in which life was sacrificed for the sake of growing empires and industries. The reckoning of this debt is cast into the future, toward some final judgement in which all the failings of this time will finally be paid back in full.

In Pynchon's fiction as in the culture at large, growing ecological concerns figure as a rupture in both the modern temporality of progress and the postmodern sense of stasis. "There is no synchronicity in climate change. Now more than ever, we inhabit the diachronic, the discordant, the inchoate: the fossil fuels hundreds of millions of years old, the mass combustion developed over the past two centuries, the extreme weather this has

[87] ATD 468-9.

already generated, the journey towards a future that will be infinitely more extreme—unless something is done *now*—the tail of present emissions stretching into the distance... History has sprung alive, through a nature that has done likewise."[88] Whether refugees or vampires, these time-travellers add one more loop to the circuits of time which spiral through Pynchon's later novels. Although framed in the language of environmental catastrophe, the core of these passages remains the Gothic tangle of temporalities and the disorder of the present by intrusions from both past and future. In contrast to the pygmy sequence in *Mason & Dixon*, the trespassers of *Against the Day* figure this disrupted temporality in a much bleaker tone, although the dystopian implications of the latter novel are nonetheless present in the former. In *Mason & Dixon*, too, time is not only out of joint, but turned against us, and twisted upon itself to the benefit of a few, but only for so long—"*Après moi le déluge!*"[89]

Where does this leave us? As something of a closing remark, I want to suggest that if—following Jameson—the postmodern is the halted perception of time, or an end of history, then some value is to be found in *Mason & Dixon*'s Gothic folds of time as a point of contrast. Just as Pynchon's essays on Luddism and Sloth work to provide genealogies of the present moment, with all its inhuman machineries, *Mason & Dixon* likewise gives an account of the past which reframes the present in a new and horrifying light. Further, the novel appears to *rewrite* "Is It O.K. To Be A Luddite?" and "Nearer, My Couch, to Thee" both by giving weight to their utopian suggestions—by giving voice to fantasies both miraculous and melancholy—and by simultaneously revealing how

[88] "The history circling back into the warming condition is not of the buoyant modernist kind, not a bristling flow of events linked by purpose and direction, anything but a bandwagon to jump on: rather it is frozen. Nor is the nature now returning of the intact variety Jameson finds in the interstices of modernity: rather it appears to be melting. Yet history and nature they seem to be, and society looks like it is beginning to reel under them. The warming condition is still, however, far from constituting a total 'cultural logic' in Jameson's sense." Malm, *Progress of This Storm*, 11.

[89] Karl Marx, *Capital Volume I*, trans. Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1976), 381.

those dreams were "compromised by genocide and ecological devastation."[90] But what the novel adds in place of the now undermined utopias of the essays is a renewed concern for the monstrous and inhuman forces which work to co-opt even the most pure of utopian imaginations. As Pieter Vermeulen writes of *Against the Day*, the novel demonstrates "Pynchon's later conviction that the logistics can never be worked out. Which, for better or worse, means there will be no miracle. Which means that we will need a nonmiraculous intervention to forge a future for the human in an irrevocably posthuman world."[91]

Without hope for miracles, all that remains is to take this world in its singularity, as the only world to be won—or lost. In Pynchon's later novels, this means piercing through the anaesthetising illusions of capitalist modernity *and* postmodernity, with their distinct yet equally anodyne forms of time-perception. To this end, the novel's time is perpetually out of joint: written from the nineties to the eighteenth century, it binds up the neoliberal end of history with the conception of capitalist modernity, and uncovers the inhuman machinery that drives it, and us, into oblivion. Beyond lie the Gothic circuits of time, and the knowledge that the world today is haunted by other times, worlds lost, generations unavenged, and futures unachieved.

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[90] Jeffrey Howard, "The Anarchist Miracle and Magic in *Mason & Dixon*," *Pynchon Notes* 52-53 (Spring-Fall 2003): 181.

[91] Vermeulen, "Pynchon's Posthuman Temporalities," 82.

Chapter Six

"Down, down, and gone:" *Bleeding Edge*'s Ambivalent Cybergothic

> Out in the vast undefined anarchism of cyberspace, among the billions of self-resonant fantasies, dark possibilities are beginning to emerge.[1]

Pynchon's most recent novel, *Bleeding Edge*, recapitulates many of his well-worn themes of paranoia, conspiracy, and control, while transporting them to a time barely a decade prior to the book's release. Akin in this respect to *Vineland*, which is set a mere six years before its publication date, *Bleeding Edge* enacts a literary *weirding* of recent history by taking events that are still well within living memory and treating them in much the same exaggerated style as any of his historical novels proper—*Gravity's Rainbow*, *Mason & Dixon*, and *Against The Day*. What makes Pynchon's vision of the early 2000s all the stranger is his focus upon the largely unrealised and unrecorded underbellies of nascent cyberculture, captured in the final year of the dot-com bubble's crash, with all the ruined hopes and incomplete dreams of the 1990s lying in ruin. It is in this mixed portrayal of yesteryear's cybercultures, which today reads equally of tragedy and farce, that Pynchon's novel toys with the aesthetics of cyberpunk and the cybergothic.[2]

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[1] BE 327.

[2] It is fortuitous that Pynchon should turn to cyberculture as a topic of interest, given the digital origins of the current wave of Pynchon scholarship beginning in the mid-90s. As Eric Cassidy and Dan O'Hara note in "Thomas Pynchon: Schizophrenia and Control" (*Pynchon Notes* 34-5 (1994): 7-10), the first meeting of what was to become the International Pynchon Week conference in fact emerged out of Warwick University's infamous Virtual Futures conference of May 1994. Organised by the apocryphal Cybernetic Culture Research Unit (Ccru), Virtual Futures brought together an experimental mix of academic papers, rave-scene theorists, and arcane rituals, or in Cassidy and O'Hara's words: a "collection of our favorite anarcho-materialists, a fusion of Luddites and cybernauts gathered in an ecstatic survey of cyberculture" (7). Only later, in 1996, would Virtual Futures (d)evolve into an occult bacchanal, with one scholar lying on stage in a "snake-becoming" while "croaking enigmatic invocations intercut with sections from Artaud's

The cyberpunk elements of Pynchon's novel are of course most prominent in his depictions of the web, in which he shows a particular flair for the twentieth century's visions of neon-lit digital landscapes—affectionately known as 'cyberspace'—by way of the novel's fictive software DeepArcher. Described as a graphical interface for the deep web, which renders unindexed domains and untraversed links as three-dimensional objects in a digital world reminiscent of *Worlds Chat* (1995) or *Second Life* (2003), DeepArcher functions less like a game and more like a portal into a dreamscape of shifting scenery and proliferating characters utterly unlike the rigidly systematised virtual worlds to which it may be compared.[3] By introducing this element of the fantastical into a novel which is well-researched in all other respects—and that puts to shame the countless other novelists of Pynchon's generation who have tried and failed to write a novel 'about' the internet—Pynchon harkens back to the beginnings of cyberpunk, when the fictions of cyberspace and dreams of virtual worlds preceded their actualisation. As Sadie Plant

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asylum poems" (Mackay, "Experiment in Inhumanism"). At once a study of contemporary cybercultures and an evocation of the web's darkest corners, the discussions of Virtual Futures 1994 inevitably turned toward Pynchon's fiction and a follow-up conference on that very topic. This brief collision of academic and cybernetic cultures birthed a wave of Pynchon scholarship which we can only suppose was not altogether shocked when Pynchon himself turned his gaze from *Gravity's Rainbow*'s "analogue" methods of control to the digital architectures of *Bleeding Edge*.

[3] It should be noted here that despite passing similarities to social games such as *Worlds Chat* or *Second Life*, DeepArcher remains a thoroughly fictive piece of software, suggestive less of actual programs than of the dream these programs represent. Much of the fantasy of *Bleeding Edge* succeeds because of its great fidelity to the realities of the early-2000's web, while injecting fabulations which disturb that realism. In fact, the inventiveness of DeepArcher is better seen in contrast with its closest real-world analogues. For example, the digital space of *Worlds Chat* is composed of premade settings meant to showcase its media partnerships—and is thus far more akin to the DeepArcher of the novel's end, after it has been colonised by shopfronts and billboards. Similarly, while the spaces of *Second Life* are user-generated they are not freeform, as the game is highly ordered around editing privileges and server ownership—effectively baking property ownership into the space itself. Additionally, neither *Worlds Chat* nor *Second Life* make contact with the outside web as search engines or databases, which is DeepArcher's defining feature throughout the novel. In a word, although DeepArcher appears to draw inspiration from real-world experiments in digital space, the great success of Pynchon's fantastical program is that the digital world it navigates *is* the web itself (not a self-contained or cordoned-off gamespace).

writes, the fictive power of cyberpunk fiction largely depends on its prophetic quality, of anticipating the soon-to-emerge 'real-world' developments in digital technology:

> When the first of the cyberpunk novels, William Gibson's *Neuromancer* was published in 1984, the cyberspace it described was neither an actually existing plan, nor a zone plucked out of the thin airs of myth and fantasy. It was a virtual reality which was itself increasingly real.[4]

The cyberspace imagined by Gibson and his imitators would over the course of the '80s and '90s become increasingly realised, but would still remain incontrovertibly unreal in both its disjunction from the 'real world' and from the literary and cinematic anticipations of a virtuality which never came to fruition. *Bleeding Edge* locates itself at precisely this disjunction, at a moment not long past when the fantasy of another world behind the computer screen was still in memory, and before the monoliths of Facebook, Google, Apple, and Web 2.0 thwarted this dream for good.[5]

From this ambivalent moment in history *Bleeding Edge* summons both a sympathy for the loss of better futures and a suspicion at the dark forces which brought our present reality into being. It is here that Pynchon's cyberpunk elegy draws nearer to a cyber*gothic* style which is all too conscious of the subliminal pulsions and nightmarish

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[4] Sadie Plant, *Zeros + Ones: Digital Women + The New Technoculture* (London: Fourth Estate, 1997), 12.

[5] As Mike Featherstone and Roger Burrows write, "the term cyberpunk refers to the body of fiction built around the work of William Gibson and other writers, who have constructed visions of the future worlds of cyberspace, with all their vast range of technological developments and power struggles. It sketches out the dark side of the technological-fix visions of the future, with a wide range of post-human forms which have both theoretical and practical implications." Set during a pivotal moment in real-world cyberculture, and concerned with both the practical and theoretical implications of the transformations in technological and society at that time, *Bleeding Edge* occupies a curious place within this vision of cyberpunk: as a work of speculative fiction about a world which has already passed. The ambiguity of Pynchon's cyberpunk story is addressed in the final section of this chapter. See: Mike Featherstone and Roger Burrows, "Cultures of Technical Embodiment: An Introduction" in *Cyberspace, Cyberbodies, Cyberpunk: Cultures of Technological Embodiment*, eds. Mike Featherstone and Roger Burrows (London: SAGE, 1995), 3.

secrets which course through the cybernetic circuit and lie in wait for late-night web junkies. Fred Botting writes:

> With cyberspace comes 'cybergothic.' A dream and a nightmare, utopia and distopia [sic] all at once, the future produced in the void of the present, is both horrifying and thrilling. But it is far from Gothic, made redundant along with the notions of history, modernity, ideology and national culture in which it was bound up.[6]

In the dead stasis at the end of history, Botting argues, the deep well of time that nourishes the hauntings, ruins, and authorities of the Gothic dries up, and in its place emerge the glitched graphics, high-speed rush of intensity, and blood-spattered memory banks of the cybergothic. Taking the video game *Doom* (1993) as a key example, Botting enumerates the ways in which "its labyrinths, ghostly figures, monstrous mutants evoke primitive fears and instinctual responses" and "its violent shocks and graphic images quicken the blood and set the pulse racing" in "a fanciful, childish game of excessive expenditures in which self-possession is lost and regained."[7] But if these elements bear a passing resemblance to the fears, shocks, and excitements of Gothic fiction, this is not to say that they are reproduced as faithful copies of those now long-dead literary predecessors. Rather, Botting argues, cybergothic takes all the horrifying spectacle of the Gothic and cannibalises it as a backdrop to high-speed simulated violence. No longer truly Gothic, cybergothic offers a Gothic coat of paint for the endlessly reproducible but fundamentally depthless thrills of cyberspace.

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[6] Fred Botting, *Limits of Horror: Technology, Bodies, Gothic* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2008), 176.

[7] Botting, *Limits of Horror*, 78.

Conversely, whereas Botting considers the cybergothic a cancellation of the Gothic alongside the historical depths necessary for its form, Anya Heise-von der Lippe suggests that it is precisely this lack of depth which is capable of engendering its own Gothic anxieties. If Botting is sceptical of the Gothic-themed bloodbaths of *Doom*, and suspects that they are little more than pastiches of Gothic imagery which lack the genre's underlying thematics, Heise-von der Lippe argues that this state of free-floating spectacle is itself Gothic on a textual level. Heise-von der Lippe writes that "in a post-factual, technologically mediated world, any narrative can carry the same weight as any other, while we seem to be trapped in an endless regress of looking for an obsolete concept called 'the real thing.' Cyber-Gothic texts draw attention to this discrepancy by highlighting narrative constructions of reality, particularly those based on human-technology interactions."[8] Drawing our attention to the form of digital media itself, Heise-von der Lippe identifies the lack of depth, the loss of stable meaning, and the proliferation of identities which mark digital life as traditionally Gothic themes and as the defining elements of the emergent cybergothic genre.

Whether *Bleeding Edge* falls into a style of cybergothic pastiche or the Gothic proper remains to be seen, for as much as Pynchon's novel dives into the wired-headed ecstasies of cyberspace it also delves deeper into the pools of historical time banked up against the endless present of postmodernity. For this reason, the present chapter follows the path of descent, beginning with the strange topographies of the web—its island paradises and Gothic crypts—before journeying deeper into the occult spaces of Pynchon's cyberspace. There, the virtual otherworld of the web flips over into more familiar visions of underworlds both subterranean and infernal, where the dead continue to walk and time is stretched through eons and microseconds. In those hidden zones the

[8] Anya Heise-von der Lippe, "Techno-Terrors and the Emergence of Cyber-Gothic," in *The Gothic and Theory*, eds. Jerrold E. Hogle and Robert Miles (Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press, 2019), 184.

figure of the posthuman returns, as human life is eclipsed by the forces of machine intelligence and unconscious drive, melded together on the cybernetic circuit. Finally, having travelled down to the web's darkest chambers, this chapter returns once again to the surface to run through the Gothic, cybergothic, and posthuman Gothic possibilities of *Bleeding Edge*'s style. If, following Botting, the cybergothic is merely the digital afterlife of the Gothic, where does *Bleeding Edge* stand in this nexus, and what is at stake in Pynchon's mischievous resurrection of cyberspace fantasies in this age of technological horror?

As a mix of noir crime investigation, conspiracy thriller, and a latter-day cyberpunk homage set in the months following the dot-com crash of the early 2000s, *Bleeding Edge* brings Pynchon's longstanding concerns with technology and control into the digital age. The novel's protagonist is Maxine Tarnow, a recently divorced mother of two and fraud investigator, usually of the financial kind, who is drawn by an old friend into a whole other world of crime: cybercrime. In Pynchonian fashion, the novel quickly descends into conspiracy, as collusion among tech companies, foreign governments and shadowy agencies slowly become visible. As the plot becomes overrun with loose threads of state-sanctioned barbarism, business malpractice, and cybernetic control, the lines converge on the web as a locus for the traumas of late capitalism, and for the hopes for another digital world which precipitated and fell away at the turn of the century.

The world that Pynchon dissects is depicted variously in the language of nineties and early-noughties pop-culture and in the darker tones of cyberpunk and the Gothic. Throughout the novel, the web figures as an otherworld just outside our own, where our dreams seek refuge and our nightmares take shape. In this chapter, I argue that although Pynchon plays into the cyberpunk aesthetic, he ultimately redeploys its ambivalent terror and thrill for late capitalist economic and cultural capture to launch a critique against the world now made in its likeness. Looking back at the frenetic early years of the web,

Pynchon forces us to see them through tragic rather than utopian eyes. This journey backwards through time begins with a departure from the web that we know, through the forgotten and hidden passageways of cyberspace, down to the Gothic secret which lies at its heart.

From the Sanctuary to the Crypt

The central portal to the web in *Bleeding Edge* is the mysterious program DeepArcher. DeepArcher is a kind of graphical interface for navigating the deep web, in which various links and websites are represented by 3D models submitted by the program's users. One of its creators describes the process like so:

> The further in you go, as you get passed along one node to the next, the visuals you think you're seeing are being contributed by users all over the world. All for free. Hacker ethic. Each one doing their piece of it, then just vanishing uncredited. Adding to the veils of illusion.[9]

In addition to its role as a collaborative online space, the program doubles as a search engine for the deep web. The deep web is comprised of pages on the Internet which have not been indexed by conventional search engines—because they are protected by passwords, encryption, or are otherwise inaccessible to the web crawlers which compile the search indexes. Think online banking pages, paywalled journals, and assorted junk websites. As opposed to the surface web, which is easily accessible to anyone with an internet connection, the deep web must be accessed by way of direct links, and it is this role that DeepArcher plays by stringing together pathways through the deep web in its digital world.

[9] BE 69.

Something can also be said of Pynchon's specific choice of the deep web rather than the *dark* web, which exists as an encrypted and intentionally hidden part of the deep web. Certainly, Pynchon's depiction of the deep web evokes popular conceptions of the dark web and its networks of illegal activity, ranging from the untraceable communiqués of spies and whistleblowers to the trade in drugs, weapons, and pornography. Yet as David Haeselin has made clear, Pynchon's concerns are not with this particular "frontier underworld" but with the fate of the web as a whole, as search engines penetrate into and catalogue a web which was deep from its inception.[10] The central focus of *Bleeding Edge* is not the illicit activities and edgy mythology of the dark web, but the much more mundane (and far more easily forgotten) growth of the search engine as the primary means of access to large parts of the web. In Haeselin's words, "Pynchon's novel historicizes the evolution of the search engine" to account for the changing forms of memory and paranoia in the twenty-first century.[11] The deep web, as the vast majority of the web left un-indexed by search engines such as Google, is figured in *Bleeding Edge* as a place of forgetting, emblematic of the collective amnesia which occupies so much of Pynchon's attention. Haeselin argues:

> The reader should not be shocked, then, that Pynchon accomplishes all this while never once explicitly naming Google, thus effectively hiding the chief motivator of these changes just out of plain sight. As much as the search engine seems to promise comprehensiveness, it actually offers the ultimate shortcut. Throughout the novel Pynchon demonstrates how the Deep Web—along with everything else

[10] David Haeselin, "Welcome to the Indexed World: Thomas Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge* and the Things Search Engines Will Not Find," *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 58, no. 4 (2017): 313.

[11] Haeselin, "Welcome to the Indexed World," 313.

> that exceeds the search engine's purview—will soon be neglected altogether. Afterwards we may cease to remember that disorder ever existed at all.[12]

The refusal to mention Google by name seems an intentional choice on Pynchon's part, as the conspicuous absence of the company becomes all the more obvious as the stakes of the novel become more clearly intertwined with the interests of the search engine giant. Beginning as a tool of convenience, Pynchon suggests, the search engine grew into a force of control which funnels the attention of internet users according to the opaque whims of an algorithm. Within the anarchic space of the web depicted in *Bleeding Edge*, dark forces are gathering strength, and although left unnamed are nevertheless visible in the background of events.

But the novel is not entirely preoccupied with the dark and foreboding powers of corporate capital. There is nonetheless a certain fantasy element in Pynchon's depiction of the deep web, not only in the ways that DeepArcher calls ahead to the online worlds of today, but in the ways in which it recalls the "consensual hallucination" of William Gibson's cyberspace.[13] As in early works of cyberpunk such as *Neuromancer*, this vision of cyberspace presents a world just outside our own, composed of beautiful and sublime vectors of geometry, into which we may take flight from the darkened skies of this world. One of Pynchon's characters recounts:

> Originally the guys, you have to wonder how presciently, had it in mind to create a virtual sanctuary to escape to from the many varieties of real-world discomfort.

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[12] There are thus two loci of paranoia in the novel: the Gothic anarchy of the deep web, slowly being made "more useable and legible" through DeepArcher's interface; and the patriarchal Demiurges of Ice and his cronies, who would shape "the world into their vision of a neoliberal techno-paradise" (Haeselin, "Welcome to the Indexed World," 314). From below the swarming machines of the web, and from above the tyrannic arm of Capital.

[13] William Gibson, *Neuromancer* (London: HarperCollins, 1984), 67.

> A grand-scale motel for the afflicted, a destination reachable by virtual midnight express from anyplace with a keyboard.[14]

In this imagery of sanctuary, and its darker undertones of trauma and escape, DeepArcher functions in the novel as a synecdoche for the Internet as a whole. Pynchon presents here a branching of digital technology into the communal that never occurred, but which is fated to the same depredations and privatisations as our own Internet. As Kevin Robins has remarked on Gibson's vision of "consensual hallucination" in cyberspace: "It is a tunnel vision. It has turned a blind eye to the world we live in."[15] The dream of escape into cyberspace was compelling, but still only a dream which passed over the social and political contingencies which allowed the early cybercultures to flourish. Over the sanctuary of the Internet lies the spectre of capital, and the capture of any as yet uncommodified creation to ends more base. Pynchon writes of DeepArcher that:

> Whatever migratory visitors are still down there trusting in its inviolability will some morning all too soon be rudely surprised by the whispering descent of corporate Web crawlers itching to index and corrupt another patch of sanctuary for their own far-from-selfless ends.[16]

The logic of the novel thus descends from the cybercultural dreams of creating another world to the grim realisation that our world is not so easily evaded.[17] The nightmares of

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[14] BE 74.

[15] Kevin Robbins, "Cyberspace and the World We Live In," in *The Cybercultures Reader*, eds. David Bell and Barbara M. Kennedy (London: Routledge, 2000), 77.

[16] BE 167.

[17] Pynchon is not the first or the only one to make the connection between the abortive political utopianism of the early web and the influence of state and capital which infected it from the start. Among the histories of the early web's utopian imagination and its infiltration by business and intelligence interests, Fred Turner's account stands out for its detail. Turner writes: "As both information technologies and the network mode of production have spread across the landscape, they have been celebrated as sites of personal and collective salvation. And to that extent, they have rendered their believers vulnerable to the material forces

surveillance, cooption, and control take hold, and whatever freedom there is on the web is forced to either capitulate or to take on methods more secretive and hostile to the surface world. David Haeselin remarks that "for Pynchon, the ability to search offers access to a version of history, one not distorted by governmental power alone but by 'late [digital] capitalism' [...] Here Pynchon's fictional world fuses with ours. Information is cheap. There is already too much of it. Information is not power; the ordering of information is power. Given the unparalleled volume of data, only the mechanized indexing practices of the search engine can offer us access to this broad and dark world."[18]

In many respects, Pynchon's presentation of the web as a frontier recapitulates the spatial dynamic of *Mason & Dixon*, with unindexed digital space standing in for the unmapped geographical space of the earlier novel. As Inger Dalsgaard has argued of the two novels, "land may serve as a source of wealth (through crop production, extractive industries, sales, and rentals, say); so, too, the Internet (via service provision, hosting, and online marketing). [...] Read chronologically in terms of setting rather than writing, Pynchon's novels show how America has been carved up and subdivided since land surveyor's chains were dragged across the continent in the seventeenth century by the eponymous characters of *Mason & Dixon*."[19]

Just as *Mason & Dixon* counters the surface space of rationality with an underground space capable of evading capture, the dark world of the digital era which *Bleeding Edge* depicts is increasingly described in subterranean terms. A character

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of the historical moment in which they live." Fred Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2006), 262.

[18] Haeselin, "Welcome to the Indexed World," 322.

[19] Inger H. Dalsgaard, "Real Estate and the Internet," in *Thomas Pynchon in Context*, ed. Inger H. Dalsgaard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 162-3.

describes the process of trawling through the deep web in terms of excavation and secrecy:

> The Deep Web is supposed to be mostly obsolete sites and broken links, an endless junkyard. Like in *The Mummy* (1999), adventurers will come here someday to dig up relics of remote and exotic dynasties. "But it only looks that way," according to Eric—"behind it is a whole invisible maze of constraints, engineered in, lets you go some places, keeps you out of others. This hidden code of behavior you have to learn and obey. A dump, with structure."[20]

Here the logic of storing, hiding, and revealing that drives the deep web is twisted up with the language of horror. The web functions as a virtual archaeological dig, into which the waste of one age is cast to be excavated by the next. As Brian Stonehill anticipates in his 1994 assessment of the Pynchonian cyberspace latent in *Gravity's Rainbow*, "cyberspace is not the 'out-there' the word cyberspace would seem to suggest, but a 'down-there,' a nervous system whose links and branches flicker and spark *beneath* Earth's skin."[21] Dead links, abandoned pages, and the amassed clutter of the past are hidden in the depths, where treasures and garbage alike lie forgotten by the world above. But it also functions as a crypt, as in tales of adventure and mystery, which exerts its own power over its excavators. Complex networks of tunnels, passwords, and firewalls take the place of the puzzles, booby-traps, and curses of its more corporeal and cinematic brethren. "Sprawling beneath public cyberspace lies the labyrinthine underworld [...] Cyberspace has its own shadow, its dark-twin: the Crypt."[22] The deep web figures in the novel not as an

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[20] BE 226.

[21] Brian Stonehill, "Pynchon's Prophecies of Cyberspace," *Pynchon Notes* 34-35 (Spring-Fall 1994): 19.

[22] CCRU, *Writings, 1997-2003* (Falmouth: Urbanomic, 2017), 229.

excavation site that brings light to ages past, but as a catacomb into the darkness of which we must journey.

This journey is recalled in the name of DeepArcher, which facilitates the departure of its users into the dark world below. In the first few pages of its introduction into the novel, the program is discussed in otherworldly terms, as Maxine speculates upon the alternate self, or avatar, which functions as a representation of the self in the virtual world:

> "In the Hindu religion avatar means an incarnation. So I keep wondering—when you pass from this side of the screen over into virtual reality, is that like dying and being reincarnated, see what I'm saying?"[23]

The avatar transports us from this world, and this life, into another. To be reborn on the other side of the screen is to undergo a journey without spatial coordinates, to be in two places at once, as in an out of body experience. As Mark Fisher writes on the cyberspace of Gibson's *Neuromancer*:

> Travel in cyberspace, then, becomes less a question of floating detached from all (sensory) input than of what Deleuze-Guattari call "intensive voyage." [...] The often dizzying confusion of *Neuromancer*'s narrative arises in large part from its hypernaturalistic description of intensive voyages. Different "realities" can be accessed – intensively – while the body lies prone, in the same extensive space. The concept of intensive voyage allows us to deflect assumptions that cyberspace travel is merely a psychological illusion, a phenomenological or interior projection.[24]

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[23] BE 70.

[24] Mark Fisher, *Flatline Constructs* (New York: Exmilitary, 2018), 55-56.

Bleeding Edge continues this cyberpunk tradition of intensive voyages, but with the added awareness of the mundanity of the web as a whole. Not all parts of the internet possess the power of initiating these departures from our world. In fact, the surface web serves precisely the opposite role, of tying its denizens ever tighter to the rhythms of commerce and the paranoia of surveillance. When Maxine logs into DeepArcher she finds herself:

> slowly descending from wee-hours Manhattan into teeming darkness, leaving the surface-Net crawlers busy overhead slithering link to link, leaving behind the banners and pop-ups and user groups and self-replicating chat rooms...[25]

The deep web of the novel is not merely a result of the incompleteness of digital archiving technology, but a vision of another world which hides all that cannot be in our own. Despite the '90s aesthetic of his novel, Pynchon does not fall into the hype for a cybercultural utopia that would play home to "the imagination of a global mind, hyper-connected and infinitely powerful."[26] Instead, this other world is precisely that: Other. The descent from the New York cityscape, through the surface web, and down deeper and deeper to the sunless seas of DeepArcher is a journey of divestment, of being able to eschew the world as it is for precisely what it is not. Towards the end of the novel, after the September 11 attacks have wiped the dreams of the twentieth century away forever, the program becomes haunted by the ghosts of those departed, and a haven for the living abandoned by this reality. DeepArcher is an exercise in hauntology: as the ghosts and fragments of our world persist even as absences.

In the most telling passages of the novel, an ambiguous complex of images emerges, which tie together fantasy with capture, creation with death, and the depths with

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[25] BE 240.

[26] Franco Bifo Berardi, *After the Future*, trans. Arianna Bove, Melinda Cooper, Erik Empson, Enrico, Giuseppina Mecchia, and Tiziana Terranova (Oakland: AK Press, 2011), 17.

an invasive surface banality. Francisco Collado-Rodriguez has written that "*Bleeding Edge* is saturated with expressions that explicitly refer to the posthuman stage of present society," the conditions of which recall N. Katherine Hayles' theorisations of the posthuman as a product of the disembodiment of information.[27] In Hayles' words, the "nonmaterial space [of] cyberspace defines a regime of representation within which pattern is the essential reality, presence an optical illusion."[28] Information in *Bleeding Edge* isn't only disembodied, but is also, in Wendy Chun's terms, "undead," as the deep web takes on the form of a crypt into which deferred and cancelled futures descend, and from which long-forgotten pasts exert a dark power.[29]

Ghosts of the Web

Over the course of the novel, Maxine tumbles ever downwards through the hidden passageways of DeepArcher, into a virtual world defined in all respects by its exteriority to the world outside. The web is figured in terms that recall the subterranean world of *Mason & Dixon*, in which all that may not exist above finds its place below, in the shrinking depths of another world which obeys other laws of geometry and morality. Counter-intuitively, this alien quality of the web does not diminish but only increases in the days and weeks after the September 11 attacks, when shady coincidences force DeepArcher to go open source, and the program becomes a safe haven for countless lost souls and wayward tourists seeking escape from the grey streets of Manhattan:

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[27] Francisco Collado-Rodriguez, "Intratextuality, Trauma, and the Posthuman in Thomas Pynchon's *Bleeding Edge*," *Critique: Studies in Contemporary Fiction* 57, no. 3 (2016): 235.

[28] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 36.

[29] Wendy Hui Kyong Chun, "Crisis, Crisis, Crisis; or, The Temporality of Networks," in *The Nonhuman Turn*, ed. Richard Grusin (Minneapolis: University of Minneapolis Press, 2015),160.

> Open source has certainly brought some changes. Core is teeming these days with smartasses, yups, tourists, and twits writing code for whatever they think they want and installing it, till some other headcase finds it and deinstalls it. Maxine goes in with no clear idea of what she'll find.
>
> Onto the screen, accordingly, leaps a desert, correction, the desert. Empty as the train stations and spaceport terminals of a more innocent time were overpopulated. No middle-class amenities here, beyond arrows to let you scan around the horizon. This is survivalist country. Movements are blurless, every pixel doing its job, the radiation from above triggering colors too unsafe for hex code, a sound track of ground-level desert wind. This is what she's supposed to pick her way across, dowsing a desert which is not only a desert, for links invisible and undefined.[30]

In this desert of the virtual, Maxine finds herself drifting toward the philosophical: "Does anybody get extra lives? Does anybody even get this one? She pauses in the uneasy melismas of desert wind. Suppose it's all about losing, not finding. What has she lost?"[31] As she soon discovers, in this desert reside many lost things and people, ranging from those who have sought refuge or dropped off the map in those days of national mourning and mass psychosis, to others who although passed from the world above have not entirely made their exits from the message-boards and data-banks below.

Among the ghosts Maxine encounters the most prominent is perhaps that of Nicholas Windust, federal goon and Maxine's one-time lover, if such a word can be applied to such a man. Appearing on Maxine's screen with no announcement, "no intro," Windust—or what seems to be Windust—engages Maxine in some rudimentary

[30] BE 403.

[31] BE 403.

conversation before whisking her away on an intensive voyage across the pixelated landscape.

> Abruptly, she isn't sure who took the first step, they're back out on the desert again, moving at high speed, not exactly flying because that would mean she's asleep and dreaming, beneath a crescent moon that sheds more illumination than it should, past wind-shaped rock formations that Windust tends to dodge suddenly and violently into the cover of, pulling her somehow with him.[32]

More so than in previous depictions of DeepArcher's graphical interface, this passage delves further into the fantastical imagery of flight and dreams. What was introduced a few pages prior as the "survivalist country" and "desert" covered with "links invisible and undefined" now opens into a vista just barely reminiscent of anything possible on early-2000s hardware.[33] Logging off and returning to the scene of their last affair, Maxine stumbles upon Windust's corpse, long-since mutilated by stray dogs and rot.

> So who was she talking to, back there in the DeepArcher oasis? If Windust, judging by the smell, was already long dead by then, it gives her a couple of problematic choices—either he was speaking to her from the other side or it was an impostor and the link could have been embedded by anybody, not necessarily a well-wisher, spooks, Gabriel Ice... Some random twelve-year-old in California. Why believe any of it?[34]

And yet Maxine does appear to believe it, and Pynchon tilts the fiction in favour of this tentatively supernatural reading. Although the possibilities of a hoax, of identity theft, or of some glitch in the system remain at hand to explain away the seeming appearance of a

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[32] BE 406.

[33] BE 403.

[34] BE 411.

ghost, Pynchon doesn't allow any one explanation to sit easy or to resolve the mystery. Akin to *The Crying of Lot 49*'s refusal to give a final interpretation to its hermeneutic puzzle (as examined in Chapter One), *Bleeding Edge* also refuses to replicate the Radcliffean terror of the explained supernatural by proliferating explanations and deferring their resolution of the mystery. But whereas *The Crying of Lot 49* harnessed this deferral to the ends of a frenzied creation—to fly off in a fictive delirium—here Pynchon allows his novel to settle into a quiet agnosticism, in which the resolution or even the pursuit of the mystery matters less than its mere occurrence. Windust briefly appears to fulfil the role of Gothic patriarch taken up with such gusto by Inverarity, but is all too quickly devoured by the machinations of power to which even he is not privy. In death, as in life, his figure holds none of the gravitational pull which kept Oedipa's world centred on the mystery of Inverarity, leaving Maxine to drift on to other clues and coincidences without a that guiding thread.

When an old friend, murdered a couple of hundred pages earlier in the beginnings of Maxine's search, makes his own return in the datacombs of DeepArcher, Maxine's response is comparatively muted in contrast to Oedipa's frantic attempts to summon Inverarity back from the dead. As if in a haze, the departed simply returns, and then once again disappears to leave Maxine in wonder at the colours dancing across her screen:

> Even though its creators claim not to Do Metaphysical, that option in DeepArcher remains open, alongside more secular explanations—so when she runs unexpectedly into Lester Traipse, instead of assuming it's a Lester impersonator with an agenda, or a bot preprogrammed with dialogue for all occasions, she sees no harm in treating him as a departed soul.[35]

[35] BE 427.

In these passages, Maxine's quiet conversations with the digitised dead begin to reflect something of the melancholy dislocation which marked *Mason & Dixon*'s encounters with the departed (see Chapter Five). Like Mason, Maxine is left in an epistemological no man's land, in which she succumbs to an incapacity to decide upon the nature of her visitations, to dispel them from her imagination, or to draw them back into waking reality. But whereas Mason's visitations come from outside of time, and fold into *Mason & Dixon*'s broader logics of temporality and capture, in *Bleeding Edge* the ghosts reside in the margins of a newly-opened digital frontier. In these ghostly figures, the spirit and avatar overlap in their disembodiment, as if the loss of bodily presence on the web presaged the soul's exit from the body in death. In this fashion the Gothic logic of the haunt is folded into a wider posthuman melancholy, which speculates on the loss of materiality and embodiment in the information-systems of the web. Such a melancholy perspective is best represented in N. Katherine Hayles' writings on data and disembodiment: "Embodiment can be destroyed, but it cannot be replicated. Once the specific form constituting it is gone, no amount of massaging data will bring it back. [...] As we rush to explore the new vistas that cyberspace has made available for colonization, let us remember the fragility of a material world that cannot be replaced."[36] Pynchon, too, looks to the cyberspace as an ambiguous space which at once promises freedom from the strictures of the body while also effacing the human aspect of that embodiment.

The identity of the deep web and the underworld is further developed in the final pages of the novel, as the last secrets of Windust's past are divulged to Maxine in conversation with his first wife Xiomara. Only a girl back then, Xiomara had fallen for the young Windust while he worked in Guatemala on one imperialist mission or another of torture, extortion, and the forcible imposition of American economic interests. Imagining him back then, Maxine can see:

[36] Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman*, 49.

> A clean-looking kid, short hair, chinos and button-down shirts, only has to shave once a week, one of a globetrotting gang of young smart-asses, piling into cities and towns all over the Third World, filling ancient colonial spaces with office copiers and coffee machines, pulling all-nighters, running off neatly bound plans for the total obliteration of target countries and their replacement by free-market fantasies.[37]

But at the end of his life, another blind and broken cog in a machine which values no life higher than its profits, Windust becomes in body what he had been in mind for so long: a corpse. For Xiomara this scission of the self which Windust experienced was all too familiar, as she recounts his years in Guatemala as a kind of confrontation with death:

> "Windust began hearing Xibalba stories as soon as his unit arrived in country. At first he thought it was another case of having fun with the gringo, but after a while... I think he began to believe, more than I ever did, at least to believe in a parallel world, somewhere far beneath his feet where another Windust was doing the things he was pretending not to up here."[38]

On the surface this passage reads as a somewhat sympathetic depiction of a man at odds with himself, who must distance himself from his actions, even to the point of imagining a double performing all his misdeeds, if he is to live with his sins. We are confronted with the image of a young Windust, who *knows not what he does*, and his evil twin who knows and yet *does anyway*. This image of the evil twin has its own history in Gothic fiction, ranging from the split personality of Stevenson's *Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde* (1886) through the assorted doubles and false selves of David Lynch's *Twin Peaks* (1990) and *The Return* (2017). Perhaps more pertinent to the *cyber*gothic, however, is the unique

[37] BE 110.

[38] BE 443.

experience of becoming someone or something other than oneself online. Whether one adopts a new persona or avatar to inhabit a self different from one's own, or abandons all sense of self to become an anonymous voice in a mass of voices, the internet affords all manner of opportunities to not only escape the self one has been given but also to meet another copy of oneself face to face. In this respect more akin to the doubling of self in the cyberpunk anime *Serial Experiments Lain* (1998) or the annihilation / proliferation of self in B R Yeager's fringe horror novel *Amygdalatropolis* (2017), the unity of underworld and web in *Bleeding Edge* presents a vision of the evil twin unique to the digital era.[39]

Reflecting on Windust's preoccupation with the underworld and his weird premonition of a second Windust lurking down below, Maxine thinks to herself of her own visions of that world outside of time:

> I know of a place, [Maxine is] careful not to add, where you dowse across an empty screen, clicking on tiny invisible links, and there's something waiting out there, latent, maybe it's geometric, maybe begging like geometry to be contradicted in some equally terrible way, maybe a sacred city all in pixels waiting to be reassembled, as if disasters could be run in reverse, the towers rise

[39] If one common thread runs through these examples of doubling, and becomes all the more central in the cybergothic examples, it is that the double is as much an annihilation of self as it is a proliferation of selves. The fragmentation of self into multiple selves is most apparent in Stevenson's novella, as when Jekyll speculates on the divided composition of his own being: "I hazard the guess that man will be ultimately known for a mere polity of multifarious, incongruous and independent denizens" (*The Strange Case of Dr Jekyll and Mr Hyde*, 68). In the later works, however, the doubling of selves on the internet takes on the often bewildering anonymity of that medium as a source of horror. In *Serial Experiments Lain* the horror is not only that one may be a different person when online, but that this online persona may come to eclipse the "real-world" person altogether. Yeager's *Amygdalatropolis* takes the online persona a step further and refuses to differentiate the protagonist's anonymous messages from those of his fellow imageboard-dwellers. Whereas the horror of Stevenson's novella (and later iterations on the theme in *Twin Peaks* and elsewhere) hinges on a fear of being replaced, the cybergothic more often uses the double as a figure of abdication and dissolution than one of usurpation.

> out of black ruin, the bits and pieces and lives, no matter how finely vaporized, become whole again...[40]

Somewhere down below, whether in Xibalba or cyberspace, exists a realm in which the dead do not only walk among the living, but time itself can run against the clock and all that has been destroyed come back into being. As Michael Jarvis has suggested, later in the novel "DeepArcher will become a space where it's possible to meet and talk to the deceased—or, in typical Pynchonian equivocation, perhaps merely to their avatars—a space that exceeds the rational and allows glimpses of capitalism's unimaginable other."[41] Likewise, Tiina Käkelä has argued that "a great deal of the countercultural elements in Pynchon's work are associated with death and the dead," especially when "Pynchon uses these multitudes of the dead—or the ontologically unspecified—as representatives of not just alternative histories but alternative worldviews."[42] As discussed in the previous chapter, Pynchon's thematics of time and time-travel are bound up in conflicting images of utopia and capture, and this scene of nostalgic return on the web is no exception. As we shall see, this power of reversal is not only deployed to the ends of the miraculous return of the dead, but also for ends more base, as repetitions in time are folded into an economic order which fuels itself on the premeditation and premonition of disaster.

Premonitions on the Circuit

With all this talk of departures, depths, and descents, whatever could lie at the bottom of Pynchon's web? Although the creators of DeepArcher claim that they "don't do

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[40] BE 446.

[41] Michael Jarvis, "Pynchon's Deep Web," *Los Angeles Review of Books*, September 10, 2013, https://lareviewofbooks.org/article/pynchons-deep-web/.

[42] Tiina Käkelä, "Death and Afterlife," in *Thomas Pynchon in Context*, ed. Inger H. Dalsgaard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 267.

metaphysical," their program opens a twisted hole down to something.[43] Another character recounts:

> When the earliest Vikings started moving into the northern oceans, there's one story about finding this huge fuckin opening at the top of the world, this deep whirlpool that'd take you down and in, like a black hole, no way to escape. These days you look at the surface Web, all that yakking, all the goods for sale, the spammers and spielers and idle fingers, all in the same desperate scramble they like to call an economy. Meantime, down here, sooner or later someplace deep, there has to be a horizon between coded and codeless. An abyss.[44]

Pynchon's cybergothic novel draws us down below the surface of the web, through the rubble of recent history, catacombs of information, to a place where all the bustle and purpose of the surface fades to black. At the deepest recesses of our digital world is not a ground but a horizon, which opens out onto the vast abrupt where the coded and codeless meet.

At this threshold, the web takes on yet more occult properties, not least among them being a strange form of premonition. In what at first appears a part of Pynchon's wider metahistorical toying with historical narratives and their proximity to conspiracy theory, Maxine begins to discover hints of a foreknowledge on the part of the powerful and wealthy of the events of September 11. In the words of one yuppie whom Maxine interviews, with some suspicion as to his truthfulness, it's "as if they know already what's going to happen. This... event. They know, and they're not going to do anything about it."[45] The sense of premonition that runs through the novel has been read by Christopher

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[43] BE 70.

[44] BE 357.

[45] BE 284.

Coffman as "the intuition of environmental factors typically more difficult to perceive, [and] a strong instance of the digital fostering ecologization"—especially when "Maxine's sense of impending flood is entangled with her recognition of events that suggest unseen causal connections that tacitly affirm a network of relations between seemingly disconnected phenomena."[46] In my view this reading paints an all too rosy picture of the novel's relation to technology and its supposed capacity to foster ecological consciousness, especially given that the novel's premonitions have less to do with Maxine's heightened recognition than they have to do with the disaster than looms over the novel's events.

Between its episodes of turn-of-the-millennium silliness, *Bleeding Edge* evokes a feeling of grim expectation, and constantly calls forward to the events which are on their way, seemingly inevitably, to shatter the whimsical vision of the end of history. A page before the horror of 9/11 comes crashing into the novel's early-century daydream, Maxine's own husband and children sit around a computer screen looking over the stock exchange, and the "sudden abnormal surge of put options on United Airlines" and "American Airlines."[47] The first explanation to come up is naturally that of insider trading, with all its suggestion of an inside job—yet as events transpire this market abnormality is made far more nefarious and cryptic than any simple plot by government or business to exploit foreknowledge of a tragedy.[48]

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[46] Christopher K. Coffman, "Another Apocalypse: Digital Ecologies and Late Pynchon," in *The New Pynchon Studies*, ed. Joanna Freer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 136.

[47] BE 315.

[48] On the occult properties of digital life, Warwick University's erstwhile Cybernetic Culture Research Unit writes: "Think of Cyberspace as a black-mirror. It is where time flips over: collide with it and you travel backwards. As telecommerce accelerates us into the net, it seems that things of ever deeper antiquity awaken, and begin their return [...] Cybergothic exists as a web of sinister rumour, haunting a subterranean soft-labyrinth which it calls the 'Crypt.'" CCRU, *Writings*, 223.

Reflecting on his own miraculous survival of the event, Maxine's husband Horst reveals his powers of market prediction, and the intertwining of market shocks with real disaster:

> "The times we shorted Amazon, got out of Lucent when it went to $70 a share, remember? It wasn't me that ever 'knew' anything. But something did. Sudden couple extra lines of brain code, who knows. I just followed along."
>
> "But then... if it was that same weird talent that kept you safe..."
>
> "How could it be? How could predicting market behavior be the same as predicting a terrible disaster?"
>
> "If the two were different forms of the same thing."
>
> "Way too anticapitalist for me, babe."[49]

What Horst taps into here, even while shrugging off the "anticapitalist" suggestion of a link between market patterns and historical catastrophes, is what David McNally calls the "occult economy of late capitalism."[50] The word "occult" is used here not only for its Gothic overtones, but also to describe the manner in which neoliberal economics is hinged upon on the hyper-fetishisation of speculative markets to further obscure the

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[49] BE 320. As Sascha Pöhlmann argues, in having his characters discuss strange stock market behaviour and potential insider trading prior to the September 11 attacks, Pynchon "reframes the terrorist attacks so that it is no longer understood as an act of politically motivated violence but rather as an economic event from which certain people have made a profit. The question of who was responsible for the attacks can thus be paraphrased in the words of Maxine: 'Who was doing all this trading?' (BE 324). The detective work necessary to answer that question is neither historical nor political in *Bleeding Edge*, but it is mostly financial, as this is the most decisive factor that allows for insight into history and politics." Sascha Pöhlmann "'I Just Look at Books:' Reading the Monetary Metareality of *Bleeding Edge*," *Orbit: A Journal of American Literature* 4, no. 1 (2016): 26.

[50] David McNally, *Monsters of the Market: Zombies, Vampires and Global Capitalism*. (Chicago: Haymarket Books, 2011), 163.

material conditions of its growth—and to create an image of growth in a purely magical fashion, by reading the steady uptick of computerised trading as an increase in real wealth.

As Laura Lotti suggests, it is specifically the digital nature of twenty-first century markets which occults their workings: "As markets become increasingly evanescent—due to the flickering materiality of layers and layers of code blindly interacting with each other—it has become more difficult, if not impossible, to formulate an intelligible image of the financial ecosystem."[51] Having effectively evaded all post-GFC attempts to critique or even curb its growth, algorithmic trading and "the neoliberal virtual machine" have made "a powerful apparatus of capture" which not only eludes perception of its full operations, but subjugates human needs to an increasingly automated system of mass gambling on futures which may never arrive.[52] As Franco Berardi puts it with typical panache: "Speculation is the subjugation of the future to its financial mirror, the substitution of present life with future money that will never come, because death will come before."[53]

Further still, the possibility of a genuine premonition of events on the cybernetic circuit is hinted at, as not only do Pynchon's corporate villains and market algorithms seek to profit from the coming event, but the web itself seems to shudder with anticipation of the shock. Speaking to the coders of DeepArcher, Maxine learns how they encrypt their software by using random numbers provided by a Californian organisation known as "the Global Consciousness Project." As the programmer explains:

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[51] Laura Lotti, "Enter the Black Box: Aesthetic Speculations in the General Economy of Being," in *Aesthetics After Finitude*, eds. Baylee Brits, Prudence Gibson, and Amy Ireland (Melbourne: re.press, 2016), 139.

[52] Lotti, "Enter the Black Box," 146.

[53] Berardi, *After the Future*, 146.

> "These folks maintain a network of thirty to forty random-event generators all around the world, whose outputs all flow into the Princeton site 24/7 and get mixed together to produce this random-number string. First-rate source, exceptional purity. On the theory that if our minds really are all linked together somehow, any major global event, disaster, whatever, will show up in the numbers. [...] All goes well till the night of September 10th, when suddenly these numbers coming out of Princeton began to depart from randomness, I mean really abruptly, drastically, no explanation. You can look it up, the graphs are posted on their Web site for anybody to see, it's... I'd say scary if I knew what any of it meant. It kept on that way through the 11th and a few days after. Then just as mysteriously everything went back to near-perfect random again."[54]

From out of nowhere—or out of a noosphere—random numbers begin to coincide, and the patterns of an event start to pour forth from the stream of digits. Once again conspiracy and premonition become indistinguishable, as the possibility of intentional sabotage is ever-present, and DeepArcher's infiltration by forces of capital and state becomes more apparent, while the bizarre theories of Global Consciousness seem confirmed. Beyond the fictive content of this mystery, and the equivocations between coincidence, conspiracy, and something altogether more occult, Pynchon's novel readily dramatises a newly emerging perception of selfhood and agency on the web. For all the speculative airiness of these passages, and their refusal to give any one sensible explanation for the events they describe, these ambiguities ultimately come down to earth in the character dramas of the novel. As we shall see, just as Oedipa serves as an anchoring-point for all the shifting posthuman elements of *The Crying of Lot 49*, the interminable mysteries of *Bleeding Edge* are all made legible in their orbit around Maxine and her attempts to make sense of her increasingly digital world.

[54] BE 341-2.

Networks of Drive and Tangles of Wires

Whether there is or isn't a shadowy agency behind this sudden suspension of randomness, Pynchon's novel effectively collapses human agency into a wider machinic structure—which whether it is driven by ordered numeracy or a chaotic randomness is nonetheless made to precede human action on all fronts. The digital networks of the novel do not simply reflect or measure non-digital events, but themselves take on a determining role in these events. In this confusion of cause and effect, and the refusal to put them back in order with some overarching narrative, Pynchon's novel is symptomatic of what Jodi Dean has described as the "new essentialism" of digital ideology, for which "network logics are dictates of nature, a new form of natural law that immanently and necessarily yields the unity and convergence of all things to the extent that they are allowed to flow freely."[55] Akin to Dean's own critical analysis of web culture, *Bleeding Edge* also offers a glimpse beneath the networked surface of the web to the "horizon between coded and codeless" where human will and machinic organisation overlap in a generalised unconscious drive.[56]

The human is not merely caught in a trap of media spectacle, but is amalgamated at the level of desire into a machinery that depends upon this capture of drive. As in Deleuze's terms, the individual is made a *dividual*, or one who is not a whole and self-sufficient subject but a subject perpetually divided by tasks, distractions, and desires

[55] Jodi Dean, *Blog Theory: Feedback and Capture in the Circuits of Drive* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2010), 31.

[56] BE 356. Further, Dean suggests that "the notion of drive [highlights] the inhuman at the heart of the human, the cut or break with the flow of life, the peculiar and uncanny human propensity to become stuck on minor activities and minimal differences. Conceived in terms of drive, networked communications circulate less as potentials for freedom than as the affective intensities produced through and amplifying our capture." Dean, *Blog Theory*, 31.

which are not its own.[57] What appears on the surface to be the human subject of yesteryear is now a holographic projection or epiphenomenon of this mass, collective, and machinic movement of drive. "Understanding this circulation via drive enables us to grasp how we are captured in its loop, how the loop ensnares."[58] Recapitulating the terms of the posthuman Gothic, this account of drive mangles any sense of autonomous humanity, and folds the interior of the subject back into the exterior forces of control.

Yet, a deeper horror lies at the heart of Pynchon's cyberspace. The departure from ourselves into the bodiless, lifeless catacombs of the web leads only deeper into a yawning void. And at the bottom of it, in the darkness, thinking we have escaped the material world far above, we find our hands running across wires, cables, drowning in coolant—all the material infrastructure which keeps the hallucination running. In the final pages of the novel, a technician voices his scepticism toward the Silicon Valley dreams of posthuman escape from the world. "Fiber's real," he declares, although we could imagine him rephrasing his statement as "Fibre is *the Real*:"

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[57] Deleuze sees the transition from the individual to the "dividual" as part of a broader shift from the disciplinary societies identified by Foucault toward an emergent society of control. Whereas disciplinary societies compose individual subjects who internalise and are interpellated by disciplinary state structures, control societies work by cybernetic means to modulate behaviour without necessarily drawing a distinction between the inner life of the subject and the exterior forces of subjectification. In a sense, Pynchon's own work (at least from *Gravity's Rainbow* onwards) offers its own genealogy of control that is not so far off from Deleuze's account: "The digital language of control is made up of codes indicating whether access to some information should be allowed or denied. We're no longer dealing with a duality of mass and individual. Individuals become '*dividuals*,' and masses become samples, data, markets, or '*banks*.' [...] Recent disciplinary societies were equipped with thermodynamic machines presenting the passive danger of entropy and the active danger of sabotage; control societies function with a third generation of machines, with information technology and computers, where the passive danger is noise and the active, piracy and virtual contamination." Gilles Deleuze, *Negotiations, 1972-1990*, trans. Martin Joughin (New York: Columbia University Press, 1995), 180.

[58] Dean, *Blog Theory*, 121.

> "you pull it through conduit, you hang it, you bury it and splice it. It weighs somethin. [All] you people, livin in this dream, up in the clouds, floatin in the bubble, think 'at's real, think again. It's only gonna be there long as the power's on. What happens when the grid goes dark? Generator fuel runs out and they shoot down the satellites, bomb the operation centers, and you're all back down on planet Earth again. All that jabberin about nothin, all 'at shit music, all 'em links, down, down and gone."[59]

Bleeding Edge's depiction of cyberspace is pulled in three successive but mutually exclusive directions: outward to a posthuman utopia, downward to the crypts, and deep below to the infrastructure which maintains it all. The first of these evokes the utopian dreams of cyberculture as sanctuary from the culture at large. This is the cyberspace of what Fred Turner calls digital utopianism, best exemplified by *Wired* magazine's dreams of "a global, harmonious community of mind."[60] There are throughout Pynchon's writings, as Inger Dalsgaard has suggested, hints of "the optimistic, collectivist thinking of those like Brand, Buckminster Fuller, Lewis Mumford, and Marshall McLuhan who suggested (in very different ways) how technology paired with information-sharing could potentially liberate or return power into the hands of the community and facilitate a necessary, environmentally sensitive social movement."[61] But even as cyber-utopianism is toyed with, in *Bleeding Edge* Pynchon ultimately refuses this vision as mere fantasy, and as pretext for a greater capture by the forces of neoliberal capital. "What initially appears as the most separate and complete realm for living fantasies quickly opens up into the actualities of financial markets, wage labor, and exploitation."[62] As Jason Siegel has

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[59] BE 465.

[60] Turner, *From Counterculture to Cyberculture*, 262.

[61] Dalsgaard, "Real Estate and the Internet," 167-8.

[62] Dean, *Blog Theory*, 120.

argued, "in *Bleeding Edge*, Pynchon indirectly critiques this utopian movement in posthuman theory by acknowledging the material conditions under which the technologies that challenge the humanist conception of the human arose. [Pynchon] argues that because such technologies—specifically Internet technologies—are controlled by a coalition of government, law enforcement, and big capital, the advent of posthumanism has become another in a long line of opportunities for freedom that was co-opted by the powers that be and transformed into an instrument of oppression."[63] What appears at first as a utopic ascent into a posthuman dreamworld is soon uncovered as another means of capture by forces more inhuman than either human or posthuman.[64]

The second cyberspace of the novel evades this Elysian mirage in favour of a Stygian descent, ever deeper beneath the surface web, where time is contracted in the undeath of the haunt and space is travelled by intensive journeys of impersonal hallucination. This second vision seeks a cyberspace unassimilable to the markets and state-interests of the surface web, but in doing so surrenders itself to an arcane and inhuman logic. No longer a playground for its users, the web becomes a labyrinth where all paths lead inexorably downward, away from the light and the living, to where all human interlopers become subject to the circuitry itself. A machinic unconscious.

Here, at the base terminus of cyberspace, a third image emerges. By the novel's end, any possibility of digital escape has been undone, coopted, or cut off. The otherworlds of cyberspace, whether higher or lower than our own world, all collapse into the base material Chaosmos of our own world. As Jodi Dean writes, "the now old cyberpunk fiction of a cyberspace, techno-utopian fantasy of an information frontier, and

[63] Jason Siegel, "Meatspace is Cyberspace: The Pynchonian Posthuman in *Bleeding Edge*," *Orbit: A Journal of American Literature* 4, no. 2 (2016): 3.

[64] This rejection of digital utopianism stands in direct contrast to the tentative hopes of Pynchon's "Luddite" essay, which ends with the suggestion that the power of miracles now lies in "the computer's ability to get the right data to those whom the data will do the most good" (OK).

still lingering supposition of 'the Internet' as a domain separate from 'real life' continue to dwindle as imaginaries of an outside."[65] Despite his ready deployment of cyberpunk imagery and themes, Pynchon abandons as pure fiction their thirst for an outside of the mundane despair of late capitalism. The fantasy of cyberspace as another world, whether of a utopian or esoteric variety, dissolves into the singularity our own.

But this is not to say that *Bleeding Edge* ends with a grand awakening from the collective hallucination of cyberspace, or at that this digital mirage at last disappears into the bare reality of the earth. If anything, quite the opposite occurs, as the non-digital world is irreparably changed by the contact of its denizens with this other world, and everything finds itself drawn toward that void at the heart of the web. In an act of revenge against Gabriel Ice and his corporate machinations, two Russian hackers bring Maxine in on their plot to disrupt one of his server farms up in the "Adirondack Mountains" near the long-haunted "Lake Heatsink."[66] Having divulged their plans to set off an electro-magnetic pulse near the lake, with the intent of wiping the data stored nearby, the two hackers do not so much annihilate their digitally-incorporated opponent as much as they wipe themselves from the novel itself. The damage done is only enough to necessitate the switching from the upstate server to one all the way across the globe in Lapland. In contrast, the Russians disappear entirely, and their act slowly fades into background noise.

> The Lester Traipse Memorial Pulse, as Maxine will come to think of it, barely gets onto the local news upstate, forget Canadian coverage or the national wire, before being dropped into media oblivion. No tapes will survive, no logs. Misha and Grisha are likewise edited from the record of current events. Igor tosses hints that

[65] Dean, *Blog Theory*, 119.

[66] BE 456.

> they might've been reassigned back home, even once again inside the zona, some numbered facility out in the Far East. Like UFO sightings, the night's events enter the realm of faith. Hill-country tavern regulars will testify that out to some unknown radius into the Adirondacks that night, all television screens went apocalyptically dark—third-act movie crises, semifamous girls in tiny outfits and spike heels schlepping somebody's latest showbiz project, sports highlights, infomercials for miracle appliances and herbal restorers of youth, sitcom reruns from more hopeful days, all forms of reality in which the basic unit is the pixel, all of it gone down without a sigh into the frozen midwatch hour. Maybe it was only the failure of one repeater up on a ridgeline, but it might as well have been the world that got reset, for that brief cycle, to the slow drumbeat of Iroquois prehistory.[67]

Despite the best efforts of many latter-day Luddites, the digital world is increasingly permanent, and the collapse of the boundary between the coded and codeless more often privileges the new norms of the former over those of the latter. That brief blackout in the hills around Lake Heatsink slowly transitions into memory and myth, while "all [the] forms of reality in which the basic unit is the pixel" return ever-brighter with the dawn, and continue to absorb what remains of this world into another.

Maxine as Gothic Heroine

In its final pages, *Bleeding Edge* puts ever-more pressure on its cyberpunk aesthetics as a latent Luddite sensibility and concern comes increasingly to the fore. As Francisco Collado-Rodriguez has remarked, "*Bleeding Edge* is saturated with expressions that explicitly refer to the posthuman stage of present society. [...] If at the beginning of the

[67] BE 468.

twenty-first century social energy manifests as information, who may control cyberspace poses an eventual threat for freedom."[68] As much as Pynchon leans into the language of pixel-universes and neon-buzz to suggest an earnestly utopian vision of a digital world apart from the grime and corruption of our own, he inevitably turns back from this ideal and resituates both worlds within a higher order of production, technology, and finance which every day threatens to capture whatever utopian possibilities lie outside.

But it is also in this undercutting of its cyber-utopian dreams that *Bleeding Edge* is most recognisable as a cyber*gothic* text, as it not only deploys the styles of horror and terror to describe its subject matter, but allows its protagonist to fulfil the role of a Gothic heroine, ready to navigate this darkened world. In this respect, the novel returns to a Gothic mode familiar from *The Crying of Lot 49*, with Maxine taking on the task of deciphering the clues of dream and dread which surround her. Collado-Rodriguez, for example, argues that "Pynchon provides readers of *Bleeding Edge* with abundant clues to support the parallelisms existing between the two female protagonists who are questing to find out the conditions of social energy at their respective times."[69] The mysteries of DeepArcher here become analogous to the network of WASTE, in that both function as the nexus of wider social conflicts and anxieties about the place of humanity in an information society, while also standing in for a potential escape from that conflict into an exterior realm of freedom.[70] Both networks also function as red herrings for the heroines and readers of the novels alike, by distracting from the heroine's inner journey and placing all her hopes in an ultimately futile community of isolates. As Kostas Kaltsas

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[68] Collado-Rodriguez, "Intratextuality, Trauma, and the Posthuman," 235.

[69] Collado-Rodriguez, "Intratextuality, Trauma, and the Posthuman," 231.

[70] Whereas WASTE posits a virtual realm of freedom opposed to the bare actuality of our own world—which speaks to Oedipa through the mute cacophony of the telephone wires—DeepArcher mixes the meaning of the virtual in both its quasi-existence as a non-actual dreamscape and as a virtual (digital) world.

remarks, "DeepArcher is doomed from the start. The true anonymity necessary for resistance in Pynchon's works eventually proves impossible to maintain on the web, and the kind of anonymity offered in the compromised DeepArcher only increases the chances that anyone a user interacts with may be one of Them, not even alive, not even human, leading to isolation and negating any chance for *organized* resistance."[71] In the end, it is not the network but the heroine who must take on this task of organising herself against the forces which so easily coopt the utopian spaces on their margins.

In taking on her investigation into the hidden mechanisms of capture and escape, Maxine continues in Oedipa's footsteps as a Gothic heroine who uncovers the fell workings of her world. "Echoing Oedipa's mission, the protagonist [Maxine] becomes involved in a quest to unveil 'deep, sinister' patterns that takes her out of her normal field of investigation, which concerns mostly sound, real estate."[72] If Maxine's search differs from Oedipa's, beyond the varying competencies and commitments of the two characters, it is in the advancement of the process which Oedipa saw emerging and which Maxine now sees in a state of near complete dominion over the earth. If Oedipa is able to encounter networks of the deprived and forgotten on the streets of America, chattering through the wires of the nation, for Maxine these preterites have sunk even further from sight. They no longer live on the wire of WASTE or escape into the subjunctive and subterranean world of *Mason & Dixon*, but are forced from this world entirely and strung out on intensive journeys across the new frontiers of the web.

Much of Maxine's success in navigating this new, digital world may be attributed to her performance of the role of heroine, and how her performance differs from that of

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[71] Kostas Kaltsas, "Of 'Maidens' and Towers: Oedipa Maas, Maxine Tarnow, and the Possibility of Resistance," in *Thomas Pynchon, Sex, and Gender*, eds. Ali Chetwynd , Joanna Freer, and Georgios Maragos (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2018), 42.

[72] Collado-Rodriguez, "Intratextuality, Trauma, and the Posthuman," 235.

Oedipa. As Kaltsas writes, "even if the realities of *Bleeding Edge* arguably end up being inescapable in a way that the radical uncertainties of *The Crying of Lot 49* are not, Maxine and *Bleeding Edge* do not quite succumb to the politics of despair that haunt the ending of the earlier novel, and this refusal to succumb is intimately related to the way Maxine perceives her roles."[73] In fact, it appears that the main difference that distinguishes Maxine from Oedipa is her role as a mother (setting aside Oedipa's brief performance of the role of Holy Mother[74]), which both keeps her tied to the world as it is and to a position of responsibility for the care of her children. As Inger Dalsgaard critically remarks, "in keeping with maternalist care feminism, Maxine's moral strength and ability to heal people around her comes from that female 'weakness.'"[75] This emphasis upon Maxine's maternal qualities may pose a problem for sympathetic feminist readings of Pynchon's work, but in the context of the Gothic is not entirely unexpected. The focus upon the transformative potential of motherhood keeps well within the conventions of the feminine Gothic plot, in which the heroine's growing capacity for empathy and understanding—in a word, the her ongoing "*process* of becoming a mother"—define the scope of her freedom.[76]

In a manner that self-consciously reinstates feminine gender roles, while simultaneously complicating the character's relation to those roles, Pynchon casts Maxine as a heroine who succeeds as a mother in spite of her misgivings about her maternal role. As Kaltsas writes, it is Maxine's ambivalent relation to motherhood which sets her apart from Oedipa, "because it is precisely the acceptance of these responsibilities—of

[73] Kaltsas, "Of 'Maidens' and Towers," 43.

[74] TCL 87. See also my discussion of this passage in Chapter Two.

[75] Inger H. Dalsgaard, "Choice or Life?: Deliberations on Motherhood in Late-Period Pynchon," in *Thomas Pynchon, Sex, and Gender*, eds. Ali Chetwynd, Joanna Freer, and Georgios Maragos (Athens: University of Georgia Press, 2018), 232.

[76] Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 158.

motherhood *and* 'motherhood'—that saves Maxine from despair at the end of *Bleeding Edge*. A rejection of gendered roles, as Maxine understands but Oedipa seems to fail to, need not lead to the refusal to play *any* role that would resemble them or a refusal to be motivated by the attributes these roles have been built around."[77] Whereas Oedipa performs the role of Gothic heroine as a terrified damsel, at odds with a monstrous world and always struggling to stay one step ahead of the social forces which keep her imprisoned, Maxine takes on the role of Gothic heroine as "conscientious mother" who doesn't so much project a world as attempt to mend this one.[78] This difference goes some way toward explaining the different ends at which the two characters arrive, but also unites them in their roles as Gothic heroines who, by the different means at their disposal, both search out a hidden order within their world.

Similarly to Oedipa, Maxine's search quickly loses any particular object for discovery and spirals off on its own logic, with Maxine "after a while interested not so much in where she might get to than the texture of the search itself."[79] Whereas Oedipa's search is couched in Gothic imagery of "captive maidens" and inescapable towers, Maxine's is adapted to the emerging technologies of the internet search engine. The introduction of the search engine to the Gothic heroine's search for understanding further complicates the dynamics of that search, by yoking it not only to the tumultuous sensibility of the heroine but also to the digital infrastructure that guides her hand as she

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[77] Kaltsas, "Of 'Maidens' and Towers," 48.

[78] Dalsgaard offers a useful summary of Maxine's motherly acts, which at once confirms the character as a primarily maternal figure and makes clear the stakes of motherhood in Pynchon's fiction: "Pynchon's conscientious mother, Maxine, recovers the lost boy capable of good deeds in Windust to the point of resurrecting his one family connection, Xiomara, the wife who had tried to save him earlier. The most maternal of Pynchon's female detectives also gets the closest to closure and fixes the most families; she reestablishes Windust's family, she patches up relations with both her ex- husband and sister, and she brings March Kelleher, Tallis, and Kennedy Ice back together." Dalsgaard, "Choice or Life?" 237.

[79] BE 75.

searches pixel by pixel for some shred of sense. In one sense, Maxine herself becomes a search engine capable of trawling through the minutiae of early-century life to uncover information otherwise hidden from prying eyes. But in another sense, her search is also positioned against the emerging unfreedom of the indexed web. As Luc Herman argues, the internet is the "ultimate distractor in Pynchon's fiction," which "creates a form of hyper attention that masquerades as freedom but really reinforces the status quo. If Maxine's attention helps her to translate her intuitions into connections that may well be meaningful to solve her cases, all in all it can only appear as a remnant of the deep attention the internet is now about to destroy forever."[80] Similarly, David Haeselin suggests that Pynchon's novel troubles "the relationship between surface and depth" by examining the ways in which the search engine became a naturalised part of the internet infrastructure.[81] Beyond the typical Gothic valences of surface and depths—and the confusion thereof—the obvious parallel in Pynchon's fiction is *Mason & Dixon*'s endlessly subtracted subjunctive space, which exists as the vast unmapped sublimity of the earth that is nonetheless enclosed by the network of lines drawn across it.[82] The search engine in *Bleeding Edge* then takes on the function of Mason's vast, continental machine, which not only works to map out the contours of space, but also to direct the movements of the protagonist in ways of which they may not even be conscious.

Focusing upon this "hidden code of behaviour," Haeselin suggests that Pynchon now "signals a systemic shift in the way citizens, fraud investigators, scholars, and

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[80] Luc Herman, "Reading Pynchon In and On the Digital Age," in *The New Pynchon Studies*, ed. Joanna Freer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 205.

[81] Haeselin, "Welcome to the Indexed World," 315.

[82] Yet there are two differences: this co-option takes space not in any real space, geographic or fantastic, but in a wholly abstract and artificial space; and this process of capture is thus doubly abstract, charting an intensive, shifting space to make it intelligible and navigable. The project of hashslingrz and their acquisition of DeepArcher is not a landgrab in this sense, but an actualisation and extraction of virtual forces: the dreamscape of the web is being brought into our world one search at a time.

everyone else gather and assess information. The search engine habituates its users to obey by encouraging them to overlook the processes that deliver its results."[83] The novel charts a contradiction of so-called information society, in which information is made all the more accessible while its processes of production are all the more obfuscated. Following Haeselin's criticism of those critics who identified *Bleeding Edge* as an "Internet novel" instead of "a novel of the search" alongside so much of his other fiction, we may add that the logic of the search is motivated by primarily Gothic themes of terror, descent, and the irrational heart of rationality itself.[84] The conspiracies that populate Oedipa and Maxine's wildest fears are total and absolute—emerging from a supra-human network of forces which, although perhaps created by people, now supersede any presumed human authority.

Whence Cybergothic?

If Oedipa readily performs the hysteria and turmoil of the Gothic heroine, Maxine's reactions are far more restrained, and for all the commonalities between the novels *Bleeding Edge* ultimately betrays an ambivalence toward the Gothic genre's tendencies towards emotional overload and psychological collapse. Amid the cybergothic horrors of minds severed from their bodies and souls caught in artificial worlds, Pynchon inserts reminders of a more fantastical mode, which imagines life as it could be truly beyond the reach of the powers of capture and control.[85] One last vision of a world which could be

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[83] Haeselin, "Welcome to the Indexed World," 318. The phrase "hidden code of behaviour" is cited from BE 226.

[84] Haeselin, "Welcome to the Indexed World," 319.

[85] As in *Mason & Dixon*, even if the world lies on the precipice of subsumption into a total machine, some utopia still remains over—or under—the horizon, where it will be driven off ever-further or encased ever-deeper while never quite shrinking from sight.

free emerges in the chapters following the September 11 attacks, when ghosts and refugees crowd into the subterranean spaces of DeepArcher to seek solace from the world above. There, Maxine finds not only the sullen and mournful melancholics who would detach themselves from the world entirely, but acts of desperate, innocent re-attachment to the memories of a world now passed:

> Might as well be homecoming weekend down here. Next thing she knows, here's who but her very own Ziggy and Otis. With a whole expanding universe to choose from, among the global torrents somehow the boys have located graphics files for a version of NYC as it was before 11 September 2001, before Ms. Cheung's bleak announcement about real and make-believe, reformatted now as the personal city of Zigotisopolis, rendered in a benevolently lighted palette taken from old-school color processes like the ones you find on picture postcards of another day. Somebody somewhere in the world, enjoying that mysterious exemption from time which produces most Internet content, has been patiently coding together these vehicles and streets, this city that can never be.[86]

In this passage, the typical contortions of Gothic narrative are pushed aside, and a gentle sentimentality takes hold. Like *Mason & Dixon* before it, the ending of *Bleeding Edge* toys with the possibility of a comic arc, in which, by a miracle, a utopian space is opened for the sons of Mason and Maxine alike. But this comic mode remains overshadowed by a tragic knowledge on the part of these parents, who are all too aware of the forces which lie in wait to turn the innocent yearning for escape against itself. In the last resort, the novel equivocates between a properly Gothic mode of horror and a fantastic vision of paradise regained. In this manner, Pynchon refuses to err either on the side of the Gothic horrors of the crypt which he relays in cyberpunk dressing, or to fully embrace the

[86] BE 428.

fantasies of an impossibly free world re-created on the web. In this respect, the Gothic and cyberpunk elements of the novel come off as something of a morbid gag, or as an exercise in historical storytelling which resurrects the now stale imagery of zombies and hackers alike. The techno-utopian component fares no better, having been dredged up from an era long since passed to speak of digitised salvation to an audience all too benumbed to such topics by the lived anti-utopias of Facebook, Google, Apple, and their government benefactors.

If anything is to be made of either the Gothic or idyllic elements of *Bleeding Edge*, it must be by returning to the novel's heroine and following her slow revelation of the workings of her world. Just as the aporic ending of *The Crying of Lot 49* belies Oedipa's discovery of a method of interrogating the world, which although it refuses to provide a final transcendent answer is nonetheless capable of confronting the inhumanity which surrounds her, so too does Maxine receive a genuine education about her world even as her story ends in uncertainty. What Maxine is made certain of is the treachery of her world, and the fragile balance in which hang the lofty ideals of truth, humanity, and life. As her friend Heidi remarks in the aftermath of the September 11 attacks: "No matter how the official narrative of this turns out, [...] these are the places we should be looking, not in newspapers or television but at the margins, graffiti, uncontrolled utterances, bad dreamers who sleep in public and scream in their sleep."[87] Like Oedipa tuning into the

[87] BE 322. Passages such as these go some way to explaining Pynchon's stakes in writing *Bleeding Edge*, and his extraordinary success in writing a so-called '9/11 novel' which is able to conceive of the event as a tragedy without losing sight of the history which preceded it. The subtlety of *Bleeding Edge*'s approach was largely missed by critics on its release, whose reflex-response is typified by Andrew Leonard's handwringing suggestion that Pynchon "verg[es] perilously close to truther territory," or Jonathan Lethem's accusation that the author "unnervingly plays footsie with 9/11 trutherism." In contrast to the blinkered reactions of these critics, we might return to the days after the event—which the novel handles with much sympathy and caution—and to Fredric Jameson's remarks in October 2001 on the seeds of history which lay dormant in the present. "Historical events," Jameson notes, "are not punctual, but extend in a before and after of time which only gradually reveal themselves. It has, to be sure, been pointed out that the Americans

monstrous roar of the telephone wires, Maxine also learns to listen for the voices that scream in the night, the lives lived beneath trampling feet, and learns to seize the small fragments of redemption before they disappear altogether.

If the conclusion to *Bleeding Edge* seems rather un-Gothic and altogether sentimental, one final remark might be made on the fate of Pynchon's latter day Gothicism. Although the newfound sincerity and sentimentality of Pynchon's late novels appears to undercut the force of horror and terror that was so potent in his earlier fiction, it is itself undermined by his refusal to wholly endorse that new perspective. By leaving everything in a precarious balance between a whole novel of horrors and confusion on the one hand, and an ending which gestures toward some faint salvation on the other, Pynchon allows his novel to fall into an ever-greater pessimism. Writing of the final scene of *Bleeding Edge*, and the seemingly inevitable march of the spiders and bots in their indexing of the web, David Haeslin suggests that what some critics have seen as "a touching, if not sentimental, realization of motherly duty, perhaps documenting a newfound paternalism and sincerity in Pynchon's work" is nonetheless bound up in "the

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created bin Laden during the Cold War (and in particular during the Soviet war in Afghanistan), and that this is therefore a textbook example of dialectical reversal. But the seeds of the event are buried deeper than that." When Pynchon's characters speculate on the fortuitous motions of the stock market (BE 284; 320), make idle mention of the Bush-Saudi connection (BE 53), or discuss the "terrible inertia" of the Cold War (BE 101), rather than dismiss these narrative elements as 'conspiracy theory,' we might better identify them as the historical seeds of events only now coming to fruition. What some commentators have mistaken for a foolish flirtation with conspiracy theory on Pynchon's part, is, on closer inspection, a clear-headed attempt to unearth some of these seeds and to acknowledge the blood-red rot in which they grow. The comments by Leonard, Lethem, and Jameson may be found at: Andrew Leonard, "*Bleeding Edge*: Thomas Pynchon Goes Truther," *Salon*, September 11, 2013, https://www.salon.com/2013/09/11/bleeding_edge_thomas_pynchon_goes_truther/; Jonathan Lethem, "Pynchonopolis," *The New York Times*, September 12, 2013, https://www.nytimes.com/2013/09/15/books/review/bleeding-edge-by-thomas-pynchon.html; and Fredric Jameson, "11 September," *London Review of Books*, October 4, 2001, https://www.lrb.co.uk/the-paper/v23/n19/nine-eleven-writers/11-september.

language of search engine protocols. [...] We see here how the Internet offers no real freedom or refuge, only a new mechanism for order and control."[88]

On the final page of *Bleeding Edge*, Maxine sees off her sons on their walk to school, and looking out the door begins to imagine the dark combat waged for possession of their cyber-metropolis:

> The boys have been waiting for her, and of course that's when she flashes back to not so long ago down in DeepArcher, down in their virtual hometown of Zigotisopolis, both of them standing just like this, folded in just this precarious light, ready to step out into their peaceable city, still safe from the spiders and bots that one day too soon will be coming for it, to claim-jump it in the name of the indexed world.[89]

A mixed sentimentality for Maxine gives way to an avowed gloom for the reader, who cannot but see the coming catastrophe for all those who would seek refuge in a cybernetic dream. Haeselin observes that "the indexed world looming at the end of the novel and, presumably, the lived reality of the contemporary reader, represents more than just a failed promise: it augurs a new pervasive conspiracy of thin answers to thick problems, the sublimation of the deep by the immediate."[90] A positive reading of this sentimental moment can only be made by missing the weight of history that hangs over the novel—as illustrated by the commentary of Collado-Rodriguez: "Even if she is late to take her children to school, as she did at the beginning of the story, Maxine still cares. Her children, exposed to physical entropic change, are now older, but, disengaged from addictive posthuman virtuality and able to stand the face of evil, the protagonist has

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[88] Haeselin, "Welcome to the Indexed World," 321.

[89] BE 476.

[90] Haeselin, "Welcome to the Indexed World," 321.

regained her old capacity to feel. Dismissing posthuman commodified trauma, human energy is again unbound."[91] Could it ever be so simple? To disconnect and step outside? Such a reading only elides the darker subtext of the final pages, in which the spiders and the bots lurk just out of view, the web still gapes like a Gothic catacomb beneath the text, and the knowledge that has been found in those depths remains unable to be forgotten. As in *Mason & Dixon*, the novel ends with a grim hope for the future: but a hope carried by children who aren't free from the mistakes of their parents, and who, unlike their parents, have not yet come to learn the words with which they might know their unfreedom.

[91] Collado-Rodriguez, "Intratextuality, Trauma, and the Posthuman," 240. Similar sentiments are expressed by Mark Rohland, who suggests that "Maxine here expresses Pynchon's most recent attitude toward family. It's what keeps us up, whatever goes down," and by Inger Dalsgaard: "They [Maxine's children] open their source code and they walk openly into a flawed world, teaching Maxine to relax her guarding instincts. Ernie and March may epitomize the paranoid, political, and social indignation present in Pynchon's novels, but Maxine's approach to her sons' journey through real and virtual cityscapes represents better the gentle touch." See: Mark Rohland, "Family," in *Thomas Pynchon in Context*, ed. Inger H. Dalsgaard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 120; and Dalsgaard, "Real Estate and the Internet," 169.

Conclusion

The Gothic Sublime, or, the Unspeakable

In the introductory chapter of this thesis I surveyed the wide range of critical approaches taken to the work of Thomas Pynchon —from the historical Pynchon to the mythological Pynchon, the allegorical Pynchon to the philosophical Pynchon, and so on.[1] Of the proliferating Pynchons enumerated at the beginning of this thesis, I isolated the Gothic Pynchon from the crowd for reasons of its novelty and its underacknowledged relevance to the author's recurring themes and narrative structures. But the question remains: Where to place this new Pynchon? And, what can be done with the assorted Pynchons left by the wayside? My intention is to answer both of these questions by situating the posthuman Gothic Pynchon alongside its most prominent precursor: the postmodern Pynchon, defined by his stylistic ambiguity and accompanied by the overbearing theme of the unspeakable.

Far from coming into the world *ex nihilo*, my proposed Gothic reading of Pynchon owes much to the postmodernist studies which emphasise the indeterminacy and ambiguity of his style. But in these readings, the postmodern indeterminacy of language lapses from a playful ambiguity to a terrifying uncertainty, as the failure of language begins to signal the concomitant failures of perception, imagination, and reason itself. What appears at first as a literary style unique to the social and historical conditions of postmodernity—a style of which Pynchon is an exemplar—is rediscovered as a continuation of the Gothic style, which depicted the birth of modernity with the same literary tropes that would later document its death. The object of this chapter is to

[1] For the full list of critical approaches to Pynchon enumerated in the Introductory chapter, see footnotes 1 and 2 of that chapter.

delineate this transition in style from the canonical postmodern readings of Pynchon toward a posthuman Gothic reading, and to identify the points at which these styles overlap and intersect.

The bridge which connects the archaic forms of the Gothic with the newer but no less historically situated form of the postmodern is their common theme of the unspeakable—not only the prototypically Gothic unspeakable, but also that which goes unsaid for reasons varying from its ineffability to the lack of words to speak it. The unspeakable has recurred many times in this thesis, even if it was itself left unsaid, and may be seen in all of the texts so far discussed—from Oedipa and Mucho Maas' respective visions in the cities and car yards of California; through Mason and Dixon's discoveries of inhuman mechanisms working in the frontier space and capitalist time of early modernity; to Pynchon's demand for miracles; and Maxine's glimpse of the wires behind the web. Typically, in Pynchon scholarship, the theme of the unspeakable has been folded into the overarching style of ambiguity that defines his writing. As Deborah Madsen writes, the ambiguity of Pynchon's fiction always leaves elements unspoken or un-perceived, which nevertheless persist as uncertain hints of an unidentified structure: "These fictional worlds not only lack certainty but are constructed to suggest that an order exists but is withheld and remains unknown because it is unnamed, experienced only in suspicions."[2] This identification of Pynchon's work with a style of ambiguity, while perceptive, also works to obscure the moments in which meaning isn't merely deferred but denied, when the play of language reaches its limit and the unspeakable supplants the ambiguous.

The style of ambiguity which has thus far been used to define Pynchon's writing owes much to Pynchon's reputation as a postmodern writer, whose works are typified by

[2] Deborah L. Madsen, "Ambiguity," in *Thomas Pynchon in Context*, ed. Inger H. Dalsgaard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 298.

indeterminacy, slippage of meaning, and narrative uncertainty.[3] In turning his works askew, and prioritising the unspeakable over the ambiguous, I wish to unsettle the established reading of Pynchon's works and uncover a Gothic style that persists beneath the postmodern. The possibility of discovering a Gothic unlife within the now undead postmodern tradition is not without precedent. As Allan Lloyd Smith argues, "one reason to pursue these similarities between such different fields as the Gothic literary tradition and the broader postmodern—period, phase of production, aesthetic style?—is that postmodernists seem to have borrowed certain particular qualities of the Gothic to pursue their own agendas."[4] According to Smith, the Gothic elements which have been freely borrowed by postmodern works include their indeterminacy; their epistemological and ontological uncertainty; their attention to surfaces, affect, and the grotesque; and, most salient for this chapter, their common use of the unspeakable. Similarly, Vijay Mishra argues that the aesthetics of the postmodern are directly borrowed from those of the Gothic, as both resort to "the sublime not as a simple aesthetic category arising out of a delight with terror, but as the fundamental faculty of the imagination."[5] Thus, it is first necessary to sketch out the postmodern approach to these elements in Pynchon's fiction, in order to better uncover the Gothic components which have been scavenged for its making.

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[3] As Ian Copestake suggests, the placement of Pynchon as a postmodern writer—if not *the* postmodern writer—has been fortuitous for postmodern scholars, but has never been an entirely certain categorisation of the author. As Copestake argues, Pynchon can "claim to be as far removed from any adherence to critical assertions of literary postmodernism's identity as he can equally claim to be one of its foremost practitioners. That he chooses publicly to do neither allows his work to flow freely across the boundaries and borders which such definitions placed upon it." Ian D. Copestake, "Introduction. Postmodern Reflections: The Image of an Absent Author," in *American Postmodernity: Essays on the Recent Fiction of Thomas Pynchon*, ed. Ian D. Copestake (Bern: Peter Lang, 2003), 9.

[4] Allan Lloyd Smith, "Postmodern/Gothicism," in *Modern Gothic: A Reader*, ed. Victor Sage and Allan Lloyd Smith (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1996), 14.

[5] Vijay Mishra, *The Gothic Sublime* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1994), 17.

The Postmodern: Unspeakable History

Pynchon and the postmodern appear to be inseparable, not only because of the applicability of the latter's hermeneutical framework to the fiction of the former, but also because those fictions have provided a convenient shorthand for the postmodern style from its inception. As Brian McHale suggests, Pynchon's novels "helped to define that [postmodern] era and its poetics. [...] Pynchon and postmodernism were literally *made for each other*, for better or worse."[6] If the postmodern seems an all too convenient category for Pynchon's work, it is because that category depended upon Pynchon from the start. In pithier terms, Friedrich Kittler states that "if Thomas Pynchon didn't already exist in secrecy, he would simply have to be invented, in order to verify postmodernism."[7] As this thesis shows, the inseparability of Pynchon and the postmodern is by no means stable, and as the critical currency of the postmodern fades we may suspect that its claim to Pynchon's fiction was never assured.[8]

The postmodern account of Pynchon's work deals variably with his ironic style, his mixture of high and low cultures, his incredulity towards metanarratives, and other

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[6] Brian McHale, "Postmodernism," in *Thomas Pynchon in Context*, ed. Inger H. Dalsgaard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 289-90.

[7] Friedrich Kittler, "Pynchon and Electro-Mysticism," *Pynchon Notes* 54-55 (Spring-Fall 2008): 108.

[8] As Simon de Bourcier has pointed out, the traditional association of Pynchon's writing with the postmodern style also depended upon the notion of a postmodern readership in the process of being "de-conditioned" (in Brian McHale's terms) of their modernist reading habits. On this topic, de Bourcier writes: "the twenty-first-century Pynchon still fits McHale's account of postmodernism's ontological dominant, but what has changed [...] is Pynchon's readership, implying that 'the unconstrained projection of worlds in the plural 'is no longer synonymous with the project of 'de-conditioning' the (modernist) reader." Further, among those who grew up among postmodern cultural products, there now appears "a widespread awareness of changed historical circumstance, the sense that the postmodern moment has passed." Simon de Bourcier, "Reading McHale Reading Pynchon, or, Is Pynchon Still a Postmodernist?" *Orbit: A Journal of American Literature* 2, no. 2 (2014): 9-10.

typical fixtures of postmodern fiction.[9] But, as with the Gothic (as discussed in the Introduction), simply listing various qualities and tropes of the postmodern gets us no closer to identifying the unifying principle which makes them prototypically postmodern. Among these postmodern readings of the author, therefore, perhaps the most significant is that which does not merely label Pynchon as 'postmodern' and begin ticking off the boxes, but which instead begins with postmodernity as an historical period and attempts to situate Pynchon's fictions as responses to the conditions of that era. I write, of course, of Linda Hutcheon's formulation of Pynchon's novels as 'historiographic metafiction,' or as a style of historical fiction which self-reflexively interrogates and undoes its driving narratives. More than an incredulity toward metanarratives, à la Jean-François Lyotard's *The Postmodern Condition*, historiographic metafiction is a demolition of metanarrative, which overloads all overarching stories of history with excessive and contradictory narrative threads. As Hutcheon writes,

> Pynchon's intertextually overdetermined, discursively overloaded fictions both parody and enact the totalizing tendency of all discourses to create systems and structures. The plots of such narratives become other kinds of plots, that is, conspiracies that invoke terror in those subject (as we all are) to the power of pattern.[10]

Taking this formulation a step further, Amy Elias argues that this turn toward narrative overload is itself a response to the mass traumas of the twentieth century, and an attempt to encompass the unrepresentable object of the century's history without directly showing

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[9] The typical features of postmodern fiction, which are coincidentally the typical features of Pynchon's fiction, are identified by Brian McHale as incredulity toward master-narratives; an ironic attitude; the double-coding of high and low culture; a pervasive sense of simulation; the decentring of subjectivity; the spatial turn away from modernist preoccupations with time; and a shift from epistemological questions to ontological ones. See: McHale, "Postmodernism," 290-2.

[10] Linda Hutcheon, *A Poetics of Postmodernism*, (London: Routledge, 1988), 133.

it in all its horror. Under the postmodern condition, Elias writes, "what is *not* possible to speak becomes the locus of meaning within history. Lyotard locates this 'unspeakable' thing outside of representation and modernity's epistemological paradigms; he terms this unspeakable element the language of the *postmodern event*."[11] The postmodern, then, is not just a style of ambiguity and textual playfulness, but one in which the ambiguity of language hides an unspeakable core. In the postmodern fictions which attempt to reckon with their place at the end of modernity, the unspeakable object of history—all the mass slaughter, mechanised mutilation, and economic depredation which birthed the so-called end of history—is grasped, if it is grasped, in the language of the sublime. Unable to be spoken, the sublime object of historiographic metafiction is depicted either as excess or as absence, but never directly and always with the caution that attends those things which are best not disturbed from their depths.

This sublime moment in Pynchon's novels has been shown in the chapters on *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Mason & Dixon* to adhere to particular scenes and moments of socio-historical trauma, as when Oedipa or Mucho encounter the modern American landscape as a mechanised labyrinth, or when Mason and Dixon envisage the birth of capitalist modernity as the assemblage of a demonic machine. In Mucho's caryard, Oedipa's cacophony of wires, and Mason's melancholic visions, the nightmare of history is at once given an overarching narrative and refused any means by which that narrative may be represented. The libidinal economies of the caryard defy Mucho's comprehension; the voices of the city buzz just beyond the range of Oedipa's hearing; and the diabolical machine revealed to Mason remains unnamed in its enormity. The sublime feeling emerges as representation reaches its limits. As David Cowart writes of Pynchon's novels, under postmodernity the metaphors by which history was once understood

[11] Amy J. Elias, *Sublime Desire: History and Post-1960s Fiction* (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 2011), 25.

become insufficient to the task, as "history—especially twentieth-century history—cannot be ordered by a metaphor, however elaborate, however similar to the metaphors or metanarratives that served civilizations of the past. But even as it gives the lie to mythography and indirectly impugns historians blind to the fictive drift of their enterprise," the conspiratorial narrative typical of Pynchon's fiction "enables and enacts a new kind of history."[12] What emerges in the place of the guiding metaphor of history is a deep suspicion of historical narrative, "a suspicion in keeping with a Lyotardian definition of the postmodern as nonrepresentation, unspeakability, and eruption."[13]

The Gothic Precursor

Given the proliferation of critical commentaries on the 'postmodern condition' and the immense changes to historical and social consciousness which it precipitates, we would be forgiven for assuming that it is a new phenomenon (or, at least, a new phenomenon at the time of its inception in the middle of the last century). What this assumption would miss, however, are the ways in which the *post*modern is shot through with fragments of the pre- and early-modern, if not the modern itself. In the case of Pynchon, at least, the evidence of the persistence of older forms within the postmodern is most apparent in his aesthetics of the unspeakable and the sublime. The debt owed by the postmodern sublime to its Gothic forbearer has not gone without comment, as Allan Lloyd Smith has argued that "what underlyingly links the Gothic with the postmodern is an aesthetic of anxiety and perplexity, as similar responses to the confusing new order—or should that be the new *dis*order?"[14] Likewise, Vijay Mishra has noted that both the postmodern and Gothic

[12] David Cowart, "History and Metahistory," in *Thomas Pynchon in Context*, ed. Inger H. Dalsgaard (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2019), 106.

[13] Elias, *Sublime Desire*, 178.

[14] Smith, "Postmodern/Gothicism," 18.

sublimes revolve around the "basic problem of being hostage to the unpresentable," and of making the sublime experience bottomless and without positive resolution.[15] Whereas other forms of the sublime, such as the religious or Romantic sublime, culminate in a moment of resolution and revelation, the postmodern and Gothic sublimes are conspicuous for their deferral of resolution. Instead of revealing the powers of God or nature, Mishra argues, the postmodern and Gothic sublimes subsist in a state of terror without end or escape.

In Pynchon, too, the postmodern sublime of the historical lapses back into a Gothic sublime which encompasses and frustrates all attempts at representation. Orbiting around the historical traumas which sit at the heart of Pynchon's novels are a whole host of narrative anxieties which are concerned not only with historical consciousness but with the contortions of language and the limits of reason itself. In his performance of a seemingly postmodern suspicion of narrative, Pynchon's fiction approaches the Gothic conception of writing as itself a form of bondage, by which assorted lapses and falterings only hide that which is supposed to be divulged. As Anne Williams argues, Gothic narratives dramatise "both the materiality of writing and its implicit inadequacies: its discontinuities, ambiguities, unreliabilities, silences. [...] In Gothic, language is multifarious, duplicitous, and paradoxical."[16] In an added irony, the act of writing about the unspeakable object is itself what makes that object unspeakable. By attempting and failing to grasp the sublime object, it is pushed only further into the inaccessible regions of the unconscious.[17] The sublime qualities of *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Mason & Dixon*

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[15] Mishra, *Gothic Sublime*, 17.

[16] Anne Williams, *Art of Darkness: A Poetics of Gothic* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1995), 67.

[17] As Sedgwick writes, "the unspeakable here is an interpersonal barrier where no barrier ought to be—language is properly just the medium that should flow between people, mitigating their physical and psychic separateness—but once this barrier has come into being, it is breached only at the cost of violence

are not only engendered by the historical traumas of their respective epochs, but stem from the incapacity of language to render those traumas intelligible. It is not the nightmare of history itself which sends Mucho running to pop-cultural distractions or which turn Mason's gaze toward the stars, but the trembling they feel when something unspeakable brushes past their limited lives. The unspeakable object of history and its postmodern species of the sublime cohabits the narrative space of Pynchon's novels with a much older, Gothic form of sublime that feeds on the unspeakable itself in all its forms.

This is not to say that the unspeakable object of history is left entirely without descriptive qualities. To the contrary, throughout Pynchon's novels the unspeakable is spoken of in the interchangeable terms of the mechanical and the feminine—Pynchon's ironic vision of history remains grounded within the gendered terms of objectification and fetishism. The unspeakable object of history is not merely a site of mass trauma, but something essentially feminine in both its allure and its otherness. From as early as *V.*, Pynchon's spectre of history is presented in terms equally mystifying and objectifying ("Perhaps she is a woman; women are a mystery to me"[18]); in *Mason & Dixon* Mason's guide through his melancholic reveries is Rebekah; while in *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Bleeding Edge* it falls to the heroines to make their own sense of the world. This, too, draws us further backwards into the domain of the Gothic, and its peculiar fusion of erotics and terror. In the Gothic, the unspeakable remains unspoken not only because it cannot be grasped, but because it is pushed away and kept hidden so that it may not disturb one's sense of reality. As Anne Williams writes, this silencing of the unspeakable is invariably communicated in gendered terms: "In a patriarchal culture, the female and 'the erotic' are by definition marginal and fantastic; and so stories that contradict the

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and deepened separateness." Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick, *The Coherence of Gothic Conventions* (New York: Methuen, 1986), 16.

[18] V 405.

dominant myth about reality, specifically the nature of the self's way of being in the world, are bound to seem 'unrealistic.'"[19] Like Helen Vaughan in Arthur Machen's *The Great God Pan*, the Lady V stands in for all that cannot be spoken by the men of her age—she is a woman who "reveals secret forces at the heart of things, forces what should, the narrator moralises, remain buried, no doubt because their sexual nature is linked to female desire."[20] As argued in Chapter Two, it is the lot of Pynchon's masculine characters to run up against this limit, this unspeakable feminine figure, and to recoil in horror, whereas—as argued in Chapters One and Six—his heroines Oedipa and Maxine are capable of reaching some entente with this excluded exterior to masculine history, narrative, and language.

If anything of the postmodern sublime remains, even after it has been unmasked as a palimpsest of the Gothic sublime, it lies in the changed socio-historical context in which this sublime form is experienced. As Vijay Mishra writes, "the Gothic sublime and the [postmodern] sublime of late capital are linked by the definitions of the subject," but are nevertheless placed at opposite ends of an historical process—one witnessing the birth of the capitalist mode of production and the other witnessing its global triumph.[21] In both forms, the aesthetics of the sublime revolve not around nature or the divine, but around an unspeakable trauma at the centre of capitalist modernity, that enormous amassment of "dead human labor stored up in our machinery," as Fredric Jameson puts it, "which turns back on and against us in unrecognizable forms and seems to constitute the massive dystopian horizon of our collective as well as our individual praxis."[22] In Gothic fashion,

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[19] Williams, *Art of Darkness*, 151.

[20] Fred Botting, *Gothic*, 2nd ed. (New York: Routledge, 2014), 135.

[21] Mishra, *Gothic Sublime*, 26.

[22] Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (Durham: Duke University Press, 1991), 35.

this monstrous object—capital and its history—is only seen askance, and the theorist or novelist who wants to describe its totality must resort to the well-worn figures of the sublime. This sublime aesthetic finds itself in new garb, but retains the form given to it by the Gothic, which renders the unspeakable visible in the negative.[23] Far from marking a distinct break from what came before, the postmodern is not only continuous with its precursors, but formally indebted to their styles, which persist in a postmodern afterlife that is both contemporary and archaic.

Toward Posthumanity

Beyond the postmodern and Gothic valences of Pynchon's work, critics have long been aware of the preeminent presence of the sublime in his novels. Harold Bloom remarks that "Pynchon is the greatest master of the negative Sublime at least since Faulkner and West," and that the great triumph of his sublime vision lies in his discovery of "ways of representing the impulse to defy the System, even though both the impulse and its representations always are defeated."[24] This negative sublime undoubtedly contains elements of Gothic horror and terror, but in the view of critics such as Bloom this sublime experience also encompasses something more numinous or even divine than the base thrills of the Gothic. For my purposes, however, the sublimity of the System in Pynchon's works is not so distinct from the profane concerns of his characters. As Steven Weisenburger argues, the Gnostic element of Pynchon's fiction works to uncover the machinations of power, and "imagines a world degraded to mere relations of power and

[23] "The unspeakable is willed—it has not, that is to say, a pre-existent content that is itself already unspeakable—but its gratuitousness is grounded in, is rendered visible in the colors of, the individual obsession and the obsession of the age." Sedgwick, *Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, 138.

[24] Harold Bloom, "Introduction," in *Bloom's Modern Critical Views: Thomas Pynchon*, ed. Harold Bloom (Broomall: Chelsea House, 2003), 1-2.

instrumentality, an acute alienation from divinity that can only be reversed by still more instrumented paths open to adepts—those with arcane *gnosis*."[25] Even as the language of the numinous and divine sublime is deployed, it is used not to the ends of a religious gnosis, but a profane illumination of the earthly relations of power.

Although the scholarship on Pynchon's work is correct to locate within it an aesthetics of the negative sublime, this is not to say that the numinous quality of the fiction is left entirely ungrounded from reality. Rather, the demiurgic powers of Pynchon's fiction are not divine and otherworldly, but technological and all too much a part of this world. The miraculous Word that blows through Oedipa's world is not sent from a god but from a mass of wires; the nightmare visions revealed to Mason and Dixon are not scenes of hell but of the modern world emerging before their eyes; and the strange presences which Maxine encounters on the Internet are not divine messengers but accumulations of data that have taken on a will of their own. The numinous, the divine, and the Gnostic elements of Pynchon's works are all effects of a wider social and technical order that births suprahuman forces from the products of human hands. As Georgios Maragos argues:

> It is not a paradox that a machine can achieve more than a human. […] If the traditional religions give man some of the qualities of God, then today's faith in technology and science can give the exact same qualities to human accomplishments. Pynchon's characters are often awed by things that are man-made, yet outside their intellectual grasp.[26]

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[25] Steven Weisenburger, "The Americas—*Thomas Pynchon: Allusive Parables of Power* by John Dugdale / *The Gnostic Pynchon* by Dwight Eddins," Modern Fiction Studies 37, no. 2 (1991): 272.

[26] "The computer, for Frenesi and for Pynchon, has turned into a sentient being without any human needs and defects. It rises above humans and is given the ability to know and control, if not all, then a considerable number of important aspects of their lives. […] From a cybernetic point of view, there should be no distinction between a machine and an organism; what does matter is its competency in handling and,

The unspeakable, the unintelligible, is not divine in itself, but is instantiated within cybernetic and mechanical systems which have grown to surpass all human understanding.

This fusion of the numinous with the cybernetic in Pynchon's fiction has been dubbed by Friedrich Kittler a kind of "electro-mysticism" by which the electric circuit "can be transformed into ethics. The only condition is to define people as plus or minus, as man and woman. Within a model of current, oscillations and signals—thus on this side of metaphor—we can think only of beings made of flesh and blood."[27] Similarly, writes Brian Stonehill, the technologised world of Pynchon's fiction, when examined in its totality, frequently assumes the dimensions of a supra-human entity, for which "the far-flung synapses of cyberspace would seem to embody that global entity's mind, or its conscience, or even its soul."[28] Yet, I argue, this focus upon the mystical and numinous ultimately accepts the apotheosis of the machines as fact, and elides the place which Pynchon nevertheless gives to his human characters within this vast and overbearing system.

This indistinction between the human and inhuman no doubt recalls N. Katherine Hayles' formulation of the posthuman as the loss of boundaries between an identifiable self and exterior influences upon its motions. As Hayles declares: "If 'human essence is freedom from the wills of others,' the posthuman is 'post' not because it is necessarily unfree but because there is no a priori way to identify a self-will that can be clearly

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subsequently, manipulating the flow of information." Georgios Maragos, "A Medium No Longer: How Communication and Information Become Objectives in Thomas Pynchon's Works," in *Against the Grain: Reading Pynchon's Counternarratives*, ed. Sascha Pöhlmann (Amsterdam: Rodopi, 2010), 178.

[27] Kittler, "Pynchon and Electro-Mysticism," 119.

[28] Brian Stonehill, "Pynchon's Prophecies of Cyberspace," *Pynchon Notes* 34-34 (Spring-Fall 1994): 16.

distinguished from an other-will."[29] The confrontation of the inhuman within the human, or of the impossibility of distinguishing one from the other, is what drives both the horror and the wonder of the posthuman—and it is also what ties the posthuman impasse to the aesthetics of the Gothic. As Sean Bolton writes, the "source of dread in the posthuman Gothic lies not in the fear of our demise but in the uncertainty of what we will become and what will be left of us after the change."[30]

It is at this point of dissolution between self and other that the posthuman comes closest to the conventions of the Gothic, which Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick identifies as being comprised of a "particular spatial model" comprised of "what's inside, what's outside, and what separates them."[31] In the Gothic novel this separation of inside and outside is expressed at multiple levels, including the thematic (live burials, castle walls, veils, and masks all recur), psychological (characters are cut off from memory, conceal identities, and terrorised by the invisible), and even structural (as when the novels descend into nested narratives or reproduce the lacunae of their fictive texts). But even as the Gothic text engages with the anxieties of selfhood structured by its isolation, "the identification of center with self and the programmatic symmetry of the inside-outside relation are finally undermined in the same texts."[32] As in Sedgwick's account of the Gothic style, the posthuman variant of that style ultimately confirms "the sameness of the separated spaces" and the uncanny parallels which stitch together the supposedly distinct realms of the interior subject and exterior environment.[33]

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[29] N. Katherine Hayles, *How We Became Posthuman* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1999), 4.

[30] Michael S. Bolton, "Monstrous Machinery: Defining Posthuman Gothic," *Aeternum: The Journal of Contemporary Gothic Studies* 1, no. 1 (June 2014): 3.

[31] Sedgwick, *Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, 12.

[32] Sedgwick, *Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, 13.

[33] Sedgwick, *Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, 20.

The exploration of posthuman subjectivity recurs throughout Pynchon's work, from the mechanical priest of *V.* and Slothrop's escape from the self in *Gravity's Rainbow*, to the geo-temporal crises of *Mason & Dixon* and *Against The Day*. Everywhere in Pynchon's fiction, as Stefan Mattessich has rightly pointed out, the "emphasis is placed not, as in the state of reverie, on an inside with no outside but conversely on an outside with no inside, a radical exteriority into which the subject disperses or becomes multiple."[34] It is this folding of the inhuman outside into the human subject that resonates throughout Pynchon's fiction and lends to his treatment of technology and control a more sinister perspective than is possible in the Gnostic or postmodern modes.

The Unspeakable

Throughout Pynchon's fiction, his postmodern aesthetics of ambiguity call back to the Gothic sublime, and his Gnostic themes of control and infiltration call forward to an emerging state of posthuman life integrated into machines. Where all four of these terms converge and cross over is in the trope of the unspeakable, which is rendered ironic or monstrous, numinous or technological, but in each instance is mirrored by its other forms. The bulk of Pynchon criticism has focused upon the postmodern over its doubles, and favoured a reading that prioritises the ironic, textual play of his fictions over their darker or more mystical elements. But, I argue, this textual uncertainty is not original to the postmodern style, and is in fact an element of the Gothic inherited by the postmodern. Where postmodern critics have seen an ambivalence in Pynchon's style, we can instead uncover the unspeakable. The unspeakable resides within the postmodern style as the

[34] Stefan Mattessich, *Lines of Flight: Discursive Time and Countercultural Desire in the Work of Thomas Pynchon* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2002), 9.

sublime object of historical trauma, which forces the author to constantly switch styles and forms in an attempt to grapple with something insufficiently described in any one form. But in this attempt, prior forms of writing are revivified to give expression to something essentially inexpressible, including and especially the Gothic's long tradition of attempts to speak the unspeakable. This is to say that on closer inspection Pynchon's postmodernism gives way to Gothicism.

Similarly, what modernists such as Harold Bloom have seen as a numinous Gnosticism in Pynchon's work—in his abhorrence of all forms of power and control—cannot be severed from the historical circumstances in which the author writes. Far from sitting easily in a long, canonical tradition of writers expressing some essential, mystical truth about the world, Pynchon's obsession with control is only incidentally Gnostic. What is essential to Pynchon's novels, however, is a preoccupation with mechanical and cybernetic forms of control, and the fragile position of the human subject within the System. What appears at first as the will of a Demiurge is revealed to be the product of a social totality made machine-like, subjected to forces of cybernetic control, but still essentially without a subject directing its motions. From within Pynchon's electro-mysticism the Gnostic theme of control attains specificity: it is not a distant, absolute control, but a granular, diffuse control, engrained within the souls of people who are none the wiser that they are cogs in a machine. In this sense, Pynchon's recurrent theme of control is properly posthuman, but only in the most abhorrent sense, as a cybernetic monstrosity congealed from human parts. Just as the ambiguity of the postmodern gives way to the unspeakability of the Gothic, the relative certainties of Gnostic paranoia are undone by the realities of technical change.

At its most extreme point, the Gnostic theme of control becomes ungrounded, without a driver at the wheel, and for that reason becomes more terrifying. As David Punter remarks, this is the irony of Pynchon's thematics of control, for "if indeed the

world is at the mercy of unknown manipulators, then are they competent? Or is it impossible to unravel the immediate evidence precisely because what they produce is only a series of more or less colossal mistakes?"[35] More horrible than a massive conspiracy pulling the strings is the possibility that the strange occurrences of Pynchon's novels happen purely by chance—and that in the end there is no real difference between these two possibilities. Ultimately, the focus of Pynchon's fiction returns to the lot of the hero or heroine, who is faced with navigating a world whose order (or disorder) is at heart unidentifiable. For Pynchon, as Georgios Maragos argues, "it all comes down to the struggle of the individual to make sense of all the connections that are around him or her, but not quite within his or her grasp. Pynchon is not only trying to offer a glimpse of the invisible, powerful system that encompasses the world, but also to describe the possibilities of resistance to those networks of communication that try to control the individuals."[36] Embedded in a posthuman form of life, the protagonists of Pynchon's fiction are faced with a choice of Gothic outcomes: horror at the unspeakable forces which inhabit them, or acquiescence to the terror that drives them.

The Gothic in Pynchon is not isolated to a handful of recurrent themes but is identifiable in the structural presentation of those themes. The Gothic thrust of *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Mason & Dixon*, and *Bleeding Edge* does not arise solely from the Gothic tropes in which these novels deal—the imprisoning tower, the sublimity of nature, or the imagery of the crypt—but from the topographical privations which these structures mark. Oedipa, Mason, Dixon, and Maxine all seek out some world beyond their own, but only in the final pages of their respective journeys do they begin to suspect that their searches were limited from the start, and their discoveries orchestrated by forces outside

[35] David Punter, *The Literature of Terror*, vol. 2, *The Modern Gothic*, 2nd ed. (London: Routledge, 1996), 135.

[36] Maragos, "A Medium No Longer," 179.

themselves. In typically Gothic fashion, their searches lead them up to a limit which cannot be crossed, which engenders feelings of terror and horror at the threshold, and which in some way illuminates how that very limit composes them. Oedipa discovers that she is herself a part of the circuitry she has attempted to uncover; Mason and Dixon realise that they themselves are pawns of a globe-spanning conspiracy to make the world into a machine; and Maxine makes peace with her knowledge that dreadful powers lurk in the interstices of her world, waiting to invade and defile all dreams, digital or otherwise. In a word, the Gothic elements of Pynchon's work all revolve around the *unspeakable*—that point at which the limit is reached and representation either breaks down or is forced to take on new, more terrifying forms.[37]

The Gothic denotes above all an ambivalence, beneath which lurks the unrepresentable and unspeakable object of horror. What does this discovery of the unspeakable mean for our reception of Pynchon? I argue that, above all, it means that the critical treatment of Pynchon has hitherto been partial, concerned primarily with the effects of the unspeakable in historical, linguistic, and social contexts, but not with the unspeakable core of his fictions itself. This unspeakable element is what has united the most successful readings of Pynchon's work, and it is one which owes its form to the Gothic. Far from being a writer solely of 'historiographic metafiction,' 'cybernetic theory-fiction,' or some other theoretical neologism, Pynchon—as he says himself in his nonfiction—is a writer of the horror of our cybernetic age. Having been swept up in the recent trends of literary criticism, the debt that Pynchon's style owes to the Gothic has gone largely unnoticed, and his explicit theorisation of the posthuman has gone largely

[37] "'Unspeakable,' for instance, is a favorite Gothic word, sometimes meaning no more than 'dreadful,' sometimes implying a range of reflections on language. The word appears regularly enough, in enough contexts, that it could be called a theme in itself, but it also works as a name for moments when it is not used: moments when, for instance, a character drops dead trying to utter a particular name." Sedgwick, *Coherence of Gothic Conventions*, 4.

unremarked upon. But at this moment when the postmodern Pynchon is being put aside, the other faces of his fiction may now be seen—and may be seen for what they always were: the ever present but unspeakable influence of the Gothic and the premonition of the posthuman.

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