

COLLECTIVITY AND FORM:
POLITICS AND AESTHETICS OF COLLECTIVITY IN MICHAEL HARDT AND
ANTONIO NEGRI, AMIRI BARAKA, AND THOMAS PYNCHON

By

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To Ada,
whose dad has been working on this dissertation all her life

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TABLE OF CONTENTS

	<u>page</u>
ACKNOWLEDGMENTS.....	4
LIST OF TABLES.....	7
LIST OF FIGURES	8
ABSTRACT.....	9
1 INTRODUCTION: A MINOR CURRENT IN POSTMODERNISM.....	11
2 FIGURING COLLECTIVITY: POLITICAL INTERPRETATION AND THE DIALECTIC OF FORM AND CONTENT	21
2.1 The Dialectic of Form and Content.....	23
2.2 Ideology, Contradiction, History	28
2.3 Political Interpretation.....	37
2.4 Figuring Collectivity—Proletariat and Multitude	45
3 THE DIFFERENT PERSONS OF AMIRI BARAKA: COLLECTIVITY, SINGULARITY, AND BECOMING-MINOR	65
3.1 Minor Poetics	77
3.2 Identity and Singularity	93
3.3 Different Persons—At Least Six of Them	105
3.4 Molar and Molecular	125
4 POSTMODERNISM AND THE PERSISTENCE OF UTOPIA: PERIODIZING THOMAS PYNCHON	130
4.1 Entropy, 1959–63—Early Stories, <i>V</i>	143
4.2 Paranoia, 1966/1973— <i>The Crying of Lot 49</i> , <i>Gravity’s Rainbow</i>	163
4.3 Nostalgia, 1990/1997— <i>Vineland</i> , <i>Mason & Dixon</i>	185
4.4 High and Late Postmodernism	226
4.5 <i>Day</i> , 2006/2009— <i>Against the Day</i> , <i>Inherent Vice</i>	250
4.6 Pynchon and the Futures of Postmodernity.....	334
5 CONCLUSION: ON SINGULARITY, IDENTITY, AND ACTUALLY EXISTING POLITICS.....	348
WORKS CITED	355
BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH.....	376

LIST OF TABLES

<u>Table</u>		<u>page</u>
4-1	Narrative time and historical time in <i>Inherent Vice</i>	343

LIST OF FIGURES

<u>Figure</u>	<u>page</u>
2-1 Semiotic rectangle.....	62
2-2 Semiotic rectangle with external syntheses.	62
2-3 Semiotic diagram of Joseph Conrad's <i>Lord Jim</i>	62
2-4 Semiotic rectangle mapped onto the three Lacanian orders.	63
2-5 Semiotic diagram of the form/content opposition.	63
2-6 Semiotic rectangle of the form/content opposition, mapped onto Jameson's three levels of interpretation from <i>The Political Unconscious</i>	64
4-1 <i>Delaware-wedge</i> , map showing lines surveyed by Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon..	340
4-2 Semiotic mapping of paranoia in <i>The Crying of Lot 49</i> and <i>Gravity's Rainbow</i>	341
4-3 Semiotic mapping of nostalgia in <i>Vineland</i> and <i>Mason & Dixon</i>	341
4-4 Semiotic mapping of the metaphors of day in <i>Against the Day</i> and <i>Inherent Vice</i>	342

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Collectivity and Form: Politics and Aesthetics of Collectivity in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, Amiri Baraka, and Thomas Pynchon examines texts written during the period 1959–2009, a span roughly congruent with what is now called postmodernity. This dissertation reads the relation between form and content in theoretical and literary texts in an attempt to articulate conditions of possibility for collective praxis in our era.

Chapter 1 introduces the concept of a “minor current” in postmodernism in order to provide a foundation for the political interpretations that follow. Next, Chapter 2 applies a unique version of formal analysis to the multitude, Hardt and Negri’s concept for collective opposition to contemporary global capitalism. Chapter 2 identifies both formal and political-historical functions of singularity (a poststructuralist conception of subjectivity), love (in a materialist, political guise), and democracy (both historical and utopian) as constituent elements of the multitude.

Subsequently, the dissertation reads a literature of the multitude through the lenses developed in Chapter 2. Chapter 3 argues that Baraka’s novel *6 Persons* represents a novelistic experiment in collectivity, in terms of both its aesthetic form and

the ways in which it problematizes the relation between individual and collectivity. Significantly, subjectivity in Baraka is best conceived in terms of not individuality but Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's notion of singularity.

Finally, Chapter 4 adopts a broad historical perspective in order to periodize Pynchon's novels. Pynchon embodies several characteristics of the postmodern, often on a grand scale. Therefore, Chapter 4 reads his corpus as a case study in postmodern contradiction. More specifically, Chapter 4 reads two strains of his work—the historical novels and the “California novels”—as representing not postmodernism but two postmodernisms: an optimistic, utopian postmodernism and a cynical, ideological postmodernism. Combining conventional historical chronology with conceptual and theoretical analysis, Chapter 4 proposes a dialectical evaluation of the possibilities for a global democracy of the multitude. Taken together, the chapters of *Collectivity and Form* attempt to contribute to our understanding of the conditions of possibility of groups today and what kinds of cultural, social, and political action are open to them.

CHAPTER 1

INTRODUCTION: A MINOR CURRENT IN POSTMODERNISM

A postmodern artist or writer is in the position of a philosopher: the text he writes, the work he produces are not in principle governed by preestablished rules, and they cannot be judged according to a determining judgment, by applying familiar categories to the text or to the work. Those rules and categories are what the work of art itself is looking for. The artist and the writer, then, are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of *what will have been done*.

—Jean-François Lyotard, *The Postmodern Condition*

Or, is postmodernity the pastime of an old man who scrounges in the garbage-heap of finality looking for leftovers, who brandishes unconsciousness, lapses, limits, confines, goulags, parataxes, non-senses, or paradoxes, and who turns this into the glory of his novelty, into his promise of change?

— Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend*

...there is always a minor current that insists on life as resistance, an other power of life that strives toward an alternative existence.

—Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, *Commonwealth*¹

Paradox abounds in postmodernism. Its entire history as a concept is marked by the antagonistic coexistence of contradictory theses: postmodernism marks a radical break with modernism—postmodernism is little but a derivative, second-rate modernism. Postmodernism consists in and insists on the death of grand narratives—postmodernism itself is a grand narrative of the death of grand narratives. Postmodernism liberates artists from the confining strictures of modernism, opening up hitherto unexplored regions of thought and expression—postmodernism is the art and

¹ Lyotard, *Postmodern* 81; Lyotard, *Differend* 136; Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth* 57.

literature of exhaustion, a dilapidated storehouse of used-up, reified relics, depleted of originality. Postmodernism constitutes a radical challenge to the political traditions of modernity—postmodernism subsumes subjectivity under the all-encompassing sovereignty of the global capitalist market. Postmodernism is a site for antisystemic struggle—postmodernism is the cultural logic of late capitalism.

The passages above taken from Jean-François Lyotard highlight contradiction at the heart of the postmodern. In *The Postmodern Condition: A Report on Knowledge* (1979; trans. 1984) Lyotard presents postmodernism as a death of grand narratives that opens up a space for experimentation, play, chance, and difference. Under this conception, postmodernism suspends inherited rules, dislodges signifiers from their signifieds, and violates canons of aesthetics, resulting in a radical creativity that can only be annulled by the reinstatement of grand narratives of sovereignty. In *The Differend: Phrases in Dispute* (1983; trans. 1988), however, Lyotard entertains an antinomian conception of postmodernism: instead of radical freedom in “the absence of a supreme tribunal,” postmodernism could rather be “the garbage-heap of finality” whose modernist “leftovers” are cynically repackaged as “the glory of ... novelty” and the “promise of change” (135–36). The originary Big Bang of radical flux and contingency found in the earlier description of postmodernism gives way to stasis, entropy, and a cultural heat death of the universe. There is nothing new under this postmodern sun.

Rather than deciding between these contradictory theses on the postmodern, I want instead to grasp them dialectically, as mutually contradictory positions that nonetheless presuppose each other, even in their antagonism. This understanding of

postmodern contradiction also requires a shift in lexicon from culture and aesthetics to history, which from a Marxist perspective is the ultimate theater of contradiction. The history of postmodernity, viewed in this light, is nothing other than the history of that dialectic illustrated by the passages from Lyotard. Or, as Fredric Jameson puts it, “the problem itself becomes the solution, and ... the opposition in which we are immobilized like a ship in the ice must itself now become the object of our thinking” (*Valences* 51). The periodization I offer in these pages hinges not on allegedly homogeneous traits that obtain throughout a given period, and not even or not only on the radical breaks and historical differentiations on which any periodizing narrative nonetheless relies, but rather on contradiction itself.

My approach to postmodernism is similar to other periodizing accounts that establish bifurcations, dualisms, or countercurrents within a given historical moment. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri, for example, identify in Enlightenment philosophy a “minor current” that serves as both immanent critique and revolutionary rupture: “The major Kant provides the tools for stabilizing the transcendental ordering of the republic of property, whereas the minor Kant blasts apart its foundations, opening the way for mutation and free creation on the biopolitical plane of immanence” (*Commonwealth* 17). This minor Kant, along with the whole minor current of Enlightenment thought that he represents for Hardt and Negri, closely aligns with Baruch Spinoza’s notion of constituent power, the revolutionary, democratic, creative force of the multitude, as opposed to the reactionary, transcendent, parasitical constituted power of the state. Against the enclosures of a modern sovereignty predicated on the constituted power of the state, Hardt and Negri’s minor current “insists on life as resistance” and strives for

“an alternative production of subjectivity” (57). Enlightenment—its major current, the textbook version—produces the categories, concepts, and tools by which the modern state maintains its authority and controls its subjects, but it also, in its minor current, furnishes the means of challenging and subverting that very modern sovereignty.

Something similar can be found in a wide range of modernism studies. The notion of alternative modernisms or alternative modernities entails a critical reevaluation of canonical theories of modernism and modernity, typically delimited by a series of exclusions: the modernist is nearly always white, male, bourgeois, Western; modernization happens in the global West and North. Arguments for alternative modernisms or alternative modernities, by contrast, hold that minoritarian fields which violate modernist canons—popular literature, literature by women, literature by ethnic minorities, postcolonial modernization, and so on—are not merely exceptions to a putatively homogeneous norm but rather direct challenges, from within, to the logics of exclusion and exploitation upon which canonical modernism depends.²

A third arena characterized by this dynamic of subversive countercurrents against mainstream or doctrinaire narratives is contemporary globalization. Like the Enlightenment and modernity, neoliberal globalization determines an unequal distribution of power and privilege among its subjects. However, also like the Enlightenment and modernity, globalization may well be sowing the seeds of its own undoing. One crucial recurrent question for globalization studies, especially during that field’s period of emergence in the 1990s and 2000s, has been whether, how, and to

² For alternative modernism in literary studies, see, e.g., several of the essays in *A Companion to the Modern American Novel, 1900–1950* (ed. Matthews), especially those by Hsu, Stephens, Keresztesi, and Konzett. For interdisciplinary perspectives, see, e.g., Appadurai; Dirlik.

what extent the mechanisms by which global capitalism exercises control over power and wealth might be reappropriated for the masses against capitalism. The best known affirmative answer to that question comes from Hardt and Negri, who see the global multitude as the contemporary inheritor of the industrial proletariat's revolutionary mantle. On their take, the same networks of communication and affective labor that undergird today's late capitalism are also the milieu and munitions of the multitude. In a sense, the coming revolution of the multitude stands as a minor current in globalization itself, a counter-globalization, alter-globalization, or globalization from below.

I want to argue that something similar is at work in postmodernism. Rather than viewing the discrepant evaluations of postmodernism as simply another double bind, or still less a set of options from among which postmodern consumers of culture are free to choose, I propose that the putative antinomies of postmodernism that I enumerated above, along with scores of others, are best understood as symptoms of the antagonism between official or dominant postmodernism and its minor current, an antagonism which, unlike antinomy, "is a clash in historical time and the seizure of a unique historical instant" (Jameson, *Valences* 120). One crucial hypothesis of this dissertation is that there is no such thing as postmodernism; instead, there are postmodernisms—at least two of them, but almost certainly many more. There is, of course, the canonical major current of postmodernism, characterized by pastiche, play, and difference, by floating signifiers and autoreferentiality, by hypertexts and hyper-reality, simulacra and simulation. This postmodernism is above all a consumerist postmodernism exemplified in shopping, advertising, and spectacle. I submit, however, that there is also a minor current in postmodernism, one which insists on collective

agency despite the atomization and isolation of subjects accomplished by late capitalism and which, against all odds, remembers how to think historically—or better, invents new ways of thinking historically.

The radical or utopian sense of this minor postmodernism is shared by Amiri Baraka and Thomas Pynchon, the primary subjects of this dissertation. Their minor literature, as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari would call it, exhibits the cultural logic of postmodernism's minor current, a cultural logic that stands squarely opposed to the late capitalism of which canonical postmodernism is the cultural expression.

Notwithstanding the specificity of each author's relation to both canonical and minor postmodernism, the texts of Baraka and Pynchon demonstrate commitment to radical praxis and utopian imagination in the context of postmodernity. Crucially, both authors write out of an experience of postmodernity and exploit postmodern literary techniques to pose alternatives to the reigning postmodernist, late-capitalist order. In doing so, moreover, they offer critical insight into the aporias and contradictions of postmodernism, and above all into the lived experience of political praxis in postmodernity.

Any theory of postmodern political praxis must account for the ways in which social collectivities are inaugurated, organized, sustained, but also foreclosed, disaggregated, or recuperated. Baraka's and Pynchon's work is particularly relevant to the question of postmodern collectivity: both Baraka's biography and his literary career can fruitfully be read as a vast series of collective political commitments, while Pynchon's obsession with revolutionary or resistance movements, underground networks, avenues for flight, cabals, cartels, and conspiracies presents a kaleidoscope

view of the prospects for collectivity under global capitalism. This dissertation, therefore, reads the literature of Baraka and Pynchon as both symptomatic expressions of postmodern contradiction and symbolic figurations of utopian political and social organization. Their texts have much to teach about not only the subjugation of collectivities under late capitalism but also projects dedicated to the imagination and construction of new collectivities and “life as resistance.” In short, they take up the task of postmodernism’s minor current.

In terms of method, such an approach to postmodernity and postmodernism requires a combination of Marxist and poststructuralist analysis. Marxism provides the framework for the theory of history that operates in this dissertation; in particular, I draw on Fredric Jameson’s well-known tripartite hermeneutic from *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981) as a way to articulate history, politics, economics, and ideology. In addition, Jameson’s work, especially in terms of contradiction and historical metasynchrony, also provides theoretical grounds for identifying and analyzing the minor current represented here by Baraka and Pynchon. Poststructuralism, meanwhile—especially the theories of Deleuze and Guattari, as well as the contemporary interpretations of those theories by Hardt and Negri—provides a means for cognitively mapping the anatomies and processes of the oppositional subjectivities engaged in metasynchronous struggle against capitalism and its isolation and atomization of subjects. Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of schizophrenic subjectivity and Hardt and Negri’s politicization of it under the guise of the multitude explode the integrity and alleged self-sufficiency of the individual bourgeois subject; instead, subjectivity is here recast as contingent, historically dynamic, multivalent, and above all

collective: “everyone is a little group,” Deleuze and Guattari claim (*Anti-Oedipus* 362). In concert, the Marxist and poststructuralist strains of my methodology allow me to critically examine the history of collectivity in postmodernity in order to evaluate the prospects for collective praxis in our own postmodern moment today.

The analysis that follows unfolds over three chapters. Chapter 2 demonstrates an inextricable link between political and formal analysis by reading Jameson’s *The Political Unconscious* with the Introduction to his more recent *The Modernist Papers* (2007). In Chapter 2, I advocate a Marxian reappropriation of the notion of form itself as a tool for properly political, as opposed to formalist, analysis. My analysis of the multitude—an analysis simultaneously formal and political—illustrates the dialectic of content and form that I develop out of Jameson while it also provides a theoretical foundation for my later readings of collectivity in Baraka and Pynchon.

Chapter 3 examines the texts of Baraka through the lens of Deleuze and Guattari. Using Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of minor literature to illustrate the radical challenge that Baraka’s literature poses to capitalism, I read Baraka’s neglected, seldom-read novel *6 Persons* (composed 1973–74; published 2000) as a synchronic snapshot of revolutionary schizophrenic subjectivity. *Six Persons* allegorizes the temporary formation and praxis of collectivities even while it performs an imaginary resolution of the contradiction in Baraka between revolutionary and reactionary tendencies in his transition from Black Nationalism to Third World Marxism. I argue that the most important contribution of *6 Persons* to Marxist theory and radical praxis is found in its novelization of singularity, a model of subjectivity in Deleuze and Guattari that stands opposed to liberal individualism and which later becomes a precursor to

Hardt and Negri's multitude. Baraka's novel is nothing less than a dramatization of the processes by which revolutionary subjectivities flee capitalist control in order to create and occupy spaces for collective praxis.

Chapter 4 broadens the scope of analysis, both textually and historically. There I apply Jameson's hermeneutic framework of the ideology of form—which reads form itself as the manifest content of historically specific, mutually antagonistic modes of production—to Pynchon's oeuvre in order to bring into precise focus the dialectical, diachronic relation between postmodernism's major and minor currents. I read Pynchon's long historical novels and his comparatively short California novels as allegorical manifestations of minor and major postmodernism, respectively; I argue that those currents in postmodernism, moreover, correspond to experiences of revolutionary subjectivity against capital—the multitude—in the historical novels and of capitalist control under real subsumption in the California novels. This allegorical reading mandates a thoroughgoing reevaluation both of today's prospects for radical change and revolution, and of the categories and concepts with which we periodize history, including our present moment, in the first place. Pynchon's novels help illuminate the history of the present at the same time as they gesture toward what might be emerging on the horizon of futurity.

For notwithstanding the literary focus of this dissertation, its ultimate frame of reference is political praxis in the present. Not only for Marxist critics but also for radical thinkers and activists generally, collectivity is the *sine qua non* for praxis. At the end of the first chapter of *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson writes: "History is what hurts, it is what ... sets inexorable limits to individual as well as collective praxis" (102). Taken

together, the chapters of *Collectivity and Form* attempt to contribute to our understanding of the conditions of possibility of collectivities today, how we can form and sustain them, and what kinds of cultural, social, and political action are open to them. Such understanding is not merely salutary but indispensable for us, today, subjected to the permeating social controls of global capitalism, trapped in a lifeworld that is too often little but a torture chamber for the history that hurts.

Note on the text: Baraka and Pynchon use ellipses extensively in their texts, including several passages quoted in this dissertation. In order to distinguish the authors' ellipses from my own, I enclose my ellipses in brackets in direct quotations from Baraka or Pynchon. All ellipses in quotations from other sources are my own.

CHAPTER 2

FIGURING COLLECTIVITY: POLITICAL INTERPRETATION AND THE DIALECTIC OF FORM AND CONTENT

It's like if I put you in a cop suit; I don't care what you think, somebody might say,
There's a cop, shoot him. There's a content to form.

—Amiri Baraka, “Amiri Baraka Analyzes How He Writes”¹

Recent years have seen a resurgence of formalist criticism in literary studies. In her review essay “What Is New Formalism?” (2007) Marjorie Levinson surveys this (re)emergent “movement,” characterizing it as a response to the institutional hegemony of a “new historicism” often conceived “as a catchall term” for any reading of texts that privileges a political frame of reference (558, 559). According to Levinson, new formalists call for a “rededication” to form, over against the content nearly exclusively privileged, the new formalists claim, in the new-historicist paradigm (561). For Levinson, however, the new-formalist focus on the “prestige and praxis” of formalist versus new-historicist interpretation, rather than on the former’s “grounding principles,” results in a failure “to retheorize ... form,” to think form anew after the ordeal of new historicism (or cultural studies, or theory, or Marxism) (561). Instead, the new formalism amounts in the main to a retreat from the political and a restoration of the traditional/conservative aesthetic vocation of the literary disciplines.

Fredric Jameson’s introduction to *The Modernist Papers* (2007) makes an important, however tacit, intervention in the new-formalism debate. Given the atheoretical refusal among new formalists to rethink form as well as the explicitly antitheoretical agendas and posturings of certain new-formalist partisans, the dialectical

¹ Baraka and ya Salaam 6.

reworking of the relation between form and content that Jameson enacts in that introduction is salutary. Jameson returns to the four permutations of the form/content relation developed by the linguist Louis Hjelmslev, producing “a series of partial syntheses” of form and content, each of which views the dialectical relation between the two from a unique perspective (xii). Jameson’s gloss on Hjelmslev is an attempt to rethink form itself—but also, significantly, content as well—an attempt whose conspicuous absence marks new formalisms.

In addition to this much-needed dialectical reconceptualization of form and content, I see a second crucial function of this introduction. Jameson’s treatment of the form/content nexus, once it has been refracted through the tripartite dialectical Marxist hermeneutic from his earlier *The Political Unconscious: Narrative as a Socially Symbolic Act* (1981), opens a way of thinking about the socially symbolic resonances of form and content. It restores to these erstwhile reified terms their dynamic political functions. Such a view of form and content is useful, I contend, not only for literary and cultural analysis but also for a dialectical account of collective praxis, collectivity also being grasped as a problem of form and content.

Here I argue for a dialectical political reading of form and content. Section 2.1 briefly rehearses Jameson’s dialectical revision of Hjelmslev in the introduction to *The Modernist Papers*. Section 2.2 then revisits the three-tiered hermeneutic program of *The Political Unconscious*. Next, section 2.3 maps the system of four terms drawn from Hjelmslev onto the system of three levels from the earlier book. Finally, section 2.4 extends Jameson’s dialectical model of form and content to two representations of collectivity: the classic case of the proletariat and its contemporary reworking under the

banner of the multitude. The broad contentions of Chapter 2 are that form and content are understandable only by means of the dialectical relation between them and that this relation demonstrates the thoroughly political valences of formal interpretation as well as the inextricably formal contours of political thinking itself.

2.1 The Dialectic of Form and Content

Among the most significant consequences for the new formalism of Jameson's dialectical reworking of the form/content opposition in *The Modernist Papers* are its transcendence of restrictive definitions of form, which would reduce the latter to something like "the literary" (Levinson 560), and its reactivation of the processes of theorizing cancelled in advance by new formalism's antitheoretical orientation. Taken from Hjelmslev's *Prolegomena to a Theory of Language* (1943), Jameson's treatment of form and content moves beyond the initial binary opposition between the two that informs the agenda of new formalisms: "getting out of binary oppositions may often mean, not so much doing away with them, as multiplying them and using the initial ideological starting point as the beginning of a more complicated construction which is at the same time a more complex diagnosis" (Jameson, *Modernist* xi; see Hjelmslev 47–60). Following Hjelmslev, Jameson casts form and content not simply as two opposed terms—form versus content—but as four combinatory perspectives: the content of content, the form of form, the form of content, and the content of form.

The first two of these perspectives, the content of content and the form of form, stand for a kind of purity, aspiring to rid themselves of their opposite number. Taking the view of the content of content results "inevitably [in] a referential operation" that seeks "to identify the social and historical realities in which the text comes into being and which it presumably designates" (xiii). On this perspective, a text is taken to have a

content that is entirely independent of formal representation and that stands outside “the mediation of ... representational or figural systems” (xiii). The form of form, meanwhile, entails the “formalistic production of form ... in which the ideological forms of an older content are somehow neutralized and bracketed by an abstraction that seeks only to retain ... their purely formal structures” (xv). Such a production is, of course, immediately recognizable as the project of late modernist formalisms such as the New Criticism and contemporary new formalisms alike. The inverse mirror image of the content of content, the form of form consists, ideally, of form that is altogether without content. Jameson takes pains to point out, however, that this emptying out of content from form is not exclusively reactionary: “the attempt to escape ... ideologies must also be ... counted as a Utopian one” (xv). The form of form and the content of content, therefore, relate to each other in the mode of antinomy: the form of form is able to project utopia, but only through “purely formal structures”—its utopia is a compensatory one; while the content of content, in its refusal of representation *tout court*, reserves no space for utopian thinking, which necessarily is always already representational and figural.

Let me take a moment to sketch what I mean by *utopian*. Suffice it to say for now that the utopian for our times is the bonus of pleasure that exceeds the strictures imposed, in our historical context, by the instrumentalization and reification engendered by late capitalism. Utopian thinking thinks a form of collective life that transcends the narrowly ideological and, in the words of Phillip E. Wegner, “passes through and disrupts the closure of any historical present, thereby opening it up to the possibilities of historical becoming” (*Imaginary* 18). It is thus “utopian” in the quite literal sense that

such a form is to be found *nowhere*, but it also serves to sustain the impulse and desire for an achieved collectivity in an historical moment when that collective life is objectively and structurally impossible. If, under late capitalism, the ideological is the locus of atomization and reification, the utopian would then be the no-place of the transcendence of the ideological, the reunification of the social, and the immanence of collective praxis.

The thrust of Jameson's account of the utopian character of the form of form is to suggest that its formalizing operation, though "in this society false and ideological," gestures toward a possible future when culture can become "the expression of a properly Utopian or collective impulse [which is] no longer basely functional or instrumental" (Jameson, *Political* 293). There is a profound utopian impulse at work in the formalizing operation of the form of form, notwithstanding its ahistorical, depoliticized dimension. This dialectical perspective on utopia also accounts for the ultimate insufficiency of the form of form: it "relaxes into the religious or the theological, the edifying and the moralistic, if it is not informed by a sense of the class dynamics of social life and cultural production" (292). The content of content, meanwhile, in its isolation of ideology from utopian impulses, amounts to little more than the stereotypical vulgar materialism often attributed to Marxism by its critics.

Both the content of content and the form of form, moreover, are ultimately untenable—their alleged purity (pure content, pure form) is pure fiction. The referential history or "context" of the content of content is only ever grasped through narrative or formal representations. As Jameson points out, "[n]o one has ever seen [for example] a social class or experienced one immediately" (*Modernist* xiii); rather, historical referents

like class can only ever be intelligible by means of some narrative, linguistic, or representational code. Similarly, the form of form's aestheticizing abstraction is doomed in advance to failure: "such ... abstraction ... must ultimately fail to be a completely non-representational language...; we cannot escape our being-in-the-world, even by way of its formalizing negations" (xv). Both the form of form and the content of content are therefore limited by the impossibility of ever realizing the purity to which they aspire: the impossibility of grasping referential history without recourse to formal categories and of constructing, even imagining, a pure form that has no relation to historical or ideological content.

In contrast, the form of content, which "encompass[es] everything called ideology in the most comprehensive acceptance of the word," eschews the idea that form or content can ever be grasped in isolation (xiv). If historical content is only ever accessible by means of preexisting forms (and recall that Jameson's example here is class), the form of content denotes the preexisting ideological formation which allows for that access: "The aristocracy exists, as a thing-in-itself; but it can only be evoked for all practical purposes by way of some preexisting representation of the aristocracy as a social class [as in, for example, Dickens], and that representation is bound to be ideological and to have its own history as an ideology" (xiv). Such representations are both narrative and ideology (form and content), both trope and argument. For Jameson the form of content in this case is the form in which the historical content of class antagonism becomes accessible and intelligible.

Interestingly, though, at the same time that it is ideological—indeed, because it is ideological—the form of content also has a utopian valence. Insofar as ideology is

always the ideology of a particular social class, “it expresses the unity of a collectivity” and is therefore necessarily utopian: “such collectivities [as class] are themselves *figures* for the ultimate concrete collective life of an achieved Utopian or classless society” (Jameson, *Political* 291). The ideological representation of the aristocracy in Dickens stands as a utopian figure as well.

In presenting these permutations in the order that I have followed, I have attempted to trace out a certain unfolding of utopian openings. The fourth position in Jameson’s combinatory schema, the content of form, is both the most dialectically complete and the most directly focused on utopian possibilities. The content of form is the perspective

from which [the] insufficiencies..., the usefulness and indeed the indispensability of the other three could be appreciated. It ... constitutes the only productive coordination of the opposition between form and content that does not seek to reduce one term to the other, or to posit illicit syntheses and equally illicit volatilizations of [that] opposition.... There is thus a way in which the notion of the content of the form stands as a philosophical and dialectical solution to the initial binary dilemma.... (xv)

To refuse both “illicit syntheses” and “illicit volatilizations” is to insist on contradiction as such, to prevent contradiction from falling into either the ideal synthesis attributed to Hegel in the philosophy textbooks, “that old but still influential caricature of the dialectic” (x), on the one hand, or the antinomian logic of the double bind, on the other.² Indeed, in its character as “philosophical and dialectical solution” and in its capacity for assessing the “usefulness” of the other three perspectives—which means recognizing

² The content of form is thus analogous to what Jameson discusses elsewhere as utopian neutralization, whose “neither/nor” refuses the terms of a binary opposition, in distinction to the “both/and” of synthesis and the “either/or” of antinomy. See Jameson, *Archaeologies* 170–81; Wegner, “Jameson’s” 12–13.

their utopian outcroppings as well as their objective limitations—the content of form comes to coincide with the perspective of dialectical thinking.

The content of form, moreover, insofar as it serves as the place from which the usefulness and limits of the other three perspectives can be judged, enables dialectical analysis of the other three perspectives: it reveals both the terrain in which they operate and the limits that define and circumscribe that terrain. This means that to “focus on the content of the form” is to focus on “the possibilities for figuration or representation” on which both ideology and utopian thinking depend (xvii). The content of form articulates the conditions of possibility for both ideological discourse and utopian figuration alike.

Jameson’s revisiting of Hjelmslev clearly signals that the relation between form and content must be thought differently than the new formalists would have it. Not only does the Introduction to *The Modernist Papers* provide a welcome corrective to new formalism’s refusal to theorize the very terms that constitute its praxis, but it also reveals the intrinsically political and ideological character of both form and content that the new formalists strive to bracket. This political resonance of form and content proves crucial to my reading of representations of collectivity below, but it also serves as an initial and provisional bridge between *The Modernist Papers* and *The Political Unconscious*.

2.2 Ideology, Contradiction, History

The long first chapter of *The Political Unconscious* outlines an original program for dialectical Marxist literary criticism, consisting of “three concentric frameworks,” each of which progressively widens the historical horizon in which a literary or cultural artifact is examined (75). This historical horizon, moreover, provides the ground for social contradiction, with the nature of contradiction undergoing modification in each perspective. Meanwhile, the specific form that contradiction takes in each perspective

determines in turn the contours of ideology; each framework interprets the artifact in terms of ideological function, “ideology” being understood differently each time. Let me outline the three phases or levels of Jameson’s program in terms of history, contradiction, and ideology. This structure will come into play when I lay out my theory of collectivity in section 2.4.

The initial framework casts the literary text as a “*symbolic act*” (76). At this first level, history is conceived as the chronological succession of punctual events, the history of timelines and chronicles (75). The historical ground of a text is tied to contemporary events, from which springs real but ultimately irresolvable social contradiction. This irresolvable contradiction functions as “an absent cause” that finds its “symptomatic expression” in “the form of ... the *antinomy* ... [which appears] as logical scandal or double bind ... [and] which must therefore generate a whole more properly narrative apparatus—the text itself—to square its circles” (82–83). This narrative apparatus, the symbolic act, is an ideological act as well. But ideology has a special sense here. The text—in a formulation modeled on Claude Lévi-Strauss’s characterization of myth (see 256), which itself significantly finds another echo in Louis Althusser’s famous definition of ideology as a representation of imaginary relations to real conditions of experience—stands as “the imaginary resolution of a real contradiction” (77). It is both imaginary and real, both symbolic and active: either exclusively stressing the active nature of a text’s formal operations (“*symbolic act*”), or emphasizing the merely imaginary status of these operations’ product (“*symbolic act*”), results in “sheer ideology,” be it pure formalism or “vulgar materialism” (82). The first-

level interpretation (or symptomology) of the symbolic act views the text from both these poles without ever privileging one to the exclusion of the other.

Let me illustrate this first perspective by referring to Joseph Conrad's novel *Lord Jim* (1900), which Jameson analyzes at length in the penultimate chapter of *The Political Unconscious*. The historical moment of this novel, what Jameson would call its subtext, is that of "the passing of the heroic age of capitalist expansion" and "the setting in place of the worldwide institutions of capitalism in its monopoly stage" (237, 238). This moment is also marked by "the coexistence of capitalism and precapitalist social forms on the imperialist periphery," a contradiction between competing modes of production (253–54). This contradiction finds symptomatic expression in the competing figures of the buccaneer Gentleman Brown and the Malaysian religious pilgrims aboard the junket *Patna*. Gentleman Brown represents both the untrammelled pursuit of capitalist profit on a new worldwide stage and the anomie and nihilism that ultimately result from the structural processes of reification under monopoly capitalism. The pilgrims, meanwhile, embody Conrad's Orientalist fantasy of a unified, organic community, bound together by the integrity of a shared religion.

Jameson reads these twin figures as the novel's representation of the antinomy of activity and value. Activity and value, in Jameson's sense, are best understood according to the instrumental logic of means and ends that serves as the conceptual basis of reification. Gentleman Brown represents the synthesis of activity, or sheer means of accumulation, and not-value, since his efforts to acquire wealth are organized strictly according to instrumental calculation. The Malaysian pilgrims, on the other hand, synthesize value, for in Conrad's romance they embody the ultimate value-in-

itself of the organic religious community, with not-activity, since their being-in-the-world consists in piety and religious contemplation. For Jameson the real social contradiction in Conrad's moment between capitalist and precapitalist social formations is recast as the conceptual antinomy and undecidable double bind between value and activity.

The figure of "Lord" Jim, the novel's title character, represents an imaginary resolution of this real but irresolvable social contradiction. Once installed as Tuan or "Lord" of the village Patusan, he embodies "the union of activity and value, of the energies of Western capitalism and the organic immanence of the religion of precapitalist societies" (255). This resolution, of course, is "impossible" and imaginary, but it also requires a prior awakening of the "deeply political impulses" that it then "manage[s]" through the wish-fulfillment of "Lord" Jim (255, 266). Crucially, this prior reawakening underscores the utopian character of formalizing operations; the impossible fantasy of "Lord" Jim must spring first from a collective fantasy for a life beyond capitalist reification, a fantasy at the heart not merely of *Lord Jim* but of so-called mass literature generally. Thus, first-level interpretation reads the symbolic act of *Lord Jim* as ideological and utopian simultaneously.

Jameson's second interpretive level produces not the symbolic act but "the *ideologeme*" (76). Here, it is not the chronological unfolding of events but the discourses of competing social classes that provide historical framing. These discourses, moreover, are fundamentally dialogical, in the Bakhtinian sense: they are the arena "in which two opposing discourses fight it out within the general unity of a shared code" (84). What one finds here is the agon of class antagonism, an ideological struggle over discourse itself. This perspective, therefore, views the text as "an

individual *parole* or utterance” of the much larger *langue* of “collective and class discourses” (76). For level-two interpretation, contradiction is the very substance of the dialogical text, the system of relations constituting the antagonistic *langue* of which the text is an individual polemical *parole*. The *ideologeme*, then, modeled after the series of *-emes* (morphemes, phonemes, and so forth) that are the minimal intelligible units of various kinds of linguistic analysis, stands as the unit that organizes the *langue* of class discourse. Because the ideologeme is “amphibious,” both trope and ideology, it is both a “protonarrative”—a component of a text’s formal, narrative apparatus—and a “pseudoidea”—an instance of the ideological content of class discourse (87). Second-level interpretation amounts to a lexicological project of identifying and cataloguing the ideologemes that comprise the *langue* of class discourse.

Examples help clarify what Jameson is getting at here. Jameson’s ideologemic analysis of George Gissing’s “experimental” novels, in chapter four of *The Political Unconscious*, is exemplary not only of the identification and articulation of ideologemes involved in phase-two lexicography but also of the ways in which that project itself builds off of a phase-one reading of symbolic acts. To begin, Jameson identifies a contradiction in the concept of “the people,” which for Gissing represents an attempt at thinking “the social totality”: either “the people” works “as a merely classificatory concept”—think of the static sociological conception of class against which Jameson distinguishes the dynamic, antagonistic Marxian one (83)—in which case characters come to embody static and eternal essences; or, on the contrary, the concept of “the people” “take[s] on class connotations ... [and] fatally become[s] relational,” in which case the totality putatively represented by the concept actually overflows and exceeds

that concept (190–91). This contradiction, in turn, is symptomatically expressed in the double bind of the “*alienated intellectual*,” a “witness” from “another class” who must nonetheless “remain an actor and a participant in ... [the] social world” of “the people” (195). Gissing’s imaginary solution, meanwhile, lies in the narrative of *déclassement* or “class treason” that is accomplished through the project of charity and which runs through Gissing’s experimental novels (195, 200).

It is out of this symbolic reading of Gissing, however, and specifically out of the figure of the alienated intellectual, that Jameson launches his ideologemic analysis. Jameson recounts the fate of Gissing’s various alienated intellectuals, all of whom are ultimately and severely punished for their class treason. This recurrent narrative pattern becomes one face, the protonarrative, of the ideologeme of *ressentiment*, a pseudoidea which proposes that both the poor and those who incite the poor to revolt act fundamentally out of a sense of envy and resentment (200–02). Moreover, the discourse of *ressentiment* is fundamentally a dialogical one. Not only does it rely on eighteenth-century rhetoric, “a dead language like Latin,” but it also amounts to a utopian fantasy which speaks out against “the attitudes of the upper classes” even in identifying with them, and which the mature Gissing “generalize[s] into a global refusal of commodity desire itself” (203, 205). Jameson’s reading of *ressentiment* in Gissing stages the ideologemic analysis of the second phase of *The Political Unconscious’s* interpretive schema.

Finally, the third framework reads not ideologemes or symbolic acts but “the *ideology of form*” (76). This broadest level of interpretation situates the text or artifact relative to the *longue durée* of History—Jameson occasionally uses the capital *H* to

distinguish History from the histories of the first two levels—“conceived in its vastest [Marxian] sense of the sequence of modes of production” (75). The series goes from tribal hordes, Neolithic kinship communities, and the so-called Oriental despotism to ancient slaveholding societies, feudalism, capitalism, and communism. Mediating between conceptions of individual modes of production as synchronic systems, on the one hand, and views of history that emphasize the diachronic transition from one mode of production to its successor, on the other, the temporality of History posits “a kind of metasynchronicity” that envelops both the diachronic elapse of time and the synchronic structures of modes of production and their associated ideological discourses (97). The key to this puzzling metasynchronicity lies in the fact that historical periods are heterogeneous with respect to modes of production: “every social formation ... has ... consisted in the overlay and structural coexistence of *several* modes of production at once, including vestiges ... of older modes of production ... as well as anticipatory tendencies” of possible future modes of production (95). Thus, like social classes as seen from the second perspective, metasynchronous modes of production are both coeval with and antagonistic toward one another. Somewhat dramatically, Jameson casts contradiction in this third framework as “perpetual cultural revolution” whose “punctual event[s]” are really “the passage to the surface of ... permanent struggle[s]” (97). The task of third-level interpretation, therefore, becomes the reconstruction of perpetual cultural revolution, of clashing modes of production, from the materials available in a given text (97). The analyst accomplishes this reconstruction by reading “*the ideology of form*,” which “grasp[s] ... formal processes as sedimented content..., as carrying ideological messages of their own” (98, 99). The ideology of form, in other

words, takes formal structures themselves—say, Jamesian realism or modernist impressionism—as ideological projections of the modes of production to which they correspond—in this case, as I discuss shortly, industrial or monopoly capitalism. These ideological messages of form are precisely the materials from which the critic reconstructs permanent cultural revolution. Thus, the work of the level-three critic consists no longer in symptomology or lexicography but in the allegorical reconstruction of History itself. Formal analysis and ideology critique are here both conjoined and transformed, constituting a single project that reads form as history and history as form.

Jameson's first-level reading of the imaginary resolution of *Lord Jim's* romance narrative is one element alongside others in his broader reading of the ideology of form in Conrad's novel.³ Like many critics, Jameson remarks the formal heterogeneity and "generic discontinuity" in *Lord Jim*, which consists of a "modernist" narrative of Jim's scandal aboard the *Patna* as well as a second, "romance" narrative that takes place in Patusan, the site of "Lord" Jim's imaginary resolution. For Jameson, these distinct formal registers correspond to the simultaneous emergence of modernist "high literature" and the popular literature and bestsellers of "mass culture" (206–07). As Jameson points out in his essay "Reification and Utopia in Mass Culture" (1979), such a splitting off of high and mass culture comes about only by means of capitalist instrumentalization, which results in "the dialectical fission of older aesthetic expression

³ Jameson's chapter on *Lord Jim* is emblematic of the interrelated nature of his three hermeneutic frameworks. In addition to the first-level reading of *Lord Jim* as a symbolic act, which I have discussed above, and the third-level reading of the ideology of form in the novel, which I examine presently, Jameson also articulates the functioning of the ideologeme of *ressentiment* in the figure of Gentleman Brown. This coimplication of each of the three frameworks in the others recalls a similar relation among the three orders of Lacanian psychoanalysis, each of which "must be defined by reference to the other two" (Evans 135). The import of this resonance between Jamesonian interpretation and Lacanian psychoanalysis will become clear below, in section 2.3.

into two modes, modernism and mass culture, equally dissociated from group praxis” (140). Conrad’s moment, however, as noted above, is that of the passage from industrial to monopoly capitalism, so that both of these cultural milieus, distinct though they be, coexist side by side in *Lord Jim*. Thus, the high-literary and mass-literary elements of the novel signal, respectively, the utopian impulse undergirding aesthetic experience—Conrad the literary modernist—and the manipulation of that impulse toward ideological and compensatory ends, its use as a release valve for the popular imagination—Conrad the popular novelist. Furthermore, both the modernist, impressionist narrative of the novel’s first half and the romance narrative of the second depend on a “structural breakdown of ... older realisms,” a “cancelled realism [and] a negation of realistic ‘content’” (*Political* 207, 266). Taken together, these two segments signal the metasynchronous co-presence of different modes of production. The imaginary resolution of the “modernist” Conrad, what Jameson calls his “impressionist sensorium,” betokens the passage into monopoly capitalism, as does the emergence of the “popular” romance of the novel’s second half. The cancelled-but-preserved realism that undergirds the imaginary resolution that the novel calls “Lord” Jim harkens back instead to an earlier industrial capitalism. In addition, Conrad’s Eurocentric reduction of the Malaysians to an essence of religiosity is also “the superstructural projection of a[n older] mode of production” (252). Such metasynchronicity illustrates the limitations of both the typological and the transitional readings against which Jameson defines the temporality (or really, temporalities) of the ideology of form. Neither the labeling of Conrad under “industrial” or “monopoly capitalism,” nor the insistence on the transitional emergence of his modernist moment, but only the analysis of the ideology of form can

adequately assess *Lord Jim* in the broadest historical context of the gigantomachia that is permanent cultural revolution. That is Jameson's main claim in his productive hierarchy of three levels.

2.3 Political Interpretation

It remains to be seen, however, how the tripartite hermeneutic of *The Political Unconscious* can connect up with that more recent quadripartite schema that Jameson develops in *The Modernist Papers* and how both schemas suggest new representations of collectivity. In this regard, Wegner's essay on Greimassian semiotics, Lacanian psychoanalysis, and Marxist dialectical thinking, titled "Greimas avec Lacan; or, From the Symbolic to the Real in Dialectical Criticism" (2009) provides a useful first approach. In mapping A. J. Greimas's semiotic rectangle onto the three Lacanian orders of the Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary, Wegner establishes a precedent for the mediation between systems of four and three that I undertake here.

Let me begin by sketching out the semiotic rectangle, abstractly first and then concretely. In Jameson's early usage, it functions to model ideological closure by identifying possible combinations of two "contrary" terms of a binary opposition (S and -S) as well as the "simple contradictions" of those terms (-S' and S'). One begins with the binary opposition and identifies the simple contradictions of those terms (see fig. 2-1).

The four corners of the rectangle generate a corresponding set of four syntheses: the synthesis of the primary opposition (S, -S) generates the "complex term," the ideal synthesis of the contradiction. The synthesis of the simple negations (-S', S') gives rise to the "neutral term," which, since it is the synthesis of the negations of the first two terms, can be taken to represent the possibility of flight or escape from the binary

dilemma. Finally, the left-hand and right-hand syntheses (S, –S'; –S, S') represent the ultimate antinomy or double bind to which the conceptual opposition gives rise.⁴ Figure 2-2 offers a full schematic rendering of the semiotic rectangle.

Jameson's semiotic diagram of the ideological closure of *Lord Jim* is a helpful illustration of the semiotic rectangle, since it has already appeared (minus the discussion of the narrator, Marlow, and the "deck-chair sailors") (see fig. 2-3). "Lord" Jim represents the ideal but impossible imaginary resolution of the antinomy of Conrad's moment, while Gentleman Brown and the pilgrims represent the incommensurable poles of that antinomy. (Marlow, meanwhile, represents a withdrawal from the social contradiction, as well as from the plot of the narrative proper.) All of these positions are generated by the logical permutations of the fundamental terms of the opposition and their respective negations.⁵

⁴ I should point out that not all discussions of the semiotic rectangle use the same terminology as I do, nor do they all necessarily proceed from the original binary opposition all the way to the external syntheses. A. J. Greimas and François Rastier, for example, in their essay that debuts the semiotic rectangle, do not discuss the external syntheses at all. Likewise, Ronald Schleifer focuses exclusively on the relation among the four S terms; he also uses "complex term" to denote the bottom two corners of the rectangle and distinguishes them as "positive" and "negative" complex terms (in my terminology, S' and –S', respectively). I draw my terminology for the semiotic rectangle from Jameson's more recent deployments of it, which themselves have evolved over the course of his career.

For the canonical description of the rectangle, see Greimas and Rastier. Useful introductions to the rectangle can be found in Schleifer, *A. J. Greimas* 25–33 and Introduction xxv–xxxix. For an elaboration of the rectangle that emphasizes its capability to diagram ideology, see Jameson, Foreword xiii–xxii. Part three of Jameson's *The Seeds of Time* (1994) is an excellent example of the kind of dialectical use of the rectangle that I attempt here (129–205). On the history and development of the rectangle in Jameson's thought, see Wegner, "Greimas."

⁵ Note that in the semiotic rectangle for *Lord Jim*, both characters (or "actants," to use a Greimassian term)—Jim, Brown, etc.—and ideological concepts—activity and value—appear side by side. This juxtaposition illustrates Jameson's claim that the rectangle is a figuration of ideology: one does not have to listen hard to hear echoes of Jameson's description of the ideologeme in his statement, in his foreword to the English translation of Greimas's *On Meaning*, that "[i]deology is ... whatever in its very structure is susceptible of taking on a cognitive and a narrative form alternately" (xiv).

I can now turn to Wegner's mediation between the four corners of Greimas's rectangle and the three orders in Lacan's schema.⁶ Wegner's insight is to view the rectangle not in terms of fours—four internal positions, four external syntheses—but in terms of three horizontal planes defined by the external syntheses, with the top plane occupied by the complex term, the middle plane by the terms of the antinomy, and the bottom plane by the neutral term. This division of the rectangle begins to reveal the affinities between it and Lacan's three orders. The complex term names the system: as “the name of the totality,” it identifies that ideal synthesis which defines the system as a whole and whose logic, or ideological closure, the system models (Wegner, “Greimas” 227). Thus the complex term coincides with the Symbolic Order in Lacan, the site of the institution of language, grammar, and law. The antinomian terms, in turn, fall in with the Imaginary Order, “primarily a matter of dualities and oppositions ... the antinomies whose apparent irresolvability constitute[s] the lived experience of a particular situation” (227). The neutral term, finally, coincides with the Lacanian Real, the unsymbolizable, unrepresentable, and unassimilable, which escapes signification and is the locus of trauma (see Lacan, *Seminar XI* 53–60). Wegner quotes Jameson's characterization of the Real as “another name for ‘simply History itself’” (Wegner, “Greimas” 227). Here it is worth recalling Jameson's famous dictum that “History is what hurts” (*Political* 102).⁷

⁶ Although Lacan discusses the Real (along with the Imaginary and the Symbolic) in his early works, the *Seminar* marks the first formalization of the Real as an “order” in psychoanalysis (and thus also the emergence of the *three orders*); see esp. books II and XI. See also Evans 84–85, 134–35, 162–64, 203–04; Fink 24–31; and Wilden 161–62, 174–75, 249–70, 293–98, et passim.

⁷ Slavoj Žižek further reinforces this link between History and the Lacanian Real when he calls the latter, in *The Parallax View* (2006), “not the inaccessible Thing, but the *gap* which prevents our access to it” (281). Moreover, it is precisely this inaccessibility that “lend[s] the [R]eal its essentially traumatic character,” as Dylan Evans puts it in his dictionary entry on the Real (163). This recalls the fact that, for Jameson, we have no access to the mode of production itself, even though we do occasionally

The neutral term is the place of the trauma of History and the experience, such as it is, of the Real.

The rectangle thus maps onto the three Lacanian orders (see fig. 2-4). Wegner's recasting of the semiotic rectangle in terms of the Symbolic, Imaginary, and Real is not only suggestive in its own right but also an excellent model of dialectical mediation between two such seemingly disparate systems. I want to begin my own work here by focusing first, as Wegner does, on the system of four, the Hjelmslevian permutations of the form/content opposition.

That it can be called that—that it makes sense to speak of a form/content *opposition*—immediately suggests a starting point. For indeed, what Jameson's discussion of the four "partial syntheses" of form and content shows is that the initial opposition between form and content is binary in appearance only, and that form and content are best understood not as antinomian but as dialectically interrelated; hence Jameson's compulsion to multiply rather than reduce the number of possibilities. What I can now add to my earlier account is a Greimassian diagram of this dialectical relation (see fig. 2-5).

My construction of the semiotic rectangle is confirmed by being refracted through the prism of Wegner's mediation between Greimas and Lacan. Indeed, the basic characterization of the three orders in Lacan takes on a new tenor when juxtaposed with the tripartite hermeneutic of *The Political Unconscious*. The first level of interpretation, the reading of symbolic acts, renders the text as an imaginary resolution of a real contradiction, which it casts in the mold of the antinomy. The antinomy's binary

witness the rise to the surface of the social antagonism that drives the movement of History. Therefore, it is not insignificant that Žižek identifies "social antagonism" as one gap of the Real (*Parallax* 281).

structure is identical with that of the Imaginary, “primarily a matter of dualities and oppositions” for which a text’s whole formal apparatus is grasped as a proposed solution.

Whereas the reading of symbolic acts is predicated on identifying such imaginary resolutions, phase-two interpretation reconfigures the text as a *parole* of class *langue*. The linguistic logic governing second-level interpretation and the critical project of ideologemic lexicography indicate that the central task here is the articulation of a grammar of ideologemes, a syntax of ideology. Therefore, ideologemic analysis corresponds with the Symbolic Order, the moment of the institution of language.

Finally, the ideology of form takes the perspective of the ultimate Marxian conception of the History of modes of production. The latter, of course, like the Real in Lacan—“that which resists symbolisation absolutely” (Lacan, *Seminar I* 66)—are never experienced as such; both History and the Real “always [lie] on the edge of our conceptual elaborations” (*Seminar II* 96). In reading form as the residual or anticipatory trace of a once or future mode of production, the ideology of form is the allegorical reconstruction of the unrepresentable Real of History.

But if the three levels of interpretation in *The Political Unconscious* match up with the three Lacanian orders, then it seems permissible for me to substitute the language of Jameson’s hermeneutic for that of Lacanian psychoanalysis. This substitution yields yet another semiotic rectangle (see fig. 2-6). This twice-modified semiotic rectangle now proposes a whole program for linking up the hermeneutic agenda of *The Political Unconscious* with Jameson’s dialectical investigation of form and content in *The Modernist Papers*.

To begin anew, the level-one reading of symbolic acts coincides with the form of form and the content of content. To the extent that such a reading views the text as an imaginary resolution of a real social contradiction, the critic is obliged to navigate between—but also not to adopt outright—the perspectives of the form of form and the content of content. Both of these options—the purely formal or purely aesthetic, devoid of content; the purely historical and social, unmediated by formalizing operations—are unacceptable for a first-level reading. Indeed, Jameson’s injunction against privileging either the imaginary or the active status of the symbolic act identifies empty formalism and reductive materialism as the twin temptations to be avoided here. The critic must keep both of these positions in play in doing the work of first-level symptomology. This symptomology consists precisely in reestablishing the link between the “purely” formal and the “purely” historical without which it would be impossible to read any text as a socially symbolic act.

Let me illustrate level one by citing Jameson’s use, in *The Political Unconscious*, of Lévi-Strauss’s account of Caduveo facial art. Lévi-Strauss locates the fundamental formal antinomy of this art in its use of two opposed axes of symmetry: the figures of Caduveo facial art are themselves symmetrical, but their axis of symmetry lies askance the human face’s “ideal axis” of symmetry (Lévi-Strauss, qtd. in Jameson, *Political* 78). For Lévi-Strauss, the hierarchies and inequalities in Caduveo society remain totally unresolved on the social level, so the juxtaposition of antinomian axes of symmetry stands, in Jameson’s reading, as the socially symbolic act that imaginarily resolves this very real social contradiction (78–79). Jameson’s reading thus depends on yet also conjoins the positions of the form of form—the purely formal attributes of the “text” that

the critic subjects to immanent formal analysis—and the content of content—the real contradictions that remain irresolvable on the social level and therefore can only be resolved by the imaginary operations of the symbolic act.

Whereas form and content remain heuristically distinct in first-level symptomology—the symptom never fully coinciding with the conditions it indicates—they are inextricably bound together in the miscegenated second-level concept of the ideologeme. Expressible as both pseudoidea and protonarrative, the ideologeme does away completely with such hypothetical separability of form and content. In this, the ideologeme shares an immediate affinity with the form of content, which unlike the first two permutations just discussed appears as a hybrid construction rather than a pure essence of form or content. More importantly, both ideologemic analysis and the form of content are the site of ideology critique itself: to repeat Jameson's description, the form of content "encompass[es] everything called ideology." If the ideologeme, then, is the smallest significant unit of class discourse, then to seek the ideologeme is to read from the perspective of the form of content.

Finally, the ideology of form represents the most dialectically complete version of *The Political Unconscious's* Marxist hermeneutic. Studying the ideology of form means reconstructing the struggle among rival, metasynchronous modes of production as these announce themselves in the competing formal and ideological codes at play in a text. To take this view on a text, I argue, is to apprehend it from the position of the content of form. Reading from this position entails two broad maneuvers: first, identifying the disparate formal registers and ideological signifying systems—"the possibilities for figuration or representation" that are the object of the content of form—

which manifest the antagonisms among competing modes of production; second, articulating the relation among these registers and systems, on the one hand, and the concomitant lines of struggle among the modes of production which they signal, on the other. This operation is precisely the task of Jameson's third-level critic. To study the ideology of form is to study the content of form.

Jameson's dialectical account of form and content in the Introduction to *The Modernist Papers*, then, stands in my estimation as more than just a reexamination of Hjelmslevian analysis. It is that too, of course, but it also needs to be understood in its immediate historical and critical context—and in this sense, it is no accident that *The Modernist Papers* and Levinson's review of new formalisms appeared in the same year. With this in mind, Jameson's discussion of form and content takes on the character of an intervention on behalf of a political reading of form itself, a corrective to the depoliticizing drives of the new formalists. *The Modernist Papers* can also be read as a continuation of that much earlier project articulated in *The Political Unconscious*, a project that "argue[s] the priority of the political interpretation of literary texts" (Jameson, *Political* 17). Not merely does the tripartite hermeneutic of 1981 remain relevant in the face of the advances of the new formalism, but more importantly, it compels both a rigorous interrogation and an ultimately political interpretation of the very terms—form and content—that are naively and antitheoretically assumed by the new formalists to be unproblematical and transparent. The analysis carried out in the section to follow aims to counteract the apolitical tendencies of today's new formalisms and to apply the interpretive schema articulated in these pages to the newly relevant concept of collectivity in the context of globalization and resistance to it.

2.4 Figuring Collectivity—Proletariat and Multitude

A first approach to the form and content of collectivity might provisionally characterize them along the lines of organizational structure and constituent membership. This characterization is only a starting point, for it not only resembles the traditional, reified meanings that a new formalist would attribute to these terms but also reveals precious little that is not already implicit in this or that figuration of collectivity. For example, the organizational “form” of the proletariat would be something like the worker’s council, the party, or the vanguard, while the “content” would then be the industrial working class itself. But this is already given implicitly in the very notion of the proletariat, to say nothing of the history of this formation.

I find it useful to follow Jameson’s lead in multiplying the positions and taking a dialectical approach. In the discussion that follows, I utilize Jameson’s fourfold permutations of the form/content relation, mapped onto the three levels of interpretation in *The Political Unconscious*, to sketch out some characteristics of both the industrial proletariat, which I take as a classic case of oppositional collectivity, and the multitude, an influential contemporary version of proletarian collectivity under global capitalism.

I begin, then, with the proletariat. As I have already suggested, an initial characterization of the form and content of the proletariat would fall along the respective lines of the organizational structures that represent the proletariat—workers’ councils, the party, the vanguard—and the industrial working class. That those organizational structures all *represent* the working class, however, already points to a first dialectical reading of the relation between form and content here. One of the fundamental contradictions that the concept of the proletariat must attempt to resolve lies in the fact that the working class is the constituent force of history and the motor of revolutionary

change and yet is unable to assume a position of constituted authority. Entrapped as it is by the mechanisms of capitalist exploitation, the working class is ideologically subjugated by capital—it suffers from what Marx calls false consciousness. As such, the working class cannot represent or speak for itself; it must be represented and spoken for by some other entity—canonically, of course, by the party. Significantly, Antonio Negri reads the entire history of the soviets under Lenin as a confrontation between the power of the party and “the constituent power of the masses”; that is, between the constituted structures of representation and the constituent forces that they represent (*Insurgencies* 268).⁸

For Negri, the crux of the contradiction between party and constituent power is found in the latter’s subsumption under the reified structures of bourgeois liberal democracy. Nowhere is this clearer than in the historical role of workers’ councils. On the one hand, “[t]he councils had marked the highest moment of the proletarian organization in the most acute phases of revolutionary struggle”; but on the other, they all “tend to become institutional outside of the revolutionary process and ... therefore must subordinate the permanent and real aims of the class movement to the organizational ends assumed by social democracy” (*Insurgencies* 268, 271). Revolution must therefore become permanent in order to exceed attempts at recuperation. In Negri’s reading, Lenin grasps the party as the means to this end: only the party can achieve permanent revolution because only “it permanently goes beyond

⁸ Negri’s *Insurgencies: Constituent Power and the Modern State* (1992; trans. 1999), from which comes his analysis of the party that I discuss in this section, is a sustained political and philosophical investigation of the interplay between constituent and constituted power in the history of Western revolutions. For a theoretical discussion of constituent and constituted power, see *Insurgencies* 1–35. For a discussion of constituent power that also serves as a precursor to Hardt and Negri’s elaboration of the multitude in *Empire* and subsequent works, see Hardt and Negri, *Labor* 263–313.

the material limits that the capitalist structure imposes on class movement” (282).

Lenin’s conception of the party attempts to resolve the contradiction between the radical demands of communism—for example, the abolition of the private-property system and the dictatorship of the proletariat—and the concessionary measures of reformism—the eight-hour day, a living wage, and so forth.

Viewed from the dialectical perspective of *The Political Unconscious* and *The Modernist Papers*, Lenin’s attempt at resolving this contradiction in the working class under the auspices of the party appears as the kind of imaginary resolution characteristic of socially symbolic acts. Consider the working class not simply as the content of the concept “proletariat” but as its content of content, its historical referent. The contradictions that function on this immediate historical level—between organization and spontaneity, between revolution and reform, between praxis and false consciousness—are then worked over in the figure of the Leninist party. The party attempts to activate and channel the constituent power of the working class without itself succumbing to the reification inherent in bourgeois formations of state power. Thus it seeks to mobilize the “purely formal structures” of the state, but without all its ideological baggage—in this sense, then, it stands as the form of form of the proletariat (Jameson, *Modernist* xv). To put it differently, this ideological function of the party operates according to what Slavoj Žižek calls the logic of “as if”: “What we call ‘social reality’ ... is supported by a certain *as if* (we act ... *as if* the Party expresses the objective interest of the working class...)” (*Sublime Object* 36). Of course, the consequences of this *as if* are well known: as Negri would put it years later, “the party’s determinations of norms and measures, its decisions ... become separated from the

experience of the movements and absorbed by the logic of capitalist alienation, turning bureaucratic and tyrannical. What should give force to multiplicity is transformed into the violence of identity” (Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth* 198–99). What is crucial to note here is that this bureaucratic turn of the party is no historical accident but a direct result of the forms available to the party for thinking praxis. On this reading, the role of the party in the admittedly tragic history of Soviet socialism, rather than motivating a sort of penitence and moral handwringing, now takes on the character of an attempt to resolve the real but irresolvable contradictions of the historical moment of the proletariat in the twentieth century.

This contradiction, however, cannot remain limited to the level of an internal contradiction in the concept of the proletariat itself. As Jameson reminds his reader, the proletariat is graspable as a social class only when viewed in its contradictory relation of social antagonism. In shifting gears now to this next perspective on the proletariat, I want also to shift my attention from the Russian to the American working class.

Absent the kind of lasting social or political revolutions accomplished by successful socialist and communist movements of the twentieth century, the proletariat in the U.S. finds its most lasting influence in the Popular Front of the 1930s and '40s. Michael Denning's *The Cultural Front: The Laboring of American Culture in the Twentieth Century* (1997) stands as a landmark study of the “aesthetic ideologies” and “cultural politics” of the cultural production of the Popular Front. For my present purposes, Denning's argument is especially useful in articulating the terrain of the Popular Front's class struggle. Denning discusses the Popular Front's rhetorical use of the tropes of populism and nationalism as weapons in its ideological arsenal against fascism and

capitalism. According to Denning, the Popular Front's deployment of the terms *populism* and *nationalism* effects a transformation in their meanings: instead of representing the liberal "sentimental invocations of a people without race or ethnicity" or the conservative "'politics of patriotism,' resolving all conflicts in the harmony of 'Americanism,'" under the Popular Front's usage these terms count as radical "attempts to imagine a new culture, a new way of life, a revolution" (134). In waging struggle over these ideological concepts, the Popular Front sought to redefine "the people" itself, to rethink who and what counts as the people. (One could restate this in Greimassian/Lacanian terms: as the proletariat's ideologeme, which occupies the apex of the Greimassian diagram developed above, "the people" names the ideological system and provides the conceptual grammar and regulatory laws that govern the ideological closure of the proletariat.) Furthermore, whereas in Gissing's moment "the people" butted up against its antinomian dead end—it either worked as a merely classificatory category or it became a relational class concept and thereby relinquished its claims to represent the social totality—the Popular Front's appropriation of "the people" attempted to push this contradiction to the point where "the people" as a class concept truly would coincide with the totality. Far from simply parroting the slogans of populism and nationalism, the Popular Front was engaged in a conscious attempt at reclaiming those slogans for its own properly dialectical ends.

The ideologemic perspective on the form of content, however, stipulates that these slogans must be articulable as both protonarratives and pseudoideas. Denning's readings of the authors and artists of the cultural front illustrate this double imperative. The very notion of what counts as "the people" undergoes stringent evaluation and

reformulation such that the cultural front's artistic forms—the ghetto pastoral, for example—attempt to redefine the pseudoidea of the people in order to mobilize it as a radical democratic principle. Those same aesthetic forms, moreover, also manifestly narrativize this principle: these protonarratives tell the story of “the people” as it appears in the ghetto or the factory. Such ideologemes, therefore, can be seen as the form of content of the American proletariat, the ideological concepts—which are simultaneously narrative tropes—of the working class's ongoing struggle with American capitalists.

Such ideological struggles, however, are always a means to an end for revolutionary movements—and the end, of course, is always revolution itself. Denning discusses the putatively unsatisfying ending of Mike Gold's seminal proletarian novel, *Jews without Money* (1930). The novel concludes with the narrator's conversion to revolutionary Marxism:

A man on an East Side soap-box ... proclaimed that out of the despair, melancholy and helpless rage of millions, a world movement had been born to abolish poverty.

I listened to him.

O workers' Revolution, you brought hope to me, a lonely, suicidal boy. You are the true Messiah. You will destroy the East Side when you come, and build there a garden for the human spirit.

O Revolution, that forced me to think, to struggle and to live.

O great Beginning! (309)

According to Denning, the apparent neatness of the narrator's conversion experience, which appears as “a flaw of craft and aesthetic” to the critic seeking “psychological realism,” amounts to an attempt to allegorize the revolutionary moment (249).

Revolution, however, remains constitutively unrepresentable: not because of some quasi-Derridean refusal to anticipate the concrete forms of the coming revolutionary other, but because, more concretely, the revolutionary moment anticipates an as yet

nonexistent mode of production, namely communism. Thus the impossibility of “adequately” representing this future is best read through the Jamesonian project of the ideology of form.

For the proletariat, then, it is revolution itself, in all its “possibilities for figuration,” that stands as the content of form. That the proletariat is always assumed by Marxist discourse to be both an ontological substance—there is such a thing as the proletariat, and we can identify it at work in the movement of the history of capitalism—and an ongoing political project—we must work to construct the proletariat as a self-conscious revolutionary subjectivity—signals the position of revolution as the proletariat’s content of form: revolution is what the proletariat, having no access to the Real of History itself, tries ceaselessly to (re)present. And that the moment of revolution remains in the future indicates not an interminable deferral of meaning but the metasynchronous temporality of permanent cultural revolution. Unless and until communism becomes the hegemonic mode of production, its possibilities for figuration will remain just such utopian projects and anticipatory traces.

Developing out of the Marxian tradition of the proletariat—which also means “walk[ing] beyond Marx and develop[ing] on the basis of his method a new theoretical apparatus adequate to our own present situation” (Hardt and Negri, *Multitude* 140–41)—Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s concept of the multitude is likewise dedicated to the twin revolutionary aims of both expressing the demands of oppositional praxis and founding the very subjectivities capable of mounting that opposition. A first understanding of the multitude, therefore, would view it as a postmodern version, a contemporary updating, of the Marxist category of the proletariat. What immediately

needs to be added is that the proletariat of the twenty-first century is quite different from that observed by Marx during the mid–nineteenth century. Hardt and Negri’s collaborations—*Empire* (2000), *Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (2004), *Commonwealth* (2009), and *Declaration* (2012)—arise from an experience of the later years of the 1990s and the first decade of the twenty-first century. Hardt and Negri “situate the argument [of *Empire*] at the midpoint between” the conclusion of the Persian Gulf War and the onset of the Kosovo war, that is, circa 1995/96 (*Empire* xvii). *Multitude*, meanwhile, develops out of the experience of collective oppositional praxis that crystallized around the protests at the 1999 World Trade Organization ministerial conference in Seattle. *Commonwealth* revisits and revises the arguments of the first two books from the vantage point of the end of the George W. Bush administration. Finally, *Declaration* reprises Hardt and Negri’s theorization of the multitude in light of the Occupy Wall Street movement. One of the most important differences between the multitude and the proletariat, then, is to be found in the hegemonic form of labor. Whereas the classic notion of the proletariat is dominated by and often coincides perfectly with the industrial working class, in the postmodern proletariat—the multitude—the leading role falls to what Hardt and Negri call immaterial labor (or sometimes, and more increasingly in their recent books, “biopolitical labor”). This labor is “immaterial” because both its products and its means of production are (not only material but also) immaterial: immaterial labor produces communication, knowledge, affect, feelings, states of mind, even sociality itself.

Immaterial labor stands as the referent, the content of content, of the multitude. But the multitude is also, however, a complication of traditional conceptions of social

class, which tend to alternate between unitarian (e.g., Marxian or, as above, Leninist) and pluralistic (e.g., liberal democratic) configurations. Unlike its conceptual predecessors—and here is an important point of departure from doctrinaire Marxist conceptions of the proletariat—the multitude embraces both of these perspectives (*Multitude* 103). For Hardt and Negri, unity and plurality get recast as commonality and singularity: the multitude consists of innumerable singularities, each of which persists in its singularity and autonomy, but which all together participate in, communicate through, and ultimately produce the common (see *Commonwealth* 183–84, 189–99; *Multitude* 198). Moreover, the production of the common is itself an intrinsically immaterial affair: what the multitude produces here is the web of social connections and lines of communication that provide the field of interaction between singularity and commonality.

But this interplay between singularity and commonality is also a conceptual tension, and as such it calls for an imaginary resolution. The multitude emerges from (but also contributes to, as in a feedback loop) the production of the common, yet it also, Hardt and Negri insist, leaves intact the autonomy of its constituent singularities. This contradiction—which bears a striking resemblance to the antinomy of self and other that springs from the Imaginary of the Lacanian mirror stage—becomes a crucial paradox in the concept of the multitude, which, like the proletariat before it, must negotiate both “the unity of the political” and “the multiplicity of subjects” constitutive of the multitude itself (Negri, *Subversive* 40). How can such a conjoining of singularity and commonality exist as a class, that is, per Jameson’s reminder in *The Political Unconscious*, in a fundamentally dichotomous, antagonistic relation with global capital?

How can it be at once both open and plural, with respect to singularities, but also unified as oppositional subjectivity under and against capitalism?

For Hardt and Negri, the imaginary resolution to this contradiction takes the form of the network. In terms of both production and resistance, the network stands as the structural model of the multitude: for production, the network has displaced the assembly line as the dominant metonym for labor in general (*Empire* 295); while for resistance, the network supersedes the party as the organizing model of oppositional praxis, with the result that individual actors communicate with each other and coordinate their efforts in a horizontal relation of immanence and equality instead of the vertical hierarchy typical of the party structure (see *Multitude* 285–88). The multitude has no need for the transcendent authority of the party, the vanguard, or the state itself because its authority is taken to be immanent in the very network structure that articulates its dynamic web of singularities acting in common. (This is not to say, of course, that the multitude will not use apparatuses of the party or the state to its advantage when possible.) Moreover, the multitude's use of communicative networks amounts to a reappropriation of the means of immaterial production. The network is the symbolic resolution of immaterial labor's inherent social contradiction between singularity and the common. It is, in short, the form of form of the multitude.

However, the multitude is more than just a common structure of autonomous singularities; Hardt and Negri conceive of the multitude as an oppositional subjectivity. As such, the multitude must mobilize its formal structures and constituent singularities in the realm of political struggle against global capitalism. What is perhaps surprising,

though, is that Hardt and Negri turn at this point not to conventional revolutionary strategies but to a politics of love.

Hardt and Negri's conceptualization of love is a potential source of considerable confusion, not only because love has been so thoroughly reified as bourgeois romantic love, but also because the politics of love develops gradually in Hardt and Negri's work. In *Empire*, Hardt and Negri primarily discuss love in oblique, allusive terms. The closing words of that book read: "This is a revolution that no power will control—because biopower and communism, cooperation and revolution remain together, in love, simplicity, and also innocence. This is the irrepressible lightness and joy of being communist" (413). The key to understanding both *Empire's* paean to love and joy and the development of the politics of love throughout Hardt and Negri's texts lies in the Spinozian dimension of joy.⁹ For Spinoza, joy is that which expands and enhances, not contracts and diminishes, the power of the body. This constituent power is what distinguishes Hardt and Negri's politics of love from its bourgeois romantic and familial counterparts. They write near the end of *Multitude*: "Love means precisely that our expansive encounters and continuous collaborations bring us joy.... This does not mean you cannot love your spouse, your mother, and your child. It only means that your love does not end there, that love serves as the basis for our political projects in common and the construction of a new society. Without this love, we are nothing" (351–52). This is crucial: Spinozian love does not stop with the family. It results in neither a closed set from which non-members are excluded nor the patriarchal, heteronormative reproduction and discipline of subjectivities. In *Multitude*, then, one

⁹ For a critical response to Hardt and Negri's use of Spinoza which emphasizes the role of sad affects in Spinoza's thought, see Grattan.

begins to glimpse the rethinking of love that *Empire* promises. What Hardt and Negri are attempting to do with love—as they do with several of their key conceptual categories and terminology—is to reclaim it from the realm of capitalism’s constituted power and mobilize it in the service of the constituent power of the multitude. This politics of love receives its most extensive theoretical elaboration in *Commonwealth*, where Hardt and Negri link it directly and explicitly to the common by means of constituent power: “When we ... form a social body that is more powerful than any of our individual bodies alone, we are constructing a new and common subjectivity.... [L]ove is a process of the production of the common and ... of subjectivity” (180). Therefore, instead of love of the same, the imperative of love “requires us to love the other or, really, to love alterity” (183). Love, then, while still an affect, is not merely an emotion in the conventional sense; more than that, it is an active social and ontological process. To love is to create the common.

Love, then, is the ideologeme at stake in Hardt and Negri’s multitude: like the Popular Front’s struggle over “the people,” their discussion of love is nothing less than an attempt at reclaiming and redefining a key ideological concept. But in order for my ideologemic analysis of the multitude to be complete, love must be articulable as both a pseudoidea and a protonarrative. As a pseudoidea, love denotes an ontological process of constituent power whereby the multitude produces subjectivities and enlarges the common. Love’s other face, its protonarrative, is to be found in the realm of praxis itself. Hardt and Negri’s texts abound with references to the social movements of the multitude: protests at WTO conventions starting in Seattle in 1999; struggles over water and gas rights in Cochabamba in 2000 and 2003; the picketing of the city of

Buenos Aires by unemployed workers starting in 2001; and protests over the exclusion and exploitation of the Parisian “*banlieusards*” in 2005, among others. (“Love of the other” could then be the name of this ideological system, the complex term that ultimately coordinates and orders the possible relations among the other terms of the multitude.¹⁰) From an ideologemic perspective, all of these social movements are so many illustrations and narratives of political love’s construction of common life and common praxis. They are stories of the formation of oppositional subjectivities from within, so to speak, a process that is rooted squarely in expansive encounters with other singularities.

Ideologemes are always weapons in an ideological arsenal, tactical and strategic means to a political end, and the ideologeme of love is no exception. For Hardt and Negri, the praxis of the multitude aims directly at democracy itself. Let me examine two important passages to illustrate this.

At the beginning of the chapter of *Multitude* titled “Global Demands for Democracy,” Hardt and Negri outline a *cahier de doléances*, a list of grievances, against global capitalism. The grievances include the illegitimacy of representation, both elected and unelected, under globalization; global violations of civil and human rights; the exponentially increasing economic inequality that both results from and sustains neoliberal globalization; and the commodification of the whole of social life and even the natural environment (268–85). Hardt and Negri’s list brings together and categorizes a

¹⁰ In connection with the capacity of a complex term in a semiotic rectangle to “name the system,” along with the institution of the Law that Lacan locates in the Symbolic Order, it is not insignificant that in *Commonwealth*, Hardt and Negri cast evil as a “corruption” of love and characterize evil’s prominent embodiments—particularly the family, the corporation, and the nation—as institutions that produce corrupt love, “love gone bad.” If love serves as the ideologeme of the multitude, it therefore determines even possible perversions or degradations of the multitude. See *Commonwealth* 153–64, 189–99.

wide range of injustices brought about by global capitalism and indicates the vast scope of the multitude's project. Capitalism exploits the multitude on every front, through all conceivable means. The multitude's list of grievances amounts to nothing less than a rejection of the capitalist world order *in toto*.

The multitude, though, is not just negative and polemical; guided by Spinozian love, it is also constitutive of new forms of social life. Hardt and Negri take pains, early on in *Empire*, to characterize these dual stances of the multitude: it is both “*critical and deconstructive*, aiming to subvert” global capitalism, and at the same time “*constructive and ethico-political*, seeking ... the constitution of an effective social, political alternative” (47). Thus the *cahier de doléances* of *Multitude* must be viewed side-by-side with the constructive project of forging a new social life, “a social praxis of singularities that intersect in a mass process” (Negri, *Subversive* 45). *Empire* concludes by briefly sketching out this project under the guise of three demands made on behalf of the multitude: “the right to global citizenship,” “the right to a social wage,” and “the right to reappropriation,” that is, to the reappropriation of the means of production (396–407; cf. the similar list of “platforms” at the conclusion of *Commonwealth* [380–83]). These three rights characterize the future society that the multitude seeks, the coming communism of the multitude. And the communism of the multitude is really nothing less than “absolute democracy” (see *Multitude* 351 et passim), democracy without limit and without condition. This is the utopian figuration of the multitude, its content of form.¹¹

¹¹ At this point, I must mark my distance from Žižek's critique of Hardt and Negri in *The Parallax View*. Žižek states that Hardt and Negri's “withdrawal” from “a description of the notional structure of [the] qualitative jump” into absolute democracy marks a weakness in their argument (specifically, in *Multitude*). According to Žižek, Hardt and Negri “perceive resistance to power as preparing the ground for a miraculous Leap into ‘absolute democracy’ in which the multitude will directly rule itself—at this point, tensions will be resolved, freedom will explode into eternal self-proliferation” (*Parallax* 264, 265). What Žižek misses in this critique is the constituent force, the Spinozian nature, of the praxis of the multitude—

The politics of the multitude—its “irrepressible lightness and joy,” its reliance on the ideologeme of love, its deferral of the question of the moment of revolution—has provided a pretext for a number of Hardt and Negri’s critics who fault their account of the multitude and of globalization itself for being overly optimistic, if not outright naïve, when it comes to the multitude’s political prospects. Ellen Meiksins Wood goes so far as to call *Empire* not “the *Communist Manifesto* of our time,” as Žižek’s dust-jacket endorsement of *Empire* famously puts it, but a “manifesto for global capitalism” in its alleged celebration of the revolutionary possibilities opened up by global capitalism, which Hardt and Negri famously (or to some, scandalously) view as a “step forward” from previous forms of capitalist organization (*Empire* 43–44). Furthermore, Malcolm Bull argues that Hardt and Negri’s valorization of migration as a tool of the multitude “ignores the fact that migration is often linked with the most severe forms of labor discipline” (225).¹² By insisting on globalization’s liberatory potential, the centrality of affect in immaterial labor, and the radicalism of migration and what Deleuze and Guattari call nomadology, these critics claim, Hardt and Negri espouse an optimism unwarranted by our present situation.

Notwithstanding the particular shortcomings and local problems with many of these objections, they collectively suggest a certain tension between the utopian and the Real, between the lightness and joy of Hardt and Negri’s communism and the

indeed, Spinoza’s name is conspicuously absent from Žižek’s discussion. Because democracy consists for Hardt and Negri in the praxis of Spinozian political love, the antisystemic movements of the multitude are not “preparing the ground” for absolute democracy, they are already constructing it.

¹² On migration and mobility (or “nomadology”) in Hardt and Negri, see *Empire* 212–14, 362–64, and 396–400. For critiques of Hardt and Negri’s treatment of migration, mobility, and the conceptualization of space that these require, see, in addition to Bull, Arrighi, “Lineages”; Callinicos, “Toni Negri,” esp. 136–40; and Dunn. Hardt and Negri’s primary philosophical basis for discussions of nomadology and space is Deleuze and Guattari’s *A Thousand Plateaus*; see 351–423, 474–500.

trauma and suffering of the History that hurts. This tension, however, is analogous to the paradoxical situation of utopian thinking generally, as Jameson sees it: utopian figurations “are in this society false and ideological; but they will know their truth and come into their own at the end of what Marx calls prehistory. At that moment ... the problem of the opposition of the ideological to the Utopian, or the functional-instrumental to the collective”—or, I might add, History that hurts to lightness and joy—“will have become a false one” (*Political* 293). Like the revolution figured in the content of form of the proletariat, the multitude’s absolute democracy of lightness and joy is but an allegorical figuration of the ultimate collective life of communism. Only at the moment when that arrives will the multitude know its truth.

* * *

Throughout Chapter 2 I have been arguing on multiple fronts. I have argued against an alarming retrenchment against the political in recent literary scholarship. I have argued as well for a mediation between two versions or visions of dialectical reading laid out in Jameson’s work but separated by some twenty-five years, a mediation that emphasizes the political and ideological registers of what tries to pass as “the purely formal.” All of this, in a sense, is what Jameson might call the “exoteric” meaning of my argument, the outward-directed polemic against new formalisms and apolitical scholarship. For there is also, perhaps, an “esoteric” sense of this argument, as well: indeed, what I hope to have shown in the dialectical reading of collectivities that I have just concluded is the continuing relevance of Jameson’s call to submit politics itself, both theory and praxis, to rigorous formal analysis. If there is ultimately no such thing as a pure content, if history and the Real can only ever be grasped by means of

formalizing or narrativizing operations, then it is imperative that Marxists deal with such operations head-on. In the embattled state in which Marxist theory—and indeed, theory in general—finds itself today, the failure to do so can only, like the relinquishing of “family values” to the Republicans in American political discourse, leave the task of defining polemical terms to the conservatives.

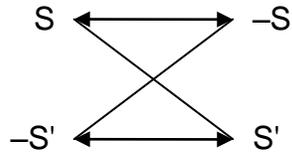


Figure 2-1. Semiotic rectangle.

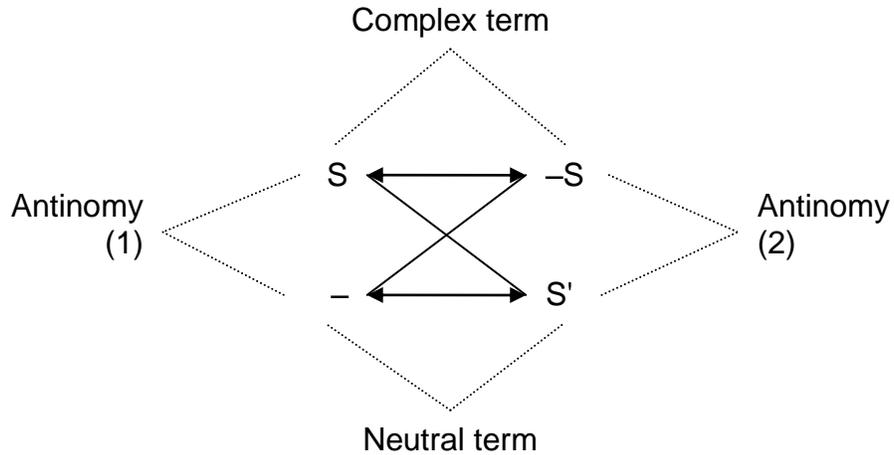


Figure 2-2. Semiotic rectangle with external syntheses.

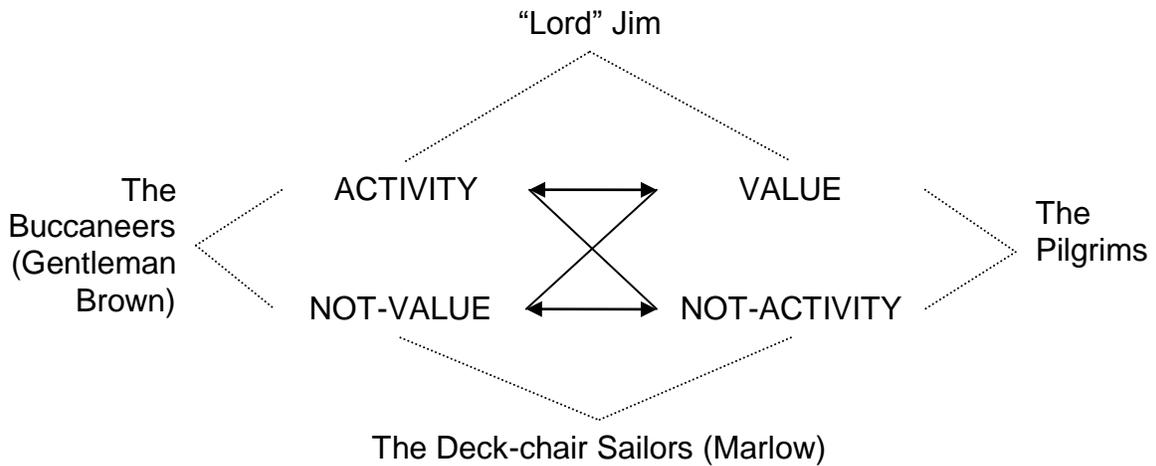


Figure 2-3. Semiotic diagram of Joseph Conrad's *Lord Jim*. (Source: Jameson, *Political* 256.)

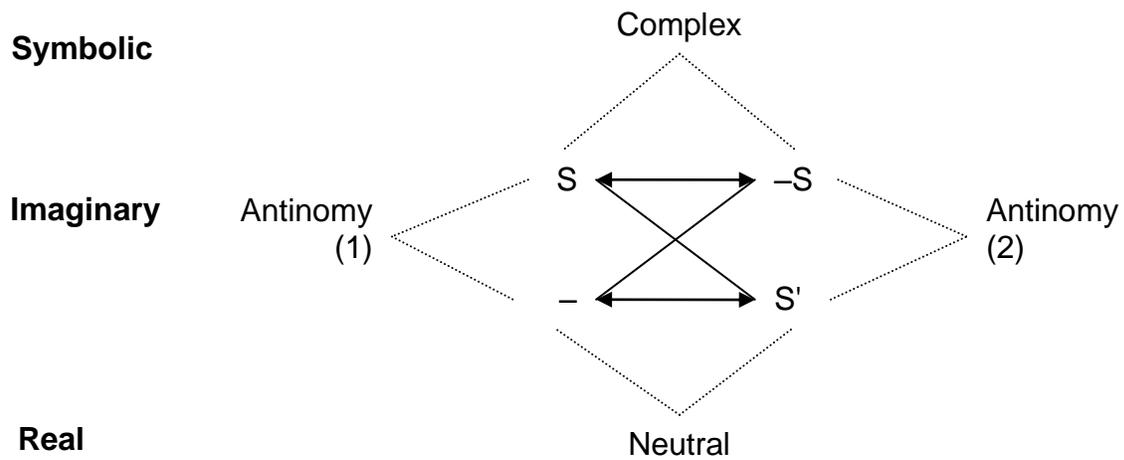


Figure 2-4. Semiotic rectangle mapped onto the three Lacanian orders. (Source: Wegner, "Greimas" 231.)

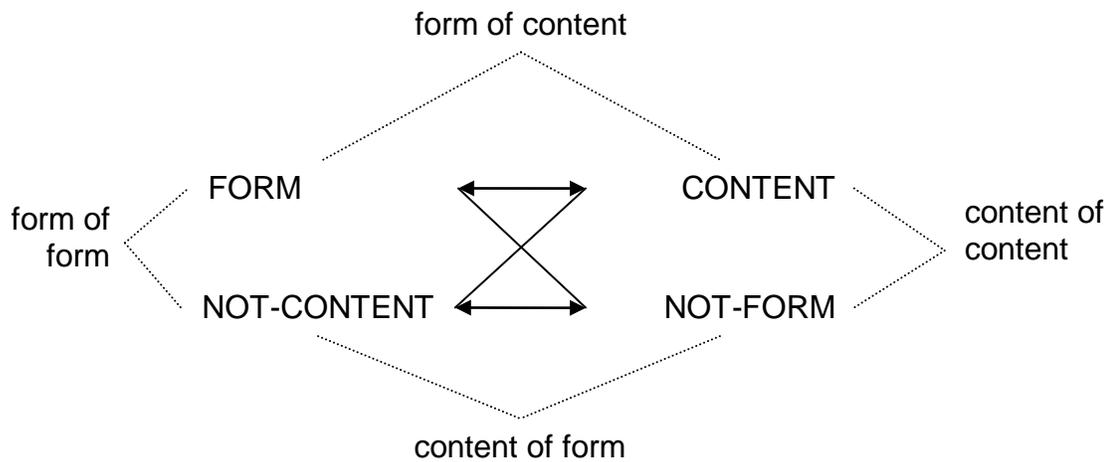


Figure 2-5. Semiotic diagram of the form/content opposition.

Ideologeme

Symbolic Act

Ideology of Form

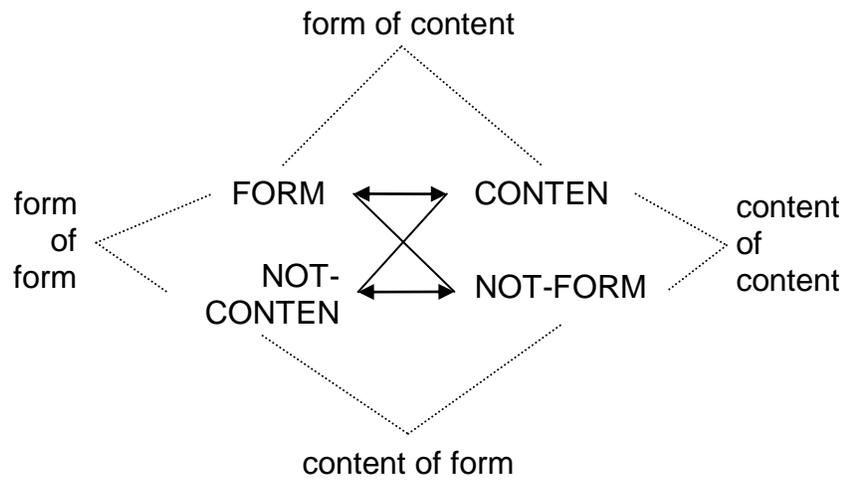


Figure 2-6. Semiotic rectangle of the form/content opposition, mapped onto Jameson's three levels of interpretation from *The Political Unconscious*.

CHAPTER 3

THE DIFFERENT PERSONS OF AMIRI BARAKA: COLLECTIVITY, SINGULARITY, AND BECOMING-MINOR

Now something that you formerly loved as a truth or probability strikes you as an error; you shed it and fancy that this represents a victory for your reason. But perhaps this error was as necessary for you then, when you were a different person—you are always a different person—as are all your present “truths”....

—Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Gay Science*

People always say, “Well, what’s Baraka doing now? He keeps on changing.”

—Amiri Baraka, *Daggers and Javelins*

...everyone is a little group ... and must live as such....

—Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus*¹

In his texts as in his life, Amiri Baraka refuses closure and takes flight. His career is punctuated by sharp breaks and extreme, often dramatic transitions in form, politics, places and manners of living, even personal identity (successively LeRoy Jones, LeRoi Jones, Imamu Ameer Barakat, Imamu Amiri Baraka, Amiri Baraka). More than just an idiosyncratic predisposition, Baraka makes of this protean flux an aesthetic principle. In his 1964 essay “Hunting Is Not Those Heads on the Wall,” Baraka famously condemns the artifact worship of “academic” literary critics (read: New Critics) and argues for a process-oriented aesthetic that would emphasize the active creating expressed in the gerund “art-ing” over the reification of that process in the noun *art* (*Home* 173–78). Art and literature, he proposes, must be viewed as an active unfolding. Contrary to the late

¹ Nietzsche 245–46, section 307; Baraka, *Daggers* 334; Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 362.

modernist formalist desire (new or old) to close off a text from history, Baraka's texts tap into and channel the flows of history, not merely spilling off the page but exploding: his controversial post-9/11 poem, "Somebody Blew Up America" (2002), sounds "Like an Owl / Exploding in fire [...] / In terrible flame like the whistle of a crazy dog" ("*Somebody*" 50). Unlike one of his erstwhile modernist inspirations, T. S. Eliot, Baraka will never be pinned and wriggling on a wall.

Nonetheless, when viewed from a macroscopic perspective, the fluxes that characterize Baraka's texts do tend to cluster around related themes, styles, genres, and political projects at given moments in his career. Conventionally, his output is divided into four distinct periods.² From 1959 to 1962 Baraka lived in Greenwich Village among white bohemians and associated, corresponded, and collaborated with noted figures of the Beat movement such as Robert Creeley, Diane di Prima, Allen Ginsberg, and Frank O'Hara.³ He also worked as an editor, publishing little magazines *Yugen* (co-edited with Hettie Cohen, his first—white—wife, 1958–63) and *Floating Bear* (with di Prima, 1961–63). During this time, Baraka wrote primarily poetry in a free-verse style heavily influenced by the Beat aesthetic and exemplified in his debut collection of

² I follow the pattern found in critical monographs on Baraka of beginning my discussion with a brief exposition of Baraka's periods. Although this might seem excessive, almost compulsive, in a chapter on Baraka (as opposed to a book-length study), such an exposition is virtually obligatory for any analysis of Baraka that seeks to make sense of what are, superficially at least, apparently contradictory and perhaps irreconcilable stances. Furthermore, my own discussion is also motivated by the way that I attempt to theorize change as a constituent element in Baraka's thought.

³ Given the differences among Beat, Black Mountain, and New York School poets, it might be better to call Baraka's circle from 1959 to 1962, following Andrew Epstein, the "New American Poetry scene," *New American Poetry* being the title of an anthology edited by Donald M. Allen (1960) that includes a broad spectrum of poets, including Baraka (Epstein 168). However, for consistency with other Baraka scholars, I use the term *Beat* to refer to this period of Baraka's career as well as his poetic style during that time.

poetry, *Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note...* (1961), and his brief early essay on poetics, “How You Sound??” (1959).⁴

The years 1963 to 1965 marked a transition between Baraka’s Beat period and his later adoption of Black cultural nationalism. This transitional period saw the publication of Baraka’s first book of music criticism, *Blues People: Negro Music in White America* (1963); his second book of poetry, *The Dead Lecturer* (1964); and his first novel (and until 2000, his only one published), *The System of Dante’s Hell* (1965). This was also the time that Baraka staged his first professional plays, most notably *Dutchman* (1964), for which he won an Obie. Although Baraka still lived in the Village until 1965 and continued to move and work in Beat and bohemian circles—in 1963 he edited *The Moderns: An Anthology of New Writing in America*, which included fiction, poetry, and poetics by the likes of Creeley, di Prima, William S. Burroughs, and Jack Kerouac—his transitional works are characterized by what many critics have noted as a progressive “blackening” of both content and form, or the development of what Baraka scholar William J. Harris calls the “jazz aesthetic” (*Poetry* 13–33).⁵ Introducing a collection of essays chronicling his transitional period, Baraka famously writes: “By the time this book appears, I will be even blacker” (*Home* 10).

⁴ William J. Harris’s introduction to *The Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones Reader* provides useful biographical information as well as a periodization of Baraka’s career (xvii–xxxiii). Komozi Woodard’s *A Nation within a Nation: Amiri Baraka (LeRoi Jones) and Black Power Politics* (1999), although not a biography per se, is richly detailed in its narrative of Baraka’s political activities during the 1960s and early 70s. In addition to Baraka’s own autobiography, biographical sketches can also be found in Brown 17–26; Effiong 73–86; Harris, *Poetry* 1–12; Hudson 3–40; Lacey, *To Raise* 1–3, 43–46, 94–98; Sollors 1–9; and Watts 21–43.

⁵ Baraka’s collaborative spirit—evinced, for example, in his continued editorial work with Beat writers—coalesces with what critic Tejumola Olinayan calls Baraka’s “gradual attention to the specificity of the African-American condition” during the transitional period (76–77) in an anecdote from a short piece by poet Lorenzo Thomas. Thomas relates the eventual emergence and flourishing of the Black Arts Movement to Baraka’s “unselfish generosity” in organizing a section on “Five Young African American Poets” in the spring 1964 issue of the Parisian journal *Revolution* (Thomas 189–90).

Following the assassination of Malcolm X, Baraka left Greenwich Village for Harlem in 1965, the same year that his marriage to Hettie Cohen ended. His departure from white associations marked his entry into a Black nationalist period that lasted until 1974, and it was during this time (in 1968) that he adopted his current moniker. His publications included a volume of short fiction, *Tales* (1967); his second book of music criticism, *Black Music* (1968); an anthology of contemporary Black literature, *Black Fire* (co-edited with Larry Neal, 1968); the drama collected in *Four Black Revolutionary Plays* (1969); the books of poetry *Black Magic* (1969) and *It's Nation Time* (1970); the collaboration *In Our Terribleness* (1970), which combines Baraka's poetry with photography by Fundi (a.k.a. Willy Abernathy); and a volume of essays, *Raise, Race, Rays, Raze* (1971). He also co-edited the short-lived music magazine *The Cricket*, with Larry Neal and A. B. Spellman, in 1968–69. A key text for this period is *Home: Social Essays* (1966), which traces the development of Baraka's thought during the transitional period, beginning with his fateful visit to Cuba in 1960, chronicled in the essay "Cuba Libre," and culminating in "The Legacy of Malcolm X, and the Coming of the Black Nation" and "State/meant." The latter outlines the revolutionary role of the Black artist—"aid[ing] in the destruction of America as he knows it" (251)—in what would come to be known as the Black Arts Movement. The Black Arts Movement and Black cultural nationalism were central to this period in Baraka's career. He founded the Black Arts Repertory Theater/School in Harlem and Spirit House (another theater associated with the Black Arts Movement) in Newark, worked with influential Black cultural nationalist Ron Karenga, participated in African American candidate Kenneth Gibson's successful 1970 run for mayor of Newark (Baraka's hometown), and helped organize the Congress

of African Peoples (Atlanta, 1970) and the National Black Political Convention (Gary, Indiana, 1972). The writings of this period, both literary and critical, advocate full-blown revolution, often cast as cultural revolution but violent nonetheless.⁶ After Baraka was arrested following the Newark riots of 1967, his sentencing judge read lines from the poem “Black People!” which called, apparently, for armed robbery (“The magic words are: Up against the wall mother / fucker this is a stick up!”) and murder (“Take their lives if need be”) (*Black Magic* 225). Baraka was convicted on misdemeanor charges of unlawful possession of a firearm and resisting arrest; though he won his appeal and had the conviction reversed, the entry of Baraka’s poetry into the public record indicates the centrality to public images of him of revolutionary fervor and anti-white violence.⁷

Although the tropes of anti-white racism and the “angry Black man” continue today to influence popular perceptions of Baraka, his third and most recent radical break with himself occurred when he repudiated Black cultural nationalism in his 1974 essay “Toward Ideological Clarity” and began instead to espouse revolutionary Marxism. Baraka has continued, of course, to struggle for the liberation of African Americans, but this time in a wider international context that no longer targets merely white, Western culture but rather monopoly capitalism: “Black liberation will come only through revolution and it is part and parcel of proletarian revolution” (*Daggers* 101); “[t]his is not to say Black nationalism was not necessary, it was and is to the extent that we are still [...] involved in the Black Liberation Movement, but we must also be revolutionaries who

⁶ See, e.g., Baraka, *Raise* 39–47. See also Funkhauser; Gosse 111.

⁷ In an early study of Baraka, critic Theodore R. Hudson provides a detailed account of the Newark riot and Baraka’s arrest and trial (25–31). More recently, Woodard devotes a chapter of his study of Baraka and the Black Power movement to “the Newark Uprising” (69–90). For Baraka’s narrative, see *Autobiography* 367–74, 378–84; *Conversations* 201–02. Baraka’s short story “Answers in Progress” is oddly premonitory of scenes from the Newark riot (*Tales* 127–32; *Conversations* 101).

understand that our quest for our people's freedom can only be realized as the result of Socialist Revolution!" (Introduction to *Hard Facts*, unpaginated). In the years since, alternately called Third-World Marxist (predominantly by critics) or "Marxism–Leninism–Mao Tse-tung Thought" (by Baraka himself), Baraka has continued to publish regularly and to attempt to revolutionize his literary work. His first Marxist poetry, *Hard Facts*, appeared in 1975, followed by *Poetry for the Advanced* (1979) and the long poem *Wise, Why's, Y's* (1995), which he considers his magnum opus (Baraka and ya Salaam 226). Baraka has also penned several Marxist plays, among them *The Motion of History* (1975–76) and *What Was the Relationship of the Lone Ranger to the Means of Production?* (1979). Important nonfiction of the Marxist period includes the essays collected in *Daggers and Javelins* (1984) as well as *The Autobiography of LeRoi Jones*, the latter published with unauthorized excisions in 1984 and in full in 1997. The *Autobiography* provided Baraka with an opportunity for self-critique and a chance to distance himself from previous positions characterized by misogyny, homophobia, anti-Semitism, and hatred toward whites, casting them now as so many kinds of "[b]ullshit that could only isolate [him] from reality" (*Autobiography* 348).⁸ Although Baraka initially

⁸ This is not to say that Baraka's revisions to his earlier positions were complete or unproblematic. Baraka's attitude toward homosexuality, for example, remained deeply conflicted even after his rejection of nationalism, combining what today would seem moderate-liberal with reactionary elements. On the one hand, although Baraka claims that whenever he had said *faggot*, it was in reference not to sexuality but to weakness, he henceforth foregoes using that word in a 1981 interview: "[the word *faggot*] does come from a denigration of homosexuality, and [... such] gratuitous attacks on homosexuals have to be opposed." On the other hand, he nonetheless continues to hold simultaneously that "homosexuality is an aberration, and [...] a product of class society, essentially" (*Conversations* 199, 200). (For reference, Baraka's novel *6 Persons* [the chief literary text that I discuss in this chapter] mentions *faggot* or its derivations twenty times or so, if not more, by my count.) Unsurprisingly, Baraka's conflicted attitude regarding homosexuality infuses his literature as well; José Esteban Muñoz offers a sophisticated reading of Baraka's play *The Toilet* (1964) that combines queer studies, utopian studies, and philosophical discussions of temporality to read the play, which depicts a gang beating of a gay character who is clearly an object for not denigration but sympathy, as "a failed recognition" rather than just another "bring[ing] out" of Baraka (Muñoz 363, 354–55; Baraka, "*Baptism*" 34–62; cf. Epstein 199–224).

viewed nationalism as complementary with socialism, the turn to Marxism eventually facilitated a nearly total rejection of his earlier Black nationalism: “All nationalism leads to exclusivism and chauvinism[...], reaction and backwardness” (359; cf. “Toward”). While Baraka’s reputation and importance as a literary figure had leveled off somewhat during the Marxist period—largely on account of the perceived dogmatism and propagandizing of his Marxist work, especially his plays⁹—he has recently garnered renewed attention for “Somebody Blew Up America.” Despite overwhelmingly (though unsurprisingly) negative portrayals of Baraka by the mainstream media following a public performance of the poem in 2002, while he was Poet Laureate of New Jersey, an upshot of the “Somebody” controversy has been a resurgence of scholarly interest in Baraka, both the relatively neglected Marxist texts of the last thirty-five years and his oeuvre as a whole.¹⁰

I want to highlight two aspects of Baraka’s work that run throughout his career. First is the formal experimentation of his literature and poetics. As early as “How You Sound??” Baraka insists that he “*must* be completely free to do just what [he] want[s], in the poem[...]. There cannot be anything [he] must *fit* the poem into. Everything must be made to fit into the poem. There must not be any preconceived notion or *design* for what the poem *ought* to be” (“How” 424–25). This means that form is not a cause but an effect of the text, and that to hold otherwise is to straitjacket literature. Similarly,

⁹ Lloyd W. Brown’s appraisal of Baraka’s Marxist drama is exemplary of the more dismissive critical attitudes toward that period of Baraka’s work: “As a scientific socialist he is in the least imaginative phase of his life as a political writer.... [His Marxist plays] offer hackneyed and literal statements in lieu of artistic forms that are both imaginative and sociopolitically significant” (168).

¹⁰ Piotr Gwiazda provides a detailed account of the “Somebody” affair and a definitive rebuttal of the almost risibly inept misinterpretations of the poem disseminated in the mainstream news media. See also Dawes, esp. x–xii, xxi–xxiv; Harris and Nielsen. For responses from Baraka, see “I Will Not”; *Somebody* 51–55; and Schwartz 53–54.

when articulating his process aesthetic of “art-ing” in “Hunting Is Not Those Heads on the Wall,” he again decries formal rigidity: “Formal art, that is, artifacts made to cohere to preconceived forms, is almost devoid of this verb value [of art-ing]” (*Home* 174). This antiformalist ethos motivates not only Baraka’s open, free-verse form, from the early Beat lyrics onward, but also the more experimental and generically hybrid poetry of the later periods: for instance, the blurred distinction between poetry and music in what reads like a drum break in “It’s Nation Time” (*Nation* 22); the innovative combination of the West African griot tradition, blues and jazz music, and extratextual improvisation and visual art in *Wise, Why’s, Y’s*;¹¹ and the improvisatory delivery that Baraka uses in public readings and performances of his work.¹² Moreover, this freedom from formal

¹¹ Baraka introduces *Wise, Why’s, Y’s* with this comment:

Each of these sections is accompanied by a piece of music [listed with each section heading]. The work is meant to be visualized by painters Vincent Smith and Tom Feelings.

Before [the first section] there is a long improvisation, not yet completely transcribed. (5)

In an interview, Baraka endorses the position that *Wise* “is actually a score rather than a book of poetry,” and that “until you hear it recited, sung and played, you haven’t really dug it” (Baraka and ya Salaam 226). Note also that several of the poems in “*Somebody Blew Up America*” and *Other Poems* are likewise “set” to specified music, and one poem—“In Town” (15–18)—has been recorded as a song, “Something in the Way of Things (In Town),” featuring Baraka’s recitation as the vocal track, by hip-hop group The Roots on their album *Phrenology* (2002).

¹² Recordings of several public readings are available on Baraka’s Web site, www.amiribaraka.com. The performance of “Somebody” available on the site—typical of Baraka’s reading style—exemplifies the kind of genre-blurring I have in mind here: Baraka performs the poem against the background of a jazz combo playing the distinctive piano groove from Thelonious Monk’s “Mysterioso,” and the poem concludes with an extended improvised riff on the image of “an owl exploding at midnight.” (“Midnight” is absent from the print version of the poem and represents an improvised addition.) On aurality and performance in Baraka, see Benston, *Performing* 212–27; M. Jones; Sherwood 123–27.

preconceptions characterizes not just the poetry but the drama and much of the prose, as well.¹³

Second, in addition to being formally experimental, Baraka's texts also share a concern for collectivity, community, and popular praxis. Some critics see a fraught relation between individual and community in Baraka's work. For these commentators, Baraka is guilty of avant-gardist elitism despite his attempts to forge a revolutionary mass culture.¹⁴ However, not all readers of Baraka share this negative appraisal of his relation to collectivity.¹⁵ More recent criticism, in particular, approaches the collective dimension of Baraka's work in several ways, often in terms of the collective improvisation characteristic of jazz music that inspires so much of Baraka's literature and poetics. Others comment on communal, ritual aspects of his work, especially his

¹³ Baraka also puts his antiformalism to explicitly political use during his Marxist phase. In his essay "The Revolutionary Tradition in Afro-American Literature," he points out that "a formal, artifact-documented presence could easily be denied slaves," facilitating the effacement of African culture in the slaveholding U.S. (*Daggers* 139–40). His objections to formalism are therefore not only aesthetic but also political: viewing the self-contained artifact as the highest embodiment of culture leads to the ethnocentric marginalization of non-artifactual cultures.

¹⁴ Werner Sollors best represents the charge that Baraka is elitist when he argues that "[w]riting 'for the people' may mask a deep-seated opposition to the people" (194). Similarly, and more recently, Jerry Gafio Watts—a political scientist whose book *Amiri Baraka: The Politics and Art of a Black Intellectual* (2001) has taken fire from Baraka scholars over the last decade, and who strikes Baraka as a "fool" who misunderstands his work (Gosse 126)—avers that "when Jones [sic] wrote for ordinary black audiences, he created his most banal work" (Watts 14). See also Hudson 181–82.

¹⁵ Kimberly W. Benston, whose *Baraka: The Renegade and the Mask* (1976) is contemporary with Hudson and Sollors, goes so far as to claim that "the active journey from lonely individuation to fulfilling communality is the fundamental progress of Baraka's work: the salvation of his own soul and that of his people are inextricable" (xviii). More recently, in *Performing Blackness: Enactments of African-American Modernism* (2000), Benston reads Baraka's evolving recitation/performance style in terms of its relation to audience: Baraka's performance style "force[s] a redefinition and retraining of 'reader' as well as audience, for the page [becomes] less a text anchoring meaning ... than a chart [i.e., sheet music] initiating gestural and vocal inflection.... [T]he poem is actually becoming ... both precedent and occasion for exploring shared resources and perceptions" (222). On Benston's take, collectivity is at stake throughout Baraka's literature, in all its versions and iterations.

drama.¹⁶ Two recent essays, both from a special Baraka issue of *African American Review* (2003), are especially noteworthy for their treatment of collectivity. In “*In the Tradition: Amiri Baraka, Black Liberation, and Avant-Garde Praxis in the U.S.*” Daniel Won-gu Kim identifies several formal sources of “hesitation” in the poem “BLACK DADA NIHILISMUS” (*Dead* 61–64), signaling an ambivalence on Baraka’s part toward the avant-garde tradition that the poem invokes and puts into play (Kim 347–48). For Kim, the charge of elitism might hold for other avant-garde artists, but not for Baraka, who on the contrary “represents a deep and ongoing aesthetic struggle with the historic tensions at the heart of avant-gardism: the tension between and within aesthetic radicalism and political radicalism” (352). Kim sees this tension playing out on the level of form itself. Joseph Lease also addresses formal configurations of collectivity in “‘progressive lit.’: Amiri Baraka, Bruce Andrews, and the Politics of the Lyric ‘I.’” Contrary to Andrews and the language poets’ critique of the lyric “I,” Lease argues that “Baraka’s lyric ‘I’ is always already exploding, reinventing the social and the historical within individual and collective lyric” (389).¹⁷ In Lease’s view, this holds not only for the nationalist and Marxist poetry but even for Baraka’s Beat work, as well. Lease’s argument suggests that one can read Baraka’s poetry as an ongoing aesthetic interrogation of the relation between the individual and the collective.

¹⁶ On the collective dimension of jazz in Baraka, see, e.g., Baraka and ya Salaam 232; M. Jones; Kim 357–61; N. Mackey, “Changing” 368–70; Muyumba 125–50. On ritual, see, e.g., Benston, *Baraka* 21–22; Dieke, “Sadeanism” 163; Effiong 69–122; Greenfield and Pinchoff; Nesteruk; Olaniyan 82–84; Sollors 217; and esp. Elam, who takes up the question of ritual specifically as a tactic of social protest theater (1–17, 129–39, et passim). For Baraka on ritual and drama, see, e.g., “Bopera Theory,” which articulates a theory of dramatic ritual encompassing dance, lighting, set design, speech/dialogue, and most notably music; *Daggers* 30–52, esp. 32–34; and *Home* 211.

¹⁷ In Baraka’s own estimation, his performance style in public poetry readings also contributes to this exploding of the “I,” making it “less the individual I and more the collective I” (Baraka and ya Salaam 232).

Notwithstanding the scholarly attention paid to Baraka's experimentalism and his relation with collectivity, an important text that continues this Barakan combination has gone virtually unnoticed in the scholarship: his second novel, *6 Persons*. Composed in 1973–74, on the cusp of his shift from nationalism to Marxism, *6 Persons* was rejected by the publishing house Putnam, which had commissioned a follow-up to *The System of Dante's Hell* but was disappointed with Baraka's offering. Baraka tried unsuccessfully to publish the novel elsewhere, finally shelving it until the 2000 publication of *The Fiction of LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka*. Save for one reading of the novel, a brief scholarly introduction, and a couple of passing references, the belated publication of *6 Persons* has gone almost entirely unremarked by literary critics.¹⁸ Chapter 3 seeks to illuminate that blind spot in Baraka scholarship.

I argue that *6 Persons* occupies a crucial place in Baraka's corpus, for two reasons. First, *6 Persons* represents a full-fledged attempt at a novelistic experiment in collectivity, in terms of both its aesthetic form and the ways in which it problematizes the relation between individual and collectivity that scholars have remarked in so many of Baraka's other works. More specifically, *6 Persons*, on the level of plot as well as form and even grammatical structure, dramatizes Baraka's notion of the constant flux of subjectivity and depicts the functioning of difference and collectivity at the heart of his notion of individual identity itself. Second, the novel also complicates the tidy periodizing schema that I have sketched out above by providing an alternative set of

¹⁸ For an account of the publication history of *6 Persons*, see Nielsen, "Fugitive," which also provides the reading alluded to. Baraka occasionally discusses *6 Persons* in interviews; see *Conversations* 101–02; Baraka and ya Salaam 217. Matthew Calihman makes passing reference to *6 Persons* in an argument about multiethnic radicalism and Baraka's relation to the Italian-American left (70).

criteria for periodizing his career beyond the biographical/ideological nexus that marks his many shifts. What is ultimately at issue in Baraka's political, ideological, thematic, and stylistic variations is nothing other than a search for a language and style of collective praxis.

I also want to read Baraka in conjunction with two thinkers with whom he shares a sympathetic resonance but whose names have been largely absent from conversation until now. The philosophy of Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari provides an invaluable set of tools for examining the flows and interruptions that shape Baraka's oeuvre and the collective dimension of his conception of subjectivity. Indeed, as I argue below, Deleuze and Guattari provide a useful means for examining and describing how Baraka moves from the "essentialism" of his Black cultural nationalist period to the Third World consciousness of his Marxist phase. More specifically, a Deleuze/Guattari-style analysis shows that what is at stake in Baraka's changes is a tension between identity and singularity as the base unit of collectivity. Baraka ultimately deserves attention not only as an avant-garde poet, playwright, essayist, and novelist—and certainly not merely as some ossified relic of the Black Arts Movement—but as an innovative, experimental thinker of collectivity.

When it comes to the absence of Deleuze in Baraka scholarship, Jeffrey T. Nealon is one notable exception. His essay "Refraining, Becoming-Black: Repetition and Difference in Amiri Baraka's *Blues People*" (1998) takes a Deleuzian perspective on Baraka's account of blues as a Black idiom.¹⁹ Although I find Nealon's article a useful forerunner in establishing some basic points of connection between Baraka and

¹⁹ In addition, Patrick Roney, whom I discuss in section 3.2, below, briefly uses Deleuze to contextualize his Nietzschean reading of Baraka's anti-essentialist conception of the self (424–25).

Deleuze/Guattari, my project differs from his in both scope and purpose. First, he focuses exclusively on *Blues People*, whereas my concern is with Baraka's poetics and literary texts, especially *6 Persons*. Second, he uses primarily the comparatively metaphysical Deleuze—the Deleuze of *Difference and Repetition* (1968)—while I am more interested in the political concepts of minor literature and singularity developed during the 1970s in collaboration with Guattari.

The pages that follow articulate and apply a poststructuralist framework developed out of Deleuze and Guattari to Baraka's texts. Section 3.1 begins by fleshing out Baraka's process poetics in connection with Deleuze and Guattari's concept of minor literature. Next, section 3.2 draws on Baraka's poetry to examine the relation between his poetics and his conception of subjectivity and identity by means of the link between minor literature and singularity. *Six Persons* is the focus of section 3.3, where I provide an extended analysis of the novel in order to demonstrate the flux and multiplicity of Barakan collective subjectivity. Finally, section 3.4 harkens back to the conventional periodization of Baraka in order to show how *6 Persons* enacts an imaginary resolution of the contradictions in Baraka's nationalist and Marxist phases.

3.1 Minor Poetics

Despite Baraka's noted propensity for dramatic shifts and seemingly abrupt transitions, there is a persistent, pernicious antiformalism that appears in all phases of his career. This antiformalism is in fact a constitutive component of Baraka's poetics. For Baraka, form—especially whenever it is conceived prescriptively, as an inherited, canonical standard against which new literary works are judged—is nothing but a reified vestige of the artist's active creation, an aftereffect of art-ing.

But if antiformalism is a constant throughout Baraka's work, its various functions provide a way to differentiate among several moments in his career. In "How You Sound??" that freedom is couched in individualist terms: "MY POETRY is whatever I think I am[...]. I CAN BE ANYTHING I CAN[...]. The only 'recognizable tradition' a poet need follow is himself[...]. To broaden his *own* voice with. (You have to start and finish there ... your own voice ... how you sound.)" (424–25). Formulated during the time of Baraka's immersion in bohemian culture, this explicitly individualist notion of artistic freedom reflects the radical individualism and the flight from social mores and cultural norms that are common tropes of Beat literature and culture.²⁰ There is thus some early justification in emphasizing, as Theodore R. Hudson does, Baraka's individuality and unique identity. Hudson devotes the entire first half of *From LeRoi Jones to Amiri Baraka: The Literary Works* (1973) to a discussion of Baraka's biography, worldview, and style—in short, his individualism—as the key to interpreting his literature: "[Baraka's] 'window' is that of an individualistic and sensitive artist. The frame of reference ... is his life" (41). This biographical reference dominates Hudson's analysis of Baraka's work, as well as another important study from the 1970s, Werner Sollors's phenomenological-psychological *Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones: The Quest for a "Populist Modernism"* (1978). Both Sollors and Hudson consistently emphasize—or rather, overemphasize—the particularity and uniqueness of Baraka's perspective and his work, leading to a reversal of the well-known feminist slogan: they make the political

²⁰ Here I must note an important discrepancy regarding individualism between Baraka's poetic theory and the poetry itself: although Baraka conceives of his poetry in individualistic terms in his Beat poetics, in practice that individual perspective carries a collective value and represents collective interests. See Lease.

personal.²¹ What Hudson nearly completely misses and Sollors misreads as a failure to achieve a “populist modernism,” though, is Baraka’s subsequent pluralization and collectivization of this individualist aesthetic.

Baraka’s first move in this direction is to begin rooting his aesthetic in a functionalist account of artistic production, what Hudson calls an “art of utility” (88). Baraka begins his argument for art-ing over art, in “Hunting Is Not Those Heads on the Wall,” by deploring “the substitution of artifact worship for the lightning awareness of the art process.” As noted above, this artifact worship amounts to a reification of active creative processes. This is problematic for Baraka. Insofar as it obscures “the lightning awareness of the art process,” the nominalization of art-ing in the noun *art* effaces “the doing, the coming into being, the at-the-time-of.” Instead of the live, unfolding process of artistic creation, this “academic” take on artistic production reduces it to a dead, static thing; if art-ing is like live music on stage, allowing the audience to “contemplat[e] the artifact as it arrives [and listen] to it emerge,” art is like exhibits in a museum, “a curious graveyard of thinking” (*Home* 174). Art is done. Art-ing is doing.

Art-ing is also excessive. One reason for the inadequacy of artifactual conceptions of art is that in cutting off the artifact from the processes that generate it, they sever the connections between art (or art-ing) and history, the multiple flows between the creative act and the historical contingencies that form its context. Thus the

²¹ See, e.g., in Hudson: “Social workers and postal workers [in Baraka’s literature] ... are obviously his mother and father, projected as decorous, middle-class oriented, and rather alienated from their inherent blackness” (67). In Sollors: “[During his nationalist period, Baraka] exaggerated his attacks on white ‘liberals’ to such a degree as to finally convince himself that ‘whites in general’ were not worth attacking, that he should address himself exclusively to Black people.... Baraka was posturing in order to exorcize his own association with devil-whiteness...”; “more than the result of abstract Black nationalist influence, or a version of the reactionary side of Bohemianism, Baraka’s anti-Semitism was also an intensely personal exorcism of his own past...” (174, 199).

Baraka art-ing creator contrasts with the art-imitator, “the most pitiful phenomenon,” who takes the artifact as a complete, autonomous entity: “A saxophonist who continues to ‘play like’ Charlie Parker cannot understand that Charlie Parker wasn’t certain that what had happened had to sound like that. But if a man tries to understand *why* Parker sounded like he did, the real value of his music begins to be understood” (176).

Understanding art-ing requires one to understand the conditions that shape it, the contingencies that bear upon it in its historical moment. Thus art-ing, unlike the art object, always links up with something beyond itself. Baraka writes: “We are all full of meaning and content, but to make that wild grab for more! To make words surprise themselves” (175). Art-ing is not content merely to reproduce what is, to regurgitate inherited forms, meanings, and contents. It pushes beyond those bounds, seeking the new and the surprising. Art-ing transforms.

All of this, however, is still framed in somewhat individualist terms similar to those of the earlier “How You Sound??” poetics. In addition to reifying the artistic process, artifactual formalism also effaces the individual artist: “The artist is cursed with his artifact, which exists without and despite him” (*Home* 173). In contrast to this anonymity, art-ing insists upon the artist’s individuality: art-ing is “[l]ike dipping cups of water from the falls. Which is what the artist does. Fools want to dictate what kind of dipper he uses” (175). The artist’s dipper, like the unique voice heralded in “How You Sound??”, shapes both the process and product of art-ing, marking them with an individual aesthetic signature.

Nonetheless, this individualism already begins to undergo modification between “How You Sound??” and “Hunting.” Although Baraka still privileges the individual artist

in the latter text, he now subordinates the artist not to the artifact but to the art-ing process. “Even the artist is more valuable than his artifact,” he writes; but he immediately continues: “But the process itself is the most important quality because it can transform and create, and its only form is possibility” (174). What is significant here is the new position of the artist: instead of being the source of the unique voice of “How You Sound??”, the art-ing artist of “Hunting” marks the point of convergence of the flows “dipped” into by the artist. What is essential is no longer the artist’s identity as an individual but rather the perspective that she or he brings to bear on art and world, the position from which the artist dips into and redirects “the will to existence” (175). If the “transition” that labels this phase of Baraka’s career refers, on the macro level, to the shift from the Beat rejection of mainstream, middle-class norms to radical politics and Black nationalism, the transitional poetics of “Hunting” likewise marks a move out of the individualist Beat aesthetic toward one embedded in the processes and flows of history.

This politicization of aesthetics erupts once Baraka arrives at a fully fledged Black nationalist stance. The essays in *Home* that most directly articulate the relation between Black nationalism and Black aesthetics—“The Revolutionary Theatre” (1964), “The Legacy of Malcolm X, and the Coming of the Black Nation” (1965), and “State/meant” (1965)—mark the total eclipse of Baraka’s earlier Beat expressionism by a new emphasis on the political uses of art. Drawing on M. H. Abrams’s heuristic model of types of criticism, Sollors describes this as a move from “expressive” art in the Beat period (in which the work of art shares a fundamental relation with the artist and serves as a means of self-expression) to “pragmatic” art in the nationalist and Marxist phases

(in which the primary relation is now between work and audience, with the intent to move that audience to action) (8; see 264n8). This reading remains a standard one.²²

To be sure, there is merit to this account of the shift in Baraka's poetics. Baraka emphasizes the importance of producing concrete, political results through art: "The Revolutionary Theatre should force change; it should be change[...]. The Revolutionary Theatre must EXPOSE!" (*Home* 210). The revolutionary charge of Black nationalism reorders the priorities of the creative artist: "The Black Artist's role in America is to aid in the destruction of America as he knows it. His role is to report and reflect so precisely the nature of the society [...] that other men will be moved by the exactness of his rendering and, if they are black men, grow strong[...]; and if they are white men, tremble, curse, and go mad" (251). On first glance, it seems that in place of the active, overflowing creative processes of art-ing, Baraka here posits an instrumental usage of art and a binary conception of essential identity. This is a far cry from finding out "how you sound" or joyously celebrating an excessive will to art-ing. Not only does Baraka indeed seem "even blacker" now than the Beat poet LeRoi Jones of "How You Sound??", he reads like a different poet, a different person.

But any account of the different persons of Amiri Baraka risks incoherence if it overstates the kinds and degrees of difference among Baraka's various incarnations to

²² For a more recent version of this reading, see, e.g., Vincent B. Leitch's chapter on the Black aesthetic in his history of twentieth-century U.S. literary criticism:

Baraka's antimimetic and antiformalist philosophy of art underwent revision when he articulated a Black Aesthetic. Because black art had to have social and political dimensions, the privatized expressionism of phenomenological poetics needed to be scrapped.... The sociopolitical mission of black art required a combined didactic-affective poetics rooted in mimesis: the precise reportage of the artist would instruct and move the black audience to correct political understanding and action. (288–89)

See also Baraka, *Home* 251–52.

the exclusion of elements of continuity from one period to the next, one Baraka to the next. Baraka uses the metaphor of “the changing same” to describe the interdependence of historical change and continuity. In the opening paragraph of “The Changing Same (R&B and New Black Music),” a well-known, frequently anthologized chapter from *Black Music*, he writes: “Through its many changes, [“the blues impulse”] remained the exact replication of The Black Man In The West” (180). This juxtaposition of difference—the rich diversity of African American musical and artistic styles inspired by the blues—and constancy—the enduring authenticity of the blues as the expression and “exact replication” of changing historical experiences of African Americans—is precisely what Baraka means by “the changing same.” Moreover, the notion of “the changing same” helps to conceptualize the many breaks and shifts in his career and, in the process, to account for what at first appear merely as ideological inconsistencies and contradictory tendencies among the different positions that he adopts.

Take essentialism, for example. The radical poetic freedom of “How You Sound??” seems resolutely anti-essentialist—“I CAN BE ANYTHING I CAN”—in comparison with the later call for Black literature to “look into black skulls” in order to “draw out [...] the correct image of the world” (“How” 424; *Home* 210, 251). It would be easy to make the argument that the later essentialism unseats and replaces the earlier poetic freedom, that Baraka has simply changed his mind. (Indeed, in the *Autobiography*, Baraka himself frequently repudiates as error or “bullshit” his earlier bohemian self-indulgence and nationalist “chauvinism.”) The temptation here is the one identified by Nietzsche in the passage from *The Gay Science* that serves as an epigraph to this chapter: the temptation to dismiss the earlier position as mere “error”

rather than examining the historical processes that lead first toward, then away from that position.

Despite the differences between the Beat and nationalist poetics, Baraka's conception of art-ing is always rooted in material reality, even if only tenuously; or, as critic Daniel Punday puts it, experience for Baraka "is not antithetical to the technical [i.e., the aesthetic], but rather is the basis of technique" (784). Baraka catalogues material for poetic creation in "How You Sound??:": "I make a poetry with what I feel is useful & can be saved out of all the garbage of our lives. What I see, am touched by (CAN HEAR) ... wives, gardens, jobs, cement yards where cats pee, all my interminable artifacts" (424). Even this privatized, individual experience is still worldly experience. The later essentialism, notwithstanding its seeming opposition to the antiformalist possibilities opened up by free verse, likewise arises out of material conditions: all jazz music, Baraka argues, "makes reference to a central body of cultural experience" (*Black Music* 181). As Punday points out, experience "frames the relation between the individual and the collective" in Baraka's work, thus providing a matrix for reading the early individualism alongside the later collective dimension (782). Baraka's chief historical argument regarding jazz and blues is that the entire evolution of Black music in the U.S. is a series of historically specific responses to white Western strategies of dehumanization and exploitation.²³ According to his account, "[t]he white man enforced

²³ Cf. Baraka's introduction to *Blues People*:

as I began to get into the history of the music, I found that this was impossible without [...] getting deeper into the history of the people. That it was the history of the Afro-American people as text, as tale, as story, as exposition, narrative, or what have you, that the music was the score, the actually expressed creative orchestration, reflection, of Afro-American life[...]. That the music was an orchestrated [...] confirmation of the history[...]. That the music was explaining the history as the history was explaining the music. And that both were expressions of and reflections of the people! (ix-x)

[...] cultural rape” of African slaves, thereby “stripping away [...] the pure African form as means of expression by Black people” and unwittingly setting the stage for the emergence of the blues: “Black Music is African in origin, African-American in its totality, and its various forms [...] show just how the African impulses were redistributed in its expression[...]" (*Black Music* 182). It is crucial to note the deep historicism of Baraka’s essentialism. Blues stands as the authentic Black musical voice not because it embodies a *timeless* essence of Blackness, some eternal, unchanging, and monolithic soul of Black folks, but because it is the aesthetic form generated in response to the *historical* experiences of really existing African American people. In Tejumola Olaniyan’s terms, Baraka’s notion of “essential” Black identity is not “expressive”—it does not “[propose] culture ... as an essence [in the conventional sense], transparent, obvious, and unchanging”—but “performative”—it “stresses the historicity of culture ... as an intricate and open process of practices” (30–31). Essences can change. Saxophonist Ornette Coleman, whom Baraka calls “the elemental land change, the migratory earth man,” represents “a spiritual change,” a “change of Essences” (*Black Music* 197). Contrary to appearances, then, the essentialism of the Black nationalist period still participates in that (changing) same tapping into and rechanneling of the flows of history that define the process of art-ing.

Failure to note the historicism in Baraka’s essentialism can result in gross misinterpretation of his stance. For example, Lee B. Brown, a philosopher and aesthetician, argues that “both [Baraka and contemporary jazz trumpeter Wynton

Nathaniel Mackey astutely suggests that *Blues People*, insofar as it “shares with Marxist thought the conviction that artistic or cultural expression is determined by and thus reflective of the social, political and economic realities of the context in which it’s produced,” is prescient of Baraka’s later adoption of Marxism (“Changing” 359).

Marsalis] suffer from a formally similar outmoded essentialism” (241). Brown fails to recognize the historical and political aspects of essentialism in Baraka, leading him to mischaracterize Baraka’s attitude toward white appropriation of Black music and culture as “conservative.” On Brown’s take, the problem for Baraka is that derivation leads to “homogenization” and mediocrity (250). This is far off the mark. What counts for Baraka is not simply that commodified, white jazz is mediocre but also that Black music has been co-opted for racist and capitalist ends—and Brown’s characterization of the essentialism he sees in Baraka and Marsalis as “*formally* similar” suggests that he misses this very crucial consideration of *content*. Just as the history of jazz and the blues is a history of flight from exploitation, Baraka’s insistence on an historicized essential Black identity in jazz is an affirmation of the need for an African American conception of identity that would stay at least a step ahead of commercialization for white, middle-class consumers (see Yost).

The more salient change between the transitional and nationalist poetics, I contend, deals with the role of culture. In a line from “How You Sound??” that I have already quoted, Baraka opposes culture (“recognizable tradition”) to the isolated, individual poet. Culture conceived in this way is what the poet must surmount in order to find the unique voice (as if Beat culture were not, in fact, a culture). Subsequently, though, culture takes on an enabling aspect and is no longer antagonistic to free artistic production. In *Blues People*, culture is characterized as “how one lives, and is connected to history by habit” (181). Glossing this line in “The Legacy of Malcolm X,” Baraka widens his definition of culture to include not only art but also politics and religion as well (*Home* 245). Art still arises from concrete experience, but now

experience is conceived as collective, historical, political, and economic.²⁴ Baraka's Beat fetishization of outsider status precludes recognition of shared experience and collective affinities—in short, of culture.

Baraka's recognition of and identification with the common historical experiences of African Americans and their cultural expression in Black art are what enable and energize the cultural politics of his nationalist period. Significantly, Baraka still holds to the process aesthetic developed in "Hunting," but he now situates that aesthetic squarely in historical and political realities: "Art is method. And art [...] remains in the world[.... E]thics and aesthetics are one. I believe this" (*Home* 212). Ethics and aesthetics coincide for Baraka precisely because both are ways of acting in and on the world. They are forces with directions—vectors: "What is called the imagination [...] is a practical vector from the soul" (213). And culture is "the epic memory of practical tradition" (166). Praxis and culture coalesce in Baraka's Black cultural nationalism:

Art, Religion, and Politics are impressive vectors of a culture. Art describes a culture. Black artists must have an image of what the Black sensibility is in this land. Religion elevates a culture. The Black Man must aspire to Blackness. God is man idealized. The Black Man must idealize himself as Black[...]. Politics gives a social order to the culture[...]. The Black man must seek a Black politics, an ordering of the world that is beneficial to his culture, to his interiorization and judgment of the world. This is strength. And we are hordes. (248)

This cultural platform illustrates the gulf separating the individualist Beat poetics and the later collective practical poetics. If the earlier poetics obsesses over the expressive "I," the concern here is with the active, political "we," with hordes.

²⁴ If Baraka's antiformalism rejects the artifact worship of late modernist formalisms, his widened definition of culture likewise marks his difference from today's late modernist enshrinement of disciplinarity and return to the aesthetic that Susan Hegeman critiques in *The Cultural Return* (2012).

Nonetheless, in accordance with the model articulated in the notion of the changing same, the collective aims of Black cultural nationalism share the same antiformalism expressed in “How You Sound??” and “Hunting.” However, to his earlier creative-artistic objections to formalism, Baraka now adds political and economic grievances: the formalist desire to reproduce “recognizable tradition” coincides with a middle-class “striving for respectability,” resulting in what Baraka decries as “second-rate” literary imitation of white forms (Home 113); formalist assumptions lead white, mainstream critics to dismiss radical Black literature as “filth, or pornography, or obscenity” (163); and commodified versions of Black musical forms become “[t]he strait jacket of American expression sans blackness” (Black Music 209). Far from abandoning the earlier poetics entirely, Baraka’s Black nationalism widens the scope of antiformalism and raises the stakes of art-ing.

Thus, the main thrust of development in Baraka’s poetics from 1959 to the late 1960s and early 70s, I submit, is not so much an abandonment or repudiation of antiformalist art-ing as a reordering and resituating of it in the context of political praxis and cultural revolution. Baraka’s poetics can therefore be viewed as a minor poetics, in the sense that Deleuze and Félix Guattari give to the term minor literature, a literature “which a minority constructs within a major language” and which is opposed to or subversive of that major language’s dominant culture (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 16)—the literature of a Kafka, or a Joyce, or a Baraka.

In *Kafka: Toward a Minor Literature* (1975; trans. 1986), Deleuze and Guattari establish three criteria for defining minor literature. First, minor literature “deterritorializes” major language, rendering it strange and foreign without thereby

translating it into another language altogether. When Kafka writes in Prague German, “a ‘paper language’ or an artificial language,” he uses it as “a deterritorialized language, appropriate for strange and minor uses” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 16, 17). Deleuze elaborates on this trait of minor literature in another text: “it is not a question of imitating patois or restoring dialects.... It is a case of making language shift.... It is not a question of speaking a language as if one was a foreigner, it is a question of being a foreigner in one’s own language, in the sense that American is indeed the Blacks’ language” (Deleuze and Parnet 58–59).²⁵ The African American practice of signifyin(g) is one such strange and minor use of a major language. Several of Baraka’s literary strategies, including puns, violations of (white) aesthetic norms, irreverence for authority, jazz-inspired improvisation, and others, perform the work of signifyin(g).²⁶

Second, minor literature is immediately political. Owing to the “cramped” social space occupied by minoritarian subjects, individual narratives are always already political narratives, too, in a minor literature: this “forces each individual intrigue to connect immediately to politics,” because each has “a whole other story ... vibrating within it” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 17). Following from this is the third criterion of a minor literature: “everything takes on a collective value,” and minor “literature finds itself positively charged with the role and function of collective, and even revolutionary,

²⁵ Cf. Deleuze and Guattari’s parenthetical comment immediately following their discussion of the first criterion of a minor literature: “(This can be compared in another context to what blacks in America today are able to do with the English language)” (*Kafka* 17). Furthermore, although they never address Baraka’s literary texts, Deleuze and Guattari cite *Blues People* twice in *A Thousand Plateaus* to use blues idioms as illustrations of minor literature (527n39, 530n34). It is noteworthy, then, that Deleuze and Guattari’s “making language shift” recalls Baraka’s “mak[ing] words surprise themselves,” as well as his praising “the great Irish writers—[Oscar] Wilde, [George Bernard] Shaw, [J. M.] Synge, [James] Joyce, [Seán] O’Casey, [Samuel] Beckett, etc.,” for “teaching the mainstreamers their own language, and revitalizing it in the doing” (*Home* 175, 164, 165).

²⁶ On signifyin(g), see Gates 44–88. On signifyin(g) in Baraka, see, e.g., Gwiazda 474–76; Harris, *Poetry* 15–16, 19–24; Luter; D. Smith 203–05.

enunciation” (17). Baraka’s widened conception of culture certainly meets these criteria, at least in terms of its aims and goals. Deterritorializing, political, and collective: these characteristics describe not only minor literatures generally, but also the texts of Baraka.

Let me briefly fill in this sketch of minor literature a bit more in order to reinforce my link of that concept to Baraka’s literature and poetics. Like Baraka’s antiformalism, a minor literature eschews preconceived forms and structures: in a major literature, “[t]hat which conceptualizes well expresses itself. But a minor, or revolutionary, literature begins by expressing itself and doesn’t conceptualize until afterward” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 28). A Nietzschean will-to-literature is at work here, just as in Baraka’s rejection of inherited literary forms and his celebration of the excess of art-ing.

Moreover, both Deleuzian minor literature and Barakan art-ing herald the new and experimental in the wake of now-defunct traditional forms. In each case, reified being (or Being, the noun) gives way to dynamic becoming (be-ing, the verb, the unfolding and ongoing process of existence) (see Baraka, *Home* 175). In his various group affiliations, Baraka exhibits the “anomalous” characteristic of minor literature: “The Anomalous is always at the frontier, on the border of a band or a multiplicity; it is part of the latter, but is already making it pass into another multiplicity, it makes it become, it traces a line-between” (Deleuze and Parnet 42). It launches “an experiment which exceeds our capacities to foresee” and which is therefore immediately political, as well: “Politics is active experimentation, since we do not know in advance which way a line is going to turn” (48, 137). Therefore, the anomalous in minor literature summons forth a collectivity, “even if the objective conditions of this [collectivity] are not yet given to the

moment except in literary enunciation” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 84);²⁷ consider Baraka’s short poem “SOS”:

Calling black people
Call all black people, man woman child
Wherever you are, calling you, urgent, come in
Black People, come in, wherever you are, urgent, calling
you, calling all black people
calling all black people, come in, black people, come
on in. (*Black Magic* 115)

Baraka’s distress signal—which signifies upon representations of the police and state authority, as in “calling all cars”—is also a political transformation of the collectivity called Black people: the anomalous Baraka not only invites them (“come / on in”) but also solicits their active participation, thereby mobilizing a new revolutionary political force and “making [them] pass into another multiplicity.” Walton M. Muyumba’s claim that “‘blackness’ is a synonym of ‘improvisation’” in Baraka is richly suggestive in this light (42): Baraka’s SOS inaugurates a collective, minoritarian, improvisational experiment, the results of which cannot be predicted in advance.

All of this, however, bears not only on literary production but also on subjectivity itself. The “minority” of a minor literature refers not merely to quantitative or demographic minority but to qualitative difference: “the minority is the becoming of everybody, one’s potential becoming to the extent that one deviates from the [hegemonic, majoritarian] model.... [It is] the becoming-minoritarian of everybody” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand* 105). Like Baraka becoming “even blacker,” minor literature enacts a transformation, a becoming-minor, on the level of subjectivity itself.

²⁷ In another light, minor literature could therefore be called metasynchronous: its calling forth of a collectivity-to-come is also an anticipatory, metasynchronous gesture betokening a future beyond capitalism and racism and signaling, ultimately, perpetual cultural revolution.

The problem of minor subjectivity is in fact a central one to both Baraka's politics and his literature.

Before proceeding to discuss minor subjectivity, though, I want to say a word about Baraka's Marxist poetics. When Baraka makes his transition to Third World Marxism in 1974, his views on literary production come to depend on an increasingly mechanical and rather simplistic conception of dialectical change. In *Daggers and Javelins: Essays, 1974–1979*, he espouses a dialectical perspective on the history of African American literature: “everything splits in two parts to be looked at dialectically; separated into its positive and negative aspects it can be understood and learned from. So we can pick up the good in it, discarding the negative” (315). This description of dialectical thinking obscures the functioning of contradiction, reducing it to a simple operation of parsing out and selecting. It also introduces an unwarranted voluntarism, as if dialectical analysis permitted one to choose what to negate and what to sublimate, independently of material, historical conditions. Furthermore, it also results in a markedly mechanical application of the base/superstructure model: “ideas are secondary, a reflection of [...] material life”; “[t]hese ideas [...] constitute merely the *superstructure* of [...] society, a superstructure that reflects [...] economic foundations” (30, 138). This version of the base/superstructure model is monocausal—there is but one base, late or monopoly capitalism—and its causality is unidirectional—the superstructure is merely a reflection of the base, incapable of transforming or acting on it. Art, which had formerly been the centerpiece of cultural revolution, now seems in comparison derivative and impotent.²⁸

²⁸ Furthermore, Baraka's own positions on Black art—most especially Black music—gives the lie to the mechanical reduction of culture to mere superstructural reflection of the economic base. If the

So the poetics of Baraka's Marxist period deactivates the forces of deterritorialization and closes down lines of flight opened up by the minor poetics of art-ing (even as the reactionary aspects of nationalism give way to full-blown revolutionary praxis in his later politics). All that this means, though, is that one must look elsewhere in the Marxist phase for Baraka's becoming-minor: namely, in the literature itself, which often retains a minor character, despite the poetics. It is therefore to Baraka's literature that I now turn my focus.

3.2 Identity and Singularity

Baraka's literary texts obsess over identity. As early as *Preface to a Twenty Volume Suicide Note...*, the poet is concerned to seek out and question the self. "I have forgotten the head / of where I am. Here at the bridge," he begins "The Bridge" (*Preface* 25). The poem's central conceit puns on two senses of *bridge*: the word denotes both a built structure for crossing a passage and, in music, a contrasting chord progression interpolated into a song's main chord progression, or "head" (the latter, of course, also being a metonym of the self) (see Epstein 191). The poem goes on to exploit this metaphorical identification of place, musical expression, and identity. The persona has forgotten his own head and therefore must search for himself: "we drove through, headed out / [...] to what / we wanted to call 'ourselves.' / 'How does the bridge go?'" (25). The bridge is a provisional means to seek identity: "The changes are difficult, when / you hear them, & know they are all in you, the chords // of your disorder meddle with your would be disguises" (26). In music, a bridge reorders, modifies, riffs

base/superstructure model espoused in Baraka's Marxist poetics were to hold, Black music would be impotent to seek or create lines of flight from capitalist exploitation, yet this is precisely, in Baraka's view, the motor force driving the whole history of Black music, from jazz and blues to R&B and hip-hop.

upon, transposes, or otherwise transforms the melody of the head: the chord changes are “difficult” because in deviating from those of the head, they require a performer to suddenly and temporarily play or sing over new chords, in a new key, before returning once again to the head. This presents both a challenge and a unique opportunity for jazz improvisation: a virtuoso can soar across a bridge, but a novice or a hack can be hanged from it. It is thus unsurprising that the poem ends on an ambivalent note:

The bridge will be behind you, that music you know, that place,
you feel when you look up to say, it is me, & I have forgotten,
all the things, you told me to love, to try to understand, the
bridge will stand, high up in the clouds & the light, & you,

(when you have let the song run out) will be sliding through
unmentionable black. (26)

A conventional interpretation might read this conclusion as a metaphor for death and the disintegration of the self in the guise of oblivion and “unmentionable black.” (The first stanza compares the persona to “a little girl / you sense will be dead before the winter / is over” [25].) But whose death—who is the *you* addressed in these lines?

“The Bridge” begins in the first-person perspective, but the bulk of the poem—nearly everything after “How does the bridge go?”—uses the second person. In *The Shadow and the Act: Black Intellectual Practice, Jazz Improvisation, and Philosophical Pragmatism* (2009), Walton M. Muyumba reads “The Bridge” as a piece of “lyrical improvisation serv[ing] as self-invention” (135). For Muyumba, this is emblematic of Baraka’s proteanism: his “transitions are attempts to kill off the old selves in favor of newer, improvised selves” (133). Thus the addressee of “The Bridge” is none other than Baraka himself, a Baraka who predicts, and perhaps fears, that he will one day “forget” his old tastes, loves, his old self.

This lyrical self-questioning-cum-self-invention is present in Baraka's literature throughout all four periods (Beat, transitional, nationalist, Marxist). In many instances, this impulse takes the form of an introspective but fragmented or divided self, as in the transitional poem "An Agony. As Now": "I am inside someone / who hates me. I look / out from his eyes" (*Dead* 15). Similarly, the chapter of *The System of Dante's Hell* titled "The Eighth Ditch (Is Drama)" portrays a seduction of "[y]oung, smooth-faced" "46" by the older and more worldly "64," interpreted by Sollors as a confrontation of Baraka's youth by his older bohemian persona (*System* 79–91; Sollors 97).²⁹ In other texts, such as the nationalist poem "Numbers, Letters," a plaintive speaker seeks recognition from others as a buttress to the self: "I cant [sic] say who I am / unless you agree I'm real / [...] / I am real, and I can't say who / I am. Ask me if I know, I'll say / yes, I might say no. Still, ask" (*Black Magic* 47). In still other instances, Baraka's texts assert a right to identity and self-definition; for example, one of the best-known passages in all his corpus, Clay's "pumping black heart" speech in *Dutchman*, begins with such an assertion: "Let me be who I feel like being. Uncle Tom. Thomas. Whoever. It's none of your business. You don't know anything except what's there for you to see" (34; see 34–36).³⁰ Viewed in conjunction with the flux and contingency of Baraka's poetics of

²⁹ Although not all critics take the autobiographical frame of "The Eighth Ditch" as literally as Sollors does—that is, they do not go so far as to postulate, as he does, that 46 and 64 represent "two different stages of the 'author's' development" (Sollors 97)—there seems to be broad consensus that the seduction (or rape) of 46 by 64 counts as an instance of a divided or fractured self and/or that *System* generally dramatizes this self-division: "Wish [...] to be some other self[...]. Some other soul, than the filth I feel[...] Some separate suffering self" (Baraka, *System* 134). See Benston, *Baraka* 10–11; Dieke, "Paradoxes" 272–74, "Sadeanism," and "Tragic Faith" 109; Epstein 206–19; Hudson 111–18, esp. 114.

³⁰ Baraka's nationalist play *J-E-L-L-O* expands Clay's demand into a full-blown premise. *J-E-L-L-O* parodies *The Jack Benny Show*—the title alludes to announcer Don Wilson's plugs for Jello, the show's corporate sponsor—by having Rochester, Jack Benny's chauffeur and a stock Uncle Tom character, reject his assimilationist servility, to Benny's apprehension and terror: "What're you saying? Rochester, your hair, what happened[...]? Why's your hair so wooly? [...] What's wrong with you? Why're you acting this

art-ing, along with the historically variable nature of so-called essential identity in his nationalist poetics, these meditations on selfhood suggest that the Barakan self is always in transition and taking flight.

A good deal of the scholarship on Baraka focuses on this transitional, transitory self. The four major studies of Baraka to emerge from the 1970s—Kimberly W. Benston's *Baraka: The Renegade and the Mask* (1976), Lloyd W. Brown's *Amiri Baraka* (1980), Hudson's *From LeRoi Jones to Amiri Baraka*, and Sollors's *Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones*—all devote attention to Baraka's search for the self. In addition to Muyumba, for whom the transitional poetry, in particular, is one long improvisation of selfhood, other scholars active over the last decade who analyze processes of constructing or questioning identity in Baraka include Ikema Dieke ("Paradoxes," "Sadeanism," and "Tragic"), Andrew Epstein, Peter Nesteruk, Patrick Roney, Sandra G. Shannon, and Ted Yost.³¹ As this breadth of coverage shows—to say nothing of the germinal role played by the new social movements, including those associated with Baraka's name, in the history and development of identity politics in the U.S.—the concept of identity in Baraka clearly merits critical attention.

Moreover, the search for identity or the questioning of the self in Baraka's literature is more directly connected to his poetics of art-ing than it might seem at first. In "Hunting," he extends his argument for verbal art-ing (as opposed to nominal art) to the realm of subjectivity itself: "If we describe a man by his life we are making him a verb, which is the only valid method" (*Home* 175). Thus Baraka's aesthetic approaches

way?" (12–13). Instead of delivering a climactic monologue à la Clay, Rochester performs an active reclaiming of his right to define his identity.

³¹ See also Murray, who extracts a theory of performative identity in the nationalist Baraka in order to read John Oliver Killens's novel *The Cotillion, or, A Good Bull Is Worth Half a Herd*.

individual subjectivity by means of the worldly actions of the subject, the subject's being-in-the-world or facticity. Since art-ing is a process, not a product, it calls attention to the conditions under which, and the manner in which, the art-ing process occurs. Baraka writes in an essay from the nationalist phase: "*How is a description of Who. So a way of feeling (or a description of the process of) is what an aesthetic wd be*" (*Raise* 117).³² Any aesthetic analysis of art-ing will therefore sketch out, or at least gesture toward, the position of a subject whose perspective and experiences—in short, whose facticity—determines which flows are redirected in art-ing, what directions those flows take, what "dipper" interrupts and redirects them.

In broad terms, however, the critics enumerated above largely do not connect the theme of identity or self to Baraka's process poetics. Closer to my own perspective is the Nietzschean reading of Baraka performed by Roney in "The Paradox of Experience: Black Art and Black Idiom in the Work of Amiri Baraka" (2003). Against charges of racial essentialism leveled at Baraka, Roney argues persuasively that race is always already a fluid, nonessential concept in Baraka's work. Drawing on Benston's essay "Late Coltrane: A Re-Membering of Orpheus" (1977), Roney identifies a "collective Dionysian force of creative destruction and destructive creation" at work in Baraka (Roney 411; see Benston, "Late Coltrane"). From here, Roney examines the different iterations of the concept of Black selfhood in Baraka, which he reads as "a transgression: The 'Black self' is never an 'itself'; it exceeds both the myth of the autonomous individual and the organic, collective unity" (416). The ensuing analysis of identity and becoming—or really, as I argue shortly, of the self as becoming, not as

³² Here Baraka uses the stylized abbreviation *wd* for *would*, as he does frequently throughout *6 Persons* (for example, *abt* for *about*, *cd* for *could*, etc.).

identity—situates Baraka as anti-essentialist and postmodern; Roney’s primary references are to Derrida and Lyotard, but he also cites Deleuze on the will to power. In all, his interpretation is that of a latter-day Nietzschean:

If Baraka envisions black art as the highest possibility for a culture of continual transformation, then it must affirm the suspension of the two traditions between which it is situated [i.e., the Western and African traditions] and, by suspending them, open the possibility for them *not* to be themselves, to disclose a possibility for difference that can only arrive when “homelessness”—an uprootedness without ground and without limits—is affirmed as a fundamental experience. (425)

Roney’s Nietzschean route passes through Deleuze here, and his Baraka is a homeless nomad.

However, Roney ends with this homelessness, whereas I want to push the Deleuzian perspective on Baraka further. More specifically, I want to connect Baraka’s literature on identity with the minor poetics outlined in the previous section. The poetics is conspicuously absent not only from Roney’s analysis but also from all those that I have just mentioned. To the extent that Baraka’s poetics is a poetics of becoming-minor, it concomitantly requires an analysis of minor subjectivity itself.

I have already discussed one version of minor subjectivity in this chapter: the art-ing artist. In the previous section I emphasized the freedom from formal constraint that characterizes Baraka’s notion of art-ing. What I want to add now is that this antiformalist freedom is also the freedom of minor subjectivity, the freedom not merely to be but to become.³³ Muyumba’s compelling analysis of improvisation as a literary strategy for self-invention in Baraka provides a useful initial reference. He reads

³³ Cf. Nathaniel Mackey’s observation that the “emphasis on self-expression [in Baraka’s poetics] is also an emphasis on self-transformation, an othering ... of the self, the self not as noun but as verb” (“Other” 60).

Baraka's periodic shifts as "part of a radical theorization of ... improvisation as a metaphor for both intellectual work and African American identity" (131). This take on improvisation does not go far enough, though, in that it remains fixed in a language of metaphor: for Muiyumba, improvisation and change *describe* identity. A perspective based on Baraka's minor poetics closes this gap between metaphor and referent: improvisation and change *constitute* minor subjectivity. This distinction—between metaphorical description and constitution; between identity and minor subjectivity—is at base a distinction between being and becoming, the same one that marks the difference between artifactual art and dynamic art-ing. When Baraka exclaims that "[HE] CAN BE ANYTHING [HE] CAN" ("How" 424), he is insisting on the right of the art-ing artist to become-minor.

Becoming-minor is, first of all, a process of deterritorialization and reterritorialization. Minor literature deterritorializes a major language—that is, it decouples signifiers from their conventional signifieds, disconnects a major language's utterances from their usual contexts—and reterritorializes it to subversive ends—it signifies upon a language's "official" uses and usages, recontextualizes utterances into new and unexpected situations. This interplay between de- and reterritorialization (not a dialectical one for Deleuze, since it never leads to anything like synthesis or sublation)³⁴ also takes place on the level of subjectivity itself. Insofar as becoming-minor is really "the becoming-minoritarian of everybody" (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand* 105), becoming-minor deterritorializes subjects from the positions allotted

³⁴ Cf., however, Jameson's essay "Deleuze and Dualism," which identifies in Deleuze a practice of "prodigious polymorphous coding" (or transcoding, mediation) (*Valences* 190; see 181–200).

them by majoritarian hegemony and reterritorializes them as subversive, partisan, even revolutionary.

Put differently, becoming-minor deterritorializes the desires corralled by paranoia and reterritorializes them in assemblages of schizophrenia. For Deleuze and Guattari, paranoia marks the neurosis of the Oedipal subject interpellated by capitalism and Freudian psychoanalysis alike. Paranoia is a “fascisizing [“delirium”] that invests the formation of a central sovereignty” and which accounts for one’s desire to be led. In contrast, schizophrenia “follows the *lines of escape* of desire,” exploding the neat closure of the Oedipal family triangle (mommy/daddy/me) and the fascist control of desire exercised by capitalism and the state (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 277). In place of the desire to be led, the secret desire for fascism, schizophrenia unleashes desire across the whole social space.

This is why the schizoid subject is also, at least potentially, the revolutionary subject. Schizoanalysis—Deleuze and Guattari’s term, modeled on *psychoanalysis*, for a pragmatics, a functional account, of any assemblage of desires—articulates the conditions under which “schizorevolutionary” deterritorializations become possible: “the completion of the process is ... not a promised and pre-existing land, but a world created in the process of its tendency, its coming undone, its deterritorialization ... where the person who escapes causes other escapes, and marks out the land while deterritorializing himself” (322). This is the sense in which deterritorialization has, in Paul Patton’s words, a “utopian vocation” for Deleuze (9): schizophrenic deterritorialization is the mass revolt of subjects, in the philosophical and political senses at once, against sovereignty. If becoming-minor is to be universal (“the

becoming-minoritarian of everybody”), it can only happen, says Deleuze, by means of the deterritorialized and deterritorializing schizophrenic subject.

Both schizophrenia and paranoia, moreover, invest collectivities, but with opposite political charges. Schizophrenia involves “a *subject-group* investment,” one that treats desire as “multiple” and “molecular.” Paranoia, on the other hand, leads to “a *subjugated group* investment..., which socially and psychically represses the desire of persons,” subordinating the multiplicity of desires to the singular, molar power of the state (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 280). The first kind frees subjects as agents—frees them to act, to pursue lines of flight, to deterritorialize and reterritorialize—while the second subjugates agents to power and authority, reterritorializing them as (political) subjects of the state. Schizophrenia is antifascist; paranoia, microfascist.

Crucially, however, schizophrenic subjectivity is no automatic guarantee of revolutionary deterritorialization. Deleuze cautions that schizophrenia can become “the descent of a molecular process into a black hole”: marginal subjects (schizoids, nomads, minoritarian subjects) do not “create the lines [of flight]; they install themselves on these lines and make them their property, and this is fine when they have ... the prudence of the experimenter, but it is a disaster when they slip into a black hole from which they no longer utter anything but the micro-fascist speech of their dependency and their giddiness: ‘We are the avant-garde,’ ‘We are the marginals’” (Deleuze and Parnett 139). Schizoid experiments become microfascist when they degenerate into “dependency,” another name for the desire to be led. For all its revolutionary potential, schizophrenic subjectivity becomes reactionary when it is content to remain at the level

of identity, even reclaimed and reterritorialized identity. The schizophrenic syntax of desire—*we want, we demand, we create*—gives way in the paranoid Thermidor to identitarian syntax: *we are, I am*.

This Deleuzian perspective allows for an alternate assessment of the perceived dogmatism or ideological blinders of Baraka's Marxist literature. The closing passage of *Daggers and Javelins* aptly captures the ambiguity between Baraka's revolutionary and reactionary aspects, his schizophrenic and paranoid tendencies, his innovation and his perceived failures. He begins: "People always say, 'Well, what's Baraka doing now? He keeps on changing.'" This line—the second epigraph to this chapter—sums up the flux that permeates his career and his corpus, and it signals the immense revolutionary potential of the becoming that undergirds his literature. But then he continues: "*I am a Marxist-Leninist, because that is the most scientific approach to making revolution*" (334; my emphasis). Baraka reverts here to what Deleuze calls microfascist speech, the identitarian speech of being: *I am*. I am reminded here of the closing lines of "The Liar": "When they say, 'It is Roi / who is dead?' I wonder / who will they mean?" (*Dead* 79). It is when Baraka does *not* know the answer to that question that he is at his most radical.

It is unfair and inaccurate, however, to characterize all of the Marxist material as stilted and dogmatic, as several critics have from the 1970s on. With the poetry immediately after the Marxist turn, in particular—the literature of the recent convert—one does occasionally get the impression that Baraka (thinks he) has all the answers, but this certitude retreats over the three decades plus that have intervened since his repudiation of nationalism. In his more recent work, especially *Wise, Why's, Y's* and

“*Somebody Blew Up America*” and *Other Poems*, one finds an increasing return of the interrogative voice in Baraka’s poetry: “now war / is over / we free / they say // who they / who say / what free / gone be?” (*Wise* 20); “How do we know who we are / Except in the world, going through it / Together” (“*Somebody*” 21). The best example of this is “*Somebody Blew Up America*.” Early on, Baraka poses a crucial question: “They say (who say? Who do the saying)” (42). Most of the rest of the poem consists of a series of questions beginning with *who*:

Who killed the most Irish
 Who killed the most Africans
 Who killed the most Japanese
 Who killed the most Latinos

Who/ Who/ Who/
 [...]
 Who put the Jews in ovens,
 And who helped them do it
 Who said “America First”
 And ok’d the yellow stars (42, 45, 48)

Who live on Wall Street
 The first plantation
 Who cut your nuts off
 Who rape your ma
 Who lynched your pa
 [...]

The poem’s resonance with Ginsberg’s “Howl” has not gone unnoticed (even if some, like poet Liam Rector, view it as “a painfully second-rate and derivative ‘Howl’” [10, qtd. in *Gwiazda* 480]). Indeed, both poems use questioning to launch critique, targeting the identitarian and fascist logic of the Cold War U.S. and its failed afterlife under Bush 43.³⁵

³⁵ The chief similarity of Baraka’s “*Somebody*” to Ginsberg’s “*Howl*” consists, first, in the repetition of *who*—“who poverty and tatters and hollow-eyed and high sat up smoking ... / who bared their brains to Heaven ... / who passed through universities,” etc.—and second, in the use of repetitive structure as a vehicle for accusation—“Moloch! Solitude! Filth! Ugliness! Ashcans and unobtainable dollars! Children screaming under the stairways! Boys sobbing in armies! Old men weeping in the parks! / Moloch! Moloch! Nightmare of Moloch! ... / Moloch the incomprehensible prison!” etc. (Ginsberg,

The return of the question in Baraka's poetry signals that identity is not already decided after all, that there is still room for singularity in Baraka's literature—and that Baraka knows a reactionary, identitarian fascist, a micro-Moloch, when he sees one.

This, finally, is why Deleuzian schizophrenia is not only a philosophical concept but also a tool for praxis. Patton argues that the freedom at issue in schizophrenia, "critical freedom," marks a line of flight from the positive and negative freedoms of liberal political philosophy:

critical freedom ... concerns those moments in a life after which one is no longer the same person. It is the freedom to transgress the limits of what one is presently capable of being or doing, rather than just the freedom to be or do those things. In the course of a life, individuals make choices which may significantly affect the range, nature or course of their future actions.... To the extent that these events may have the effect of opening up certain paths and closing off others, and to the extent that the individual's capacities to affect and be affected will change as a result, they are possible occasions of 'becoming'.... (85)

Critical or schizophrenic freedom consists in, precisely, the freedom to be a different person. It is thus a Barakan freedom, too. This conception of freedom, furthermore, also marks the ultimate inadequacy of the liberal discourse of identity that grounds mainstream scholarly investigations of subjectivity in Baraka. For what is at stake in Baraka's minor literature is nothing other than, not identity, but singularity. Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri usefully articulate this difference as the difference between emancipation and liberation:

whereas emancipation strives for the freedom of identity, the freedom to be *who you really are*, liberation aims at the freedom of self-determination and self-transformation, the freedom to determine *what you can become* [i.e.,

"Howl" 9, 21). With respect to *who*, the critical difference is that Ginsberg's is a relative pronoun identifying "the best minds of [his] generation destroyed by madness" (9), while Baraka's is an interrogative that contributes to the accusatory tone of "Somebody." Nonetheless, both poets, in broad terms, are clearly using poetry as a means of social protest.

Patton's critical freedom, the freedom of singularities]. Politics fixed on identity immobilizes the production of subjectivity; liberation instead requires engaging and taking control of the production of subjectivity, keeping it moving forward. (*Commonwealth* 331–32)

The critical freedom of singularity—which, for Hardt and Negri, is the fundamental freedom of the multitude itself—is the Deleuzian freedom to activate and pursue lines of flight, the freedom to become different.³⁶ Becoming-minor and becoming-(even)-Blacker mean playing over the bridge and becoming a different person.

3.3 Different Persons—At Least Six of Them

No text of Baraka's stages this process quite like *6 Persons* does. To be sure, Baraka's whole corpus can be read as one immense assemblage of processes of becoming-minor, as evinced by his poetics and his literature alike. However, *6 Persons* is unique—or better, singular—insofar as it stands as both the most sustained and developed narrative of Baraka's self-fragmentation and self-othering and a rare glimpse into his prose fiction.³⁷ Moreover, there is really nothing else like *6 Persons* among Baraka's texts. It shares little in common with *The System of Dante's Hell*, his only other published novel, and although the first chapter had been published as a short story in *Selected Plays and Prose of Amiri Baraka/LeRoi Jones* (1979), the chapters of *6 Persons* are too unified, too closely linked with each other to be comparable to the

³⁶ It is noteworthy in this connection that Benston describes Baraka's poetic voice as "a manifesto of freedom not *for* transformation but as transformation" (*Performing* 192)—freedom's just another word for becoming-minor.

³⁷ In an interview, Baraka reports that he has actually written substantial amounts of fiction, including "several" novels, but that there is a much smaller commercial market for his fiction than for his poetry and plays (Baraka and ya Salaam 227). In my view, this further reinforces the importance of *6 Persons* insofar as it, along with *System*, is a very rare example of a much larger body of work—minor literature, indeed, in more than one sense. On Baraka's unpublished fiction, see Baraka and ya Salaam 217, 226–27, 233; Nielsen, "Fugitive."

short story collection *Tales* or his more recent *Tales of the Out and the Gone* (2007).

The closest cousin to *6 Persons* is the *Autobiography*, but the latter serves what he calls an “archival” purpose, in contradistinction to the aesthetic experimentation of the former (qtd. in H. Lacey, “Longish” 230). The uniqueness of *6 Persons*, I argue, consists in this: the novel singularly dramatizes the multiplicity of the subject in process of becoming-minor, becoming-Blacker, even becoming-Baraka.

Six Persons is in one respect a novelization of Baraka’s own subjective development—his becoming-minor—through 1973–74, the time of the novel’s composition. It is therefore something like a *bildungsroman*: it follows Baraka’s life from childhood through his time at Howard University, his service in the U.S. Air Force, his bohemian life in the Village, and his cultural-nationalist fervor, to his transition to Marxism. If *6 Persons* is a *bildungsroman*, however, it is an unconventional one: more than “a longish poem, about a dude” (*6 Persons* 273)—a phrase from the novel that Henry C. Lacey uses as the title to his introduction in *The Fiction of LeRoi Jones/Amiri Baraka*—it is really about several dudes at once.

This multiplicity is noticeable, first of all, in the novel’s use of multiple narrators. The first two chapters are narrated from a more or less autobiographical perspective; in the first chapter, the narrative voice tends to coincide with the chapter’s preadolescent subject, while in the second, it takes on the character of self-critique focused on Baraka’s time at Howard, cast here as “Colored School.” The third, fourth, and fifth chapters are narrated by a consciousness that Lacey compares to “a street-wise, urban griot” (“Longish” 230). In these chapters, which narrate Baraka’s service in the Air Force, his bohemian years, and his transition to nationalism, the narrator grows

increasingly critical of, and at times almost openly hostile to, the protagonists. Finally, the narrators of the sixth and seventh chapters approach progressively closer to what one would take to be Baraka's current (1973–74) perspective, chronicling the gradual breakdown of various nationalist alliances and the beginnings of his Marxist phase. *Six Persons* is an autobiographical novel, but one that is told from a fragmented perspective which inscribes difference within the act of narration itself.

Moreover, the multiplicity alluded to in the novel's title is also a play on the grammatical concept of persons. In addition to varying the narrative perspective, each chapter also privileges a different syntactical construction of person; together, they catalogue all six persons of the English language (first, second, and third, each in singular and plural), as signified in the chapters' titles: "I," "You," "He," "They (Them Theirs Theyres &c)," "You, Yall, Ya," "We," and "We & All." (The last chapter title, of course, does not denote a seventh grammatical person but instead gestures toward the Third World universalism of Baraka's brand of Marxism-Leninism-Maoism.) As the consciousness of the narrator changes from chapter to chapter, it also shifts its relation to the chapters' protagonists, sometimes identifying with Baraka's avatars, sometimes critiquing them, sometimes accusing them directly. Thus, the novel confounds any attempt at a straightforward identification of either protagonists or narrative voices with Baraka "himself."

Finally, the six persons of *6 Persons* are also six different protagonists. First is the unnamed first-person narrator, followed by "LJ" (as in LeRoi Jones) in the second chapter. Subsequently, the novel describes the deeds and thoughts of Bro, Burt Corliss, Mickey, and Barney. Just as there is no unified or unifying narrative voice that

subsumes the novel's chapters under a single perspective, so also is there no single protagonist that can definitively be said to "represent" Baraka in unproblematic, referential fashion.

All of this gestures toward the central issue of collectivity that I have been raising throughout this discussion. One way to read *6 Persons* is to follow the successive collectivities that cluster around various moments or incidents in the novel's plot and/or Baraka's biography. Each chapter details a collectivity that corresponds to the biographical period of Baraka's life that the chapter works over. Even the first chapter, "I," which focuses on Baraka's youth, is marked by a collectivity: "our famous club, the Secret Seven, [which] met and ate kits and drank kool-aid and plotted to fly" (236). The chapter on "Colored School" describes the "boys club" that LJ runs with, a circle of "cats" whose primary concern seems to be the performance of cool: "All the brothers hung out together as commentators on the Colored School[.... W]e could talk a talk. We cd beat a fine track down, a lingo we had, man, that was us. Sweet" (261). The third chapter, in turn, is about LJ's shared experiences with his fellow enlisted soldiers in the Air Force, who strive to establish some collective bond among themselves: "We used to stand in line and jive about this bullshit we had got in[...]. Tryin' to be close in a way, without knowin' each other" (274). LJ's, Bro's, and Corliss's experiences among bohemians crystallize, in the fourth chapter, around "the castle," a pseudo-Utopia populated by changing casts of numerous Beats, fellow travelers, and other partiers and thrill-seekers. The nationalist chapters (the fourth and fifth) narrate the rise and decline of cultural nationalism—nationalism, of course, being at its core nothing other than a theory and figure of collectivity. Finally, the transition to Marxism takes the form of

Corliss's/Mickey's/Barney's dawning awareness of collective revolutionary subjectivity: "We are the subjective element of the revolution. The Human will. & we need training, more practice coming out of new revolutionary theory. (Waves of light settle on our collective hands. We *are* the revolutionaries.)" (403). If *6 Persons* narrates a life, that life is in turn articulated according to a series of collectivities.

In this section, I want to read *6 Persons* as minor literature, as a novel of flows and lines of flight, of singularities and collectivities, and ultimately of the process of becoming-minor. This approach to *6 Persons* accomplishes two crucial tasks. First, it provides a means for situating within the larger context of Baraka's career a text that has escaped critical notice for too long. Second, in so doing, my approach also establishes and demonstrates, through an immanent Deleuzian analysis of the text, a logic that undergirds Baraka's flights and transitions without either resorting to a reductive psychological-biographical reading or doing away altogether with the element of continuity inherent in the notion of the changing same. Significantly, my Deleuzian reading of *6 Persons* also avoids subsuming those flights and transitions under a teleological narrative in which all revolutionary paths lead necessarily to Marxism—a teleology that Baraka himself occasionally attributes to his many changes. What emerges instead is a view of Baraka as a sometimes conflicted and contradictory but nevertheless insightful and provocative theorist of revolutionary subjectivity.

A signal trait of that revolutionary subjectivity in *6 Persons* is its mobility. This is evident on a superficial level in the geographical movements and migrations that structure the novel: from Newark (chapter 1) to Colored School (chapter 2); Air Force bases in New York state, Illinois, and Puerto Rico (chapter 3); Newark again, "the Big

Apple,” the bohemian castle, Cuba (chapter 4); Harlem (chapter 5); and finally, back to Newark once more, this time fictionalized as “Finland Station” (chapters 6 and 7). More compelling than this macroscopic, geographical mobility, however, is the mobility that inheres as a quality of subjectivity itself in the novel. Actants trace lines and leave them in their wake. The death of Malcolm X compels Corliss to flee his bohemian “whiteout” and propels him to Harlem: “we knew we had to leave America. Go home[...]. & the speed lines drawn around us give us no peace or reflection. Press forward! Raise the struggle” (381). Velocity and movement define Corliss in this passage; the momentum generated by Malcolm’s assassination catalyzes Corliss’s politicization and in the process launches (a) movement. The speed lines suggest not only the intense velocity of Corliss’s flight to Harlem but also the revolutionary heroism of that act: speed lines and Corliss’s frantic, breathless activity conjure up an image that resembles the heroes of comic books. (I am thinking here of speed lines as the visual representation of movement in comics, a medium in which Baraka had dabbled as a child [*Conversations* 9, 182–83].) There is also thus a mobility or flux among media in this passage: a prose-fictional image taken from comic books whose heroes also featured in the radio shows that Baraka followed as a child and memorializes in several early poems.³⁸ Speed lines preclude the idle talk that characterizes the Beat and bohemian coteries at the castle: “no bye, rush off, speed lines behind them” (*6 Persons* 401). There is no soliloquy here, no long goodbye, no reflection: just movement.

³⁸ For Baraka’s poetic tributes to the radio shows of his youth, see, e.g., in *Preface*: “In Memory of Radio,” “Look for You Yesterday, Here You Come Today,” (12–13, 15–18); in *The Dead Lecturer*: epigraph, “Green Lantern’s Solo” (8, 67–70). See also *Autobiography* 26–27; *Conversations* 182–83; Punday.

In addition to the fast movement of speed lines, there is a slower movement that also runs throughout *6 Persons*: the slow motion of flowing blood. Baraka exploits the polyvalence of the word *blood*: in addition to the fluid that runs through our veins, it is also a slang term for an African American person. *Blood* marks racial difference. Recounting LJ's Beat associations, the narrator of "They" describes "bloods [...] arguin' with abstract painters abt whether struggle was useful" (341; sic). The opposition of "bloods" and "abstract painters" marks the latter as white bohemians. Moreover, it also highlights the gap in politicization and activism between the white and Black segments of LJ's Beat circle. The bloods in the passage just quoted are concerned with action, praxis, and material reality, as distinct from bohemian aestheticism and its correlative "hedonism," a vice that the narrators frequently attribute to the Beats. The association between blood and action also bespeaks the vitality of blood: without flowing blood, there is no life. Hence, the music of Ornette Coleman and Albert Ayler "[provides] the blood count, the pounding rithm inside they ideas, the jagged momentum of they daily stride" at the Beat castle (336). Black culture, on this take, is what animates and vitalizes the Beat movement; it is the source of hipness and cool. The castle's rhythm comes from "[t]he Beats & the pauses, the black bohemians" (352). But the "pauses" in a beat are what generate syncopation, a characteristic rhythm of jazz music and especially bebop, itself not merely an inspiration for the Beats but the very paragon of hip. Bloods, therefore, are also lifeblood, the cultural energy that sustains improvisation, innovation, and creativity.

But where there is blood, there are sure to be vampires—"blood suckers, zombies, mad doctors, & trapped naifs" (353). The centrality of Coleman and Ayler to the culture

of the castle is also a sort of tokenism, according to the logic of which listening to jazz imparts coolness on the listener and facilitates white cultural tourism. This parasitical consumption of blood(s) takes much more violent forms in *6 Persons* as well. As such, the flow of blood serves at times as an index to exploitation. For the Black artist in the U.S., there are but three options: “Either sell ass or cut it off. Or else watch yo’own limbs fly into the fresh meat bin. Bloody & hacked up for the brief television commentary on yr ‘insanity’” (353). *Bloody* in this passage must be understood in at least two ways: as violently severed, thus injured and (literally) bloodied, and as representing a stereotypical “bloody”—that is, Black—subject, one that is inassimilable and insane. In one sense, this can be read as an autobiographical comment on Baraka’s relation to white mainstream culture and commercial publishing in the 1970s U.S. (or, for that matter, today). Indeed, Baraka has consistently refused to “sell ass”—to prostitute himself for popular consumption and profit—or to “cut it off”—to silence the strident politics and activism of his art—and has therefore suffered the consequence of being marginalized as extreme or insane by the media, as even a brief perusal of newspaper and magazine editorials about the “Somebody” controversy attests. In another sense, though, this dilemma encapsulates the fundamental problem of flowing blood in *6 Persons*: blood is not only precious but also fungible, like, say, wheat or oil, and is thus susceptible to parasitical consumption and incorporation. Consider LJ’s disillusionment with middle-class aspirations: “the nightmare of the petty bourgeois blood [is] to be just an anonymous nigger in America[...]. ‘You’re not like the others,’ is the code world [sic] of bloods being led down the stained corridor toward the furnace of absolute assimilation. Those that are turned into the blood of America, into America’s

blood, its nourishment” (294). Under the logic of assimilation, Black blood, the lifeblood of cultural vitality and artistic innovation, will be bled dry. This is white cannibalism, U.S. style.

Every output is also an input: blood bleeds from one source to feed into another. Cannibalistic, parasitical assimilation names one machine for the processing of African American culture and subjectivity, or what Deleuze would call the latter’s deterritorialization and reterritorialization. For Deleuze, machines are always relational, connected both to other machines and to flows: “A machine may be defined as a *system of interruptions* or breaks.... Every machine, in the first place, is related to a continual material flow ... that it cuts into..., removing portions from the associative flow: the anus and the flow of shit it cuts off, for instance” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 36). A machine, in other words, deterritorializes the flow that it interrupts and reterritorializes it as a new product, a different flow, another output—assimilation deterritorializes blood as Black subjectivity and reterritorializes it as the safe, assimilated, middle-class “Negro.”³⁹ Thus “every machine functions as a break in the flow in relation to the machine to which it is connected, but at the same time is also a flow itself, or the production of a flow, in relation to the machine connected to it” (36). This results in a potentially endless series of machines, each feeding on the flows emitted by others while itself producing new flows that in turn will feed into still other machines, and so on.

³⁹ Baraka often opposes *Negro* and its variations (but not *nigger*)—usually connoting capitulation to white America and Uncle Tomism—to *Black* or *blood*, which preserves the Deleuzian minority of Black subjectivity. For example: “everybody knows what ‘Negroes’ are; strait-jacketed lazy clowns, whose only joy is carrying out the white man’s will” (*Home* 235); “Neegrews will tell you ... what the game is. It’s called Transform All Niggers Into Chewing Gum For The Boss! [...] Chewing gum for the boss cause employees helps” (*6 Persons* 306). See also, e.g., 305, 341, 375. Cf. Benston’s discussion of Baraka’s poetic use of *nigga* (*Performing* 190, 206).

The collections of machines produced by such serial junctions—what Deleuze calls *assemblages*—operate on two levels simultaneously: as *machinic assemblages*, they organize “bodies, ... actions and passions”; as *collective assemblages of enunciation*, they articulate “acts and statements, ... incorporeal transformations attributed to bodies” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand* 88). The former are physical and corporeal; the latter, immaterial and discursive (see Bogue 117–20). Both of these types of assemblage are inextricably and axiomatically linked for Deleuze, each, as Fredric Jameson might put it, transcoding the other: “There is no machinic assemblage that is not a social assemblage of desire, no social assemblage of desire that is not a collective assemblage of enunciation” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 82). This duality can be seen in the case of the assimilation machine that I have been describing. As a machinic assemblage, assimilation reinscribes the Black body as assimilated Negro, as “American,” through the bodily and material trappings of the bourgeoisie—fashion, consumption, hairstyle, and other signifiers of middle-class status. As a collective assemblage of enunciation, meanwhile, assimilation pronounces, and in so doing confers, as in a performative speech act, the status of assimilated Negro, the material counterparts of which are produced by the machinic assemblage. The “double articulation” of content and expression links bodies and speech, presenting them both as functions of power.⁴⁰

⁴⁰ This is one point at which the affinity between Deleuze and Michel Foucault is especially visible; see, e.g., Hardt’s discussion of assemblages and dispositifs (119–22); see also Patton 49–67. On the relation among machinic assemblages, collective assemblages of enunciation, and power, see Bogue 119–20. On the “double articulation” of assemblages, see Buchanan 119–22; Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand* 43–45.

But whereas the power governing the assimilation machine is the power of the state, *6 Persons* also engages in creative, active dismantling of such state machinery and in revolutionary, minor reassembly of those assemblages as what Deleuze calls, in a notoriously fraught nomenclature, war machines: “The assemblage that draws lines of flight ... is of the war machine type. Mutations spring from this machine, *which in no way has war as its object*, but rather the emission of quanta of deterritorialization, the passage of mutant flows” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand* 229–30). Patton’s discussion of war machines helpfully clarifies this concept. He suggests that one can understand war machines as “metamorphosis machines,” as machines for creating, deterritorializing, and becoming (109–15). War machines, or metamorphosis machines, are opposed to the state’s machinic apparatus of power; thus, a war machine is any assemblage that is revolutionary, marginal, or minor in character. Furthermore, the opposition between war machines and state machines is a function of the kind of space privileged by each: state machines propagate striated space, the space of control and regimentation, while war machines generate smooth space, the space of nomadic migration and lines of flight.⁴¹

This distinction operates in *6 Persons* as well. Against the striated middle-class space that corrals assimilated blood and the “fresh meat bin” that collects the hacked-up limbs of inassimilable bloods, there is also a smooth space in and across which blood flows freely. One can glimpse this smooth space, for example, in the castle: “The flow in the two directions already stated created two motions and one overmotion, of which

⁴¹ On war machines, see, in addition to Patton, Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand* 351–423. On smooth and striated space, see Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand* 474–500; Hardt and Negri, *Empire* 186–90, 325–39.

the bloods had key and privy” (340). The antecedent of “the two directions” is ambiguous; despite the narrator’s referring to them as “already stated,” this line in fact does not follow any clear discussion of directions or motion. The pages leading up to this line, however, suggest referents. Shortly beforehand, the narrator describes the convergent and divergent movements of persons at the castle: “From coping together, to coming together, to talking about each other, to ruining each other’s lives, to going away from each other” (335). This interplay of attraction and repulsion describes the dynamic that underlies the castle’s revolving door of members and participants. On the one hand, the bohemian collective presents a utopian alternative to middle-class conformity: “they recognized the possibility of commonality! Yeh, and of the utopian revolutionary forces” (337). But on the other hand, the castle also hosts several “solitary figures trying to run they separate thang” (339). Therefore, the “flow in two directions” denotes the composition and decomposition of collectivities—in other words, the assembly, dismantling, and reassembly of assemblages. Furthermore, the “overmotion” created by these flows is historical and political: “the motion they [i.e., the bloods] made themselves, as part of the history of Afrikans in America [...] wd always find itself in conflict, in struggle, because [...] it always sought a truer harder thrust than what hung around it describing and distorting it” (340). This motion is an historical process of struggle and resistance, the movement of collective praxis that emerges from the confluence of the flows. The two directions define an axis of metamorphosis, a smooth space of becoming, in which revolutionary praxis can emerge.

It is crucial to note that Baraka’s narrator links this smooth space directly with Black subjectivity: “the bloods had key and privy.” This implies a privileged access to

smooth space and a fundamental affinity for collective admixture: “the bloods, like gifted shadows, wd flow across the room into each other, soft, ecstatic for being alive & in each other’s company” (361). Several aspects of this sentence deserve comment. First, it describes a habitual action, as the auxiliary verb *wd* indicates. It is not so much a question of a single act as of a typical and lasting mode of behavior, reiterated in several instances over time. Second, it is a minor sentence. The narrator compares the bloods (in this case, Bro and Jan, his extramarital lover) to “gifted shadows,” appropriating and inverting the metaphorical darkness associated with and attributed to Black subjectivity (think of “shades”). Third, it overflows the individual. The confluence of blood(s) exceeds the limits of individual subjects, not merely in the sense that a collectivity is always larger than an individual, but in the much stronger sense that each subject spills out of itself. Not only do they flow “into each other”—which can always mean something like a collision or a coincidental meeting that leaves each subject intact—but they are “ecstatic” in so doing: they stand outside themselves (*ex-stasis*). Fourth, it conveys a joy of collective praxis, in the Spinozian sense of the term: “The joy of the encounter is precisely the composition of ... two bodies in a new, more powerful body” (Hardt 118; see above, section 2.4). In flowing into each other, the bloods form a new, joyous collectivity.

However, just as blood itself is at least bivalent, susceptible as much to exploitation and assimilation as to joyous, revolutionary collectivization, it can give rise to new collective assemblages through not only joyous encounters but also tragedy and

disaster.⁴² The assassination of Malcolm X—which I have already discussed as a motivation for flight—occupies a central place in *6 Persons* as in Baraka’s personal life, serving as the catalyst for the formation of the Black Arts Movement.⁴³ The announcement of his death, in the second-person-plural chapter, is ominous: “What sealed the fate of the castle crew was Malcolm’s murder” (378). This event reverberates throughout the chapter, sending Corliss on his way to Harlem and crystallizing the novel’s Black nationalist actants.

The reverberations of Malcolm’s death become a message in *6 Persons*, which transforms that event into a call to action. The message repeats several times throughout the chapter:

Malcolm is dead!

[...]What dominoe, what relationship is further revealed? There is a message! Find out what is the message! (379)

The message came on a knife delivered w/o warning directly into the center of the skull[...], severing blood vessels in the brain, causing a deadly hemorrhage that poured out the ears. A sudden blow! Blinded by blood. In the mouth, nose, ears, coughing blood[...].

The message came in the middle of the afternoon[...]. Blood on the floor, murmurs fanned around the store, welled into speech[...].

The message came. Malcolm shot. He dead! [...] A jagged sigh or sob turned sharper into a high pitched radio whine. It stayed, for years. (380)

After the message came, we knew we had to leave America. Go home we felt. Uptown. Go home. (381)

⁴² Sean Grattan’s critical response to Hardt and Negri emphasizes a similar ambivalence in the notion of the affect in Spinoza: “Living, for Spinoza, is the striving between two affective registers: the joyful and the sad—the useful and the hindering” (7).

⁴³ For Baraka’s autobiographical account of the aftermath and ripple effects of the assassination of Malcolm X, see the “Harlem” chapter of the *Autobiography* (295–328; see also 293–94). Notable texts on (or driven by) Malcolm’s death include “Afrikan Revolution” (*Selected Poetry* 230–43), *The Death of Malcolm X* (play, 1969), “In the Tradition” (*Reader* 302–10), “The Legacy of Malcolm X, and the Coming of the Black Nation” (*Home* 238–50), “Malcolm as Ideology” (essay, 1995; *Reader* 506–21), and “A Poem for Black Hearts” (*Black Magic* 112).

The death of Malcolm X—a preeminently corporeal event—politicizes a movement, a fact to which the whole history of the Black Arts Movement attests; but it does so in *6 Persons* by being transformed into speech: by being enunciated. Benston poses a question concerning the demise of John Coltrane that could equally well be applied to Malcolm’s death for Baraka: “How ... can the paralyzing pain of loss be transformed into collective progress and productive speech?” (*Performing* 145). The aftermath of Malcolm’s murder in *6 Persons* provides one answer. The initial reaction to Malcolm’s death is to assume that it has significance and to seek out that significance: “Find out what is the message!” When the message arrives, it does so violently and unexpectedly. It unleashes blood in the heads of those who hear it. But this bloodletting is also a rising consciousness: Corliss’s cranial hemorrhaging overflows his brain and his senses, forcing an acknowledgment of the bloodiness that he shares with Malcolm. Subsequently, this consciousness becomes grief (“Blood on the floor”; “A jagged sigh or sob”; “Roy Lucas [...] stood in the aisle of the store & wept” [*6 Persons* 380]), then “murmurs,” then articulate speech, and finally the alarming and anxious sound of “a high pitched radio whine.” The bodily spilling of blood becomes a communicative act.

Malcolm’s murder therefore becomes the central war machine of the novel. It is a repressive machine turned to subversive, revolutionary ends by Corliss and his fellow Black nationalists, who reterritorialize it in rallying around it. It creates a space for the redistribution of subjects into newly politicized positions of resistance—or, in Deleuze’s words, quoted above, it causes the multiplicity surrounding Corliss to “pass into another multiplicity” (Deleuze and Parnett 42). Finally, given its dual nature—it is a physical

death that leaves behind a body; it is a call that summons into being a new collectivity organized around the project of Black nationalism—it is articulable as both a machinic assemblage that works upon bodies and as a collective assemblage of enunciation.

The summons issued by the Malcolm war machine launches Corliss on his flight to Harlem. But when Corliss embarks, he doesn't just leave—he *splits*: “When the message came, you split!” (381). The word *split* seems to function here as another Barakan pun. Corliss departs, but he also splits off, splits into new and different subjects. The following chapter, “We,” which details the zenith and decline of Baraka's Black nationalist days, also introduces Mickey and Barney, the final two protagonists of the novel.

When Deleuze and Guattari define their concept of machines in *Anti-Oedipus* (1972; trans. 1977), they describe three different kinds of breaks that machines can enact with respect to the flows that feed them. First are breaks of “detachment,” which separate “segments or mobile stocks resembling building blocks” from a chain of similar segments. Second are “breaks that are a slicing off,” which, as Ian Buchanan puts it in his supremely helpful exposition of the three breaks, “[draw] off a certain amount of energy from the flow as so much surplus value ... for future use” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 39–40; Buchanan 23). Third is “the residual break..., which produces a subject alongside the machine, functioning as a part adjacent to the machine” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 40). All three kinds of breaks appear in *6 Persons*.

Detachment occurs—figured in quite gruesome imagery, at that—when the Black subject is threatened with the “fresh meat bin” and the overcoded “television comment on yr ‘insanity.’” (The “insane” and inassimilable Black subject becomes a prepackaged

seme, a brick or building block, for media distribution.) An example of the second break, the slicing-off, is the Beat appropriation of Black music as the castle's "blood count." Finally, the third, residual break can be seen in the functioning of the assimilation machine, where the assimilated subject stands as a residual effect of bourgeois interpellation.

I want to read Corliss's splitting off into Mickey and Barney—and, for that matter, the multiplicity of Baraka-protagonists throughout *6 Persons*—as precisely this last kind of Deleuzian break, produced by the war machine of the death of Malcolm X. All the protagonists are secondary to the processes enacted by the novel's machines and to the flows and interruptions that constitute the novel's plot. Ultimately, they are important not for this or that aspect of Baraka's personality that they might be taken to represent, but as figurations of collectivity itself.

A conventional reading of *6 Persons* as a *bildungsroman* might trace an evolutionary lineage extending from the childhood depicted in the first chapter through LJ's college years, his Air Force service, his entry into the Beat coterie, Bro's bohemian ecstasy, Corliss's nascent nationalism, Mickey's and Barney's waxing and waning nationalist fervor, and their conversion to Marxism. Such a clear line of descent would provide a tidy systemization of the novel's chapters, corresponding to Baraka's own biography, and wrap the novel in neat closure.

But things are much more complicated than that, of course. The novel frustrates any attempt at such linearity by insisting on a principle of radical multiplicity. I opened this section with a discussion of multiplicity in *6 Persons* in terms of narrative consciousness, grammar and syntax, and the proliferation of protagonists. What I can

now add is that this multiplicity, despite appearances, is not diachronic but synchronic. *Six Persons* narrates a process of becoming-other or becoming-multiple, but this process does not unfold progressively over the course of a chronology: it is always already unfolding at each moment. Although the narrative voice changes over the course of the novel and corresponds to different periods in Baraka's life and the protagonists' development, any linear temporality that the series of narrators might imply is vexed by a temporal folding that interpolates a later Marxist perspective into the previous phases.⁴⁴ For example, the narrator of "I"—the preadolescent chapter—admonishes: "Petty bourgeois bloods of america, this is most of our storee[...]. We can commit class suicide, and move at one with the masses of our people" (249).⁴⁵ Even the narrator is always more than one narrator.

Consider as well the novel's ambiguous pronoun usage. *They*, in the Beat chapter, refers to both the Beats and to LJ/Bro/Corliss. Shortly after LJ's arrival in New York, the narrator states: "All the years of practice they required to become these others, were suddenly all together like a granite plaque with name and dates on it" (305). The pronouns confound any possible distinction between LJ and the Beats

⁴⁴ Interestingly, such Marxist interpolations often (but not always) differ stylistically from the narratives in which they are embedded, using a noticeably more formal, almost academic tone and eschewing stylistic devices like Baraka's signature abbreviations and colloquialisms. For example, note the shift between the first and second sentences in this passage: "Black bohemians—yeh but Bohemia's in Europe, dudes! / All the different paths that brought the total crew together need to be studied to perhaps create a revolutionary construct out of similar materials" (342).

⁴⁵ There are several other instances in *6 Persons* of this retroactive insertion of a Marxist perspective or Marxist analysis into pre-Marxist phases of the protagonists' development. This anachronistic temporality is perhaps related to the more general temporal doubling that Nielsen sees at work in *6 Persons* and elsewhere in Baraka's fiction. For Nielsen, *6 Persons*, an example of "an art ... simultaneously futuristic and primitive," attempts to "plac[e Baraka] as a black artist in the position simultaneously of precedent to the white avant-garde and as a significant post- to their postmodernity" ("Fugitive" 327, 326; cf. Nielsen's similar interpretation of other texts by Baraka in "Alabama"). For other examples of anachronistic Marxist interpellation in *6 Persons*, see 233, 239–40, 241, 249, 267, 269, 283–85 passim, 296, 313, 442, 452, 453, 456–57.

generally. At other times, it is not the referent of a pronoun but the pronoun itself that slides, again complicating any aspirations of distinguishing or compartmentalizing LJ, the bohemians, or the novel's many other singularities: "No matter we talked about Mayan letters, or Arkadian hieroglyphics ... or stuffed Heidegger into *themselves*" (337–38; my italics). More importantly, to the extent that these sentences do refer to LJ, they cast him as undergoing a process of becoming-multiple and becoming-other: everything preceding LJ's move to New York and his adoption of a bohemian lifestyle and a Beat aesthetic now becomes "practice [...] to *become these others*." In the *Autobiography*—written more or less contemporaneously with *6 Persons*—Baraka characterizes each phase or step in his life as "educational" and as "preparation" (460, 463; see 447–65). *Six Persons* suggests that the object of such education is to become other.

The linear, chronological progression assumed by a conventional reading of the novel is further unraveled by the relation among protagonists in the novel's second half. Baraka's personas multiply rather slowly during the novel's first half—the autobiographical narrator of "I" holds sway for the first twenty pages or so, followed by LJ, who dominates the next hundred pages—but the pace accelerates rapidly toward the end of the Beat chapter: first Bro appears, followed by Corliss not ten pages later; fifty pages after that, Mickey and Barney appear within ten pages of each other.⁴⁶ Moreover, Mickey and Barney do not supplant Corliss; rather, they all exist side by side. When Mickey "went for" Black cultural nationalism, "Corliss was in it w/ us" (*6 Persons*

⁴⁶ It seems no accident that the name of Corliss, "the ranking intellectual of new Bohemia" (*6 Persons* 379) who first mobilizes the message of Malcolm X's death, is a near homonym of "coreless." It is after his appearance—and, more importantly, his politicization and radicalization—that the pace of becoming-other begins to rapidly increase. The coreless Corliss, the closest avatar of Baraka's transition from Beat to nationalist, seems to personify best the principle of change and becoming-minor that *6 Persons* dramatizes.

411). During the riot in Finland Station—at which “Leroi Jones” himself makes an appearance—“Mickey Barney Corliss rode around in a car shooting at police[...] the 3 pre-Marx Bros” (426, 428; note also the reappearance of Bro as “Bros”). The different persons of Amiri Baraka exist simultaneously. And they bleed into each other: “One time all we Mickey play is [...] Hate Whitey[...]. But wait that wasn’t Mickey. That was Barney. No, but Mickey married Sivella finally, right? Or was it Barney? [...] The two of ’em mash together in we head” (419).⁴⁷ Even the “same” “individual,” if either of these words even has any sense still for *6 Persons*, is different from himself. Barney and his partner Mae change their names to Malik and Lateefa, but in so doing they become new and different persons: “Barney loved Mae. Malik loved Lateefa more” (420). And all of these persons or personas come together in a vast new Marxist-Leninist collectivity: “Malik now more & more went to meetings[...]. Barney [...] got w/ Corliss + Mickey + we rest a’ niggas to do. What Is To Be Done” (421–22). Baraka’s political commitments here take Leninist form, but it is a multitude of narrators, protagonists, and actants—not a unified party—whose praxis constitutes oppositional collectivity. From Lacey’s perspective, the novel’s multiple protagonists “reflect, in a markedly cubist manner, pronounced facets of the real-life Amiri Baraka” (“Longish” 231). This is not inaccurate, but I want to take this point further. Lacey’s aligning *6 Persons* with a cubist aesthetic succeeds in capturing the fragmentary multiplicity of the protagonists. The problem, though, is that fragmentation in this sense presupposes, either as precondition or as ideal, a wholeness or an organic unity that subsequently undergoes cubist

⁴⁷ “Sivella” evokes Baraka’s second and current wife, Amina Baraka (born Sylvia Robinson; they married in 1966). In addition, Baraka also alludes here to the American R&B duo of the 1950s, Mickey and Sylvia.

fragmentation. The strong form of this argument—the claim, which I am arguing, that *6 Persons* dramatizes a subjectivity that is always already splintering and becoming-other—is articulated by Lynn Aldon Nielsen when he writes that “even the very singular first person of [*6 Persons*]'s first chapter is a teeming congress” (324).⁴⁸ Indeed: like anyone else, Baraka “is a little group ... and must live as such” (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 362).

3.4 Molar and Molecular

There is no Marxist conversion experience in *6 Persons*. Instead, there are flashes of Marxist critique scattered throughout the novel, a fomenting class consciousness that accompanies the gradual dissolution of nationalist collectivities in the closing chapters, and a conclusion teeming with jubilant anticipation: “we are revolutionary nationalists, struggling to see Afrika liberated. PanAfrikanists fighting for an end to world oppression. Socialists pushing for a new beginning for all people[...]. Victory to all peoples” (462).⁴⁹ Baraka’s language situates this passage precariously between the poles of singularity and identity. On the one hand, it describes a revolutionary subjectivity engaged in radical praxis; as such, each of the first three sentences begins with a noun followed by a participle, indicating the centrality of action

⁴⁸ See also the narrator’s retrospection on LJ’s Air Force service: “We tried out to be a officer & they thought we was crazy & flunked all a’ us” (*6 Persons* 445).

⁴⁹ The closing paragraph of *6 Persons* provides an interesting contrast with the conclusion to Mike Gold’s *Jews without Money*. The ending of Gold’s novel allegorizes, through deferral, the revolutionary moment by focusing on the beginning, as it were—the moment of conversion (see section 1.4, above). In *6 Persons*, however, there is no *moment* of conversion; what Baraka’s novel emphasizes instead is the notion of *process*, both the process of becoming-revolutionary and, in the conclusion, the ongoing process of organization through praxis: “They are looking for the ultimate weapon. Organization. The only one the people have” (*6 Persons* 462).

and praxis to the definitions of *nationalists*, *PanAfrikanists*, and *socialists*.⁵⁰ On the other hand, the language is also identitarian: “*we are revolutionary*.” Baraka’s narrator speaks with a certainty that is absent from those passages in his work that most directly engage with the problem of singularity and the processes of becoming-minor. This repeats the dilemma that I touched upon toward the close of section 3.2: in both the poetics and the literature, there are instances where the (reactionary) nationalist mode—in which “essential” racial identity is in fact radically anti-essentialist—is, paradoxically, more revolutionary than the (leftist, revolutionary) Marxist mode when it comes to Baraka’s thinking of subjectivity.

The Deleuzian notion of assemblage provides one way to think through this paradox. Buchanan describes an assemblage as “a structure which, like the novel, is able to articulate the slide into oblivion of one mode of thought together with the rise to dominance of another without having to explain it in terms of either succession or negation, but can instead stage it as coadaptation” (118). This in part accounts for the convertibility of smooth into striated space, revolutionary into fascist politics, war into state machines, singularity into identity, and vice-versa: the one never negates the other—the identitarianism of Baraka’s Marxism does not simply supplant the becoming-minor of his literature and poetics—but rather each interfaces with the other, forming new assemblages that cut into and redirect the same flows while producing others. *Six Persons* is a powerful novel, from a revolutionary perspective, precisely because it stages so vividly, in a way that political philosophy alone perhaps cannot, the process of

⁵⁰ Although Baraka repudiated Black nationalism in 1974, it would be some time still before his rejection of nationalism *tout court*; hence the inclusion of nationalism alongside PanAfrikanism and socialism; cf. Baraka, “Toward.”

becoming-other and becoming-revolutionary. So what happens when Baraka turns from nationalism to Marxism in 1974? How is it that at the moment when he is the most revolutionary in his politics, he is also at his most reactionary or microfascist in his conception of subjectivity?

Deleuze and Guattari provide one answer in a discussion of molar versus molecular politics, or of “social aggregates” versus “little groups.” They distinguish between these two politics in terms of “preconscious investment of class or interest,” which defines the aims of the larger aggregates or molar groups, and “unconscious libidinal investment of group,” which corresponds to the desires of little groups or molecular singularities (little groups like the six persons of *6 Persons*) (*Anti-Oedipus* 343). These two orders of politics, Deleuze and Guattari emphasize, are under no obligation to coincide with each other; fascist or reactionary political tendencies can exist alongside revolutionary or nomadic libidinal investments of a singularity, and leftist politics and revolutionary praxis on the molar level can coincide with an identitarian molecular logic of subjectivity that closes down lines of flight and deactivates processes of becoming-minor (347).

In my reading, this last combination of the molar and the molecular is precisely what happens with Baraka’s conversion to Marxism.⁵¹ The Marxist phase forms a new assemblage with the earlier nationalism, such that the flow of revolutionary subjectivity—the anti-essentialism of Baraka’s “essential” Black identity, the becoming-

⁵¹ The other combination that I have just discussed—reactionary molar politics plus revolutionary molecular micropolitics—can also account for many of the most reactionary tendencies found in Black nationalism, both Baraka’s own and more generally: the anti-Semitism, the misogyny, and the homophobia, for example, count in this reading as residues of a rightist class interest that continue alongside the leftist group interests of Baraka’s multiple singularities. In this regard, it is noteworthy that Baraka frequently critiques the bourgeois investments, not to mention the vestigial feudalism, of Black nationalism.

minor inaugurated by the death of Malcolm X—is rechanneled in two directions: to the molar left, it becomes reterritorialized as revolutionary Marxism or Marxism–Leninism–Mao Tse-tung Thought; but to the molecular right, it becomes reterritorialized not as a search for identity (as in the Beat and transitional poetry discussed above) or for openings onto a becoming-other (as in the minor poetics and *6 Persons*), but instead as identification with a “correct” position. No longer concerned to facilitate the emancipatory becoming-other of different persons, Baraka is now content to fight for the liberation of an identifiable group of persons. He knows the answer to *who?*⁵²

In concluding with the paean to revolutionary nationalism, PanAfrikanism, and socialism, *6 Persons* performs an imaginary resolution of the contradiction between Baraka’s molar and molecular politics. The Marxist apparatus of the text—the conclusion, the interspersed commentaries and critiques—establishes the Marxist reference as the privileged one among the novel’s narrative voices. Under Baraka’s treatment, this reorders the nomadic flights and becomings-minor of the novel’s protagonists under a retrospective teleology: “Endless series of selves resolve, and at each pt of progress, we are whoever we must be to develop + reunderstand reality” (449). The smooth space of becoming-minor is reterritorialized here as the striated space of resolution and necessity. The revolutionary molar politics of the Marxist

⁵² An interview between Baraka and Charlie Reilly attests to Baraka’s confidence in answering the question *who?* and illustrates the closing down of molecular flight during the Marxist period. When Reilly asks Baraka whether he still (in 1978) feels defined by a dynamic of change, he replies:

Not in the same sense[...]. I think during that period [i.e., the Beat and transitional periods] I was mired in the classic condition of the bourgeois artist, a special kind of confusion [...] which the bourgeoisie love to call art. As confused as Sartre is, he once said “if you write that you don’t know who the villain is, they call it art. But if you say you do know who the villain is and you know how to get rid of him, that’s social protest.” So, my writing is much more confident now because [...] it rests on a sound ideological foundation[...]. (*Conversations* 99–100)

Baraka reterritorializes the lines of flight opened up for multiplicity and singularity by the politicized death of Malcolm X.

This in no way diminishes the importance of either *6 Persons* as a minor novel or Baraka as a theorist and thinker of singularity. I conclude by citing Deleuze's celebration of Anglo-American literature's capacity for constant renewal: "to take up the interrupted line, to join a segment to the broken line, to make it pass between two rocks in a narrow gorge, or over the top of the void, where it had stopped. It is never the beginning or the end which are interesting.... What is interesting is the middle" (Deleuze and Parnett 39). This is certainly true of *6 Persons*. While the imaginary resolution of the novel's ending does temporarily close down lines of flight, its strength as a novel of singularity—or even a novel of the multitude—is in its capacity to dramatize the minor subject in flight. This is not the retrospective owl of Minerva, taking flight at dusk, the end of the day. It is the owl of Baraka, exploding at midnight.

CHAPTER 4

POSTMODERNISM AND THE PERSISTENCE OF UTOPIA: PERIODIZING THOMAS PYNCHON

Perhaps history this century [...] is rippled with gathers in its fabric such that if we are situated [...] at the bottom of a fold, it's impossible to determine warp, woof, or pattern anywhere. By virtue, however, of existing in one gather it is assumed there are others, compartmented off into sinuous cycles each of which come together to assume greater importance than the weave itself and destroy any continuity[...]. We are accordingly lost to any sense of a continuous tradition. Perhaps if we lived on a crest, things would be different. We could at least see.

—Thomas Pynchon, *V*.

Facts are but the Play-things of lawyers,— Tops and Hoops, forever a-spin.... Alas, the Historian may indulge no such idle Rotating. History is not Chronology, for that is left to lawyers,— nor is it Remembrance, for Remembrance belongs to the People. History can as little pretend to the Veracity of the one, as claim the Power of the other,— her Practitioners, to survive, must soon learn the arts of the quidnunc, spy, and Taproom Wit,— that there may ever continue more than one life-line back into a Past we risk, each day, losing our forebears in forever,— not a Chain of single Links, for one broken Link could lose us All,— rather, a great disorderly Tangle of Lines, long and short, weak and strong, vanishing into the Mnemonick Deep, with only their Destination in common.

—Thomas Pynchon, *Mason & Dixon*

What is sometimes characterized as a nostalgia for class politics of some older type is generally more likely to be simply a “nostalgia” for politics *tout court*.... [T]o describe this feeling as “nostalgia” is about as adequate as to characterize the body’s hunger, before dinner, as a “nostalgia for food.”

—Fredric Jameson, *Postmodernism*¹

Based on critical literature about his work and about postmodernism, not to mention his cameo appearances on *The Simpsons*, Thomas Pynchon appears to be the quintessential postmodern American writer. His novels—*V*. (1963), *The Crying of Lot*

¹ Pynchon, *V*. 161–62; Pynchon, *Mason* 349; Jameson, *Postmodernism* 331.

49 (1966), *Gravity's Rainbow* (1973), *Vineland* (1990), *Mason & Dixon* (1997), *Against the Day* (2006), and *Inherent Vice* (2009)—are taken to epitomize, among other stylistic trends, characteristic themes, and historical markers, postmodern allegory; the canonization of postmodern literature; postmodern difference; the postmodern epic form; the critical/aesthetic practice of “historiographic metafiction” or “fantastic historiography”; postmodern interpretation as “(mis)reading”; paranoia; postmodern pastiche and/or parody; the postmodern picaresque; schizophrenia; the postmodern spatialization of history; the intersection of postmodern literary and theoretical “writing practices”; and indeed the transition itself from modernism to postmodernism.² As this admittedly small sample drawn from the vast body of critical work on Pynchon nonetheless illustrates, the very idea of a postmodern American canon without Pynchon is virtually unthinkable.³

However, the currency of these particular approaches to Pynchon will of course rise or fall with the fortunes of the larger discourse of which they are a part: postmodernism itself. And although postmodernism has never been uncontested, as

² See, e.g., on allegory: Dugdale 142; Madsen. On canonization: Bérubé, esp. 267–315. On difference: Hutcheon, *Poetics* 6; Witzling 7. On epic: Adair 113–60; Safer 79–110. On historiographic metafiction: Hutcheon, *Poetics* 120, 133; McHale, *Constructing* 152 and “Mason” 47; Murphy 31; Pöhlmann, *Pynchon's* 239; cf. Smith 8–9. On fantastic historiography: Jameson, *Postmodernism* 368. On (mis)reading: McHale, *Constructing* 59–141. On paranoia: Apter; Brownlie 1; Coale 135–77; Cowart, “Luddite” 359; Eddins 12–13; Hardack 104, 109–10; Hite, *Ideas* 10; Madsen 23, 88; McHale, *Constructing* 178 and *Postmodernist* 96; Melley 12–13, 81–106, et passim; Johnston; Olehla; Palmeri, “Other” par. 4; Siegel; Slade 7. On pastiche: Callinicos 2; Smith 113–14. On parody: Cowart, “Attenuated”; Eddins xi; Hite, *Ideas* 5; Hutcheon, *Poetics* 130–31; Witzling 31. On picaresque: McHale, *Postmodernist* 173. On schizophrenia: Jameson, *Postmodernism* 375; Johnston. On space: Kolbuszewska, esp. 117–47, 183–216; Hinds, “Introduction” 4–5; McHale, “Mason”; Thomas, *Pynchon* 19–40. On “writing practices”: McHoul and Wills. On the transition from modernism to postmodernism: McHale, *Postmodernist* 21–25 and “What”; van Delden.

³ In his introduction to *Marginal Forces/Cultural Centers: Tolson, Pynchon, and the Politics of the Canon*, Michael Bérubé comments on the incredible proliferation of Pynchon scholarship, including “over four hundred articles” as of 1992 (3). By 2007, “there [were] 1,184 articles on Pynchon in the MLA database...” (Adams 269 n4). Today (2012), that number is upwards of 1,500.

either a periodizing term or an aesthetic category, it has come under renewed scrutiny in the wake of escalating economic globalization and widespread opposition to dominant neoliberal forms of globalization (to say nothing of the sweeping world-historical changes widely perceived in the post-9/11 era).⁴ One recent example is the critique of postmodernism made by Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri in *Empire* (2000). For Hardt and Negri, theories of the postmodern “end up in a dead end because they ... mistake today’s real enemy” to the extent that they target the fixed identities that held sway under modernity rather than the strategies by which contemporary global capitalism manages and contains plural, hybrid identities (137).⁵ Thus, what Hardt and Negri present as a postmodern celebration of the politics of difference by both postmodernist theory (epitomized by Jean-François Lyotard, Jean Baudrillard, and Jacques Derrida) and postcolonial criticism (Homi Bhabha) can “unwittingly reinforce” global capital because like postmodernist and postcolonial theory, it “too is bent on ... setting differences to play across boundaries” (138, 142). Postmodernist theory is therefore not merely dated but in fact susceptible to recuperation and manipulation at the hands of capital.⁶

Hardt and Negri, however, do not jettison the postmodern wholesale.

Postmodernist and postcolonial theories serve for them as a “symptom of passage”

⁴ For a repudiation of postmodernism predating the emergence of globalization as a contemporary problematic, see, e.g., Gardner.

⁵ Notwithstanding whatever problems there might be with Hardt and Negri’s attitude toward postmodernism—not the least of which is their rather reductive characterizations of the theorists they discuss—their critique nonetheless has the merit of being historicist as opposed to stylistic. Cf. Hoberek, “Introduction”; McLaughlin.

⁶ See also Timothy S. Murphy’s argument that postmodernism’s shelf life expired along with the Three Worlds model and that it should therefore be supplanted as a critical paradigm by globalization studies.

from yesterday's (modern) imperialism to today's (postmodern) globalization. Hardt and Negri retain the periodizing category of postmodernity as a synonym for the age of globalization, and they refer repeatedly and more or less interchangeably to the "postmodernization" and the "informatization" of labor under global capitalism. In this, they are interestingly similar to such onetime proponents of postmodernism as Ihab Hassan and Linda Hutcheon. For Hassan, whose books *The Dismemberment of Orpheus: Toward a Postmodern Literature* (1971; 2nd ed. 1982) and *The Postmodern Turn: Essays in Postmodern Theory and Culture* (1987) helped disseminate the postmodernist paradigm in literary studies, postmodernism as an aesthetic category begins, by 2001, to give way to "postmodernity (the inclusive geopolitical process) [which] refers to an interactive, planetary phenomenon wherein tribalism and imperialism, myth and technology, margins and centers ... play out their conflictual energies" (3). In other words, postmodernity means capitalist globalization. The earlier "cultural postmodernism" continues to live on, but as a "ghost" or "revenant" that has "metastasized into sterile, campy, kitschy, jokey, dead-end games or sheer media stunts" (5).

Hutcheon, whose study *A Poetics of Postmodernism: History, Theory, Fiction* (1988) remains the canonical account of historiographic metafiction, makes an analogous distinction between postmodernism and postmodernity. In her follow-up book, *The Politics of Postmodernism* (1989), Hutcheon distinguishes between postmodernism as a "cultural notion" and "postmodernity as the designation of a social

and philosophical period or ‘condition’” (23).⁷ By the time Hutcheon writes the retrospective epilogue to the second edition (2002), postmodernism has died—“Let’s just say: it’s over”—and is succeeded socially and politically, in postmodernity, by “various forms of identity politics” that have become entrenched in the academy and elsewhere (166).⁸ Although my own take on postmodernism, in both periodizing and aesthetic guises, is rather different, the fact that figures with such stakes in the concept are pronouncing its death is itself an interesting symptom of passage, a sign that things are somehow changing.

It is thus unsurprising that the increasingly questioned status of postmodernism also impacts the field of Pynchon studies. In “What Was Postmodernism?” (2007), Brian McHale—another former stakeholder in postmodernism who now remarks its passing—explicitly links discussions of the demise of postmodernism with *Against the Day*, Pynchon’s first novel to be published after 9/11. McHale briefly charts the development of an apocalyptic or eschatological aesthetic in postmodernism, running from angel imagery in postmodern visual art, television, and cinema to the widespread popularity and commercial success of disaster films.⁹ On McHale’s take, *Against the Day* views disaster—both World War I, diegetically, and 9/11, contextually—from the

⁷ “Condition” here alludes to Jean-François Lyotard’s seminal text *The Postmodern Condition* (1979; trans. 1984). In addition, for contemporary readers, the word also evokes David Harvey’s groundbreaking study *The Condition of Postmodernity* (1990).

⁸ Interestingly, for both Hutcheon and Hassan, postmodernism, in Andrew Hoberek’s words, “was done in by its own success” (233): it permeates what Hassan clearly sees as a degraded mass culture, and it is ubiquitous in “institutionalized” form for Hutcheon (*Politics* 166). The same holds for Minsoo Kang, who locates the death of postmodernism in the commercial success of *The Last Action Hero* (1993): “there’s no surer sign of an intellectual idea’s final demise than its total appropriation by mass culture” (qtd. in Hoberek 233).

⁹ For a discussion of postmodern disaster films that is closer to the periodization that I develop in this chapter, see Phillip E. Wegner’s reading of the 1996 movie *Independence Day* (*Life* 137–65).

nether side, narrating an “experience of aftermath” that signals a “changed tense” in postmodernism.¹⁰

McHale is not the first critic to propose such a reading of Pynchon. Dating back at least to the 1990s, some Pynchon scholars have questioned whether postmodernism remains a suitable frame for classifying Pynchon’s texts.¹¹ David Cowart, for example, in “Attenuated Postmodernism: Pynchon’s *Vineland*” (1994), suggests that “the postures of literary exhaustion may themselves be exhausted” and that *Vineland*, in its reactivation of “two kinds of realism: social and magic,” is less a case of “indeterminate postmodernist ‘play’” than of “totalizing modernist ‘purpose’” (3–4).¹² *Vineland*, he

¹⁰ Moreover, as Timothy Bewes points out, Jameson “has recently begun to talk of the postmodern in the past tense” on occasion (274). This needs some amending, though. In the passages that Bewes refers to, Jameson uses not the past tense but the *past perfect* tense: “In full postmodernity, and until very recently, there *had ... seemed* to be a certain general agreement ... on those features of the modern that were no longer desirable”; “now it is time ... to consider some final return or reinvention of the outmoded in full postmodernity, a recurrence ... of the very concept of modernity as such, which we [“all naïvely”] *had ... assumed* long since to be superseded” (*Singular* 1, 6; my italics). The simple past tense would denote in fairly unproblematic fashion that postmodernism is over and done with: there seemed to be consensus, in the past, but not anymore; we used to think that postmodernism had superseded modernism, but now we don’t. Jameson’s use of the past perfect, however, inserts a gap between the past referred to and the time of Jameson’s writing (i.e., 2002). The past perfect refers to something that happened before some other event, itself also in the past. I want to suggest here that both the apparent consensus and the naïve assumptions that Jameson refers to occurred before a *shift in*, not a demise of, postmodernism, and that this temporality accounts for Jameson’s use of the past perfect. See below, section 3.4.

¹¹ In fact, the question of Pynchon’s postmodernism dates even earlier than that. For example, as the title of his essay “Encyclopedic Narrative: From Dante to Pynchon” (1976) indicates, Edward Mendelson classes *Gravity’s Rainbow* as the latest in a long line of “encyclopedic narratives” that includes Goethe’s *Faust* and Joyce’s *Ulysses*, among others (1267; see also Mendelson, “Gravity’s”). Nonetheless, the recent trend in Pynchon studies that I discuss here represents a new development in comparison with Mendelson, for two reasons. First, Mendelson’s view would very soon become supplanted by the critical dominance of postmodernism in literary studies generally and in Pynchon studies particularly. The critics I discuss here, in contrast, seem to represent a growing and emergent development in Pynchon criticism much less than an isolated or fleeting development. Second, whereas Mendelson’s classing of *Gravity’s Rainbow* harkened back to an earlier, mostly modern European tradition, the current questioning of Pynchon’s status as postmodernist gestures instead toward some new (even if hypothetical or imagined), global social and historical reality.

¹² Cowart’s reference to “postures of exhaustion” alludes to John Barth’s classic essay in postmodernist poetics, “The Literature of Exhaustion” (1967). See also, however, Robert L. McLaughlin’s polemical critique of standard interpretations of Barth’s essay (55–59), as well as Cowart, “Pynchon.”

argues, signals a move away from established conventions of postmodernism: “Who knows what post-postmodern extravaganza may follow in its wake?” (12).

Similarly, in “Postmodernism at Sea: The Quest for Longitude in Thomas Pynchon’s *Mason & Dixon* and Umberto Eco’s *The Island of the Day Before*” (2005), Dennis M. Lensing reads *Mason & Dixon* as “a new sort of postmodern novel” that gestures toward “possible means of transcending the ideological shortcomings and limitations identified by Fredric Jameson” (126–27). Those limitations are well known: in *Postmodernism; or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (1991), Jameson characterizes postmodernity as “an age that has forgotten how to think historically” (ix). He goes on to catalogue symptoms of postmodern culture, including “a new kind of flatness or depthlessness, a new ... superficiality in the most literal sense,” “the waning of affect” (9, 10) and, perhaps most notably, the apparent toothlessness of pastiche in postmodern culture:

Pastiche is, like parody, the imitation of a peculiar or unique, idiosyncratic style, the wearing of a linguistic mask, speech in a dead language. But it is a neutral practice of such mimicry, without any of parody’s ulterior motives, amputated of the satiric impulse, devoid of laughter and of any conviction that alongside the abnormal tongue you have momentarily borrowed, some healthy linguistic normality still exists. Pastiche is thus blank parody, a statue with blind eyeballs.... (17)

On Lensing’s take, *Mason & Dixon* mobilizes nostalgia critically and parodically “in order to perform precisely the historical—and this, in a form supposedly most resistant to historical awareness: the postmodern narrative” (138). He concludes the essay by arguing that *Mason & Dixon* “seem[s] to be moving toward something beyond postmodernism” or, as Jameson puts it in an interview, “undo[ing] postmodernism homeopathically by the methods of postmodernism” (Lensing 140; Stephanson 59). In other words, Pynchon uses pastiche to move beyond pastiche, just as he overcomes

nostalgia by parodying it. All this, for Lensing, points toward “a future beyond the postmodern” (142).¹³

Shawn Smith also proposes that Pynchon’s fictions are better equipped for political and historical intervention than conventional characterizations of the postmodern would allow. In *Pynchon and History: Metahistorical Resonance and Postmodern Narrative Form in the Novels of Thomas Pynchon* (2005), Smith argues that “the ‘postmodern’ narrative and linguistic characteristics of Pynchon’s fiction are rhetorical and poetic expressions of a philosophy of history, a coherent vision of the past and how it haunts the present” (2). In his view, Pynchon attempts to negotiate the gap between postmodern historical relativism and “the emancipatory project of classical marxist/liberal thought” (3). In this, Smith claims, Pynchon’s view of history is close to Jameson’s own conception of history as “absent cause” (8–9).¹⁴ From his vantage, Pynchon’s novels attempt precisely the kind of historical thinking that Jameson reputedly excludes from his canonical definition of postmodernism.

Other critics have proceeded even further along such lines. In “Other than Postmodern?—Foucault, Pynchon, Hybridity, Ethics” (2001), Frank Palmeri proposes to divide Pynchon’s corpus into two periods: a “high postmodern” period running from *V.* to *Gravity’s Rainbow*, marked by a tension between paranoia and “a skeptical resistance to paranoia,” and an “other than postmodern” period beginning with *Vineland* and *Mason & Dixon* (“Other” par. 4, 21, 28). For Palmeri, the other than postmodern is

¹³ In contrast to Lensing’s argument that Pynchon works through postmodernism to arrive at some other side, Luc Herman brackets the very “question of whether or not parody in [*Gravity’s Rainbow*] should be called ‘postmodern(ist)’” at all (209).

¹⁴ For history as “absent cause,” see, e.g., Jameson, *Political* 82–83. See also section 2.2, above.

distinguished from high postmodernism by its “move[ment] away from the representation of extreme paranoia, toward a vision of local ethico-political possibilities and a greater acceptance of hybrids that combine human and machine or human and animal traits” (5). (Both high postmodernism and other than postmodern, meanwhile, differ from a “late postmodernism” that Palmeri claims has dominated American popular culture since the 1990s and that exhibits a “more rigid[ly] paranoid” and reactionary politics than either high postmodernism or other than postmodernism; his case study is the television series *The X-Files* [5].) Similarly, Sascha Pöhlmann has done much to undermine the conventional characterization of Pynchon as a postmodernist. In *Pynchon’s Postnational Imagination* (2010), Pöhlmann makes a compelling case for reading *Gravity’s Rainbow* and *Mason & Dixon* in political and historical terms as examples of “postnational parageography,” a critical practice consisting of the overlay of new maps—spaces like the Zone in *Gravity’s Rainbow* or the strange realms abutting Mason and Dixon’s Visto—onto more familiar ones. According to Pöhlmann, postmodern fiction’s performance of parageography “can result in the superficial playfulness often ascribed to postmodern texts, [but] it also results in a *political* playfulness that says things can be different from what they are” and which stakes its claims in an emergent postnationalist order of globalization (147).¹⁵ This political payoff of postmodern texts—which, of course, is supposed to have been impossible in postmodern culture according to Jameson, or at least the dominant interpretations of his stance—leads Pöhlmann elsewhere to propose: “We may have to stop calling Thomas Pynchon a postmodern writer ... not because his works are not postmodern, but

¹⁵ Similarly, Murphy suggests that Pynchon can be read as a cultural parallel to the politics of “counter-globalization” (31).

because they are more than that” (“Introduction” 9). Like Lensing, Pöhlmann sees Pynchon’s novels working through postmodernism, “reject[ing] postmodern strategies while at the same time employing them” (12)—or, again, “undo[ing] postmodernism homeopathically by the methods of postmodernism.” Collectively, such readings signal if not a sea change in Pynchon criticism and postmodernism studies, then at least a widening fissure or a crucial set of problems worth investigating.

It seems both salutary and timely, therefore, to reexamine Pynchon’s corpus, current notions of the postmodern (or whatever else we might want to call our present moment), and the relation between the two. In Chapter 4, I propose to periodize Pynchon’s fictions as a means for thinking through the tensions and contradictions inherent in the periodizing concepts that we use to make sense of contemporary history. However, my project entails the overlay or juxtaposition of two different levels of periodization.

On one level, adapting Stephen Paul Miller’s concept of micro-periodization, I chart a more or less conventional chronology through Pynchon’s career. In *The Seventies Now: Culture as Surveillance* (1999), Miller uses micro-periodization as a means for analyzing “small temporal changes within a [larger] historical period” (47). In Miller’s project, the decade of the 1970s stands as the larger period, while the micro-periods of 1970–71, 1972–74, 1975–77, and 1978–79 demonstrate the “small temporal changes” that are the object of his study (48). My periodization differs from Miller’s in that the larger period within which I situate Pynchon’s micro-periods is postmodernity instead of one of its constituent decades. Nonetheless, I follow his lead in attending to variations or mutations in the conceptual apparatuses—epistemes, to use Foucault’s

term—that warrant historically specific, ideologically inflected understandings of history, social reality, and political possibilities. Crucially, epistemic variations allow for just the kind of transcoding that underwrites both the historicized political reading that I attempt in Chapter 4 and, more broadly still, the larger allegorical reading of collectivities that is the aim of my dissertation as a whole: “Like a fractal or [a] DNA strand, all patterns within one part of an episteme can be found within any other part of that episteme” (Miller 28). Micro-periodization thus begins with close attention to concrete manifestations of a larger, historically determinant logic.

In applying this method of epistemic micro-periodization, I focus each of the paired readings that follow through a central concept or metaphor: entropy, paranoia, nostalgia, or day. The first three of these are, of course, part of a storehouse of themes and motifs to which Pynchon returns throughout his career and which are therefore staples of Pynchon criticism. However, notwithstanding their persistence throughout his oeuvre, I hope to show in my periodization how each of those concepts plays a determining role at one moment of Pynchon’s career only to recede into the background thereafter. Entropy, for example, certainly doesn’t disappear from Pynchon’s work after his first micro-period, but it no longer drives the plot, motivates characters, or accounts logically for a text’s political or historical allegories to the extent that it does in the early fiction and *V*. The same goes for paranoia and nostalgia: they both predate and outlast the periods that they define yet occupy center stage in Pynchon’s novels only temporarily. Day, finally, functions less as a concept on the same order as entropy and the rest than as a multifaceted metaphor that enables transcoding among several

perennial political and historical concerns that Pynchon's most recent, post-9/11 period interrogates anew.

The sections that follow use those four privileged concepts as the basis for reading Pynchon's corpus as a series of four micro-periods, beginning with entropy in his early stories and *V.*, moving next to paranoia in *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow*, then to nostalgia in *Vineland* and *Mason & Dixon*, and concluding with day in *Against the Day* and *Inherent Vice*. As each of these pairings suggests, my analysis, in addition to demarcating micro-periodic divisions, also follows two distinct threads through the literature: with the exception of the stories and *V.* (for reasons that will become clear below), each micro-period combines a California narrative—*The Crying of Lot 49*, *Vineland*, or *Inherent Vice*—and an historical novel—*Gravity's Rainbow*, *Mason & Dixon*, or *Against the Day*. Drawing on Jameson's discussion of the metasynchronicity of form in order to develop the second level of periodization I employ here, I argue that the two strains of Pynchon's corpus represent metasynchronous iterations of the logic of what Phillip E. Wegner periodizes as high and late postmodernism. Moreover, I also demonstrate how those threads in Pynchon relate to the critical operations that Jameson calls symptomology—which, crucially, is the locus of Jameson's notorious alleged denigrations of the postmodern—and cognitive mapping—which also finds expression in the desire to identify or name the present in recent Pynchon scholarship and in postmodernism studies surveyed above.

I see two benefits to this perspective on Pynchon and postmodernism. First, by periodizing these two postmodern modes or moods in parallel, my approach allows a critical appraisal of the political possibilities for collective praxis opened up or foreclosed

in each version of postmodernism. Second, reading Pynchon along these lines also reveals that what seem to be competing paradigms—postmodernism versus globalization—in fact represent different moments of the same historical period, different valences of the cultural logic of late capitalism, without either one supplanting or subsuming the other. Rather, Pynchon's high and late postmodernist novels dramatize the dialectical relation between ideology and utopia that plays out metasynchronously in postmodernity.

Before I proceed further, a word is necessary on the way that I develop and support that argument. Given both my focus on concepts or epistemes as periodizing markers and the sheer immensity of Pynchon's novels and the byzantine complexity of their plots, the readings that follow often bear less resemblance to literary explications than to theoretical discussions or even dramatizations of ideological tensions, antinomies, and other logical relations among concepts. Thus, although I take pains to provide contextual details whenever necessary—most notably, for example, when I read pivotal scenes or climactic moments in the literature—my interpretations tend on the whole to move recursively throughout a given text of Pynchon's, or even between texts, instead of faithfully reproducing sequences of events and ideas as those appear in the novels themselves. Pynchon's novels are notoriously taxing in their bulk and complexity; my readings, I admit here, do little to alleviate the considerable difficulty of simply reading Pynchon.

Presenting instead a dramatization and political allegory of concepts central to Pynchon's oeuvre, I begin by analyzing the period driven by entropy in section 4.1, which also concludes with a brief sketch of the historical novels and the California

novels. Next, in sections 4.2 and 4.3, I proceed by micro-periodizing Pynchon's work from *The Crying of Lot 49* to *Mason & Dixon*. Those sections also prepare the ground for a theoretical discussion of the logics of Pynchon's two strains, which I argue correspond metasynchronously to Wegner's categories of high and late postmodernism. I demonstrate that correspondence in section 4.4, which also draws on Jameson's hermeneutic of the ideology of form and concludes with a theoretical intervention in the fields of globalization studies and postmodernism studies. Finally, in section 4.5, I conclude both my micro-periodization and my metasynchronous reading of Pynchon's oeuvre by examining the shifting configurations of symptomology and utopian thinking in Pynchon's work since 9/11. Pynchon's literature, I ultimately argue, simultaneously registers symptoms of the political closures, ideological dominance, and historical disorientation accomplished by postmodern late capitalism, at the same time that it attests also to an unflagging persistence of utopian thinking in postmodernity.

4.1 Entropy, 1959–63—Early Stories, V.

Let me begin, then, at the beginning, with Pynchon's early stories.¹⁶ *Slow Learner* (1984) collects five short stories published between 1959 and 1964, the best-known of which are "Entropy" (1960), Pynchon's most frequently anthologized piece, and "Under the Rose" (1961), which is most noted for being reworked into chapter 3 of *V*. One key

¹⁶ I omit Pynchon's high-school writings from serious consideration here, not least because it seems unfair to place too much stock in an author's juvenilia—indeed, few scholars, I imagine, would want their undergraduate term papers to come up for discussion at job interviews or tenure reviews. Nevertheless, certain themes and tropes that would later develop into major topoi of interpretation in Pynchon's mature works can already be found in embryo in three short texts dating from 1952–53: preoccupation with popular music, drug culture, and paranoia in "The Voice of the Hamster," absurd (even "zany") comic parody in "Ye Legend of Sir Stupid and the Purple Knight," and secret societies in "The Boys." Pynchon's undergraduate short story "Mercy and Mortality and Vienna" (1959), first published in Cornell University's literary magazine *Epoch*, is even more recognizably Pynchonian to readers of his later fictions in its attention to the preterite, its predilection for allusion, and its recurrent pig motif, among other things.

for periodizing these early stories is their relation to literary and cultural history, specifically to the contested place of high modernism at midcentury. On the one hand, the stories reflect the dominance of the New Criticism and related late modernist conceptions of the modernist canon in English departments, evident, for example, in allusions to the formalist critic R. P. Blackmur's *Form and Value in Modern Poetry* (1957) and to T. S. Eliot's rain imagery in the 1959 story "The Small Rain" (*Slow* 36, 51). On the other hand, the stories also each react against that dominance, seeking to escape, or at least bristling against, the confines of a now institutionalized modernist aesthetic. Consider the following passage from "The Small Rain":

Around them frogs intoned a savage chorus, gradually it seemed to them [...] working itself into a pedal bass for a virtuoso duet of small breathings, cries; he puffing occasionally at the cigar throughout the performance, the ball cap tilted carelessly, she evoking a casually protective feeling, a never totally violated Pasiphae; until at last, having subsided, assailed still by stupid frog cries they lay not touching. "In the midst of great death," Levine said, "the little death." And later, "Ha. It sounds like a caption in *Life*. In the midst of *Life*. We are in death. Oh god." (50)

Combined in this passage are Pynchon's indebtedness to modernist notions of the canon—the allusion to the Greek myth of Pasiphaë, who mates with a bull and gives birth to the Minotaur and whom Dante locates in the circle of lust in the *Purgatorio* (see Ovid 185–86 [book 8]; Dante 26.40–42)—with a midcentury ethos of ennui, a sense of cultural banality, and revulsion bordering on nausea. Indeed, the "savage chorus" of "stupid frog cries" in the bayou, where "[m]angrove and moss [had] closed in on" the lovers (*Slow* 50), evokes Roquentin's disgust at the materiality of things in Sartre's

*Nausea*¹⁷—and it is no accident that Rizzo, the “company intellectual” who reads Blackmur, also reads *Being and Nothingness* (*Slow* 26).

In his introduction to *Slow Learner*, Pynchon reflects on the oblique language used to describe sex in the passage quoted above: “some kind of sexual encounter appears to take place, though you’d never know it from the text.” To Pynchon, writing in hindsight, that passage evokes “a general nervousness in the whole college-age subculture. A tendency to self-censorship [... during] the era of [Allen Ginsberg’s] *Howl*, [Vladimir Nabokov’s] *Lolita*, [Henry Miller’s] *Tropic of Cancer*” (5–6). The stylistic and thematic evasiveness (the characters in the story “evade” [5]) is simultaneously a symptom or consequence of both McCarthy-era cultural conservatism and a concomitant retreat from the political into the aesthetic à la the New Criticism. Subsequently, characters in *Slow Learner* attempt escape from that windless enclosure by means of signature practices of the “college-age subculture”: drugs and music.

The most famous examples in *Slow Learner* come from “Meatball Mulligan’s lease-breaking party” in “Entropy,” where characters “[smoke] funny-looking cigarettes,” drink until they pass out in a bathroom sink, and perform music that lacks not just “root chords” but “everything” so that the listener “*thinks*” the music instead of hearing it (81,

¹⁷ See, most notably, Roquentin’s phenomenological recounting of the pivotal scene at the park, wherein he realizes that he is the very nausea of existence that plagues him:

The chestnut tree pressed itself against my eyes. Green rust covered it half-way up; the bark, black and swollen, looked like boiled leather.... [M]y nostrils overflowed with a green, putrid odour.... If you existed, you had to *exist all the way*, as far as mouldiness, bloatedness, obscenity were concerned.... *In the way*: it was the only relationship I could establish between these trees.... I, too, was *In the way*.... But even my death would have been *In the way*. *In the way*, my corpse, my blood on these stones.... And the decomposed flesh would have been *In the way* in the earth which would receive my bones.... (Sartre, *Nausea* 127–29)

See also 126–35.

86, 95). “Entropy” not only scandalizes a conservative, middle-class, modernist sensibility but also attempts to expose the latter’s ultimate deathliness. In parodying a modernist aesthetic of minimalism, the musician character Duke simultaneously reveals and enacts the social process of entropy which has remained a staple of Pynchon criticism ever since, and which tends toward an eventual “moment of equilibrium,” a heat death of the universe in which the “curious dominant of [...] separate lives should resolve into a tonic of darkness and the final absence of all motion” (98). This vision of slow decay, of course, is nothing new; as early as 1925, in Eliot’s high modernism, to cite but the most convenient example, the universe ends anticlimactically, “[n]ot with a bang but a whimper” (82). What is noteworthy, though, is that Pynchon’s narrator describes this fate of the universe as a “tonic”—both a drink and the note that functions as the musical center of a scale (and which is missing from Duke’s performance, along with everything else). The scene at Meatball’s party thus combines a vision of ultimate dissolution and death with, fittingly enough for a party, music and drink.

This local party scene reaches vaster proportion in *V.*, where it is recast as a fully fledged mid-1950s subcultural group, the Whole Sick Crew. Like the partygoers in “Entropy,” the Whole Sick Crew is comprised of aspiring artists, writers, and musicians, as well as associated hangers-on. Unlike the narrator in “Entropy,” however, the narrator in *V.* is explicit regarding the derivative or second-rate quality of the Crew’s aesthetic practices:

The rest of the Crew partook of the same lethargy. Raoul wrote for television, keeping carefully in mind, and complaining bitterly about, all the sponsor-fetishes of that industry. Slab painted in sporadic bursts, referring to himself as a Catatonic Expressionist and his work as “the ultimate in non-communication.” Melvin played the guitar and sang liberal folk songs. The pattern would have been familiar—bohemian, creative, arty—except that it

was even further removed from reality, Romanticism in its furthest decadence; being only an exhausted impersonation of poverty, rebellion and artistic “soul.” For it was the unhappy fact that most of them worked for a living and obtained the substance of their conversation from the pages of Time magazine and like publications. (52)¹⁸

Whatever drama or heroism there might be in Callisto and Aubade’s pursuit of entropy in the short story (*Slow* 97–98) is annulled in *V.* by the Whole Sick Crew’s subsumption in a culture industry. The vice of lethargy here entails none of the subversive qualities that Pynchon would later attribute to its cousin sloth, which in the media age consists of “glumly refusing to be absorbed in [media technology’s] idle, disposable fantasies” (“Nearer”). Instead, these artists allow themselves to be absorbed, even if under duress. Raoul’s “complaining” about corporate sponsors, even as he works their products into his scripts and cashes their checks, marks both the limit of his brand of resistance and the necessity of his submission; as Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno put it in the classic text on the culture industry, “Anyone who resists can survive only by being incorporated” (104). The “non-communication” of Slab’s Catatonic Expressionism, meanwhile, substitutes a nearly-dead subject for that which would otherwise express itself in painting; thus, the label Catatonic Expressionism “creates order [but] not connections” (Horkheimer and Adorno 99)—it is explicable through and as an aesthetic, but it communicates (or tries to communicate) nothing.¹⁹ Melvin’s folk music, finally, predates the height of the folk music revival in the U.S., from the vantage of both the novel’s 1955–56 narrative and its 1963 publication date, and can thus

¹⁸ Later, the character Rooney Winsome criticizes Raoul, Slab, Melvin, and other members of the Whole Sick Crew on essentially the same grounds as the narrator does in the passage just cited; cf. *V.* 387–88.

¹⁹ Slab’s painting thus also bears something in common with Jameson’s description of the form of form’s failed attempt at “a completely non-representational language” (*Modernist* xv). See section 1.1, above.

appear only as imitation of an earlier tradition and a putatively more authentic Greenwich Village scene.²⁰ Melvin and others in the Crew derive their “substance” from *Time* magazine and other outlets of the culture industry. Ultimately, they are consumers of culture, not producers but poseurs.

It is not insignificant that the Whole Sick Crew resembles the bohemian castle in Amiri Baraka’s *6 Persons* (see above, section 3.3). Both Pynchon’s Crew and Baraka’s castle represent a “decadence” of culture against which narrators and authors define themselves. More significantly, Pynchon and Baraka also define themselves in relation to the Beat tradition represented by their respective bohemians. However, whereas Baraka dramatically (if ambiguously and problematically) repudiates the Beat ethos, Pynchon seems rather to view the Beats as important forerunners to be acknowledged instead of disavowed.²¹ Pynchon refers repeatedly to the Beats and their work in the introduction to *Slow Learner* (e.g., 6, 8, 22), and he calls the late 1950s “a transition point, a strange post-Beat passage of cultural time, with [his] loyalties divided” between Beat literature and high modernism (9). He and his contemporaries therefore see themselves, he says, as “post-Beats” (9).

Other details in *V.* corroborate the link between Pynchon and the Beats. One of the novel’s two main storylines follows Benny Profane, a member of the Crew and a “human yo-yo” who wanders apparently aimlessly up and down the Eastern seaboard of

²⁰ It is worth recalling that Pynchon describes himself as having been “an unpolitical ’50’s student” (*Slow* 6) and that he composed *V.* before the eruption of the anti-Vietnam War movement in 1963. Thus, it makes more sense to group Melvin’s folk music alongside Raoul’s screenwriting and Slab’s painting in *V.* than it might in a later novel.

²¹ Indeed, it is by reference to the Beats that Pynchon elsewhere argues for the importance of science fiction: “It was just as important as the Beat movement going on at the same time[...].” (“Is It O.K.”).

the U.S.: he “happen[s] to pass through Norfolk, Virginia” on the novel’s opening page and later is caught completely off guard when, “[w]ith its usual lack of warning, East Main [is] on him” (1, 2). Profane’s travels are marked by happenstance and surprise precisely because yo-yoing, as a rule, is primarily passive, undirected except by external factors such as the layout of a subway line. Yo-yoing is cruising for kicks, not questing for a grail. Thus, Profane and the Crew are frequently read as some sort of Beat or post-Beat community, if not the real thing then at least partaking in the Beat aura.²²

It is therefore in connection with the Beats that a useful periodization of Pynchon’s early work begins to emerge. Like Pynchon’s early stories and *V.*, the Beats revolt against Eisenhower-era conservatism and institutionalized high modernism alike. Take Ginsberg. His famous 1955 reading of “Howl” in San Francisco stands as a pivotal event in American literary history, and the collection in which that poem appears remains a touchstone among the texts of the Beat generation. Like Pynchon’s early vision of entropy, Ginsberg’s diagnoses of twentieth-century U.S. culture follows the modernists in their sense of irrecoverable loss: “Visions! omens! hallucinations! miracles! ecstasies! gone down the American river!” (22). Also like Pynchon, though, Ginsberg scandalizes midcentury bourgeois conservatism with his countercultural

²² The Beat text most frequently cited in connection with Profane is Jack Kerouac’s *On the Road*. Samuel Thomas, for example, calls the itinerant Profane narrative in *V.* “Pynchon’s most explicit nod to the beat-generation” (65). In addition, Daniel Grassian pushes the comparison further to argue that *V.* inherits directly from the Beats; particularly, he analyzes influences of *On the Road* and William S. Burroughs’s *Naked Lunch* on Pynchon’s novel. For Grassian, though, Pynchon’s relation to the Beats is ambivalent: “Essentially, Pynchon believes that the Beat style of life is admirable in theory but doesn’t work in practice” (126). Meanwhile, David Witzling compares Pynchon’s character McClintic Sphere, an African American jazz musician in *V.*, with *On the Road* and Norman Mailer’s famous essay “The White Negro”; in Witzling’s view, Pynchon, unlike Kerouac or Mailer, demonstrates at least “a nascent awareness of the stereotypical and ideological nature of many white Americans’ understanding of the figure of ‘the Negro’” (31; see 26–71). See also Chambers 7; Moore 18; and Newman 50.

rejection of dominant social norms: “The tongue and cock and hand and asshole holy! / Everything is holy!” (27). Finally, for both Pynchon and Ginsberg, the midcentury moment is dominated by the instrumentalization and commodification of art and literature under a hegemonic culture industry whose agents include “the nitroglycerine shrieks of the fairies of advertising & the mustard gas of sinister intelligent editors” (16). In parallel with the aspersions cast by the narrator of *V.* on the Whole Sick Crew’s impotent art—and, for that matter, similar as well to Baraka’s comments on “selling ass” (see sec. 3.3, above)—Ginsberg’s “America” documents capitalism’s alienation of poetry: “America I will sell you strophes \$2500 apiece \$500 down on your old strophe” (42). In these and other crucial ways, Pynchon’s early stories and *V.* react to much the same historical and social context as Ginsberg and the Beats do.

I want to argue, then, that the period of Pynchon’s work through *V.* counts as what Jameson, in *A Singular Modernity: Essay on the Ontology of the Present* (2002), calls late modernist. In contrast to the tremendous energy and radical experimentation of high modernism (think 1922: Joyce’s *Ulysses*, Woolf’s *Jacob’s Room*, Eliot’s *The Waste Land*, Rilke’s *Sonnets to Orpheus*, William Carlos Williams’s *Spring and All*, Brecht’s debut with *Drums in the Night*, etc.), late modernism is for Jameson marked by a reification and ossification of creative energies and a closing down of the possibilities opened up by high modernism: “modernism itself ... in the 1950s and 1960s seemed to touch a kind of limit and to have exhausted all available and conceivable novelties” (*Singular* 152). The earlier high modernist drive to innovate—Ezra Pound’s famous imperative: “Make it new!”—is now replaced by a “full-blown ideology of modernism,” or “the codification of the older [high] modernist practices and their organization into a

convention that serves as a model" (197). If high modernism "corresponds to a situation of incomplete modernization" (141), then the progressive completion of the modernizing project tends to replace the open futurity of incompleteness with the closed, accomplished fact—a process that Pynchon describes in *Mason & Dixon* as a change in grammatical mood from the subjunctive to the indicative. All of this leads, in Wegner's words, to "both a retreat from the radical energies of an earlier modernism and the development of a depoliticized modernist aesthetic ideology" (*Life* 5). Parodying the exhaustion of modernist aesthetic possibilities and rebelling against the resultant conformity are the first mark of the early fiction and *V.*'s late modernism.

If Pynchon's social and cultural kinship with the Beats provides a first way to view the early fiction and *V.* as late-modernist, a second can be found in the political and historical details of the Sidney Stencil narrative in *V.* Stencil, the son of a British espionage agent, spends the novel searching for *V.*, the woman, place, or other entity that had eluded his father before him. Stencil travels the globe to piece together scattered fragments of *V.*'s history, which takes him on a tour not just of former European colonies like Egypt and the former German Southwest Africa (now Namibia) and other comparably liminal spaces like the island of Malta, but also of the larger geopolitical systems and processes that made colonialism possible. *V.* is unclearly but inextricably bound up with the outbreak of World War I and, by extension, with the global order that emerges from the war's aftermath, first under the guise of the League of Nations and later the United Nations. Both of these international governance bodies make their mark on the Stencil/*V.* narrative: for example, the narrator compares a siege party in South Africa to "a tiny [...] League of Nations," while two minor characters

speculate on possible military conflict between the U.S. and Britain arising from the former's "vot[ing] in the [UN] Security Council with Russia and against England and France on this Suez business" (i.e., the Suez Crisis of 1956) (248, 465). On Hardt and Negri's take, those institutions, especially the UN, index a crucial transition between the modern international order that emerged from the Peace of Westphalia and the postmodern global order that they argue holds sway today. The UN is simultaneously the apex of the international politics of modernity and a chief symptom of the latter's decline: it "both reveals the limitations of the notion of *international* order and points beyond it toward a new notion of *global* order" (*Empire* 4). Just as Pynchon's cultural affinities with the Beats help identify *V.* and the early fiction as late-modernist, occupying both the twilight of modernism and the threshold of postmodernism, likewise the political and historical context of the Stencil/*V.* narrative locates this first micro-period in the milieu of midcentury Cold War politics playing out across a three-worlds model that, by century's end, would be supplanted by one or another model of contemporary globalization. In both cases—formally and historically—late modernism marks a pivot between modern and postmodern configurations.

Yet a third sense in which this first period of Pynchon's work counts as late modernist is the way it prefigures the rest of his oeuvre. In a compelling periodization of Pynchon's work through *Against the Day*, to which I return later, Heinz Ickstadt suggests that "*V.* can be said to contain the thematic and formal repertoire of all of Pynchon's subsequent fictions" ("History" 235–36). Stencil's obsessive quest for *V.* establishes a precedent in Pynchon's fiction for subsequent detective characters: Oedipa Maas in *The Crying of Lot 49*, Prairie Wheeler in *Vineland*, and Doc Sportello in

Inherent Vice. *V.* also introduces Clayton Chiclitz and his employer, Yoyodyne, Inc. (see, e.g., Pynchon, *V.* 240–41). Chiclitz reappears in *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow*, while Yoyodyne becomes a critical U.S. defense contractor in those novels. Kurt Mondaugen, introduced here in a flashback providing historical context to Stencil's search (see 242–97), also appears in *Gravity's Rainbow*, which details his involvement in the German occupation of German Southwest Africa and the genocide of the Herero people. An elaborate planetarium stretches the bounds of credibility, “a parody of space” (253)—perhaps a fitting description as well of the paradoxical spaces saturating later novels, most notably *Mason & Dixon*. Finally, *V.* establishes Pynchon's predilection for the “zany” musical numbers that are now a trademark of Pynchon's work. If all those subsequent texts count, as I argue below that they do, as postmodernist fiction, *V.* and the late modernist moment it occupies begin to look something like a “vanishing mediator” between the high modernist literature that preceded them, on the one hand, and postmodernism proper, on the other (Wegner, *Life* 5). Indeed, this is another fundamental feature of late modernism in Jameson's definition: it stands as both “a period in its own right” and as a transitional phase—which, viewed from a vast enough historical perspective, takes on the appearance of a radical break—between modernism and postmodernism (*Singular* 24). Thus, the early stories and *V.* constitute a discrete historical period in Pynchon's career and a moment of transition between his late modernist precursors and his own canonically postmodern novels.²³

²³ In addition, McHale repeatedly refers to *V.* as “late-modernist” (or, occasionally, “modernist”) rather than “postmodern” or “postmodernist” (*Constructing* 47, 194; *Postmodernist* 91). My own periodizing criteria, however, are different than McHale's. On his account, *V.* is (late) modernist, not postmodernist, because it “preserves the epistemological dominant of modernism” (*Postmodernist* 21).

Beginning with *The Crying of Lot 49*, those postmodern novels, as I mentioned above, fall into two categories. *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Vineland*, and *Inherent Vice* are set predominately in California. In *The Crying of Lot 49*, Oedipa Maas follows a trail of dubious clues, possible conspiracies, and secret communication networks from Kinneret-Among-The-Pines through San Narcisco and other L.A. suburbs. Prairie Wheeler's search for her absent mother, Frenesi Gates, in *Vineland* takes her on a quest from the fictional town of Vineland in northern California as far south as Orange and San Diego counties. Other threads of the narrative cross the Pacific to Honolulu or Tokyo, but these scenes occur in flashbacks, not the novel's narrative present; moreover, they could also be conceived of as part of a Pacific Rim regionalism or a trans-Pacific axis, with California being a privileged center or terminus. Finally, private eye Larry "Doc" Sportello, at the behest of his ex-girlfriend Shasta Fay Hepworth in *Inherent Vice*, investigates the interests of Shasta's lover, southern California real-estate mogul Mickey Wolfmann, in the Golden Fang (and/or the *Golden Fang*), a mysterious syndicate (and/or supernatural evil being, and/or schooner). In all three novels, the geographical scope is more or less closely bound to California.

The key distinction between modernist and postmodernist fiction in McHale's definition is that "the dominant of modernist fiction is *epistemological*," such that it asks questions concerned with interpretation and knowledge, while "the dominant of postmodernist fiction is *ontological*," leading postmodernist texts to pose such questions of reality as "What is a world?; What kinds of world are there, how are they constituted, and how do they differ? [...]" (9, 10). I do not disagree that *V.* is preeminently concerned with problems of knowing—those problems, of course, are the central focus of the Sidney Stencil episodes. I take issue, though, with the notion that this distinction in itself is a determining factor in periodizing modernism and postmodernism. Indeed, the logic of McHale's epistemology/ontology distinction requires him to class *The Crying of Lot 49* alongside *V.* as "late modernist" (*Constructing* 194). (Cf., however, McHale's later identification of 1966 as "year zero of postmodernism," partly on account of *Crying's* publication that year ["What"].) I argue shortly, though, that *Crying* stands in fact as a high postmodernist novel.

Chronologically, the California novels occupy a similarly limited timeline, and all three are anchored in an experience of the 1960s.²⁴ *The Crying of Lot 49*, whose narrative occupies the earliest timeline among the three novels, takes place in the early to mid 1960s, registered here as a time of student radicalism: for Oedipa, the Berkeley campus is a place “where the most beloved of folklores may be brought into doubt, cataclysmic of dissents voiced, suicidal of commitments chosen—the sort that bring governments down.” This stands in direct contrast to Oedipa’s own college experience in the 1950s, “a time of nerves, blandness and retreat” (83).²⁵ The present of *Vineland*, meanwhile, is 1984, a year both Reaganite and Orwellian.²⁶ Frenesi, a 1960s radical filmmaker turned government informer who gets sexually aroused from seeing men in uniforms, loses her government income when the “war on drugs,” Reagan-era budget cuts, information technologies, and the ideological success of American fascism render informing costly and redundant.²⁷ Finally, *Inherent Vice* narrates an experience of the end of the 1960s; in 1970, Doc is not a turncoat, like Frenesi, but instead a stereotype of the ageing hippie, perpetually shrouded in a “fog of dope” (*Inherent* 45). That fog, though, is also linked thematically and symbolically with the uncertainty of historical experience, the difficulty of making sense of the present—for Doc, the passage into the

²⁴ The decade of the 1960s is central not only to Pynchon’s California novels but also to the politics of his historical novels; similarly, it is a central reference for much of the criticism as well. See, e.g., Baker; Cowart, “Pynchon”; Dussere; Gordon; Ickstadt, “History” 235–39; Willman.

²⁵ Oedipa—who is apparently, like Pynchon, a graduate of Cornell (Pynchon, *Crying* 1)—is thus a contemporary of Pynchon; cf. *Slow* 6.

²⁶ On *Vineland* and Orwell’s *1984*, see, e.g., Dussere 580–81; Thomas, *Pynchon* 133–37.

²⁷ Perhaps Pynchon has in mind Frenesi’s sexual attraction to Brock Vond, *Vineland*’s villain who seduces her into government work, when he describes George Orwell’s *1984* in the foreword to that novel’s 2003 edition: “Orwell in 1948 understood that despite the Axis defeat, the will to fascism had not gone away, that far from having seen its day it had perhaps not yet even come into its own[...].” (xvi).

1970s. Thus, the chronology of these novels coheres around experiences of the '60s and the decade's immediate aftermath.

The other main strain in the Pynchon canon consists of his historical novels: *Gravity's Rainbow*, *Mason & Dixon*, and *Against the Day*. Whereas the California novels are more or less geographically restricted, the historical novels sprawl across vast international spaces. *Gravity's Rainbow* takes place in Britain, Germany, Poland, German South-West Africa, France, Kyrgyzstan, and elsewhere, with the novel's final climactic prolepsis occurring at the Orpheus Theater in Los Angeles. In *Mason & Dixon*, the title characters travel from England to South Africa, St. Helena, and the British colonies of Pennsylvania, Maryland, Virginia, and Quebec. *Against the Day* is Pynchon's most geographically wide-ranging novel, with scenes in the U.S. (including Chicago, New York, Cleveland, mining towns in Colorado and Utah, the campus of Yale University, and Washington state's Kitsap Peninsula), Mexico, England, Italy, Belgium, Germany, Austria, the Balkans, Hungary, and elsewhere. In contrast to the local contexts inhabited by the California novels, the historical novels are uncontainable by national boundaries, tending instead toward an increasingly global jurisdiction.

Moreover, this global space is not just international but also, at times, supranational or at least other than nationalist. Most of the action in *Gravity's Rainbow* occurs in the Zone of occupied Germany after V-E Day. Administered variously and ambiguously by the Soviets, the British, and the Americans, the Zone is an open space of possibility: as Geli Tripping admonishes Tyrone Slothrop, the protagonist, "Forget frontiers now. Forget subdivisions. There aren't any" (294). Likewise, many of the spaces in *Mason & Dixon* are ungovernable by national sovereignty and inexplicable by

the Enlightenment rationality that undergirds nationalism. The Warrior Path, used by the Iroquois, Mohawk, Catawba, and other Native American peoples, marks a “Membrane that divides their Subjunctive World from our number’d and dreamless Indicative” (677). Ley-Lines in England provide Dixon’s teacher, William Emerson, with the means for magical air flight. The concave surface of the hollow earth visited by Mason, where “everyone is pointed *at* everyone else,” affords a sense of community unavailable to those living in the demarcated national territories of the earth’s outer, convex surface, where “each [person] is slightly *pointed away* from everybody else” (741). The hollow earth appears again in *Against the Day*, but this time with a rather different politics, less utopian and more “byzantine”: it is the realm of hostile gnomes who lay siege to passing airships and who plot with an “international mining cartel” (117). Although *Against the Day*’s hollow earth lacks the sense of community found in its counterpart in *Mason & Dixon*, there is nonetheless an abundance of supranational spaces in that later novel—indeed, just as the geographical scope of *Against the Day* is the vastest of all Pynchon’s novels, it likewise features the greatest proliferation of spaces, places, and enclaves that escape national sovereignty and capitalist control, at least for a time. The Chums of Chance, the crew of the skyship *Inconvenience*, search for “the hidden city of Shambhala,” which one character describes as “not a goal but an absence. Not the discovery of a place but the act of leaving the futureless place where [he] was” (248, 975). The Chums’ quest for Shambhala also takes them to the subterranean city of Nuovo Rialto, which has persisted in relative peace since the Middle Ages but is presently under threat of exploitation by oil prospectors (439–41). Throughout the novel, the Chums are consistently associated with places and spaces

like Shambhala and Nuovo Rialto: early in the novel, an expedition takes the Chums to “the high edge of the atmosphere,” “the next untamed frontier” (121); by the end of the novel, they are guided by “the supranational idea [...] literally to transcend the old political space, the map-space of two dimensions, by climbing into the third” (1083). The *Inconvience* itself, little more than an ordinary dirigible at the beginning of the narrative, has by now grown into a flying city and occupies a literally supranational space. Both quantitatively and qualitatively, the geography of *Against the Day* and the other historical novels tends increasingly toward the international and the global.

Similarly, the chronological scope of the historical novels, taken collectively, expands beyond the comparatively narrow timeline of the California novels. *Gravity’s Rainbow* is set primarily in 1945, while its final scene occurs in the early 1970s. *Mason & Dixon* is narrated mostly by the Rev^d Wicks Cherrycoke over a single (!) winter evening in 1786, and the bulk of his narrative covers the span 1760–68. Finally, *Against the Day* begins with the 1898 World’s Fair in Chicago and ends sometime between 1918 and the early 1920s.²⁸ Notwithstanding *Mason & Dixon*’s single night of storytelling, each of the historical novels encompasses a longer chronological span than any of the California novels, suggesting a pronounced concern with questions of historicity and historical knowledge (and in the process, partly corroborating Hutcheon’s proposition that historiographic metafiction engage in “metafictional rethinking of the

²⁸ One of the challenges in reading Pynchon’s historical novels is keeping track of calendar time—a task for which reader’s guides like Stephen C. Weisenburger’s *A “Gravity’s Rainbow” Companion* (1988; 2nd ed. 2006) and the helpful resources to be found at the Pynchon Wiki (pynchonwiki.com) are indispensable. (For a comparative analysis of Weisenburger’s guide and the wiki for *Against the Day*, see Schroeder and den Bensten.) However, in the case of *Against the Day*, two details give a rough sense of the date at the novel’s close: the narrator refers to the end of World War I, and one of the Chums of Chance uncorks bottles of champagne with a 1920 vintage (1040, 1084). The latter fact, though, is not hard evidence that the narrative extends as far as the early 1920s: the Chums encounter time travelers from the future, so it is ambiguous whether the uncorking precedes or follows that date.

epistemological and ontological relations between history and fiction” [*Poetics* 121]). Moreover, the historical novels together seem to form one vast narrative of moments of radical uncertainty, possibility, and transition in political organization and historical moments: the revolutionary era in America, the fin-de-siècle world that would become twentieth-century modernity, and the formation of a Cold War world order all rise, like Deleuze and Guattari’s plateaus, to erupt through quotidian life and herald irrevocable change.

If it seems a stretch to imagine that these novels conspire to form a single historical narrative, even if only a loosely united one, there are textual details that connect the universes of these novels with each other: the hollow earth (*Mason; Against*); cartography (*Mason; Against* 121); the hallucinatory Kenosha Kid (*Gravity’s* 60–61) and the anarchist Kieselguhr Kid (*Against* 171 et passim); allusions to the nineteenth-century physicist James Clerk Maxwell (*Against* 98; *Gravity’s* 239 et passim). Most compellingly, though, and suggesting a stronger interrelation than might be indicated by mere thematic resonance or a common stock of allusions and symbols—some of which, after all, appear in other fictions of Pynchon’s²⁹—all three of these novels feature a sailor named Bodine: Pig Bodine is assigned to the U.S.S. *John E. Badass* in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, “Fender-Belly Bodine” is the foretopman aboard H.M.S. *Seahorse* in *Mason & Dixon*, and Bodine is the officer in charge (“O.I.C.”) of the

²⁹ For example, Maxwell figures prominently in *The Crying of Lot 49* and “Entropy,” while Jess Traverse, Frenesi’s grandfather in *Vineland*, is also a descendant of the Traverse family from *Against the Day*.

Stupendica in *Against the Day*.³⁰ If these are not in fact the same Bodine, they certainly bear an unmistakable family resemblance to each other. More importantly, his/their presence in each of these novels, either intergenerational or through an impossibly long lifespan, suggests a common historical project—precisely the kind of “coherent vision of the past” that, as noted above, Smith sees in Pynchon’s texts.

One of the most frequently cited passages in *Mason & Dixon* deals directly with the question of how we access the past in order to arrive at such a coherent historical vision. In the passage from that novel that I take as an epigraph to Chapter 4, Cherrycoke reveals some crucial distinguishing features of the specific kind of historical thinking that drives not only *Mason & Dixon* but all of Pynchon’s historical novels. First, Pynchon’s brand of historical thinking is not a matter of the sequencing of “Facts” in a “Chronology”; that is the purview of lawyers, Cherrycoke writes, because it is primarily a matter of the rhetorical manipulation of details aimed at an instrumental outcome rather than a deep understanding of the past. Second, historical thinking is not the same as “Remembrance.” The latter would amount to something like the preservation of narratives in a cultural storehouse—for example, the American nationalist myths of the Founding Fathers (themselves ironically reworked in *Mason & Dixon*)—which, Cherrycoke claims, are much more powerful than the historian’s discourse. Pynchonian historical thinking requires both a broader perspective than the close, legalistic attention required for the ordering of facts in a chronology and a more ecumenical relation to what is passed over by official chronologies and narratives of mythologized

³⁰ As my good friend and former colleague Aaron Cerny first pointed out to me, “O.I.C. Bodine” also means, for devoted readers of Pynchon, “Oh, I see Bodine!” I would like to thank Aaron Cerny for this observation.

remembrance: in other words, preterite history.³¹ In place of ordered chronologies and hegemonic myths, preterite history consists of “a great disorderly Tangle of Lines[...], vanishing into the Mnemonick Deep,” which provide “more than one life-line back into a Past we risk [...] losing our forebears in forever.” This, I argue, is precisely the function of Pynchon’s historical novels, themselves a great disorderly tangle of lines running back into the past of our postmodern present.

It remains to be seen how those tangled lines into the past might also connect horizontally or laterally with the California novels. Moreover, it also remains to be seen what both the historical novels and the California novels might reveal about the present. I begin to draw out those connections in the next section, where I coordinate this bifurcation in Pynchon’s canon with a chronological micro-periodization of his oeuvre.

Before I do so, however, I want to discuss some of the differences between the periodization I argue for and some important periodizations of Pynchon’s oeuvre by other critics. I mentioned one such periodization in the introduction to Chapter 4: Palmeri’s division of Pynchon’s career into a high-postmodern period (*V.*, *The Crying of Lot 49*, and *Gravity’s Rainbow*) and an “other than postmodern” period (*Vineland* and *Mason & Dixon*) (Palmeri, “Other”). In addition, I also alluded briefly to Ickstadt’s periodization. Ickstadt proposes a tripartite division of Pynchon’s work, consisting of *V.*, the “overture”; *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Gravity’s Rainbow*, and *Vineland*, novels of the possibilities of the 1960s as well as that decade’s ultimate closure; and finally *Mason & Dixon* and *Against the Day*, nostalgic, melancholy “narratives about a past whose future

³¹ The distinction between the elect and the preterite—the chosen and the passed-over—comes from the Puritan Christian tradition. On Pynchon’s relation to Puritanism, see, e.g., Leise; Sanders; Slade, “Religion”.

is not open any longer” (237; see 235–39). Both of these schemas shed useful insight on the Pynchon canon: Ickstadt’s account has, among others, the merit of identifying the newly important role of nostalgia centered around *Mason & Dixon*, while Palmeri’s provocative suggestion that Pynchon’s recent work is something other than (high) postmodern captures a crucial sense of departure from, or at least resistance to, the sometimes paralyzing effects of late capitalism canonically identified with postmodernity. Both of those accounts of Pynchon’s recent novels, in particular, inform my periodization that follows.

However, my periodization also differs from Palmeri’s and Ickstadt’s. Both of those critics suggest some sort of radical break between an early and a late Pynchon. On my take, however, the more relevant break in Pynchon’s canon is not simply chronological but rather metasynchronous: more important than the differences between, say, *Gravity’s Rainbow* and *Mason & Dixon* are those between *Gravity’s Rainbow* and *The Crying of Lot 49* or *Vineland*—or better yet, between *Gravity’s Rainbow* + *Mason & Dixon* + *Against the Day* and *The Crying of Lot 49* + *Vineland* + *Inherent Vice*. Two other important distinctions follow. First, in contrast to Palmeri’s account in particular, I argue that Pynchon’s novels do not move from postmodernism to something else (other than postmodernism, post-postmodernism, etc.) but rather allegorize a perpetual struggle between two postmodernisms: a canonical high postmodernism that buttresses the reigning ideology of late capitalism and a radical late postmodernism that attempts to subvert late capitalism from below. Second, unlike my precursors—whose periodizations, in all fairness, predate the publication of *Inherent Vice* and, in Palmeri’s case, *Against the Day*—I make the bifurcation of Pynchon’s

novels into the California and historical lines an explicit and direct thematic focus. Perhaps paradoxically, such a view grasps Pynchon's sprawling canon as a unified, coherent historical and political intervention in a postmodern moment that remains always already contested and conflictive. Pynchon is not a postmodernist: he is at least two of them.

4.2 Paranoia, 1966/1973—*The Crying of Lot 49*, *Gravity's Rainbow*

The Crying of Lot 49 and *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pynchon's first novels to follow *V.*, are perhaps his best-known and most frequently taught, not least because of their exemplary status among postmodern American novels. These novels indeed provide convenient indices to the development of postmodernism in American fiction. However, rather than taking them as textbook examples of postmodern literature, I find it instructive to read them as instances of two postmodern aesthetics corresponding to the two strains of Pynchon's corpus sketched out above.

Pynchon's first California novel, *The Crying of Lot 49*, follows Oedipa Maas's quest to search out the origins of the Tristero, a conspiratorial underground communication network. Her first exposure to the Tristero comes through her attempts to sort through the estate of the late Pierce Inverarity, a former lover who had named Oedipa the executor of his will. Early in the novel, she discovers a mysterious graffito: "Get in touch with Kirby, through WASTE only, Box 7391, L.A." The graffito is accompanied by "a symbol she'd never seen before, a loop, triangle and trapezoid" resembling a line drawing of a muted post horn. Oedipa immediately desires to understand or decode the message and symbol, regarding the latter as "hieroglyphics" (38). That desire, though, is fed not only by objective ambiguity surrounding the significance of the text and symbol but also by Oedipa's own predisposition for interpretation. She has a habit, in

fact, of seeing in “outward patterns a hieroglyphic sense of concealed meaning, of an intent to communicate” (14). Subsequently, she encounters a whole series of muted post horns and WASTE references scattered throughout L.A. and its suburbs. This preponderance of potentially significant signs conspires with Oedipa’s hermeneutic compulsion to make her speculate that anything can potentially be a sign and that everything might be connected, “[a]s if [...] there were revelation in progress all around her” (31). Having been charged with interpreting a will, Oedipa must now interpret everything.

Oedipa’s pursuit of the Tristero consumes her. Its convoluted history seems to draw everything into a gravitational pull of conspiracy and connection: “revelations [...] now seemed to come crowding in exponentially, as if the more she collected the more would come to her, until everything she saw, smelled, dreamed, remembered, would somehow come to be woven into The Tristero” (64). This vague sense of massive interconnection, instantiated in Oedipa’s comparing the suburb San Narcisco, viewed from above, to an integrated circuit (14), imparts on her search the character of intentionality (and she is, after all, carrying out a will): “*She was meant to remember*” (95). On her interpretation, there is no room for coincidence or mere chance: she has been deliberately selected as the recipient of revelation, the focal point of someone’s master plan. But this suspicion is also counterbalanced against an equal and opposite suspicion that “‘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” (95). In a single turn of thought, Oedipa postulates both deliberation and manipulation: she seems to be subject to a plan, but that plan might not be what it seems.

The tension between Oedipa's views of herself as hermeneutical detective and manipulated subject comes to a head late in the novel. Having chased down several leads only to have them pulled from her grasp—the director of a play that might be an allegorical history of the Tristero commits suicide; a bookstore where she had conducted research on the Tristero burns down—Oedipa arrives at an impasse among four interpretations: “Either you have stumbled [...] onto a network by which X number of Americans [communicate...]. Or you are hallucinating it. Or a plot has been mounted against you[...]. Or you are fantasizing some such plot, in which case you are a nut” (140–41). These interpretations pivot around two axes. First, Oedipa surmises that she must be either lucid or delusional: there might be something (a communication network or a plot), or there might be nothing (hallucination or fantasy). This is centrally a question of epistemology: how reliable is Oedipa's knowledge of the Tristero? How sound or accurate are her interpretations of the evidence at hand? Second, the category of lucidity itself pivots on an axis between the external and the internal: if she is lucid and there is indeed something that Oedipa's collected clues point toward, that something can be an existent network to which she is fundamentally external, or it can be an elaborate plot with Oedipa at its center. This is an ontological issue: what is the nature of the reality that Oedipa has discovered? What kind of world does that reality assume? Or, as Oedipa writes in a notebook, “*Shall I project a world?*” (64). Her dilemma is at least threefold: she must decide whether and how she knows anything; what it is that she knows; and what to do with that knowledge.

Complicating matters for Oedipa is the response that any of her propositions would inevitably elicit from her contemporaries: “Either way, they'll call it paranoia”

(140). As a tool for making sense of reality, paranoia has low stock. From Richard Hofstadter's famous denunciation of the "heated exaggeration, suspiciousness, and conspiratorial fantasy" rampant in what he coined "the paranoid style in American politics" in 1964, to Hardt and Negri's admonition in 2000 that their theory of Empire is not "a conspiracy theory of globalization" (Hofstadter; Hardt and Negri, *Empire* 3), paranoia is widely deemed ill suited for serious political analysis. However, that does not mean that paranoia and conspiracy theories have nothing to reveal. As Jameson reminds readers, conspiracy theory "is the poor person's cognitive mapping in the postmodern age; it is a degraded figure of the total logic of late capital, a desperate attempt to represent the latter's system" ("Cognitive" 356).³² Oedipa's grasping at Tristero straws is therefore significant independently of the empirical reality of the Tristero itself. Degraded figures are still figures of something.

In order to determine what might be figured by Oedipa's interpretations of the Tristero mystery, let me begin by filling in some of the latter's content. The Tristero, Oedipa learns, starts out as a medieval courier service. Through political machinations, the Tristero's main competitor, Thurn und Thaxis, establishes a postal monopoly in the Low Countries. From then on, the Tristero is pushed underground, becoming a clandestine antagonist to Thurn und Taxis and other official state monopolies on communication. The muted post horn ubiquitous in Oedipa's L.A. is the emblem of both the Tristero system and its opposition to Thurn und Taxis, whose own symbol is an

³² See also Jameson's allegorical reading of *Crying* in Part 1 of *The Geopolitical Aesthetic* (1992). In Jameson's view, the novel's conspiracy narrative is organized around a "gap between form and content in ... postmodern representations of totality" which prevents representation of "the very secret of the world system itself." Crucially, that unrepresentability is what conspiracy narratives represent in the first place: "it is very precisely that gap between form and content that must be the fundamental content—and also the form—of the conspiratorial allegory of late capitalist totality" (21–22; see also 16–17).

open post horn. The Tristero's motto combines this oppositional militancy with a high messianic anticipation; as Stanley Koteks chastises Oedipa, "It's W.A.S.T.E.[...], not 'waste': "WE AWAIT SILENT TRISTERO'S EMPIRE" (Pynchon, *Crying* 70, 139). Thus, the Tristero—as best as Oedipa can tell, at least—turns out to be secret conspiracy aimed at overthrowing its officially sanctioned nemesis and establishing hegemony over communication networks.

However, despite what is clearly an oppositional stance toward the status quo, it would be premature to describe the Tristero as revolutionary or even a resistance movement. Indeed, *The Crying of Lot 49* provides examples of secret societies and conspiracies espousing a variety of political agendas. Take Inamorati Anonymous, a support group dedicated to helping people kick addictions to love—"hetero, homo, bi, dog or cat, car, every kind there is"—in a paradoxical "society of isolates" (93–94). Far from establishing a platform from which to launch collective praxis of any kind, revolutionary or reactionary, IA attempts to help people escape the notion of collectivity altogether. The organization is strict when it comes to preserving anonymity: "Nobody knows anybody else's name; just the [helpline] number[...]. We're isolates[...]. Meetings would destroy the whole point of it" (91). IA is political in only a negative or privative sense (similar to the way that being "apolitical" is still a political stance); its fundamental purpose is to foster isolated individuality, not to nurture any sort of movement.

Or take the Peter Pinguid Society. Named for a (fictional) Confederate commodore who may or may not have been attacked by a Russian ship in an apocryphal naval battle somewhere off the coast of California in 1864, the Pinguid

Society synthesizes the American right-wing traditions of anti-communism and southern pride by positing “some military alliance between abolitionist Russia (Nicholas having freed the serfs in 1861) and a Union that paid lip-service to abolition while it kept its own industrial laborers in a kind of wage-slavery” (36). By identifying the origin of the Cold War in a nineteenth-century alliance between Russia and the industrialized northern states, the Pinguid Society positions itself even to the right of capitalism itself, so that member Mike Fallopian can refer to “left-leaning friends over in the [John] Birch Society” (36).³³ However, it is unclear what sort of action the Pinguid Society is interested in taking; its namesake, Fallopian tells Oedipa, spent his retirement “[s]peculating in California real estate,” not hoarding Confederate dollars (37). Clearly, conspiracy and secrecy do not a revolutionary movement make.

Much of what applies to the Pinguid Society and to IA also applies to the Tristero. For starters, both the Pinguid Society and the IA communicate by means of the W.A.S.T.E. network. What unites the Pinguid Society, the IA, and other users of W.A.S.T.E. is not any sort of political agenda but rather their outsider status. Over the course of a single night, Oedipa observes several users of the network, all of whom suffer their own “alienation” and “species of withdrawal” (100). Oedipa reflects on the political value of this alienation and withdrawal: “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. Whatever else was being denied them[...], this withdrawal was their own, unpublicized, private” (101). This is the preterite owning their own preterition: too insignificant to the constituted power of the republic to merit either

³³ On the John Birch Society, see O'Reilly.

campaign overtures, like those directed at politically desirable demographic groups, or concerted repression, like perceived threats to order suffer, the preterite users of the W.A.S.T.E. network persist in their subterranean, outsider status. That status defines and unifies them as a community of isolates.

The community of W.A.S.T.E. users is composed of the excluded middle—that which a binary system cannot accommodate because it falls in with neither term of an opposition. The classic example from logic is that a proposition must be either true or false; there is no middle term between those binary extremes (see Kirwan). This is why, as Oedipa knows from her humanist training at Cornell, excluded middles are “bad shit, to be avoided” (Pynchon, *Crying* 150). But they are bad shit only for a binary system that forces subjects into one of just two slots—a system that flouts the utopian (if also ideological) American self-conception as a land of immigrants and outsiders that is evident, say, in the inscription at the base of the Statue of Liberty. Oedipa regards the exclusion of America’s preterite middle as a travesty: “how had it ever happened here, with the chances once so good for diversity?” (150). In place of a utopian commingling of all in a common life of the republic, processes of marginalization produce as unintended consequences “separate, silent, unsuspected world[s]” like the W.A.S.T.E. system (101). W.A.S.T.E. exists as a separate world because there is no room for it in the officially sanctioned reality of the midcentury U.S.

Central to that reality is, of course, the Cold War. In addition to the Pinguid Society’s conspiracy theory of the origins of the Cold War, there is an allusion to Cold War reality that, although more oblique than Fallopian’s historical account, captures the apocalyptic sense of the Cold War doctrine of mutually assured destruction (according

to which the possession of nuclear weapons by both the U.S. and the U.S.S.R. served as a deterrent, since retaliation would be equally devastating as initial aggression). When Oedipa tells attorney Manfred Metzger, her “co-executor,” about what she reads as a misprint on a postal envelope—“potsmaster” for “postmaster”—he replies: “So they make misprints[...], let them. As long as they’re careful about not pressing the wrong button, you know?” (2, 33). Pushing the wrong button could result in something as comparatively innocuous as the misrouting of mail, but the image also evokes the so-called nuclear football—the device to be used by U.S. presidents to authorize a nuclear attack. Mutually assured destruction lurks in the background throughout *The Crying of Lot 49*, placing those connected with W.A.S.T.E. in danger of being slotted under the Soviet heading in the binary logic of the Cold War. When Oedipa considers trying to distribute Inverarity’s estate among W.A.S.T.E. users, she realizes that she would be ostracized and branded “a redistributionist and pinko” (150). The same binary thinking is what marginalizes those W.A.S.T.E. users to begin with; when Metzger suggests that Pinguid’s opposition to industrial capitalism “disqualif[ies] him as any kind of anti-Communist figure,” Fallopian responds: “You think like a Bircher [or any mainstream Cold War–era conservative...]. Good guys and bad guys. You never get to the underlying truth” (36). Fallopian’s portrayal of Pinguid further demonstrates the inadequacy of Cold War binarisms by pointing out that Marxism develops directly out of the context of industrial capitalism (37): no twentieth-century communism without a nineteenth-century industrial capitalism for Marx to write about and revolt against. But when the mutually exclusive positions demarcated by Cold War ideology saturate the

political landscape, underlying truths like the historical inextricability of capitalism and Marxism have nowhere to go but underground.

It is politically significant that *The Crying of Lot 49* stops short of narrating any direct confrontation between the W.A.S.T.E. outsiders and the hegemonic Cold War ideology of the U.S. Indeed, there is little in this novel in the way of hope, nothing that would offer encouragement to those trapped in the excluded middle. Oedipa's sympathies certainly tend toward the novel's preterite characters, but she herself never joins any of the collectives that comprise the W.A.S.T.E. network; although she wonders whether she might "be hounded someday as far as joining Tristero itself," she nonetheless remains an observer, a "voyeur and listener," an outsider to the outsiders (150, 100). As such, she can only interpret the alternative narratives proffered by the preterite—she cannot write them herself or shape the realities those narratives imagine. Instead, her conspiracy theories about the Tristero register the hegemony of ideology during the Cold War. The constituted power of the state exercises such extensive control over official reality that alternative or counterhegemonic ideologies have nowhere to go but into hiding. Even if W.A.S.T.E. users make "a calculated withdrawal," fleeing the official "life of the Republic," their flight is also a retreat. They await silent Tristero's empire, they do not build it, just as the novel closes with Oedipa "await[ing] the crying of lot 49" (152), not projecting a world.

Amid all the paranoia of *The Crying of Lot 49*, however, one also glimpses the contrary neurosis: schizophrenia. Wendell "Mucho" Maas, Oedipa's husband and a used car salesman turned disc jockey, begins to experience the schizoid effects of LSD in which "[e]gos lose their sharp edges" (111). His supervisor at the radio station KCUF

tells Oedipa that Mucho is “losing his identity”: “Day by day, Wendell is less himself and more generic. He enters a staff meeting and the room is suddenly full of people[....] He’s a walking assembly of man” (115). From his own perspective, though, Mucho merely realizes a fundamental truth: “That’s what I am[...]. Everybody is” (117). His access to that truth is communicative: “Everybody who says the same words is the same person[...]. You’re an antenna, sending your pattern out across a million lives a night, and they’re your lives too” (116, 118). Whereas Oedipa stands separate from the W.A.S.T.E. network and the Tristero conspiracy, remaining a paranoid, voyeuristic outsider, Mucho seems to participate—he had sent Oedipa the letter with the “potsmaster” notice—and enjoy the schizoid pleasures that come from abandoning the security of a clearly defined individual ego. Her paranoia marks her distance and separation from the Tristero, while his schizophrenia reconfigures his very subjectivity in a network of clandestine communication.

Oedipa’s and Mucho’s competing neuroses also correspond to contradictory political agendas: in Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s view, paranoia is the neurosis proper to fascism in that it “invests the formation of a central sovereignty”—like Oedipa’s paranoid fantasizing about the mysterious Tristero—while schizophrenia “follows the *lines of escape* of desire,” exploding the fascist control of desire exercised by capitalism and the state and opening onto the pleasures of collective, schizophrenic subjectivity (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 277; see section 3.2, above). Oedipa’s nostalgia for the Word of revelation evinces a desire to be led; Mucho’s overabundant plurality of words activates a set of desires alternative to the Cold War conservatism to which Oedipa still feels herself a reluctant heir.

Whereas *The Crying of Lot 49* locates schizophrenia in a marginal character whose connection to the main action of the novel is uncertain and tenuous, much of *Gravity's Rainbow* focuses on the subjective dissolution of the schizoid character Tyrone Slothrop. Before Slothrop even makes his first appearance, the novel foreshadows the fragmentation to come in a long description of the “godawful mess” atop his desk, which includes, among much other detritus, “lost pieces to different jigsaw puzzles showing parts of the amber left eye of a Weimaraner, the green velvet folds of a gown, slate-blue veining in a distant cloud, the orange nimbus of an explosion (perhaps a sunset), rivets in the skin of a Flying Fortress, the pink inner thigh of a pouting pin-up girl...” (*Gravity's* 18). That these fragments are puzzle pieces initially suggests that they should be put together somehow and that the reader's task here will be like Oedipa's in *The Crying of Lot 49*. However, *Gravity's Rainbow* frustrates any such expectations. First of all, the narrator's knowledge apparently exceeds what could reasonably be expected of a casual observer noting the disorder of Slothrop's desk—that is, the narrator identifies the wholes of which the pieces are fragments—so there is little mystery what the puzzle pieces depict, with the possible exception of the nimbus cloud. The reintegration of the jigsaw puzzles would hardly amount to a hermeneutic task on par with Oedipa's search for the Tristero.

This is not necessarily to say, however, that there are no connections in *Gravity's Rainbow*. One of Slothrop's most curious attributes is the link between his erections and explosions of German V-2 missiles: Slothrop's map of sexual encounters and the statistician Roger Mexico's map of missile strikes in Britain “match up square for square,” with Slothrop's trysts anticipating the attacks by “about 4½ days” on average

(85, 86). This correlation, which originates in experiments in Pavlovian conditioning performed on “Infant Tyrone” by Dr. Laszlo Jamf, piques the interest of “The White Visitation,” a British psychological/paranormal-research outfit seeking strategic advantages over Germany during the closing years of World War II. Subsequently, “The White Visitation” (the capitalization and quotation marks are Pynchon’s) sends Slothrop, a lieutenant in the U.S. army, throughout Europe and, following the armistice, the Zone of occupied Germany. Slothrop’s mission is ostensibly to discover information about the V-2, particularly its *Schwarzgerät* or “black device,” which is suspected to play a role in the missile’s guidance system; the reasoning seems to be that Slothrop’s anticipatory erections might make him especially well suited for investigating other aspects of the missile. His penis is somehow able to communicate with the rockets, and it is precisely that ability to communicate across otherwise impermeable boundaries that makes him useful.³⁴

As Slothrop pursues his missions throughout Europe and the Zone, his close connection with the V-2 missile comes to change his very identity. When Slothrop dresses as the comic-book superhero Rocketman, he and other characters immediately take his disguise at least a bit seriously: he “has been imagining a full-scale Rocketman Hype, in which the people bring him food, wine and maidens in four-color dispensation,”

³⁴ Nor is Slothrop alone among the characters of *Gravity’s Rainbow* in his capacity for otherwise impossible communication or identification. Early on, the narrator notes Captain Geoffrey “Pirate” Prentice’s “strange talent for [...] getting inside the fantasies of others [...] and] *managing* them” (12). Later, several pairs of characters are suspected of being the same person: for example, Roger Mexico, a statistician for “The White Visitation,” and Géza Rózsavölgyi, a psychologist studying abreaction of neuroses at “The White Visitation”; Bianca, daughter of actress Greta Erdmann and director Gerhardt von Göll, and Gottfried, submissive lover and sacrificial victim of the sadistic Captain Blicero; and Bianca and Ilse, daughter of Franz Pökler, who collaborates with the Nazis in exchange for Ilse’s temporary annual release from the Dora concentration camp (634, 672, 577). However, given the immensity and density of *Gravity’s Rainbow* as well as the requirements of my own project with respect to the rest of Pynchon’s canon, I limit my discussion here primarily to Slothrop in particular and the Counterforce in general.

and the character Säure beseeches him, “Now listen, Rocketman, I’m in a bit of trouble” (366). Slothrop accepts his role as Rocketman, coining a superhero-style slogan, “Fickt nicht mit dem Raketemensch!” (Don’t fuck with the Rocketman!) (435; sic), and becoming a champion of the Counterforce, the movement in the Zone opposed to the secret control exercised by international cartels including the likes of IG Farben and the Phoebus light-bulb cartel. Having been manipulated at the hands of those cartels—Jamf had worked for IG Farben (249)—Slothrop-as-Rocketman turns the schizoid subjectivity constructed by Jamf against them.

What enables Slothrop and the Counterforce to resist the cartels and the states that cater to them is in large part the sociality proper to the Zone. The Zone, as noted above, is a space where sovereignty is only unclearly and provisionally established, where boundaries are inconstant and permeable, and where both individual subjects and collectivities enjoy a carnivalesque freedom unattained in nationalist space.

Witness, for example, a party where Slothrop (disguised again, this time as Plechazunga, a mythical pig and German folk hero), Seaman Bodine, and a shipmate of Bodine’s on the *John E. Badass* take refuge:

Putzi’s [...] place never got requisitioned. Nobody has ever seen the owner, or even knows if “Putzi” is anybody real[...]. Inside they find a brightly lit and busy combination bar, opium den, cabaret, casino and house of ill repute, all its rooms swarming with soldiers, sailors, dames, tricks, winners, losers, conjurers, dealers, dopers, voyeurs, homosexuals, fetishists, spies and folks just looking for company[...]. It’s a floating celebration no one’s thought to adjourn: a victory party so permanent, so easy at gathering newcomer and old regular to itself, that who can say for sure which victory? which war? (602)

Unlike the lease-breaking party in “Entropy” and the Whole Sick Crew’s parties in *V.*, which this scene superficially resembles, the party at Putzi’s reflects not a subculture seeking temporary respite from enforced conformity but rather an entire new social

reality that emerges in an uncertain and open temporal and geographical space. Moreover, whereas those earlier parties are characterized by the entropic dissipation of physical and artistic energy, this scene makes the opposite gesture of “gathering,” of forming a new and potentially lasting social arrangement. My point here is not that the party or the Zone persists indefinitely: this is false both historically and within the confines of the novel, as demonstrated by its closing episodes, especially the final lines (more on which later). Rather, I want to argue that entropy is no longer the privileged logic here that it was in Pynchon’s late-modernist micro-period: in “Entropy” and *V.*, it is the dynamic of entropy determines the fate of collectivities in advance, whereas in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, utopian parties meet their end as a result of external historical developments. What is important, therefore, is not the eventual closing down of the Zone and its utopian parties but rather the moment in which the social possibilities engendered by the Zone remain open.

That openness is facilitated in large part by Slothrop and the Counterforce’s understanding of space itself in the Zone. Slothrop is able to evade Soviet forces in the Zone precisely because he and the Soviet military regard space in the Zone differently:

Their preoccupation is with forms of danger the War has taught them[...]. Fine for Slothrop, though—it’s a set of threats he doesn’t belong to. They are still back in geographical space, drawing deadlines and authorizing personnel, and the only beings who can violate their space are safely caught and paralyzed in comic books. They think. They don’t know about Rocketman here. They keep passing him and he remains alone, blotted to evening by velvet and buckskin—if they do see him his image is shunted immediately out to the boondocks of the brain where it remains in exile with other critters of the night.... (379)

Conventional military tactics no longer apply in the Zone because they are designed to engage national enemies in national territories; occupying powers in the Zone must contend instead with a militant preterite and “other critters of the night” who know that

the laws and logic of nationalism are unfit in a place that, to repeat the character Geli Tripping, lacks “frontiers,” “subdivisions,” and other nationalist rationalizations of space. Or, as Pöhlmann describes it, the Zone “is the expression of a postnational imagination that refuses to see the world in merely national categories” (*Pynchon’s* 283). In the Zone, as in the Rocket-capital in a possibly hallucinatory episode toward the novel’s notoriously disjointed concluding sections, “Outside and Inside interpierc[e] one another too fast, too finely labyrinthine, for either category to have much hegemony any more” (Pynchon, *Gravity’s* 681). The older spatial categories of nationalism are obsolete in the Zone. Slothrop and the Counterforce press their advantage by exploiting their postnational mobility to escape detection and violate now-defunct boundaries.

In itself, though, that mobility is not enough to guarantee the Counterforce’s success: “it isn’t a resistance, it’s a war,” sing Pirate Prentice, Roger Mexico, and other members of “The White Visitation” who have turned against Them and joined the Counterforce (640), and waging war requires organization. As both my own text here and the passage on Slothrop’s mobility just quoted indicate, it is “Them”—the cartels and the states—that the Counterforce fights. This necessitates that the Counterforce be organized: “Creative paranoia means developing at least as thorough a We-system as a They-system” (638). In an important early study of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, Mark Richard Siegel describes creative paranoia as a strategy of resistance which functions by generating ambiguity and “by violating the behavior that They would predict” (19). In its opposition to the They-system of the cartels, the We-system of the Counterforce eschews instrumental rationality: “*They’re* the rational ones. We piss on Their rational arrangements” (Pynchon, *Gravity’s* 639). This is not the same, however, as being

utterly disordered. The Counterforce does manage, somehow, to arrive at decisions and take action: “Decisions are never really *made*—at best they manage to emerge” (676). Even in the absence of the kind of centralized authority attributed to the They-system, the Counterforce exhibits something like what Hardt and Negri call the “swarm intelligence” of the multitude, in which “intelligence is fundamentally social” and generates “collective and distributed techniques of problem solving without centralized power or the provision of a global model” (*Multitude* 91). So, even though the Counterforce’s We-system appears to Roger Mexico not “thoughtful enough to interlock in a reasonable way” (Pynchon, *Gravity’s* 638), it is nonetheless able to mount effective attacks against the putatively better-organized They-system.

Let me offer one example of this. Seaman Bodine and Roger Mexico disrupt a dinner party hosted by a former executive for Krupp, a member of the Phoebus cartel, by metaphorically pissing on the rational arrangements that govern etiquette at Their formal events. After jointly hallucinating Roger’s head cooking on a spit, the pair set out to disgust the bourgeois appetites right out of the well-to-do dinner guests by naming such dishes as “*snot soup*,” “*clot casserole*,” “Cyst salad [...] with [...] abortion aspic, tossed in [...] dandruff dressing,” “gangrene goulash,” and “Diarrhea Dee-lite” (714–17). They are joined, moreover, by Constance Flamp, a journalist sympathetic to grunt soldiers like Bodine, and by hired help such as the orchestra’s cellist and the butler, who sends them off with “Pimple pie with filth frosting, gentlemen,” and a smile (717). Although the scene begins with the irrational event of a shared hallucination, Bodine, Mexico, and their sympathizers exhibit both the swarm intelligence of the multitude and

its inclusiveness—recall the newcomers and old regulars at Putzi’s party—in mounting what is a successful, even if minor, strike against Them.

The dinner-party incident is not the Counterforce’s only effective action against Them. Elsewhere, for example, Slothrop and the balloon pilot Schnorp are attacked midair by Major Dwayne Marvy, a racist southerner with possible ties to Rolls Royce, General Electric, J. P. Morgan, Harvard University, and Lyle Bland, Slothrop’s uncle who originally sold him into his Pavlovian bondage under Jamf. Slothrop and Schnorp retaliate by attacking Marvy with custard pies and taking cover in the clouds, another manifestation of Zonal space: “They float in their own wan sphere of light, without coordinates” (335). Later, Slothrop uses his ability to adopt and discard identities against Marvy at Putzi’s party. When the military police raid the party in search of Slothrop (dressed at the time as Plechazunga), Slothrop steals Marvy’s clothes and leaves him only the pig suit. Marvy is consequently mistaken for Slothrop by the MPs, who then proceed to castrate him (606–09). In these and other instances, what accounts for Slothrop and the Counterforce’s success is their ability to exploit the spatial and social logics of the Zone: neither geography nor subjectivity is bound in the Zone by the limits imposed by nationalist rationality.

But the Zone does not last in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, nor do Slothrop and the Counterforce. Commenting on the latter’s fidelity to Slothrop following his ultimate disintegration, the narrator reveals that the Counterforce is “as schizoid, as double-minded in the massive presence of money, as any of the rest of us” (712). Alas, the Counterforce can be bought out, as is its “spokesman” who agrees to an interview with the *Wall Street Journal* in which he betrays both Slothrop—“We were never that

concerned with Slothrop *qua* Slothrop”—and the Counterforce—“I am betraying them all[...]. I am a traitor” (738, 739). Like the “glozing neuters” (another excluded middle) defended by the narrator, the Counterforce is “just as human as heroes and villains” and therefore just as susceptible to cooptation and recuperation as other oppositional movements are (677). By the time of the novel’s conclusion and the *WSJ* interview, the Counterforce is effectively defunct.

In his interview, the spokesman distinguishes between members of the Counterforce who had merely regarded Slothrop as a “pretext” and members who had “felt that he was a genuine, point-for-point microcosm” (738). In at least one sense, the “Microcosmists” are right: the dissolution of the Counterforce is mirrored symbolically in the fragmentation and disintegration of Slothrop himself. Roughly midway through the novel, Slothrop is torn between contradictory interpretations concerning connectedness:

If there is something comforting [...] about paranoia, there is still also anti-paranoia, where nothing is connected to anything, a condition not many of us can bear for long. Well right now Slothrop feels himself sliding onto the anti-paranoid part of his cycle[...].

Either They have put him here for a reason, or he’s just here. He isn’t sure that he wouldn’t, actually, rather have that reason.... (434)

Paranoia is not without its comforts: despite the sense of powerlessness that comes from perceiving oneself at the center of a vast conspiracy—or indeed, because of that powerlessness—paranoid conspiracy theories at least have the merit of simulating a total map with which to situate oneself. If Slothrop can make sense of the vast web of interconnections that entangle him, the V-2, the cartels, and countless other factors (including, for example, the legacy of American Puritanism, the history of plastics, quantum mechanics and probabilistic sciences, and so forth), then he can chart his position in time and space relative to all those factors, just as his and Roger Mexico’s

maps align his sexual activities with German rocket strikes. But at times, the opposite possibility strikes Slothrop as equally likely: that he has nothing at all to do with the V-2 or the cartels and that the only connections he can make will be false. The closing of the novel seems in some ways to bear this fear out.

Over the fourth and final part of *Gravity's Rainbow*, titled "The Counterforce," both the novel's narrative and Slothrop's subjectivity become increasingly fragmented. By the time that Bodine and Mexico disrupt the Krupp executive's dinner, Slothrop "has become one plucked albatross. Plucked, hell—*stripped*. Scattered all over the Zone. It's doubtful if he can ever be 'found' again, in the conventional sense of 'positively identified and detained'" (712). Slothrop's schizoid capacity for performing multiple subjectivities takes its toll. After so much putting on and shedding of personas, disguises, roles, and functions, his subjectivity itself unravels: "There is also the story about Tyrone Slothrop, who was sent into the Zone to be present at his own assembly—perhaps, heavily paranoid voices have whispered, *his time's assembly*—and there ought to be a punch line to it, but there isn't. The plan went wrong. He is being broken down instead, and scattered" (738). All that Bodine—"one of the few who can still see Slothrop as any sort of integral creature any more"—can say by way of eulogy is "*Rocketman, Rocketman. You poor fucker*" (740, 741).

The dissemination of Slothrop throughout the Zone and the dissolution of the Counterforce leave the reader "on the eve of a revolution that never will come closer than smoke dirtying the sky" (740). That the novel defers the revolution both promised and threatened by the opening "screaming" that "comes across the sky"—"It has happened before, but there is nothing to compare it to now" (3)—should come as no

surprise, given that the historical moment spatialized in the Zone ended up being essentially a brief interregnum preceding the Cold War and that the novel itself speaks from the pessimistic vantage of the Vietnam War and the Nixon 1970s.³⁵ However, notwithstanding the sense of lost opportunities evoked by the fates of Slothrop and the Counterforce, the novel also defers a moment of absolute defeat. The novel ends with a prolepsis to the Orpheus Theater in Los Angeles in the “present-day” 1970s: “it is just here, just at this dark and silent frame, that the pointed tip of the Rocket, falling nearly a mile per second, absolutely and forever without sound, reaches its last unmeasurable gap above the roof of this old theater, the last delta-t” (760). However, although the missile hovers threateningly just above the cinema, it remains perpetually suspended in that “last delta-t,” the final interval of time *before* impact. The novel’s final words, “Now everybody—”, invite the moviegoers at the Orpheus and the novel’s reader to join in the singing of a preterite hymn (760); that collective, preterite utopia never arrives, but neither does the missile itself. Ending in a dash, the final line both figures the miniscule, final interval of time (the dash is like a fragment of a timeline in that sense) and gestures beyond the confines of the novel itself to whatever outcome or resolution follows it. If apocalypse occurs, it can only happen after the ending of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, in the reader’s own past or present. Both revolution *and* apocalypse are deferred here, ultimately preserving the open structure of the Zone in a sort of narrative afterlife.³⁶

³⁵ On *Gravity’s Rainbow* and the Vietnam War, see Jarvis. For recent approaches to *Gravity’s Rainbow*, Nixon, and the 1970s, see McCann, “Down”; Miller 200–08.

³⁶ On the novel’s final scene, see, e.g., Cowart, *Thomas* 60; Thomas, *Pynchon* 155–56. In addition, the title of Witzling’s study, *Everybody’s America: Thomas Pynchon, Race, and the Cultures of Postmodernism* (2008), draws on the inclusiveness of *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s “Now everybody—” in order to highlight the problematic relation between the New Left, on the one hand, and the Civil Rights Movement and Black nationalism, on the other (6–7).

That openness of the Zone, temporary though it is, is where I locate both the most important difference between *Gravity's Rainbow* and *The Crying of Lot 49* and the most significant feature of *Gravity's Rainbow* in the context of Pynchon's larger oeuvre. In *The Crying of Lot 49*, Oedipa remains separate from the Tristero, leading her to adopt a paranoid hermeneutic and to formulate conspiracy theories; she is only ever a reader, never an author. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, Slothrop oscillates between paranoia and anti-paranoia, but he also occupies the excluded middle between those terms: what Pirate Prentice calls "creative paranoia" and I call, following Deleuze and Guattari, schizophrenic subjectivity. Between the extremes positing that everything is connected and space is fully striated (paranoia), and that nothing is connected and space is utterly smooth (anti-paranoia)—positions which correspond to Oedipa's epistemological doubts about the Tristero—lies the premise, highlighted by critic Molly Hite, that not everything is connected, but "some things are connected, and in innumerable different ways," and that lines of connection are subject to change (Hite, *Ideas* 17). The efforts of Slothrop and the Counterforce to prevent Their hegemony in the Zone dramatize the attempt both to discern what is connected and what isn't and to participate actively in forging the bonds and connections that will structure whatever orders will emerge in the Zone. After all, as Deleuze and Guattari remind readers, smooth and striated space—the spatial regimes in which nothing is connected and everything is connected, respectively—"only exist in mixture: smooth space is constantly being translated, transversed into a striated space; striated space is constantly being reversed, returned to a smooth space" (*Thousand* 471). Schizoid freedom and paranoid bondage really exist as degrees relative to one another, not as absolute values. In political terms, this

means that the Counterforce's schizoid or creative-paranoid struggle is precisely a struggle to determine proportions of smooth and striated space in the Zone, of freedom and order—proportions that can and historically do take multiple, variable forms. Indeed, this is the sense in which *Gravity's Rainbow*, in Hite's words, is "a historical novel ... about the inside view of an irreducibly plural reality" (*Ideas* 133). In *The Crying of Lot 49*, Oedipa tries to make sense of the convoluted history of the Tristero. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, Slothrop attempts to directly shape the history of the present.

This distinction also points toward another crucial difference between the novels in terms of power. Whereas Oedipa largely *reacts to* structures of power and Cold War ideology that govern midcentury America, Slothrop and the Counterforce *act on and against* Their structures of power, attempting in the process to construct their own allegiances and collectivities. Thus another operative distinction is that between constituted power and constituent power. In Hardt and Negri's contemporary Marxist rereading of Spinoza, *constituted power* refers to the established power of the state, *constituent power* to the active social forces that drive democratic revolutionary movements and shape history as it emerges. As an outsider to the W.A.S.T.E. community, Oedipa can only react to and attempt to read the structures she finds already established; she never gets the opportunity to participate directly. Slothrop and the Counterforce, on the other hand, are preterite insiders among militants waging war against Their capitalist control. The brief time of the Zone—the delta-t of *Gravity's Rainbow* that signifies both a missed opportunity and, it must be stressed, a brief

historical opening onto new social and political possibilities—is a time of constituent power.³⁷

4.3 Nostalgia, 1990/1997—*Vineland, Mason & Dixon*

Gravity's Rainbow ends, perhaps, on the cusp of defeat, but it stops just this side of resignation and pessimism. Notwithstanding the threat posed by the hovering missile in the novel's "final delta-t," the narrative of Slothrop and the Counterforce in the Zone preserves at least a faint glimmer of optimism and hope for the preterite. However, the long span—seventeen years—that intervened between that novel and *Vineland* saw a precipitous foreshortening of preterite prospects, already severely limited in 1973. After the debacle that was the Nixon administration, which Pynchon had already parodied with the epigraph to part 4 of *Gravity's Rainbow* attributed to Nixon—"What?"—and the portrayal of the theater manager Richard M. Zhubb, the 1980s ushered neoliberalism onto the global stage with the elections of Ronald Reagan and Margaret Thatcher and the successful widespread implementation of their economic agendas.³⁸ In the U.S., Reagan advanced a massive assault on New Deal-era social securities and labor rights, eroding much of the already scant protection afforded the American working class. Culturally, meanwhile, the Reagan era in the United States was also marked by escalation of the so-called culture wars, with an ascendant religious right reacting

³⁷ Cf. Robert J. Lacey's much more pessimistic argument that *Gravity's Rainbow* "depicts the crucial moment in Pynchon's cosmology when all of humanity's hopes vanished for good." Such a reading is possible only if the novel's final delta-t is reduced to zero.

³⁸ See, e.g., Harvey, *Brief History*, esp. chapter 2 (39–63).

stridently against the gains earned in the previous two decades by feminist, Civil Rights, gay and lesbian, and other social movements.³⁹

Perhaps the rise of Reagan-style conservatism in the U.S. and the re-concentration of wealth under neoliberal economic policies partially explain Pynchon's long silence from 1973 through the 1980s.⁴⁰ After all, his sympathies clearly being with the working class, the poor, the disenfranchised, and other categories of preterite, the 1980s certainly must have seemed bleak to him. Much less speculatively, though, the experience of the 1980s unambiguously affects the novel to emerge from that decade. More than any other novel of Pynchon's—even more than *Gravity's Rainbow* registers the 1970s and Nixon—*Vineland* mounts a frontal and overt critique of American political leadership of its day.

And yet, following the despair of the 1980s in the U.S. was the optimism of the 1990s. For a moment, it seemed as though possibilities for change were once again opening up. As Wegner writes, that decade was “experienced as a moment of ‘sublime beauty,’ of openness and instability, of experimentation and opportunity, of conflict and insecurity—a place, in other words, wherein history might move in a number of very different directions” (*Life* 9). The Cold War that had determined Oedipa's possibilities in *The Crying of Lot 49* and that succeeded the utopian flash of the Counterforce in *Gravity's Rainbow* was over, and the regime to replace it, most commonly called

³⁹ Even a cursory glance at headlines covering early developments in the 2012 U.S. presidential campaigns suggests that we might still be living in the era of Reaganite cultural conservatism, most especially when it comes to women's rights: proposed legislation requiring the medically unnecessary rape of women seeking abortions, to cite but a single flagrant example, seems to signal a full-scale right-wing assault on feminism and women's rights.

⁴⁰ This silence was not total, however. Although Pynchon penned no novels, he did publish some new material during the interim between *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Vineland: Slow Learner* (including Pynchon's original introduction) and the essay “Is It O.K. to Be a Luddite?” both appeared in 1984.

globalization today, had just begun to crystallize. By the end of that decade, a new global coalition of diverse political movements, ranging from labor activism and environmentalism to feminism, queer politics, and indigenous-rights movements, had begun to gather in opposition to the neoliberalism that had flourished under Reagan and Thatcher and which was beginning to achieve global hegemony as the millennium approached.

My characterizations of both the 1980s and the 1990s are admittedly oversimplified. My sketch of the '80s, to give only one brief example, ignores the unexpected though limited success of Jesse Jackson's 1984 and 1988 campaigns for the Democratic party nomination for president, which were based on comparatively left-liberal platforms relative to dominant American politics at the time (and since). Meanwhile, my account of the '90s says nothing of Clinton's role in passing NAFTA and "reforming" welfare, both of which would prove crucial to the establishment of neoliberal hegemony globally and domestically, respectively, or of his part in further suppressing the voices of queer servicemembers with the recently obsolete "Don't Ask, Don't Tell" policy. But my purpose here is not to provide exhaustive or definitive historical accounts of these decades, but rather to begin limning out the context against which 1990's *Vineland* and 1997's *Mason & Dixon* appear. For just as the former is Pynchon's most openly polemical novel (especially in relation to living political figures), the latter remains Pynchon's most optimistic novel, registering the 1990s' sense of renewed possibilities.

In this section, I continue to develop my account of the two strains in Pynchon's canon by reading the second iteration of each of those strains. This section helps develop an understanding of the role of the 1960s in each strain, as well. *Vineland* and

Mason & Dixon could fairly be called Pynchon's two most nostalgic novels, but the function of nostalgia—which corresponds to concrete historical understandings of the impact and legacy of the 1960s—is different in each case. Furthermore, my analysis of these novels also does much to support the periodization of postmodernism itself that I aim to perform. Unlike Pynchon's late-modernist work and his first postmodern micro-period, *Vineland* and *Mason & Dixon* are published after the widespread adoption of the term *postmodernism* in literary, academic, artistic, and cultural spheres (both high and popular). Postmodernism is recognized to be in full swing by this point—witness, for example, the playful reference to the “*Italian Wedding Fake Book*, by Deleuze & Guattari” (*Vineland* 97)⁴¹—and the two novels that I read in this section exhibit salient features of Pynchon's two canons even more clearly than do *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow*.

The 1984 of *Vineland* is a time of dead futures, marked in Jamesonian fashion by an inability to think historically. Reagan's war on drugs, which forms the central political and cultural backdrop for the novel's pot-smoking, leftist characters, posits “a timeless, defectively imagined future” in place of an historical horizon of futurity, and it fantasizes an impossible return to a cynically idealized past: “it's the whole Reagan program, isn't it—dismantle the New Deal, reverse the effects of World War II, restore fascism at home and around the world, flee into the past” (221, 265). But this program's retrograde motion is only recognizable to characters who retain an historical consciousness and a sense of '60s radicalism, such as Ditzah Pisk Feldman, the anarchist and filmmaker who, even in 1984, “always [...] look[s] at things more

⁴¹ A “fake book” is a collection of unauthorized sheet music of popular songs.

historically” (265). Others who are invested or entrapped in the Reagan program are effectively blinkered against such historical perspective, producing conflict between the two groups of characters. Federal drug agent Hector Zuñiga tells former hippie Zoyd Wheeler, “this is a *real* revolution, not that little fantasy hand-job you people was into, [... it’s] the wave of History, and you can catch it, or scratch it” (27). At issue, then, are not only conflicting politics but also contested definitions of revolution and competing philosophies of history. Hector’s claim that the Reagan “revolution” is “the wave of History” lends the former a sense of destiny or inevitability shared even by some of the novel’s children of the ’60s. Mucho Maas, from *The Crying of Lot 49*, reappears in this novel to predict Reagan’s reelection and second term, admonishing Zoyd: “Best to renounce everything now, get a head start” (313). Against the utopian possibilities for change felt in the experience of the 1960s, the conservative 1980s amounts to a fascist closure of freedoms and an eschatological “end of history.”⁴² *Vineland* narrates a struggle between left and right politics, but that struggle itself is staged as a confrontation between the 1960s and the 1980s.

A central venue for that struggle in *Vineland* is the moving image. Whereas *Gravity’s Rainbow* is often read in terms of cinematic narrative strategies, *Vineland* pits documentary cinema of the 1960s against television of the 1980s (as well as mainstream Hollywood cinema in general).⁴³ In addition to ubiquitous references to Reagan, television is one of the novel’s primary connections with its contemporaneous

⁴² I am thinking here, of course, of Francis Fukuyama, whose pronouncement of the triumph of Western capitalism and liberal democracy in the infamous essay “The End of History?” (1989), a contemporary of *Vineland*’s, is reflected in some characters’ sense of inevitability or the impossibility of radical change.

⁴³ On cinema in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, see Cowart, *Thomas*, chapter 3. On television in *Vineland*, see above all McHale, *Constructing* 115–41.

cultural context. *Vineland* is peppered with allusions to television culture, including by my count at least 27 specific series as well as individual television personalities. There are also several fictitious made-for-TV biographical movies mentioned in the novel, often to humorous effect (for example, “Woody Allen in *Young Kissinger*” or “Pee-wee Herman in *The Robert Musil Story*” [309, 370]).⁴⁴ More important, though, are the ways in which television structures not merely the leisure time but the everyday lives of several characters. “The Tube” is integral both to characters’ understanding of the social world and to their sense of identity. Witness the reaction of an unnamed airplane passenger who grows nervous watching Takeshi Fumimota pound cocktails and tranquilizers: “There’s a hidden camera somewhere, right? This is a commercial?’ The question rang almost prayerfully” (158). To this minor character, the spectacle of television is preferable to and likelier than the prospect that Takeshi’s behavior is real (as opposed to simulated). In a sense, his reaction illustrates Baudrillard’s famous argument about the dominant role of simulation in postmodern culture: unable to accept Takeshi’s apparently self-destructive actions as authentic, the nervous passenger immediately interprets them as “a real without origin or reality: a hyperreal” (Baudrillard 1). Moreover, his view of Takeshi as not only a television simulacrum but, more specifically, an advertisement attests to the postmodern “absorption of all virtual modes of expression into that of advertising” (Baudrillard 87). There is a double move at work in *Vineland*’s Tubal world: first, a privileging of simulacra over unmediated reality, and second, an ordering and prioritizing of simulacra themselves under the commodity

⁴⁴ As Willman points out, such jokes, of course, also implicate the reader in *Vineland*’s critique of U.S. television culture: “if one gets the joke, generally the ridiculous discrepancy between the actor and the title role..., then one has obviously fallen prey to the distraction offered by television” (213–14).

form.⁴⁵ For Takeshi's uncomfortable airplane neighbor, as for so many other characters in *Vineland*, simulation supplants putatively unmediated experience.⁴⁶

Nowhere are the pervasive effects of television on everyday life clearer than in the Wheeler family. Zoyd's fourteen-year-old daughter, Prairie Wheeler, speaks a language that is unmistakably that of 1980s American television. Her interactions with Zoyd are frequently couched in terms borrowed from game shows, she offering prizes or "[making] a sound like a game-show buzzer," depending on context (40; cf. 14). At other times, she speaks to Zoyd "shaking her finger, trying for something between neighborhood scold and soap-opera Chief of Psychiatric" (17). However, deeper than these relatively superficial imitations of television culture—simulacra of simulacra, as it were—are the ways in which television mediates Prairie's conception of social reality and her sense of self. Late in the novel, after making some limited progress in her search for her mother, Frenesi Gates, Prairie contemplates her gender identity and fantasizes about a relationship with Frenesi through television imagery⁴⁷:

On the Tube she saw them all the time, these junior-high gymnasts in leotards, teenagers in sitcoms, girls in commercials learning from their moms about how to cook and dress and deal with their dads, [...] feeling each time this mixture of annoyance and familiarity, knowing like exiled royalty that that's who she was supposed to be, could even turn herself into through some piece of negligible magic she must've known once but in the

⁴⁵ Cf. also Guy Debord's canonical account of postmodern culture, *The Society of the Spectacle* (1967): "The spectacle is the stage at which the commodity has succeeded in *totally* colonizing social life. Commodification is not only visible, we no longer see anything else; the world we see is the world of the commodity" (thesis 42).

⁴⁶ I hasten to add that my goal is not to establish a binary opposition between simulation and "authentic" or "unmediated" reality. Indeed, as I hope my reading of 1960s documentary filmmaking in *Vineland* shows, at issue is the specific form that mediation or simulation takes. For *Vineland*'s right-wing adults and erstwhile apolitical youths, television is the privileged lens for interpreting and relating to social reality. On the other hand, other forms of mediation, most especially documentary film, are taken to be more politically useful by other important (and more politically active) characters.

⁴⁷ On gender politics in *Vineland*, see Hayles; Hite, "Feminist Theory."

difficult years marooned down on this out-of-the-way planet had come to have trouble remembering anymore. (327)

Prairie's ambivalence about television in this passage bespeaks the ideological nature of TV's narrative commodities. On the one hand, she recognizes these narratives as commodities and constructs, as evinced by her "annoyance" and by her insistence, elsewhere in the novel, that she is not "one of these kids on Phil Donahue" (i.e., *The Phil Donahue Show*, a syndicated talk show that aired into the 1990s) (103). On the other hand, she also experiences a desire for some sort of completeness or fulfillment that the constructed narratives of television activate and exploit. Prairie's recognition of her difference from the identities proffered by television is simultaneously perceived as a lack; consequently, the absence of her mother becomes transmuted into a narrative of loss, a fantasy of being an "exiled royalty" who has forgotten how to perform the "negligible magic" that would restore her to her proper place. Her desire for Frenesi becomes bound up with a wish to live a mediated existence.⁴⁸

Perhaps Prairie has been conditioned by her family life to view the latter as a commodified spectacle. In the opening chapters, the reader learns that Zoyd, a former hippie and unrepentant pothead, must perform an annual defenestration before news cameras in order to continue receiving "mental-disability check[s]" (3). Moreover, as with Prairie's fantasies, this obligation is simultaneously and fundamentally an aspect of family life. Zoyd is coerced by the narcotics agents Brock Vond, for whom Frenesi originally leaves Zoyd, and Hector Zuñiga into not only performing for the media but

⁴⁸ Cf. the advice given to Justin, Prairie's half-brother and Frenesi's son, by "[t]he smartest kid Justin ever met," concerning strategies for coping with fighting parents: "Pretend there's a frame around 'em like the Tube, pretend they're a show you're watching. You can go into it if you want, or you can just watch, and *not* go into it" (351). For Justin's friend as for Prairie, life sometimes becomes more palatable when it is imagined as television.

also abandoning any familial claims to Frenesi: the checks are payoff in exchange for his taking no action to reunite Prairie and Frenesi, while the broadcasts of his window stunts are a means of surveillance providing evidence that he is staying put (“Just a way for us to know where you are” [304]). Properly performing his role is Zoyd’s sole means of escaping persecution (and prosecution, for that matter).

Still other characters are compelled into dependence on television. Hector dreams of escaping his place in the lower levels of federal drug-enforcement hierarchy by casting Frenesi in an anti-drug propaganda film that would cash in on nostalgia for the 1960s and whose “ultimate message will be that the real threat to America, then and now, is from th’ illegal abuse of narcotics” (51). However, in a characteristically Pynchonian twist of irony or cruel humor, Hector suffers from Tubal addiction, at one point breaking out of a Tubal rehab clinic and later driving down the freeway with a TV set placed in the backseat so he can watch in the rearview mirror (see 32–34, 334–37).

More troubling than Hector’s plight, though, is that of the Thanatoids, the undead who reside in Shade Creek, near Vineland. What centrally characterizes the Thanatoid condition is an inability to “move on”: they all die unjustly, “victims [...] of karmic imbalances—unanswered blows, unredeemed suffering, escapes by the guilty,” and they are therefore driven by a desire for vengeance (173). The Thanatoids focus that desire by disciplining their affects, “limit[ing] themselves [...] only to emotions helpful in setting right whatever [...] keep[s] them from advancing further into the condition of death. Among these the most common by far [is] resentment, constrained as Thanatoids [are] by history and by rules of imbalance and restoration to feel little else beyond their needs for revenge” (171). However, there is a disjunction between

restoration and revenge: the Thanatoids desire revenge because they die unjustly (typically as victims of perpetrators who escape punishment and continue living), but even a successful ordering of “crime and countercrime over the generations” cannot undo the original injustice of the death that causes one to exist as Thanatoid in the first place (219). The attempt to balance “crimes and counter-crimes,” as in a double ledger, replaces a notion of justice with calculation or bookkeeping; as Derrida writes in his well known essay on justice, “Force of Law: The ‘Mystical Foundation of Authority’” (1990; expanded 1994), the Thanatoid method of seeking justice “would only be the programmable application or the continuous unfolding of a calculable process”; real justice, on the other hand, remains irreducible to such processes (252). Unsurprisingly, then, the Thanatoid pursuit of justice and peace fails. Each year at the annual Thanatoid Roast, the Thanatoids “honor a Thanatoid old-timer” whose achievement is to persist in resentment, “many original wrongs forgotten or defectively remembered, no resolution of even a trivial problem anywhere in sight” (Pynchon, *Vineland* 219). Far from “advancing [them] further into the condition of death,” their resentment dooms them to an interminable undead existence.

Thanatoid resentment is also fueled, *Vineland* suggests, by the Tube. One of the first things revealed about Thanatoids is that they “watch a lot of Tube”—“at least part of every waking hour” (170). Moreover, their viewing habits appear to be connected to the atrophying of their emotions: the lines that I just quoted lead directly into the passage describing the significance of resentment to the Thanatoid ethos. Takeshi, who by 1984 works for the Thanatoids in a rather vague capacity in “the karmic adjustment business,” suspects that the Thanatoids’ television viewing exacerbates their inability to accept

death: “television, [...] with its history of picking away at the topic with doctor shows, war shows, cop shows, murder shows, had trivialized the Big D itself. If mediated lives[...], why not mediated deaths?” (172, 218). In Takeshi’s view, the trivialization and commodification of death renders the real thing unacceptable and incomprehensible to those facing it; television estranges the undead from the fact of their own death. Thus, death, or at least being undead, provides no escape from the hegemony of the Tube: just as the fantasies propelled by television simulacra determine conditions of existence for the living inhabitants of Vineland, so also do they inform expectations of death in Thanatoid Village and Shade Creek.

It is something of a commonplace in criticism of *Vineland* to read these destructive effects of television culture as an indictment by Pynchon of mass media.⁴⁹ Hector’s Tubal abuse, for example, clearly suggests that TV, not drugs, is the real addiction that threatens contemporary American culture and that a homogenized mass culture is far more dangerous than demonized countercultural elements (which, after all, Hector dismisses as a “little fantasy hand-job”). However, other relevant texts of Pynchon’s, published in the *New York Times Book Review* during roughly the same period as *Vineland*, suggest that the real object of Pynchon’s critique is not mass media but rather the form of its dissemination and consumption.

In “Is It O.K. to Be a Luddite?” (1984), Pynchon presents Luddism as an historically grounded response to concrete conditions of exploitation: the original eighteenth- and nineteenth-century Luddites “saw the machines [originally weaving-frames] coming more and more to be the property of men who did not work, only owned

⁴⁹ See, e.g., Berressem 204–06; Cowart, “Attenuated” 6–8; Slade, “Communication”; Smith 108–23; Willman 213–16.

and hired. It took no German philosopher, then or later, to point out what this did [...] to wages and jobs.” He goes on to read Mary Shelley’s *Frankenstein* as a foundational text in the hypothetical genre of Luddite fiction, which “attempt[s ...] to *deny the machine*” in favor of the human. What is easy to overlook in Pynchon’s argument, however, is the fact that for him, “Luddite” does not simply mean anti-machine or anti-technology—he makes it plain, for example, that the historical Ned Lud, in his view, was not “a technophobic crazy.” Instead, a “Luddite” is a “dedicated Badass” who is “able to work mischief on a large scale.” In his sense of the word, Luddite assaults on technology are always really attacks on the structures of domination and exploitation that the technology merely serves. Put differently, Luddites strike at the means of production, but they do so in order to undermine relations of production. Pynchon concludes the article with a mischievous anticipation of the “unpredictable” consequences of nanotechnology—a gesture clearly incompatible with definitions of “Luddite” that reduce the latter to a species of technophobia.

The other text of Pynchon’s that pertains to an appraisal of mass media in *Vineland* is “Nearer, My Couch, to Thee” (1993), an article on the deadly sin of sloth. As he does in the Luddite essay, Pynchon begins by historicizing sloth. For Thomas Aquinas in the thirteenth century, sloth was deadly because it freed up time for other sins—think of the proverb about idle hands being the devil’s playthings. By the time of the American Revolution, sloth had been secularized: “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.” Today, however, the clock time that dominated the Protestant work

ethic and the factory system of industrial capitalism has been replaced by a radically accelerated “video time,” a temporality of instantaneous communication, remote control, and infinite digital iterability. Pynchon’s redefinition of sloth in the context of video time establishes a direct link with his conception of Luddism: “Perhaps the future of Sloth will lie in sinning against what now seems increasingly to define us—technology. Persisting in Luddite sorrow, despite technology’s good intentions, there we’ll sit with our heads in virtual reality, glumly refusing to be absorbed in its idle, disposable fantasies.” At first glance, this redefinition of sloth in Luddite terms would seem to corroborate readings of *Vineland* that focus on the novel’s negative critique of television and mass media. Indeed, both sloth and Luddism entail a rejection of means of exploitation and control, concretized momentarily in the form of the weaving-frame or clock time but subject to historical variation. To the extent that mass media is a particularly powerful form of fascist social control—a view for which there is certainly ample support in *Vineland*—it must be resisted and refused.

What that reading of Pynchon’s articles ignores, however, is his characterization of Luddism as more emancipatory than technophobic. “Refusing to be absorbed” within virtual reality is not the same as avoiding it or doing nothing with it whatsoever; on the contrary, if the sorrow experienced by today’s sloths is indeed Luddite, there must be something badass about it. The real Luddite move with respect to media technologies, then, would be to use those technologies against the power structures that they serve, to wrest them from the elect and claim them for the preterite.⁵⁰ At the very least, such a

⁵⁰ Cf. Hardt and Negri on the multitude’s “right to reappropriation,” i.e., of the means of immaterial, affective, and communicative production (*Empire* 403–07).

move would seem to have much better chances for large-scale mischief than a straightforward rejection of the technologies themselves.

For all of *Vineland's* critical portrayals of America's addiction to television and the consequent flattening and homogenizing of postmodern American culture, there is in fact a moment in the novel when a more properly Luddite truth about television begins to emerge. In order to wreak badass havoc on technological systems of domination, one must first understand how they work. Isaiah Two Four, Prairie's adolescent boyfriend, admonishes Zoyd: "you believed in your Revolution, put your lives right out there for it—but you sure didn't understand much about the Tube. Minute the Tube got hold of you folks that was it, that whole alternative America, el deado meato" (373). Significantly, unlike his mostly conservative elders in the 1980s, Isaiah does not fault 1960s radicals for their political commitments; if anything, he implies a degree of respect for their revolutionary aspirations. Rather, his problem with them is that they were unprepared to deal with television or to anticipate its success as a means for social control.

This naiveté with respect to television is, first of all, an ignorance of video time. In a flashback to Zoyd and Frenesi's wedding, the narrator describes the 1960s as "a slower-moving time, predigital, not yet so cut into pieces, not even by television" (38). This slower phenomenological time experienced during the 1960s begins to explain characters' subsequent inability to adapt to the strategies of control exercised through television.⁵¹ When Baudrillard argues for the supremacy of advertising in the regime of

⁵¹ Moreover, according to Stephen Paul Miller's historicization of the 1970s in terms of the rise of surveillance as a constituent feature of life under postmodern capitalism, that decade's retrenchment of 1960s politics—which of course leads, via the Nixonian Thermidor, into the Reagan 1980s of *Vineland*—is facilitated in part by a sense of historical retardation relative to the '60s: "prior periods begin ... to be

postmodern simulation, he does so first of all by means of temporality: “all determined languages are absorbed in advertising because it has no depth, it is instantaneous and instantly forgotten.... This unarticulated, instantaneous form, without a past, without a future..., has power over all the others” (87).⁵² A lived temporality of continuity is clearly incompatible with, and unable to account for, a temporality of advertising that lives only in the moment. The former requires constructing or imagining a stable, durable subject embedded in collective social realities, while the latter assumes an individualist, consumerist subjectivity that lives in an eternal present and acts (i.e., purchases) on impulse rather than reflection and deliberation. Video time moves too rapidly for that.

The fastest rate of passing time that the novel’s 1960s radicals can comprehend is 24 frames per second, the standard rate for shooting 35-millimeter film. Many of *Vineland*’s flashback scenes deal with the radical film collective 24fps, of which Frenesi had been a central member and which she betrayed to Brock Vond. The group originally forms from the remnants of “the Death to the Pig Nihilist Film Kollektive[...], a doomed attempt to live out the metaphor of movie camera as weapon” (197), efforts that 24fps continues. In addition to echoing Jean-Luc Godard’s utopian claim, spoken by the character Bruno Forestier in *Le Petit Soldat* (1963), that “cinema is truth 24 times per second,” the group’s name and philosophy assume a straightforward, constant ratio between image and reality. If cinematic images portray truth, then film has immediate political effects, as the 24fps manifesto proclaims: “A camera is a gun. An image taken

syndicated like television reruns. Time seems to slow down. It almost seems as if recent history were being surveyed and catalogued” (30). Note also the connection between phenomenological slowness of historical change and the commodification of history itself as television, the effects of which in *Vineland* are most noticeable on Prairie.

⁵² See also Benjamin: “The value of information does not survive the moment in which it was new. It lives only in that moment...” (90). In connection with *Vineland*, cf. Willman 216–17.

is a death performed. Images put together are the substructure of an afterlife and a Judgment. We will be architects of a just Hell for the fascist pig. Death to everything that oinks!" (197). The manifesto does not merely express the collective's radical political ethos; it also comes perilously close to effacing the symbolic dimension of symbolic acts. In *The Political Unconscious*, Jameson admonishes against the dangers of exclusively emphasizing either the symbolic or the active valence of symbolic acts (82; see section 2.2, above). In insisting on the violence and efficacy of radical filmmaking, however, 24fps obscures important differences between metaphor and social reality or between metaphoric and political praxis.⁵³ For them, filming action is the same as taking action.

This is not to say that the members of 24fps are unaware that their films are in fact constructs.⁵⁴ It is to say, though, that 24fps underestimates both their own susceptibility to manipulation and control and the efficacy, undeniable by 1984, of television and mass media as disciplinary apparatuses. Both of these mistakes coalesce when Frenesi betrays 24fps and Weed Atman, a math professor at College of the Surf who becomes the de facto leader of that campus's radical students. Frenesi herself is particularly vulnerable to the kinds of affective manipulation accomplished by television. In addition to her sexual attraction to men in uniforms—produced, of course, by television and cinematic spectacles from cop shows, war movies, and the like—she lives in precisely the kind of temporality that the commodity as spectacle exploits. While

⁵³ Hector's reduction of 1960s radicalism to an ineffectual "hand-job," meanwhile, represents the opposite error of viewing symbolic acts as merely or only symbolic.

⁵⁴ For example, editing footage of "disrhythmic young Californian women dancing at a rally," Zipi and Ditzah Pisk complain about "the impossibility of getting any of these hippie chicks to do anything on the beat," the assumption behind the complaint being that the editors' task is to manipulate footage to produce a desired effect (Pynchon, *Vineland* 198).

she is collaborating with Vond to sell out Weed and 24fps, she is wont to “make believe—her dangerous vice—that she [is] on her own, with no legal history, no politics, only an average California chick [...] for whom anything [is] still possible” (236). Here Frenesi imagines herself as a subject without history or attachment, who acts outside the bounds of cause and consequence: in short, and following Baudrillard, as an ideal consumer of television and advertising.⁵⁵ Thus, when she reflects on her complicity with Vond and her betrayal of the film collective, she does so in spectacular terms: “she was walking around next to herself, haunting herself, attending a movie of it all[...]. No problem anymore with talk of ‘taking out’ Weed Atman, as he’d gone turning into a character in a movie, one who as a bonus happened to fuck like a porno star ... but even sex was mediated for her now—she did not enter in” (237). Notwithstanding the radical politics and documentary medium of 24fps, its central and purportedly best photographer by now views herself and the radical movements of the 1960s through the lens of something like a Hollywood conspiracy drama. The transformation is total: agents of history become characters on a screen, and even the intimacy of sex is supplanted by the voyeurism of pornography. If 24fps views film as politics, Frenesi sees politics as film.

By the dawn of the 1970s, when Frenesi is on Vond’s payroll, she regards her “servitude [to Vond] as the freedom [...] to act outside warrants and charters, to ignore history and the dead, to imagine no future, no yet-to-be-born” (71–72). Frenesi is in

⁵⁵ Of all the explanations of Frenesi’s name collected by Patrick Hurley in *Pynchon Character Names: A Dictionary* (2008), two are particularly relevant to the issue of Frenesi’s sense of history (see Hurley 64): David Cowart reads Frenesi’s name as “an anagram of ‘sin free,’” while Salman Rushdie reads “sin” and “free” as “the two sides of her nature, light and dark” (Cowart, “Continuity” 185; Rushdie). In light of Frenesi’s disavowal of historical responsibility, however, perhaps it makes sense to read her name as “sin [for] free,” since she certainly seems to believe that she can escape the consequences of her actions. Among the other citations collected by Hurley, see also Hite, “Feminist” 150 n12.

several senses a fugitive from her own past: her plot with Vond successful—Weed has been murdered by one of his own comrades, and 24fps has disbanded—she has betrayed her onetime revolutionary ambitions as a filmmaker. The daughter of left-wing film workers who survived McCarthyism, Hub and Sasha Gates (a gaffer and script reader, respectively), and the granddaughter of a Wobbly, Jess Traverse (who also appears in *Against the Day*), she has literally gone to bed with a repressive agent of the state. And having married Zoyd, a fellow traveler during the 1960s, and given birth to Prairie, she abandons that family (and Prairie's future) to pursue a fly-by-night life with Flash Fletcher, another informer, with whom she has a child, Justin. Her experience of time obscures obligations to both past and future: she lives in a world with no history.

Whereas Frenesi's internalization of television temporality brings about both 24fps's downfall and her own—her inability to think historically means, among other things, that she cannot anticipate the Reagan-era budget cuts that would defund Vond's program, her meal ticket—her daughter Prairie attempts to reclaim some version of the historical consciousness that Frenesi has forsworn. After meeting Ditzah, Frenesi's onetime close friend DL Chastain, and other former members of 24fps, Prairie turns to archival 24fps footage in an attempt to connect somehow with her mother. Significantly, even though the collective's naiveté with respect to media and the culture industry proved to be its undoing, it is precisely the difference between 24fps's view of history and the waning of historicity under postmodern television that provides Prairie an opening onto a new kind of historical awareness. Raised on television, Prairie is familiar with the 1960s mostly through “fast clips on the Tube meant to suggest the era,

or distantly implied in reruns like ‘Bewitched’ or ‘The Brady Bunch’” (198).⁵⁶ In place of stock footage aired so often that it becomes a cliché and oblique allusions to a history that only ever happens offstage, the 24fps archive offers hours’ worth of material (“Night and movies whirred on, reel after reel went turning” [198]) that insists upon the social, political, and historical urgency of 1960s radicalism: “miniskirts,” “love beads,” “hippie boys,” drugs, but also “[s]trikers battl[ing] strikebreakers and police,” cops assaulting young protesters, and “college and high school campuses turned into military motor pools.” The narrator’s summary of the footage concludes: “There was little mercy in these images [...] not enough to help anybody escape seeing and hearing what, the film implied, they must” (198–99). The archival footage exposes Prairie to an experience of the 1960s which vexes the nostalgia promulgated by a culture industry that empties politics from history and reduces the latter to commodified spectacle: “Even through the crude old color and distorted sound, Prairie could feel the liberation in the place that night, the faith that anything was possible, that nothing could stand in the way of such joyous certainty” (210). Against Frenesi’s fantasy of an existence without history, this faith in possibility is precisely a faith in history and politics as such, a faith that lasting and radical change, and not just the frenetic alternation of advertising, is possible.

However, *Vineland* concludes rather modestly, not with revolution or systemic change but with reconciliation. Much of the final chapter takes place at the 1984 Traverse-Becker family reunion (the Beckers are the family of Sasha Gates’s mother, Frenesi’s grandmother) presided over by Wobbly and Thanatoid Jess Traverse. Prairie,

⁵⁶ Prairie’s initial mediated experiences of the 1960s are thus largely commensurate with Jameson’s description of postmodern nostalgia films’ commodification of history, which “approach[es] the ‘past’ through stylistic connotation, conveying ‘pastness’ by the glossy qualities of the image, and ‘1930s-ness’ or ‘1950s-ness’ by the attributes of fashion...” (*Postmodernism* 19).

having taken a crash course in 1960s history from a radical perspective, and Weed, now a Thanatoid, “become an item,” suggesting not only that Weed is beginning to make peace with his death but also that under the right circumstances, the generations of the 1960s and the 1980s can in fact meet on common ground (366). Moreover, by now “Prairie [has] managed at last to meet” Frenesi, whose return delights Sasha (367). It is crucial to recall that Prairie, unlike the generation of the 1960s as viewed by Isaiah Two Four, understands and moves comfortably in Tubal reality. The precondition for the reconciliations at the family reunion thus seems to be Prairie’s capacity for mediating between different registers of social reality and different moments in history: it is only after Prairie bridges the gap between her mediated 1980s experience of history and the alternately mediated experience of the 1960s documented by 24fps that the novel’s disparate plotlines unite.

Some critics read *Vineland’s* closing reconciliations as espousing a cautious optimism. For example, N. Katherine Hayles argues: “Resistance in *Vineland* is less dramatic [than in *Gravity’s Rainbow*] but more sustainable—and also more successful” (29 n9). This resistance hinges upon “memory,” which, although “not unmediated or untouched by time,” “has managed to be saved, rendered again to a generation that never knew the intensity and hope of the sixties directly” (28). Similarly, Molly Hite claims that although *Vineland* lacks the utopian dimension found at times in the *Counterforce*, it nonetheless “offer[s] ... an explicit and articulated They-system, a political analysis, an examination of social and historical differences” (“Feminist” 149). Meanwhile, Erik Dussere views the Becker- Traverse reunion as “Pynchon’s approximation of a utopian vision” that “assert[s] a radical politics that is homegrown,

optimistic, and commonsensical” (584, 585). For Dussere and the other critics I have just quoted, *Vineland*'s nostalgia for the 1960s enables a modest yet potentially effective politics, rooted in concrete individual experiences of politics, history, and family life, even as it backs down from the more ambitious yet ultimately impractical radicalism of Pynchon's previous novel.

Others, however, are inclined to view *Vineland* as a rather pointless or cynical exercise in 1960s nostalgia. Jeff Baker, for instance, claims that Pynchon's "activist impulse is reduced to an almost wistful recollection of a sixties' radical and anarchic mentality..." (176), while Heinz Ickstadt writes that *Vineland* narrates "a generation that was eventually swallowed by the system it had set out to change, its revolutionary fervor not being strong enough to withstand the pull of television and the image culture." Ickstadt continues, more severely, "all hopes that had been part of Oedipa's desperate expectancy [in *The Crying of Lot 49*] have come to nothing" (236). Notwithstanding the opposed values these readings attribute to the political implications of *Vineland*, they nonetheless share a common ground: regardless whether they ultimately view *Vineland* as optimistic, pessimistic, or somewhere in between, these readings are united by the notion that the novel is not only unambiguously about the 1960s but also unambiguously "pro-1960s."

In connection with such interpretations, however, it is important to note that nostalgia for the 1960s in *Vineland* is tempered at times by irony and ambivalence. For example, the narrator describes Isaiah's perceptions of his vegetarian parents' "food craziness": "they [...] discriminated *among* vegetables, excluding from their diet everything red[...], the color of anger. Most bread, having been made by killing yeasts,

was taboo” (20). Here the narrator ridicules the afterlife of the hippie ethos, its survival as New Age metaphysics, stereotypically found among middle-class Californians. *Vineland* is not just about nostalgia for the 1960s; rather, it discriminates among nostalgias, not all of them historically and politically grounded in an experience of '60s radicalism. Even more telling in this respect is the description of Frenesi's faith in love during the 1960s: “she must have [believed] in the power even of that weightless, daylight commodity of the sixties to redeem even [...] fascist Brock [Vond]” (217). Whereas Ditzah, DL, and other former members of 24fps first experience and later recall the 1960s in political terms, the spirit of that decade is largely ethical for Frenesi: the fascists will be redeemed by love, not removed by revolution. The narrator, though, signals distance from Frenesi's stance with the repeated *evens* and by highlighting the commercial nature of love, the “weightless, daylight commodity” that had already begun to be “trivializ[ed]” by the 1960s (217). Just as Frenesi betrays and abandons the political aspirations of the '60s generation, she retreats from a politics of radical love into an ethics of redemptive love.⁵⁷ If *Vineland* is nostalgic for the 1960s, it is nostalgic for a specific experience of the 1960s, one that televised, mass-mediated representations of that decade either efface or commodify.

What distinguishes *Vineland's* nostalgia from that commodified version and imparts on it a critical edge is the fundamentally political character of experiences of the 1960s that the novel's radicals commemorate and mourn. Whereas Frenesi recalls the

⁵⁷ Frenesi's naiveté concerning love takes on fuller significance in section 3.5, below, where I contrast the roles of love in the California novels and the historical novels as a means for examining each strain's alternate conceptions of collective formations and collective praxis. In addition, on political rather than ethical or romantic love, see, e.g., Hardt and Negri, *Empire* 413, *Multitude* 351–52, and esp. *Commonwealth* 179–88. See also section 2.4, above.

'60s in terms of emotion and affect, that decade is expressly political for those former members of 24fps who have remained faithful to the collective's radical spirit. In that sense, though, while what they demonstrate counts historically or temporally as a nostalgic attempt to relive the past, in political terms it amounts really to a desire for praxis itself, in an age when praxis seems to have become all but impossible.

Jameson's comment that I take as an epigraph says it best: "to describe this feeling as 'nostalgia' is about as adequate as to characterize the body's hunger, before dinner, as a 'nostalgia for food'" (*Postmodernism* 331).

In many ways, the novel certainly does suggest that the neoliberal ordeal of the 1980s has closed down the possibilities represented by the 1960s, not only by parodying the ineffectual, post-hippie afterlife of the 1960s among the middle class but also by problematizing the very reconciliation between those decades suggestively figured in *Prairie*—a reconciliation which would sublimate and reanimate the undead '60s. In the novel's climactic scene, *Prairie* is asleep in a clearing in the woods near the Traverse-Becker campsite when Vond nearly abducts her. At first she resists Vond, and she escapes abduction when Reagan suddenly defunds Vond's program and his helicopter flees into the night (374–76). A few pages later, however, *Prairie* invites Vond to return: "You can come back[...]. It's OK, rilly. Come on, come in. I don't care. Take me anyplace you want" (384). *Prairie*'s vacillation casts doubt upon any reconciliation between the 1960s and the 1980s that she might otherwise represent. The genetic explanation—that *Prairie* inherits her mother and grandmother's attraction to men in uniforms—is unconvincing and, moreover, not terribly useful to political interpretation. Rather, I want to suggest that the real point of *Prairie*'s beckoning to

Vond is to undermine the stereotypical happy ending accomplished by Frenesi's return at the family reunion.⁵⁸ As mentioned above, the novel offers reconciliation in place of systemic change; notwithstanding personal gains made by characters in the final chapter, those gains have little if any effect on the capitalist class structure or state power—Reagan, not Prairie or the novel's radicals, brings about Vond's downfall. Even on this point, however, *Vineland* is ambiguous. The novel closes with Zoyd's missing dog finding Prairie in the woods, licking her awake and "wagging his tail, thinking he must be home" (385): another image of reconciliation. Thus the novel simultaneously supports and undermines both optimistic and pessimistic readings. A certain kind of nostalgia for the 1960s is necessary, the novel suggests, but it is also impossible during the Reagan 1980s.

More specifically, the nostalgia for the 1960s that *Vineland* positively portrays is a nostalgia for collective praxis and utopian aspirations. In the novel's present tense, though, such collective praxis is impossible. What Hayles calls the novel's "kinship system" (the Becker-Traverse-Zoyd family, in contrast to the "snitch system" of Hector, Vond, and other agents or cronies of the state [15]), though useful to and supportive of the novel's characters, is not a revolutionary platform, while the aspiring revolutionary collectivity (flawed though it be), 24fps, is defunct, a relic of the past. Prairie, like Oedipa Maas in *The Crying of Lot 49*, stands outside that collectivity, and like Oedipa, she witnesses exploitation and suffering at the hands of constituted power, not the revolutionary political and historical work of constituent power. Her nostalgia for the 1960s is nostalgia for an ultimately dead or, at best, undead past.

⁵⁸ On *Vineland's* conclusion as a parody of Hollywood happy endings, see Oldster. Cf. Berger par. 45; S. Smith 113–14.

* * *

Mason & Dixon exhibits a markedly different historical perspective than *Vineland*, viewing the past not as undead or closed but as open and actively unfolding. The frame narrative of *Mason & Dixon* occurs in 1786, shortly after the American Revolution, with the main action just preceding the revolution, in the years 1760–68. Unsurprisingly, then, characters' experiences of their historical moment are marked by a sense of open futurity: speaking in 1786, the frame narrator comments that “the Times are as impossible to calculate [...] as the Distance to a Star,” and Mason, aware of “a jostling Murmur of Expectancy” on the eve of his and Dixon’s journey to Cape Town in 1760, speculates on the existence of “Gate-ways to Futurity” (6, 18, 19). In stark contrast to the historicity of *Vineland*, which documents the frustration of past revolutionary expectations in order to calculate the present of 1984, the historicity of *Mason & Dixon* orients that novel’s present toward an incalculable future. Whatever else nostalgia turns out to be in *Mason & Dixon*, it will be rooted in a longing not for an undead past but for a yet-to-be-born future.

Mason & Dixon therefore celebrates possibilities that are rooted in the present but which unfold along multiple axes of futurity. Chances are still good for diversity in this novel’s America, or at least better than in Pynchon’s California novels. As Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon travel westward along the line of latitude that would later bear their names, they encounter a host of marginal, preterite subjects and collectivities representing a variety of alternative social arrangements, manners of living, and fundamental realities. However, both as Enlightenment thinkers and as agents of the state, Mason and Dixon are also aware of the threat that they pose to those liminal

subjectivities. As Mason learns when he visits the fantastic utopian space of the hollow earth, the latter is incompatible with the rule of Enlightenment rationality and the nationalist territorialization of the earth: “Once the parallax is known, [...] once the necessary Degrees are measur’d, and the size and weight and shape of the Earth are calculated[...], all this will vanish” (741). Like the restoration of nationalism and the entrenchment of the Cold War that reterritorialize the formerly open space of the Zone in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, the saturation and colonization of geographical space, preterite subjectivities, and history threatens the open futurity of *Mason & Dixon*’s moment.

It is crucial to observe that this novel’s future, notwithstanding the threats posed to it by capitalist modernity, is still narrated as a live possibility, one that deserves to be defended and fought for. One of the novel’s most frequently quoted paragraphs aptly demonstrates such a deep commitment to futurity:

Does Britannia [...] dream? Is America her dream?— in which all that cannot pass in the metropolitan Wakefulness is allow’d Expression [...] 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[...], safe till the next Territory to the West be seen and recorded, measur’d and tied [...] 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[...]. (345)

This long sentence alludes to a series of oppositions that run throughout *Mason & Dixon*. It opens by contrasting England (and by extension the colonial powers of western Europe) with America, themselves linked symbolically with the past and the future, respectively. Layered atop these oppositions is one between “Wakefulness” and Enlightenment rationality, on the one hand, and “Slumber” and the irrational, on the other. What keeps these oppositions from becoming a sort of primitivist chauvinism,

though, and reveals their political import is the distinction between “subjunctive” and “declarative” (or, elsewhere, “indicative”), between “all that *may yet be true*” and “Points already known.” Indeed, this final opposition between the subjunctive and the declarative or indicative becomes a leitmotif around which *Mason & Dixon* builds not just its narrative but its entire historical and political intervention. The novel’s fundamental project is nothing less than a defense of marginalized histories and subjunctive utopian hopes against the incursions of official histories and instrumentalized truths that “serve the ends of Governments.”

A central manifestation of that project’s political dimension is the novel’s focus on marginalized, oppressed, and exploited groups. Indeed, what “cannot pass in the metropolitan Wakefulness” and must therefore be expressed in subjunctive dreaming is, among other things, the experiences and perspectives of slaves in Cape Town, St. Helena, and America; servants in England; Native Americans; working-class immigrants; in short, “the Mobility,” the mob or crowd:

When [...] all the Children are at last irretrievably detain’d within their Dreams, slowly into the Room [...] walk the Black servants, the Indian poor, the Irish runaways, the Chinese Sailors, the overflow’d from the mad Hospital, all unchosen Philadelphia[...]. They bring [...] their proud Fellowship in a Mobility that is to be, whose shape none inside this House may know. (759)

Here the political implications of the opposition between Enlightenment wakefulness and irrationality are unavoidable: the working-class and even lumpen fellows in the Mobility are creatures of the night, unexpressed in and incompatible with the Enlightenment discourse that undergirds capitalist and imperialist exploitation. Confined, to borrow an image from Marx, to the hidden realm [abode?] of production,

they remain largely invisible to the bourgeoisie. A defense of subjunctive hopes must therefore align itself with the preterite Mobility.

Nowhere is this political commitment to the Mobility clearer than in characters' reactions to the institution of slavery. Many of those reactions take the form of ethical denunciation; for example, the Rev^d Wicks Cherrycoke, narrator of Mason and Dixon's tale, compares slavery to feudalism and ridicules it as "dangerous Boobyism" (275). Elsewhere, he prophetically characterizes African slaves as "a Collective Ghost [...] invisible to history, invisible yet possessing Mass, and Velocity, able not only to rattle Chains but to break them as well" (68). Most dramatic, though, is the gradual development of Dixon's vehemence against slavery. At one moment, Dixon suffers from the same blindness to slaves ascribed to history by Cherrycoke: slaves remain invisible to Dixon, despite their "pass[ing] before his Sight" (398). Nonetheless, when he does regard slavery, he does so with distaste—for example, he compares American colonists unfavorably to metropolitan Britons on account of slavery and the genocide of Native Americans (248)—but he demonstrates little inclination to act. Progressively, however, he grows increasingly strident in his criticisms, as when he invokes his Quaker beliefs in response to an American revolutionary: "'Tis not how British treat Americans,' Dixon amiably rufescent [i.e., growing red], 'tis how both of You treat the African Slaves, and the Indians Native here, that engages the Friends more closely'" (568). His reddening should not be too hastily attributed to the ale he is drinking; it also suggests thinly veiled indignation at the hypocrisy of the revolutionary rhetoric of freedom in a class society dependent on forced labor. Dixon's reflections on slavery crystallize late in the novel when he recognizes slaves as the unifying presence in Cape Town, St.

Helena, and America, this last appearing now—in a formulation that significantly echoes Oedipa’s lament concerning America’s chances for diversity—as a failed promise: “America was the one place we should *not* have found them” (692–93). The climax of the novel’s abolitionist spirit comes shortly thereafter, with Dixon, momentarily a badass and perhaps a Luddite as well, turning a whip against a slave driver in defense of a chained group of African slaves (696–700). In this act, Dixon makes the leap from an ethics to a praxis of the Mobility and demonstrates allegiance to subjunctive utopianism over against the indicative history of slavery, colonialism, and exploitation.

Mason & Dixon’s political commitment to the Mobility also involves an historiographic dimension, which emphasizes subjunctive multiplicities over indicative unities. In the passage from *Mason & Dixon* that serves as an epigraph to Chapter 4 and which I discussed in section 4.1, Cherrycoke differentiates *Mason & Dixon’s* historiography from both the work of professional rhetoricians (lawyers) and the functioning of popular memory and national mythologies. Whereas those discourses attempt to establish or project arborescent, hegemonic truth, this historiography requires a rhizomatic multiplicity of “life-lines” into the “Mnemonic Deep” of history.⁵⁹ Indeed, as Cherrycoke observes elsewhere, because slaves and others among the Mobility remain “invisible to [official, indicative] history,” the telling of their history requires an historiography and a form adequate to their marginalized experiences, subjugated voices, and subjunctive hopes. The novel’s political commitment to the Mobility is

⁵⁹ On rhizomatic structures, see, e.g., Deleuze and Guattari, *Thousand* 3–25.

simultaneously an historical focus on what otherwise would be obliterated from official histories.⁶⁰

It is therefore unsurprising that from the perspective of official histories, many of the novel's subversive, radical, or utopian episodes are also the least credible—after all, they contradict the indicative and the known. A mechanical duck achieves sentience, flies fast enough to be invisible, and falls in love with a human (372–84); Mason and Dixon stumble upon a vast garden of preternaturally gigantic vegetables (656–57); Mason walks the concave surface of the hollow earth (739–42). What makes these cases politically significant and not just flights of subjunctive fancy is that each constitutes or describes a collectivity. When the chef Armand Allègre falls in love not with the duck but with another character, Luise Redzinger, “the Duck does nothing to harm Luise, indeed extends to her the same invisible Protection” as she does to Armand (384). The mere seeds of the giant vegetables are so large that “planting but a few of them is a communal Task, easily comparable to a Barn-Raising” (656). And in the hollow earth, as noted above, “everyone is pointed *at* everyone else,— ev’rybody’s axes converge,— forc’d at least thus to acknowledge one another,— an entirely different set of rules for how to behave” (741). Queer love not merely between different species but between inorganic and organic sentient life; laboring in common; unavoidable, universal consciousness of the existence and rights of all others: these collective arrangements have no place in official histories of a capitalist modernity that

⁶⁰ Cherrycoke’s historical commentaries and interpellations from his historical and theological tracts thus draw attention not just to the past but to the ways the past is discursively constructed, the categories through which subjectivities understand that past in the present, and the conditions of possibility for such construction and dissemination. In this, *Mason & Dixon*, like Pynchon’s other historical novels, follows the vocation of historiographic metafiction generally: namely, the “metafictional rethinking of the epistemological and ontological relations between history and fiction” (Hutcheon, *Poetics* 121).

policies subjectivities by managing sexuality and gender, replaces class consciousness with atomized consumerist individualism, and redefines “human” to sanction slavery and disenfranchisement. These episodes are utopian precisely because they are subjunctive: they describe what could be, what may yet be.

The hollow earth, in particular, is utopian in a fairly strict sense of the word. Throughout this dissertation, I tend to stress the political aspects of the term *utopian*: I call utopian the bohemian Castle in Baraka’s *6 Persons* and the hollow earth in *Mason & Dixon* (along with other comparable places in Pynchon’s oeuvre) primarily for the collectivities they figure and imagine. Each of these spaces, though, is also utopian in a geographical sense: they are off the official maps of white American middle-class culture or the modern nation-state. According to Jameson, imagining utopian spaces like these requires that they maintain a certain spatial or geographic separation from the actually existing places and polities ruled by common sense, ideology, and the indicative: “Utopian space is an imaginary enclave within real social space ... [whose] possibility is dependent on the momentary formation of a kind of eddy or self-contained backwater within the general differentiation process and its seemingly irreversible forward momentum,” that is, within history itself (*Archaeologies* 15). Jameson’s characterization of utopian space explicitly unites its social, political, and historical meanings—utopia is a space where new, otherwise unimaginable collective social formations can exist—with its geographical, spatial sense. The hollow earth in *Mason & Dixon* is utopian in all of these ways at once.

The utopian space of the hollow earth also opens onto a whole archipelago of utopian enclaves that dot the map of known, instrumentalized territories. Mason and

Dixon are charged, after all, with mapping the West Line (the line separating Maryland and Pennsylvania and the most common referent of the term *Mason-Dixon line* in contemporary usage), the 12-Mile Arc (the odd semicircle located at the northern extreme of Delaware, resulting from idiosyncratic territorial definitions in that colony's original charter), and the Tangent Line (the main border between Delaware and Maryland, which deviates from a true north-south orientation by a few degrees) (see fig. 4-1). All of the regions mapped by Mason and Dixon contain utopian enclaves similar to the hollow earth. In each case, being off the map provides cover, allowing utopian social and political configurations to flourish, at least temporarily.

The conjunction of the social, political, historical, and spatial in utopian enclaves also partly explains why Mason and Dixon's cartographic project threatens the hollow earth and the novel's other subjunctive utopian spaces. Like utopian figurations, cartography operates on all those levels simultaneously: in inscribing borders, the practice of cartography spatializes politics and history while it politicizes space itself and documents the latter's history. Mapping reterritorializes potentially utopian spaces into localizable places, incorporating them into a "Net-Work of Points already known," thereby translating subjunctive possibilities and *terrae incognitae* into indicative facts.⁶¹

The hollow-earth emissary allegorizes this process when he warns Mason that "all this

⁶¹ In the conceptual language of Deleuze and Guattari, what Mason and Dixon are producing is not a map but a tracing. On Deleuze and Guattari's take, a tracing is subject to a hierarchical, arborescent organizing logic that seeks to represent, "on the basis of an overcoding structure or supporting axis, something that comes ready-made..., which always comes back 'to the same'" (*Thousand* 12). A tracing thus locates subjectivities in striated spaces that confine and manage desire. By contrast, a map counts as "experimentation in contact with the real," a potentially transformative endeavor that provides multiple openings onto fields of smooth space in which schizophrenic desire plays out in critical freedom (see above, section 2.2). The challenge for Mason and Dixon, then, is to resist the tracing by insisting on the rhizomatic map: "*the tracing should always be put back on the map*" (13). For the sake of convenience, I continue to use the term *map*, rather than *tracing*, in reference to Mason and Dixon's cartographic work—suffice it to say, though, that I mean *tracing* whenever I speak of the capitalist state's recuperative, instrumental, or (re)territorializing use of maps.

will vanish” upon the successful calculation of the solar parallax: once the size and mass of the earth are established, the subjunctive possibilities of a hollow earth will be rendered simple impossibilities, incompatible with the indicative facts that they would otherwise contradict.

The whole of *Mason & Dixon* works against this translation from subjunctive to indicative, not only thematically or in terms of content but also by means of its narrative form. One of the most important functions of the Cherrycoke frame narrative is to call attention to the novel’s constructed, contingent, provisional status. Cherrycoke’s in-laws, the audience for his narration, repeatedly voice skepticism about the veracity of his narrative and his reliability. Uncle Ives LeSpark, in particular, frequently interrupts Cherrycoke to question his use of historical evidence: “you look at the evidence. The testimony. The whole Truth[...]. Time on Earth is too precious. No one has time, for more than one Version of the Truth” (349, 350).⁶² Cherrycoke—whose treatise *Christ and History* excludes facts from the purview of historians and insists upon a multiplicity of life-lines in place of univocal historical truth—often responds by resorting to speculation. In a parenthetical aside, the frame narrator intrudes upon Cherrycoke’s narration to comment: “(so the Rev^d, who was there [i.e., with Mason and Dixon in England] in but a representational sense, ghostly as an imperfect narrative to be told in futurity, would have guess’d)” (195). Clearly, indicative veracity is subordinate in Cherrycoke’s telling to a faith in and commitment to the narrative’s subjunctive possibilities. Much later in the novel, he openly admits: “I’ve not found any of Mason’s Letters[...]. Just because I can’t find them doesn’t mean they’re not out there. The

⁶² Ives’s commonsense valuation of the scarcity of time takes on enlarged significance in the commodification of time as interest in *Inherent Vice*, which I analyze at length in section 3.5, below.

Question may be rather,— Must we wait till they are found, to speculate as to the form[...]?” (720). Cherrycoke’s historiographic method rejects any claims to empiricism, insisting instead on the value of subjunctive reason as a means for understanding history.⁶³ His speculation, therefore, is evaluated according to its effect in advancing the possibilities opened up by the narrative, not by its accuracy; like the method of the tendency in Negri and other autonomist Marxists (as well as other theorists unassociated with the autonomist movement), Cherrycoke’s historiography “permits a reading of the present in light of the future, in order to make projects to illuminate the future” (Negri, *Marx* 49). The point of his story, as well as the novel itself, is to not to document historical truth but to animate subjunctive possibilities.

Before I connect this discussion of the politics of subjunctive historiography to the role of nostalgia in *Mason & Dixon* and the conditions of possibility for collective praxis imagined by the novel, I want to take a moment to distinguish the subjunctive here from the subjunctive found elsewhere in Pynchon. In purely grammatical terms, the subjunctive mood is not confined to *Mason & Dixon*. For example, *The Crying of Lot 49* uses the subjunctive mood, along with frequent qualifiers, to describe Oedipa’s attempts to make sense of the Tristero:

If one object behind her discovery of what she was to label the Tristero System or often only The Tristero (*as if it might* be something’s secret title) *were* to bring an end to her encapsulation in her tower, then that night’s infidelity with Metzger *would* logically be the starting point for it; *logically*. That’s what would come to haunt her most, *perhaps*: the way it fitted, logically, together. *As if* [...] there *were* revelation in progress all around her. (31; my emphases)

⁶³ For other passages in *Mason & Dixon* that question, challenge, or subvert Cherrycoke’s indicative authority, see 153, 171, 341, 345, 393, 497, 519, 537, 652, 695–96, 698, 744, and 758–60.

This passage uses the subjunctive mood in two ways, both grammatically standard. First, it uses the subjunctive mood in conditional sentences, such as the first sentence. There, however, the possibility noted by the subjunctive is logical and formal, not ontological and political as in *Mason & Dixon*. Second, much of the subjunctive mood in this passage denotes speculation, as it often does in *Mason & Dixon*. In *The Crying of Lot 49*, though, Oedipa's speculation, unlike Cherrycoke's, is measureable against an existing state of affairs, even if only potentially (given that *Crying* ultimately defers resolution). Either there is a Tristero system or there isn't, and if there is, then there are certain knowable facts which, once revealed, can either corroborate or disconfirm Oedipa's detective work. Cherrycoke's historical narrative, in contrast, is fundamentally incompatible with any indicative discourse that would serve as a basis for such a measure. He traffics in life-lines, not facts.⁶⁴ Oedipa's subjunctive aims at the indicative; Cherrycoke's attempts to flee from it along a tangent line.

The present-tense perspective of *Vineland*, meanwhile, is marked by a subjunctive "mood" of sorts: not a grammatical mood but an affect. That novel's nostalgia for the 1960s and regret over the closure of that decade's revolutionary potential can be paraphrased using the subjunctive language of possibility: *Vineland* mourns what *could have been*—but not what *might yet be*. Subjunctive possibilities are absorbed and

⁶⁴ See, e.g., in addition to passages already quoted, Cherrycoke's indicatively impossible account of Dixon's apocryphal trip to Annapolis:

"let us assume that he went first to Annapolis[...]. Or let us postulate two Dixons[...], one in an unmoving Stupor throughout,— the other, for Simplicity, assum'd to've ridden,— as Mason would the next year,— out to Nelson's Ferry over Susquehanna, and after crossing, perhaps,— tho' not necessarily,— on to York,— taking then the Baltimore Road south [...] toward Annapolis, and Virginia beyond. Tho' with suspicions as to his Calvert Connections already high, Dixon might have avoided Maryland altogether[...]."
(Pynchon, *Mason* 393)

annulled in the indicative history of the Nixon–Reagan years and the triumph of neoliberal capitalism and electoral conservatism. Even a shift in perspective from 1984 to the remembered past of the 1960s fails to align either the grammatical or the affective mood of *Vineland* with *Mason & Dixon*. The in-your-face, camera-as-gun documentary style of 24fps speaks not in the subjunctive but in the indicative (This is what happened) or even the imperative (Look at what happened!). Where *Mason & Dixon* dramatizes utopian possibilities in the subjunctive mood, *Vineland* reserves the subjunctive for mourning and assigns both revolutionary praxis and historical understanding to other grammatical and affective moods.

Thus, unlike its counterpart in *Vineland*, the subjunctive in *Mason & Dixon* actively affirms what indicative history takes to be contrary to fact. In addition to subjunctive spaces and the subjunctive collectivities that inhabit them, *Mason & Dixon* performs that affirmation through its use of anachronisms. Although the novel is written overwhelmingly in a period style—witness, for example, the pseudo-Germanic capitalization of common nouns, strange punctuation such as the combination of commas and dashes, archaic spelling, and diction like “Mobility”—it nonetheless paraphrases several 1990s colloquialisms and speech habits. For instance, Jet Vroom, a 16-year-old Dutch girl in Cape Town, fears “Shawl Hair” and interjects *as* (translation: *like*) in anachronistic imitation of stereotypical “valley girl” speech: “As, I haven’t better things to do?” (91). Dixon himself seems to end his sentences with the much maligned upward inflection also associated with 1990s California culture, as in the following statement from his first meeting with Mason: “Sooner we start, the better, in thah’ case...?” (18). This habit pervades Dixon’s speech, even when he threatens a slave

driver: “I’m going to kill *you*...?” (699). Even George Washington is not exempt from anachronism. At one point, he summons his house-slave by calling, “Gershom! Where be you at, my man!” (278).⁶⁵ Much more than occasional comic elements (though they are funny), such linguistic anachronisms suggest that the revolutionary, late–eighteenth-century moment narrated in *Mason & Dixon* also somehow belongs to the 1990s.

In addition, the novel also alludes obliquely to a third historical moment: the 1960s, which remains, as promised, a touchstone for the political sensibilities of the novel, as with all of Pynchon’s work since *The Crying of Lot 49*.⁶⁶ Shortly after arriving in the American colonies, Mason and Dixon visit Mount Vernon, where they smoke homegrown pot with George Washington, satiate their munchies on pastries served by Martha Washington (“Smell’d that Smoak, figur’d you’d be needing something to nibble on”), and listen to Gershom tell “Slave-and-Master Joaks, re-tailor’d for these Audiences” as fool-and-king jokes (280, 284; see 275–88). Other signifiers of 1960s counterculture are found in the appearance and character of Benjamin Franklin. Giving an interactive public demonstration of Leyden jars in what is less a science lesson than a psychedelic carnival sideshow, he wears “Lenses [...] of a curious shade of Aquamarine, allowing his eyes to be view’d, yet conveying a bleak Contentment that discourages lengthy Gazing” (294). Franklin’s proclivity for partying, his familiarity with

⁶⁵ Washington thus seems also to represent or parody white middle-class appropriations of African American speech, styles, and cultural practices. For a comparison of appropriations and portrayals of Black culture in Pynchon, Mailer, and Kerouac, see Witzling 26–71. Also, cf. Baraka’s critical portrayal of such appropriations in *6 Persons*, discussed in sec. 2.3, above.

⁶⁶ The centrality of the 1960s to Pynchon’s politics also parallels that decade’s broader importance as a signifier of utopian possibilities; as Stephen Paul Miller points out, the ‘60s remains a reminder of utopianism not just in Pynchon but in the U.S. imaginary more generally: “Caught between its front and rear views, its expectations and its aftermath, the sixties is a ripple between them. Because the expectations and the aftermath of the sixties are so incommensurate, this ripple does not subside” (34).

narcotics, and his look of “bleak Contentment” suggest a purpose for the sunglasses other than “moderating the Glare of the Sun” (266; see 266–74, 294–95)—namely, obscuring the effects of drug use on the eyes. Taken collectively, these signifiers of stoner culture, recreational drug use, and the psychedelic gesture toward the 1960s as a tacit reference point in the novel’s temporality.⁶⁷

Together, the anachronisms and the subjunctive mood of *Mason & Dixon* reveal the contours of nostalgia in the novel. As in *Vineland*, it is a nostalgia for the 1960s, yet the difference between the two nostalgias is crucial. As told in the indicative mood—which, I have argued, dominates praxis and official history alike and forecloses subjunctive promise in *Vineland*—the 1960s is no longer a live possibility. That nostalgia mourns a loss; its critical import or utility consists chiefly in illuminating the gap between what is and what could have been by maintaining lost utopian opportunities in an undead limbo. In the subjunctive mood of *Mason & Dixon*, on the other hand, nostalgia seeks—and, crucially, believes in—a reawakening of historical consciousness, a grand reopening of utopian possibilities, and a miraculous reanimation of a past that in the 1980s could only persist in Thanatoid existence, refusing to die quietly but nevertheless no longer living. *Vineland’s* is a nostalgia for an undead past; *Mason & Dixon’s*, for a future yet to be born.

The work of Walter Benjamin helps clarify the difference between the relations of nostalgia to history in each novel. As both James Berger and Skip Willman demonstrate, there is a pronounced Benjaminian character to Pynchon’s brand of nostalgia, which “seize[s] hold of a memory as it flashes up at a moment of danger”

⁶⁷ In addition, *Mason & Dixon’s* focus on slavery and Dixon’s interventions inevitably recall the history of the Civil Rights Movement in the 1960s.

(Benjamin 257). Berger reads the Thanatoids in *Vineland* as a manifestation and return of the historical trauma of the failure of the 1960s; on his take, the joining of Prairie and Weed, not Prairie, Frenesi, and Sasha, is that novel's "real reunion," "a reunion with the traumatic past ... and with the utopian sense of possibility that flashed into being at the same apocalyptic moment" (par. 46). Building on Berger's interpretation, Willman argues that the Thanatoid repetition of trauma allegorizes "the repetition of the failure of radical political movements," while the state's generationally renewed projects to suppress those movements repeat a "failed attempt to deal with the traumatic kernel of class struggle" (212). For both Berger and Willman, the nostalgia of *Vineland* is congruent with Benjamin's "revolutionary nostalgia" that "reaffirms its faith in a justice and emancipation yet to come" (Willman 218).⁶⁸ Although these readings rightly identify the critical function of nostalgia in *Vineland*—namely, refusing to let the utopian flashes of the radical past vanish into *Mason & Dixon*'s "Mnemonick Deep"—the future in that novel is not one in which "every second ... [is] the strait gate through which the Messiah might enter" (Benjamin 266)—a future unthinkable at the neoliberal end of history. On the contrary, the cyclical nature of the intergenerational Traverse–Becker–Gates–Wheeler saga and Prairie's ambivalent attraction to Brock Vond imply that in *Vineland*'s 1984, every second is the gate through which the long arm of the state might return.

Notwithstanding the strong resonances between *Vineland* and Benjamin's philosophy of history, I want to argue that it is the nostalgia of *Mason & Dixon* which is much more closely related to Benjamin's revolutionary nostalgia. For both *Mason & Dixon* and Benjamin, nostalgia inhabits a now or a *Jetztzeit* that not only seizes the past

⁶⁸ On nostalgia in Benjamin, see also Jameson, *Marxism* 60–83.

but also opens onto a utopian, messianic future.⁶⁹ In the subjunctive logic of *Mason & Dixon*, historiographic life-lines do not chronicle the past, for that would require the indicative mood. Nor do they attempt to saturate the past, in all its wholeness; their subject is the preterite, unredeemed Mobility, whereas, as Benjamin points out, “only a redeemed mankind receives the fullness of its past” (256). Rather, *Mason & Dixon’s Jetztzeit* is always subjunctive: life-lines connect with and preserve what may yet be. The subjunctive historian’s obligation to the past is therefore also a messianic anticipation of futurity.⁷⁰

That messianic anticipation of a subjunctive, utopian future colors the conclusion to *Mason & Dixon*. The final scene belongs to William and Dr. Isaac, Mason’s grown offspring from his first marriage, whose apostrophe to their dead father is at the same time an expression of nostalgia for a subjunctive future:

“Since I was ten,” said Doc, “I wanted you to take me and Willy to America. I kept hoping, ev’ry Birthday, this would be the year. I knew next time you’d take us.”

“We can get jobs,” said William, “save enough to go out where you were,—”

⁶⁹ For this reason, it makes more sense to locate a periodic shift in postmodernism in *Mason & Dixon* than in *Vineland*, which on Palmeri’s take inaugurates Pynchon’s late postmodern period (par. 28). Note also that Palmeri does not consider nostalgia in his reading.

⁷⁰ Given the Benjaminian connections in terms of nostalgia and messianism, as well as the wide-ranging and diverse composition of the Mobility, it might be tempting to link *Mason & Dixon* to another important text of the 1990s in which Benjamin also plays a crucial role: Derrida’s *Specters of Marx: The State of the Debt, the Work of Mourning, and the New International* (1993; trans. 1994). I want to resist that temptation, though, for two reasons. First, although Pynchon’s Mobility and Derrida’s New International are both “link[s] of affinity, suffering, and hope,” the Mobility is constituted predominately, though not exclusively, by the working and lumpen classes, unlike the New International, which lacks “common belonging to a class” (Derrida, *Specters* 85). Second, while both collectivities share a messianic dimension, Derrida formulates that dimension for the New International as a “messianic without messianism,” a structure of anticipation without any concrete content, without an idea of what it is (other than a future-to-come, a justice-to-come, and so on) that is anticipated. The Mobility’s anticipation of the future, although certainly not utterly incompatible with Derrida’s formulation, nonetheless does imagine contents of that future, even if those contents remain utopian figurations. Derrida’s applicability to Pynchon’s fiction, rather, emerges later in this chapter, in section 4.5, in connection with the notion of the gift and its relation to economic exchange.

“Marry and go out where you were,” said Doc.
“The Stars are so close you won’t need a Telescope.”
“The Fish jump into your Arms. The Indians know Magick.”
“We’ll go there. We’ll live there.”
“We’ll fish there. And you too.” (773)

Ambiguity arises in this novel’s conclusion not in connection with political and ideological commitments, as in the final chapter of *Vineland*, but as a result of our own twentieth- and now twenty-first-century absorption into indicative history. From that perspective, Doc and William’s evocation of a utopian America would produce a parallel effect to nostalgia for the 1960s in *Vineland* by indexing how far the U.S. has fallen from its former promise (which was, of course, always already myth and ideology as well as utopian longing). The temporality of such an interpretation, however, looks only from the present to the past, with no recourse to the future, whereas the subjunctive narrative structure and historiography of *Mason & Dixon* are closer to Jameson’s description of “Benjamin’s experience of time: a present of language on the threshold of the future, honoring it by averted eyes in meditation on the past” (*Marxism* 83). Doc and William’s America, therefore, must be understood not only as an indicative representation but also, and much more strongly, as a subjunctive figuration of the Mobility. By the novel’s final chapter, most of Cherrycoke’s in-laws are asleep. Taking their place as auditors of Cherrycoke’s tale is the Mobility itself: in the passage that I quoted above in order to first sketch out the Mobility (“the Black servants, the Indian poor,” etc.), the “Room” that the Mobility enters is none other than the parlor of the LeSpark home. It is to the Mobility that Cherrycoke narrates the novel’s close, and it is their subjunctive America, and Mason and Dixon’s, Doc and William’s—an “America, whose name is something else, and Maps of which do not exist” (757)—that the conclusion evokes and anticipates.

That America might not be our indicative own, but it is one, the novel keeps insisting, that may yet be.

4.4 High and Late Postmodernism

I want to open this section by returning to the topics with which I began the previous one: *Vineland* and *Mason & Dixon*, the 1980s and the 1990s. As I have shown, those novels are indelibly marked as artifacts of their respective moments. What I want to emphasize here, to begin, is the crucial connection between each novel's historical context (that is, the "indicative" historical moment of each novel's publication) and the role of nostalgia in each. Indeed, the skepticism of *Vineland's* nostalgia and the hopefulness of *Mason & Dixon's* register not merely an historical passage from one decade to the next but, more significantly, a transition between two radically divergent configurations of postmodern culture itself: high and late postmodernism.

I take these periodizing concepts from the work of Phillip E. Wegner, who develops his historical framework out of Jameson's discussion of late modernism. In section 4.1, I characterized Jameson's notion of late modernism in temporal terms as both a moment of transition between high modernism and postmodernism and a period in its own right. As a period, late modernism is also therefore, like any historical period, subject to a unique or distinctive logic: in this case, the atrophying of high modernism's radical creative energies and their replacement by an aesthetic ideology prescribing a set of rules where there had formerly been an open field for literary and artistic experimentation—to paraphrase Pynchon, a reduction of aesthetic possibilities to ideological simplicities.

In *Life between Two Deaths, 1989–2001: U.S. Culture in the Long Nineties* (2009), Wegner adapts Jameson's account of high and late modernism to read the 1990s as a discrete historical period. However, in Wegner's periodization of the 1990s, the political and ideological transitions between high and late postmodernism—the 1980s and the 1990s—move in the opposite direction to the trajectory of high and late modernism, with the late postmodernism of the 1990s “witness[ing] the revival of a radical political energy in abeyance in the earlier” (5). This revival is evident in both political and literary practices, among several other fields. Politically, it is manifested most notably in the emergence of a global network of “counter-globalization” movements opposed to global neoliberal capitalism, famously theorized by Hardt and Negri in *Empire, Multitude: War and Democracy in the Age of Empire* (2004), and most recently *Commonwealth* (2009). Among this politicization's literary counterparts discussed by Wegner, two in particular are relevant to my analysis of Pynchon's corpus: a proliferation of utopian fictions that “focus less on ... utopian worlds and more on ... processes..., political actions, and ... moments of decision,” and the resurgence of the historical novel as a viable postmodern literary form (33, 44).⁷¹

⁷¹ This late-postmodern resurgence of forms and categories drawn from modernism (and earlier) can also be likened to the strange temporality found in Lyotard's account of postmodernism. For Lyotard, postmodernism, in an apparent paradox, does not follow but rather precedes modernism: “A work can become modern only if it is first postmodern. Postmodernism thus understood is not modernism at its end but in the nascent state, and this state is constant” (79). In this formulation, postmodernism counts as the experimental moment that predates the establishment of “rules,” “determining judgment[s],” “familiar categories,” and the like, which only arrive with the advent of modernism itself: “The [postmodern] artist and ... writer ... are working without rules in order to formulate the rules of *what will have been done*” (81). Jameson describes this temporality of the postmodern as “a cyclical moment that returns before the emergence of ever *new* modernisms in the stricter sense [i.e., of high modernism]” (Foreword xvi). Jameson goes on, however, to identify the chief historical limitation of Lyotard's thinking: namely, its inability to articulate postmodernism together with late capitalism and, even more crucial, its fantasy of “a return to the older critical high modernism” (xvi–xvii). Although Lyotard's conception of modernism and postmodernism has the merit of grasping the antagonism between innovation and institution—or, to repurpose terminological codes that I use elsewhere in this dissertation, between constituent art-ing and

These developments signal a dramatic move away from the postmodernism described canonically in Jameson's *Postmodernism* and elsewhere, the postmodernism of apolitical pastiche, ahistorical thinking, and depthless simulation. These and other similar characteristics of postmodern culture have often been central to theoretical and critical discourse about the postmodern. Dating back to the dominance of postmodernism in literary studies and the high-water mark of theory in the 1980s, hostile critics of postmodernism have denounced it for its perceived political ineffectiveness or quietism, historical myopia, and superficiality. Defenders of postmodern culture, on the other hand, have argued against Jameson's account, insisting instead on the subversive potential of pastiche, play, historiographic metafiction, and the like, notwithstanding their admitted limitations.⁷² I do not wish to rehearse the details of those debates here, but I do want to suggest that wherever one stands concerning 1980s postmodern culture and its political corollaries—a question about which I agree with Jameson that it is often a pointless exercise or a matter of “taste” (*Postmodernism* 46, 297–300)—the salient features of late postmodernism identified by Wegner mark that period's stark differences from a canonical and henceforth high postmodernism.

Several of those differences are evident in miniature in a comparison of *Vineland* and *Mason & Dixon*. Although he does not analyze Pynchon directly, Wegner highlights

constituted art—I prefer to avoid Lyotard's cyclical historical vision in favor of the dialectical struggle between those poles that plays out between the high and the late.

⁷² For hostile critiques of postmodernism, see, e.g., Callinicos; Eagleton, *Illusions* and, more recently, *After*, esp. 41–73; and Norris, *Truth and What's*, among others. For celebrations or defenses of postmodernism, see, e.g., Hassan, *Dismemberment*; Hutcheon, *Poetics*; Lyotard; McHale, *Constructing*. On the ultimate futility of judicial criticism of the postmodern, see Jameson, *Postmodernism* 45–66, 297–300, et passim.

Mason & Dixon as exemplary of some of the literary trends of late postmodernism. Discussing “significant transformations in the work of some important established writers” during the 1990s, he notes *Mason & Dixon*’s departure from the high postmodernism of *Vineland* (36)—a departure which, I hope, section 4.3 has demonstrated in detail. In light of Wegner’s periodization of the 1990s, the differently colored nostalgias of those novels register the transformation of openings for praxis in the passage from high to late postmodernism and the concomitant shift in perspective from skepticism, cynicism, or resignation to a renewed utopian hopefulness.

It is imperative to note, however, that many of the characteristics by which Wegner distinguishes high and late postmodernism also run throughout Pynchon’s oeuvre. As Wegner observes, *Mason & Dixon* not only “breaks with the postmodernism of ... *Vineland*” but also, crucially, “‘repeats’ the formal and political energies of ... *Gravity’s Rainbow*” (36). What accounts for that repetition, I argue, is *Gravity’s Rainbow* and *Mason & Dixon*’s common belonging to the subcategory of historical novels within Pynchon’s canon. This suggests that in addition to its conventional periodizing usage, Wegner’s concept of late postmodernism can also be brought to bear on texts of Pynchon’s not written or published during the 1990s but nonetheless sharing in the political spirit and aesthetic practices that, as Wegner’s readings show, find renewed expression in U.S. culture of that decade.

In this section, I argue that the key differences between Pynchon’s California novels and his long historical novels correspond substantially to the historical periods of high and late postmodernism. In addition, lest my claim be taken to violate the very historical thinking it aims at by substituting ahistorical or transhistorical formal categories

for what are rigorously historical periodizing concepts, I argue that high and late postmodern aesthetics can productively be understood as symptomatic expressions of tensions that are inherent in late capitalism itself but which nonetheless shift in relation to each other from one historical moment to another. From this perspective, the alternation between high and late postmodernist formal and political possibilities in Pynchon begins to resemble Jameson's model of "perpetual cultural revolution" that forms the backdrop against which criticism reveals the ideology of form.⁷³ What emerges as an historically new eruption of collective praxis and its aesthetic corollaries during the 1990s is, at base, an expression of class antagonisms that run throughout postmodernity but which experience a moment in the sun of indicative history during that decade.

In order to substantiate my claim that the concepts of high and late postmodernism need not be restricted to the '80s or '90s but rather have metasynchronous applicability, I want to begin by reviewing and underscoring some important continuities throughout the California novels and historical novels discussed thus far. I then proceed by identifying the critical operation or hermeneutic most appropriate to each strain in order to explore more deeply the political projects that it enables or imagines. Finally, I conclude this section by drawing some implications of my metasynchronous periodization of Pynchon for the recently established field of globalization studies.

In addition to the similar geographical and chronological scopes that I identified in my earlier general sketch of the California novels, *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Vineland* share a number of important commonalities relating specifically to the novels' political

⁷³ On perpetual cultural revolution and the ideology of form, see Jameson, *Political* 75–76, 88–102, 206–80. See also section 1.2, above.

and social concerns. Both Oedipa and Prairie attempt to access collectivities from which they remain excluded—Oedipa by the gnostic secrecy of the Tristero, Prairie by the historical incommensurability of the 1960s and the 1980s. Praxis is thus essentially foreign to Oedipa, who catches occasional glimpses of the Tristero from the outside just as she remains an observer of student radicalism on the Berkeley campus. Similarly, praxis is impossible on all but the most local scales for Prairie, and even then it remains provisional and dubious, as in her inconclusive reconciliations with her family and with Weed Atman's 1960s radicalism. Collective praxis is further barred in each novel by structures of political and economic power. Oedipa's and Prairie's social worlds are not without their brief utopian glimmers, but those glimmers are overshadowed by apparatuses of capitalism and the state. Oedipa's paranoid speculations that Pierce Inverarity could after all be at the root of the Tristero conspiracies seem delusional at times, but they are borne out in *Vineland*, where conspiracy in fact turns out to be a vital operative logic—only this time, the conspirators are known to be agents of the state itself, working in the interests of the capitalist class—and paranoia is therefore justified. Each novel exhibits a desire for collective praxis, but at the same time, each ultimately projects a world in which that praxis is impossible, inaccessible, or unsustainable.

Gravity's Rainbow and *Mason & Dixon*, by contrast, project worlds where collectivity has at least a fighting chance. Slothrop, Mason, and Dixon all commit class treason in one form or another to join up with the preterite Counterforce or the subjunctive Mobility. Furthermore, whereas the quests of Oedipa and Prairie are largely epistemological, seeking insider or firsthand knowledge of a collectivity that remains beyond their ken, characters in the historical novels engage directly in collective praxis,

effecting political and ontological results. Slothrop's defeat of Major Marvy, Pig Bodine and Roger Mexico's scatological sabotage of the dinner party, and Dixon's attack on the Maryland slave driver are not in themselves revolutionary acts, but they are nonetheless acts of a different order than those available to Oedipa or Prairie. Even Cherrycoke's telling of Mason and Dixon's tale summons forth and assembles the Mobility that is both the subject and, ultimately, the addressee of the narrative. *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Mason & Dixon* figure collective praxis as possible despite Their unavoidable control or the hegemony of indicative nationalism. Even though these novels' utopian spaces and the chances they offer for praxis are historically bounded by the entrenchment of the Cold War or the failure of America's so-called grand experiment, those historical limits are excluded from the narratives. The triumph of control ultimately lies outside the diegetic historicity of the novels and instead in the interval between the narrative present and the reader's present: *Gravity's Rainbow* concludes with an interminable final delta-t in which the missile remains ever suspended above the Orpheus Theater, while indicative America is seen to fail in its democratic ambitions only retrospectively, two hundred years after the narrative of *Mason & Dixon* concludes. The novels indefinitely prolong and intensify what appear as mere flashes of possibility from the standpoint of indicative history. They are therefore utopian spaces in themselves: impossible enclaves or imaginary eddies that persist despite the ineluctable passage and momentum of real historical time.

I want to clarify both the political implications of each of these strands and the deep connection of each to high or late postmodernism by discussing the critical operation that predominates in each case. In the California novels, I argue, that

operation is what Jameson calls *symptomology*. *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Vineland* confront readers with a list of attributes of life under late capitalism: Oedipa's isolation from a sense of common belonging; the inability to comprehend the movements of history and the functioning of power except through recourse to conspiracy theories; the restriction of Prairie's exposure to history and radical politics to the mediated forms of television and documentary film; the undead limbo of a 1960s that refuses to pass quietly yet no longer lives. Although the California novels stop short of imagining the kinds of radical alternative social orders encountered in the historical novels, they do provide the critic with grounds for reading them symptomatically. On Jameson's account, symptomatic reading grasps a text as an "imaginary resolution of a real contradiction"; in reading a text symptomatically, then, the critic reestablishes the link between antinomies figured in a text, on the one hand, and the historical context that functions as the latter's "absent cause," on the other (*Political* 77, 82–83; see sec. 2.2, above). *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Vineland* encourage such a reading: the antinomian impossibilities of Oedipa's speculations symptomatically register the paranoia of Cold War politics, just as the inescapability and utter hegemony of the Tube attest to the saturation of the postmodern by spectacle and simulacra.⁷⁴ The California novels provide comparatively little in the way of imagining utopian alternatives, but they stand nonetheless as symptomatic indices of late capitalism's indicative reality.

⁷⁴ In addition to exhibiting symptoms, *Vineland* also performs its own work of diagnosis in some of its more critical moments—for example, in its argument, surrounding Hector, that television and not drugs is the chief culprit behind American cultural degradation. For interpretations of the novel highlighting its critical vocation (as opposed to its susceptibility to symptomatic readings), see Madsen 115–30; McHale, *Constructing* 115–41, esp. 121–25, 139–41.

The historical novels, on the other hand, mount vast surveys of their social, political, and economic worlds in order to project just those sorts of utopian alternatives that are excluded from the imaginary of the California novels. Whereas the latter register symptoms of late capitalism and thus serve primarily a diagnostic function, the former imagine collective projects that would undermine or explode the very late capitalism that determines possibilities and impossibilities for Oedipa or Prairie. The shift from the indicative of the California novels to the subjunctive of the historical novels is analogous to the difference between symptomology and another indispensable critical operation famously theorized by Jameson: *cognitive mapping*. Cognitive mapping refers to an imaginary construction or allegorical representation of the social whole, in reference to which one locates oneself. This operation, says Jameson in his essay “Cognitive Mapping” (1988), is necessary for two crucial reasons: first, “no one has ever seen the thing itself,” that is, capitalism, so it is impossible to represent the latter except by way of the imagination (354). Second, and even more importantly, “without a conception of the social totality (and the possibility of transforming a whole social system), no properly socialist politics is possible” (355). Finally, in addition to these axiomatic justifications of cognitive mapping, Jameson elsewhere implies that cognitive mapping is an indispensable precondition for radical politics in postmodernity: “The political form of postmodernism, if there ever is any, will have as its vocation the invention and projection of a global cognitive mapping” (*Postmodernism* 54).⁷⁵ In a

⁷⁵ Collectively, these characteristics of cognitive mapping reveal both its kinship to ideology and its necessary political commitments—that is, cognitive mapping is not ideologically or politically neutral. Jameson’s first two justifications of cognitive mapping underscore its similarity to ideological constructs such as, for example, social class: “No one has ever seen a social class or experienced one immediately” (Jameson, *Modernist* xiii), so an ideological construction of class identity, like cognitive mapping’s figurative rendering of capitalism, is a necessary precondition for any experience of class identity and

regime of late capitalism that produces both a vast world-system that escapes our ability to conceive it as a whole and the symptomatic representation of that world-system in overwhelming, disorienting spaces like the Westin Bonaventure Hotel in L.A. or the labyrinthine world in which Oedipa hunts down the Tristero, we cannot do without the project of cognitive mapping.⁷⁶

Significantly, cognitive mapping provides one way for thinking about the historical uniqueness of 1990s U.S. culture identified by Wegner. In a comment on Don DeLillo's *Underworld* (1997) that could be extended to cover other American historical fictions of the 1990s, Wegner identifies cognitive mapping as that novel's central "hermeneutic investigation" (*Life* 44). Both *Underworld*, in Wegner's reading, and *Mason & Dixon*, in my own, attempt the ultimately impossible figurative task of envisioning the social whole, be it the Cold War in DeLillo or "an earlier moment of globalization and spatial mapping" in Pynchon (*Life* 36). Moreover, the collective project of cognitive mapping in the 1990s also characterizes several important theoretical developments during that decade, marked by what Wegner calls their "universalizing" function (34). Cognitive mapping is a universalizing or "totalizing" process in the sense that it aims to represent a totality—a totality which, I must emphasize, can never be adequately or exhaustively represented in the allegorical renderings produced by cognitive mapping itself.⁷⁷ To use

thus for collective praxis. Given the relation between cognitive mapping and ideology—which is also analogous to the relation between utopia and ideology, which I discuss toward the end of section 3.4—any project of cognitive mapping must also be regarded as an ideological commitment and a socially symbolic act. See also section 1.1, above.

⁷⁶ For Jameson's classic symptomatic reading of the Bonaventure Hotel, see *Postmodernism* 38–45.

⁷⁷ The active process of "totalizing" or "totalization" must be kept distinct from the noun "totality," the thing itself that cognitive mapping tries to represent. Totalization remains constitutively incomplete: there are always remainders of the totality that cannot be accounted for in a given totalizing project.

an example that I discuss often in this dissertation, Hardt and Negri's *Empire* stands as a totalizing project in that their concept of Empire is a figuration for the function and distribution of sovereignty under capitalist globalization and real subsumption of capital. What determines the critical or heuristic usefulness of Empire and other totalizing concepts is not simply their comprehensiveness or exhaustiveness relative to the totality that they think—a measure which they can only ever fall damnably short of—but rather their ability to coordinate and, as Jameson might put it, transcode into each other a wide array of discursive regions such as, for example, political economy, sovereignty, culture, and praxis. Totalization thus enables a cognitive mapping that allows for coordination and navigation among what would look from a purely empirical perspective, along with several other anti-theoretical positions, like utterly disparate phenomena.

Pynchon's historical novels similarly engage with processes of cognitive mapping and totalizing thinking. The metaphor or concept of mapping itself provides one way to link *Mason & Dixon* in particular to cognitive mapping. In addition to the obvious example of Mason and Dixon's literal mapping of the West line, the tangent line, and the twelve-mile arc, that novel also includes alternative or subjunctive processes of mapping, such as Mason and Dixon's "*spoken Map of the Island*" of Sumatra, Dixon's "nasal map of [Cape] Town," and most notably the practice of "Parageography," in which "alternative Maps of the World [are] superimpos'd upon the more familiar ones," and which Sascha Pöhlmann takes as the conceptual basis for his post-nationalist

Jorge Luis Borges's short fiction "On Exactitude in Science" (1946) provides an instructive limit case for totalizing thought in the conceit of "a Map of the Empire whose size was that of the Empire, and which coincided point for point with it"—such a totalization that coincided with totality would be indistinguishable from the latter and, through sheer unwieldiness, ultimately "Useless" (325). A map has to fit in your pocket, and cognitive mapping must likewise be conceptually or metaphorically portable lest it lose its critical utility. See also Jameson, *Postmodernism* 332–34.

reading of Pynchon (Pynchon, *Mason* 57, 78, 141; Pöhlmann, *Pynchon's*, esp. 141–47). In the context of *Mason & Dixon's* subjunctive historiography, such heterodox maps count as the spatial equivalent to Cherrycoke's historiographic life-lines, preserving a plurality of contingent, subjunctive experiences of time and space. *Gravity's Rainbow*, meanwhile, is similarly totalizing. Edward Mendelson's important essays of 1976, "Encyclopedic Narratives: From Dante to Pynchon" and "Gravity's Encyclopedia," highlight and thematize the novel's enormous scope: "Encyclopedic narratives all attempt to render the full range of knowledge and beliefs of a national culture, while identifying the ideological perspectives from which that culture shapes and interprets its knowledge" ("Encyclopedic" 1269). Although I agree with Pöhlmann's thesis that Pynchon's historical novels are transnational and even post-nationalist, Mendelson's characterization of encyclopedic narratives nonetheless aptly indicates the broad, ultimately world-systemic horizon that *Gravity's Rainbow* points toward.

If the chief limitation of Mendelson's model is its rootedness in a nationalist conception of culture—nationalism itself, as Benedict Anderson canonically demonstrates, having been facilitated by the rise of print culture, and the printed word being the proper medium for traditional encyclopedic projects⁷⁸—Luc Herman and Petrus van Ewijk's recent reappraisal of Mendelson's work comes closer to my own periodizing model. In their 2009 essay, Herman and van Ewijk present the encyclopedic character of *Gravity's Rainbow* in terms less akin to standard print encyclopedias than to the rhizomatic structure of, say, Wikipedia: "[*Gravity's Rainbow*] is so charged with motifs that it turns ... into ... a hypertext whose unending connections

⁷⁸ On nationalism and print culture, see esp. Anderson 37–46.

go a long way in suggesting the infinity of the Internet” (172).⁷⁹ Indeed, in its combination of a totalizing impulse with political commitments to the Counterforce and the preterite, *Gravity’s Rainbow* prefigures both the structuring logic and the radical political uses of the Internet, the explosive expansion of which during the 1990s helped pave the way for that decade’s counter-globalization movements by making possible the “reinvent[ion of] concepts and practices of communication, information, literacy, community, property, space, and even the subject itself” (Wegner, *Life* 33). In mapping out the Zone as well as the emerging Cold War order that would replace it, the utopian spaces of subjunctive hope and the nationalist reterritorialization that would annul and absorb them, Pynchon’s historical novels attempt to allegorize the social totality in order to imagine spaces for the work of the Counterforce, the Mobility, and other preterites. Without such efforts at cognitive mapping, as Jameson reminds his readers, new forms of praxis appropriate to our global world are impossible.

The recurrence of projects of cognitive mapping throughout Pynchon’s career alongside symptomatic registers of the dearth of freedom under late capitalism suggests that something other than linear chronology is at work. Notwithstanding the important

⁷⁹ Furthermore, the function of synecdoche and metonymy in both *Gravity’s Rainbow* and Mendelson’s description of encyclopedic narratives ultimately seems more amenable to a hypertextual model than an encyclopedic one. Acknowledging that the encyclopedic vocation to “render the full range of knowledge and beliefs of a national culture” is impossible, Mendelson argues that encyclopedic narratives employ synecdoche as a figure for such plenitude: “the full range of knowledge” is thus figured in “a full account of a technology or science”—in the case of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, “ballistics, chemistry, and some very advanced mathematics,” though alongside these could also appear quantum mechanics, statistics, behavioral psychology, the history of plastics, and other scientific-technological subjects (“Encyclopedic” 1269, 1270). Given the extent to which synecdoche and metonymy account for much of the vast web of connections underlying such topical concerns, it seems that much more fitting to compare *Gravity’s Rainbow* to a hypertextual encyclopedia, in which synecdoche and especially metonymy serve an indispensable organizing role. Indeed, much of the utility and pleasure to be derived from Wikipedia and the like—including, significantly, the Pynchon Wiki—results precisely from the logic of metonymy, manifested there in the forms of cross-references, disambiguations, embedded hyperlinks, and so on. For readings of science and/or technology in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, see, e.g., Collignon; Cowley; Friedman and Pütz; Lynd; Reilly and Tomaske.

insights that Wegner's periodization of high and late postmodernism affords, and without denying the significance and the historical specificity of the political and cultural constellations of those periods, I want to use Jameson's notions of metasynchronicity and permanent cultural revolution to read the ideology of postmodern form in Pynchon's novels.

Let me review some of the characteristics of this method of interpretation, which I discussed in more detail in section 2.2. First, in place of a focus on strict chronology bounded by dates and punctual events, the ideology of form understands history to consist of the whole sequence of modes of production. Moreover, and despite their standard presentation as a linear series, those modes of production really exist only in mixture: "every social formation ... has ... consisted in the overlay and structural coexistence of *several* modes of production at once, including vestiges ... of older modes of production ... as well as anticipatory tendencies" of possible future modes of production (Jameson, *Political* 95). These "metasynchronous" modes of production are both coeval with and antagonistic toward one another, existing in a state of "perpetual cultural revolution" whose "punctual event[s]" are really "the passage to the surface of ... permanent struggle[s]" (97). In order to reconstruct that perpetual cultural revolution, the critic therefore reads aesthetic forms themselves as "content[s] ... carrying ideological messages of their own" (99) or as ideological projections of the mode of production to which they correspond. Hence, in the chapter of *The Political Unconscious* on the ideology of form in Joseph Conrad (206–80), Jameson links the modernist and popular-romantic aspects of Conrad's *Lord Jim* to the emergence of

monopoly capitalism, while the novel's realist elements indicate the metasynchronous, residual existence of an earlier moment of industrial capitalism.

Whereas Jameson reads cultural revolution in *Lord Jim* as a confrontation between monopoly and industrial capitalism, I argue that the conflictive poles of the cultural revolution staged in Pynchon's novels correspond, first of all, to specific class positions: the elect and the preterite, Them and the Counterforce, the bourgeoisie and the Mobility. More specifically, Pynchon's corpus dramatizes two fundamentally different configurations of power: as I have argued, it is predominately the constituted power of capitalism and the state that holds sway in the California novels, while in the historical novels, it is the constituent power of the preterite. These power arrangements, in turn, alternately give rise to operations of symptomology and cognitive mapping: the California novels symptomatically indicate the concentration of power and wealth under late capitalism and the disenfranchisement and exploitation of working-class and lumpen subjects, while the historical novels attempt to perform a cognitive mapping of that same late capitalism in order to locate—or force—revolutionary utopian openings.

Beyond or beneath these power dynamics and critical strategies, however, the metasynchronous historical horizon of the ideology of form ultimately refers to the modes of production whose epochal struggle with each other my reading would allegorically reconstruct. After all, if the series of contrasts that I have established between Pynchon's two strains were a function of class politics alone, then ideologemic analysis or ideology critique, not the ideology of form, would be the most applicable of *The Political Unconscious's* three hermeneutic levels. More importantly, many of the

attributes most closely associated with Pynchon's novels—his sustained concern for history, not just in the historical novels but in the California novels as well; his more or less unquestionable political and moral sympathy for the preterite;⁸⁰ his preoccupation with social, political, and economic systems—suggest that visions of the social and historical whole, the mode of production itself, are at the center of his fictions' universe. Gravity's rainbow traces an arc around the mode of production.

It will come as no surprise that I identify late capitalism as the stage within the capitalist mode of production allegorically represented by the California novels. In cataloguing symptoms of life under late capitalism, those novels allegorize the apparent inescapability of capitalist control and the concomitant perceived futility of praxis. In the ideology of postmodern form, high postmodernism is the cultural expression of the seemingly utter dominance of global capitalism under real subsumption.

But late postmodernism reveals fissures in the edifice of late capitalist hegemony. The historical novels' insistence, contrary to indicative fact, that things can be otherwise attests to a utopianism that was supposed to have died in postmodernit—except it keeps resurfacing. It resurfaces, despite the failures of radical politics in the 1920s and '30s, in the radical experience of the 1960s and the New Left, an experience crystallized for Pynchon in the anti-systemic revolt of the Counterforce in *Gravity's Rainbow* but also sublimated as the political foundation of his whole career.⁸¹ It resurfaces,

⁸⁰ I qualify Pynchon's sympathy for the preterite only to acknowledge that although his commitment to the preterite is continual, it is not static. Rather, different preterite groups or subjects at different moments in Pynchon's career are occasionally excluded from or marginal to a given embodiment of the preterite. This is particularly the case when it comes to race and gender. In the early story "Mortality and Mercy in Vienna," for example, the white protagonist goads a rather stereotypically rendered Native American character into massacring an apartment full of people.

⁸¹ On Pynchon and the New Left, see, e.g., Witzling 2–25, 61–61, 146–48, et passim. There is abundant material, of course, on Pynchon and the '60s; for an astute recent analysis of "how the

notwithstanding the defeat of 1960s radicalism, in the late-postmodern renewal of historical thinking and collective praxis in the counter-globalization movements of the 1990s, when Pynchon's political vision is also at its most openly utopian. It resurfaces, perhaps, even today—in the wake of a retrenchment of U.S. nationalism under Bush and the fascist domestic policies and global militarism that came with it—this time in the forms of the Arab Spring starting in 2010 and the Occupy movement begun in 2011.⁸² (The status of Pynchon's utopian impulse following 9/11 is a topic of section 4.5.) Both the cyclical eruptions of radical politics and praxis into indicative history, and the persistence of historical thinking, preterite collectivities, and revolutionary projects in Pynchon, stand from a metasynchronous perspective as high-messianic anticipations of a new social whole and a future mode of production: a universal democracy of the preterite in *Gravity's Rainbow* ("Now everybody—"), an ecumenical "Fellowship in a Mobility that is to be" in *Mason & Dixon*, or the coming communism of the multitude in Hardt and Negri's account of the counter-globalization movements of the 1990s and since. In concert with the California novels, Pynchon's canon dramatizes a postmodern cultural revolution pitting a dominant late or global capitalism against an emergent or anticipatory communism of the preterite.

Each pair of novels succeeding Pynchon's first, late-modernist period stages that confrontation by means of the corresponding metaphor or concept that guides my

experience of the sixties functions as the most significant juncture in Pynchon's political universe," see Thomas's chapter on *Crying* (109–30; 128).

⁸² Overlap between these two topics—the Arab Spring and the Occupy movement—is to be expected; that said, Hardt and Negri's *Declaration* (2012) not only articulates them together but also does so in a framework that serves as a sort of postscript to the *Empire* trilogy. In addition, on the Arab Spring, see, e.g., P. Anderson; Davis; Ray; Sassen (which also deals with the Occupy movement); Žižek, "Why." On the Occupy movement, see, e.g., J. Adams; the essays collected in Dean, Martel, and Panagia (esp. Brown; Dean, "Claiming"; Protevi; and Žižek, "Actual"); Hardt and Negri, "Fight"; and Harvey, "Party."

reading (paranoia in *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow*, nostalgia in *Vineland* and *Mason & Dixon*). Moreover, the permutations of each of those concepts are produced by fundamental contradictions inherent in late capitalism between ideologies of individualism and freedom associated with the tradition of liberalism, on the one hand, and mechanisms of social control and discipline, on the other. Finally, the ways that characters relate to, adopt, or move between the concepts produced by those contradictions correspond to the political configurations of Pynchon's two strains that I have just been describing.

In *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow*, both Oedipa and Slothrop are driven by paranoia throughout their respective quests. However, not all paranoias are equal. When Oedipa vacillates concerning the reality or unreality of the Tristero conspiracy, she alternates between two antinomian poles of paranoia and connectedness. At one pole, nothing is connected: Oedipa is isolated from others and subject to pure contingency or facticity. At the other, everything is connected: whether the Tristero be a communications network or a sadistic plot, it is real, and everything in the novel points toward it. Either way, the Tristero is driven by insurmountable forces of social determination that subjugate all those who remain outside its gnostic secrecy.

Slothrop occupies parallel positions in *Gravity's Rainbow*: his sense of manipulation at the hands of Laszlo Jamf and the cabals leads to extreme paranoia, while at other times he confronts the abyss of anti-paranoia where, again, nothing is connected. However, Slothrop's paranoia takes other forms, too. If nothing is connected in anti-paranoia and everything is connected in paranoia, it is also possible that connection is nothing, that it is meaningless. This is the position of entropy and

nihilism, as well as Slothrop's ultimate disassembling. According to this view, we are all irredeemably doomed to preterition, subject to metaphysical fate or the cosmic heat death of the universe, both of which function as theological or physical-deterministic allegories of social control. Opposed to this is the proposition, introduced by Hite, that not everything is connected, but some things are, and that connections can be severed, modified, or formed anew. This is the place occupied by creative paranoia, which refuses determinisms of all stripes and insists on the collective dimension of preterite subjectivity.

Mapping these conceptual and ideological permutations and charting Oedipa's and Slothrop's movements among them helps illustrate my political interpretation of Pynchon's two canons. In Chapter 2, I used the semiotic rectangle to analyze the dialectical relation between form and content (see sec. 2.3, above). Here, the rectangle again proves useful (see fig. 4-2, below). Barred from entering the collectivities that she investigates, Oedipa is unable to project a world in which praxis is possible. Consequently, she remains confined to the antinomian middle plane of the rectangle, fettered against any real possibility of escape. In contrast, Slothrop's schizoid subjectivity allows him to alternately inhabit each paranoid position in turn and, more importantly, to imagine and perform the collective praxis of creative paranoia as a revolt against Their rationality and sovereignty.

Whereas *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow* pivot around paranoia, it is nostalgia that is central to the ideological and political implications of *Vineland* and *Mason & Dixon*. Characters in both novels move from antinomian political platforms to nostalgic philosophies of history. In *Vineland*, Prairie begins as an essentially

disengaged political subject whose relation to the social world is shaped by her status as an individual consumer of television commodities and by a removal or distance from history and politics. The film collective 24fps, meanwhile, exists during the 1960s as an engaged, militant activist collectivity, directed toward the transformation of politics and history. The positions of both *Prairie* and the surviving members of 24fps, however, converge in a nostalgic perspective from which the political and subjective liberations experienced or anticipated during the 1960s have been disciplined and corralled into an undead past that in its obsolescence haunts the present.

Mason & Dixon charts a congruent set of movements. At the beginning of their collaboration, Mason and Dixon are more or less detached from the politics and economics of empire and slavery, in a way similar to *Prairie*'s starting point. Likewise, they move from that disengaged perspective to a nostalgic view of history. Crucially, however, their movement is the inverse of *Prairie*'s; their nostalgia does not mourn the past but rather anticipates the future. Meanwhile, the youth of *Mason & Dixon* approach subjunctive nostalgia from the pole of political engagement. In the frame narrative, Ethelmer and Tenebrae express the excitement and hopefulness of the revolutionary era.⁸³ The novel concludes with William and Dr. Isaac's eulogy to Mason and their vision of a subjunctive American utopia.

Plotted onto a semiotic rectangle, the characters' movements both mirror each other and illustrate the divergent political functions of the California novels and the

⁸³ For example, following his performance on the clavier of "To Anacreon in Heaven"—a song that would eventually provide the melody for "The Star-Spangled Banner"—Ethelmer compares the composition to "a Sky-Rocket" that evokes "Emotions primitive as any experienced in the Act of— [...] of Eating, that's all I was going to say..." (262). In addition, he also more generally voices a critical, left-leaning politics, such as when he (like his uncle Cherrycoke) derides the hypocrisy and logical inconsistency of religious violence (76).

historical novels (fig. 4-3). Characters in both novels begin from positions corresponding to antinomian possibilities for praxis in the present but subsequently adopt a broader historical view. However, *Vineland's* nostalgia for the past indicates its assimilation into the regime of indicative history, the ideological projection of which renders 1960s-style politics impossible in the 1980s. Nostalgia for the future in *Mason & Dixon*, on the other hand, depends on the practice of Cherrycoke's subjunctive historiography and therefore represents a possibility of utopian escape from the indicative history that holds *Vineland's* U.S. captive, the history that hurts.

In addition to these thematic, political, and critical oppositions, the metasynchronous, allegorical struggle staged in Pynchon's canon also manifests itself through the very fabric of form itself. Thus the labyrinthine structure of *The Crying of Lot 49*, which follows Oedipa's paranoid quest for communal knowledge only to abandon both her and the reader on the nether side of gnosticism, stands as a formal projection of late capitalism's alienation and disenfranchisement of its subjects. Meanwhile, the fragmented narrative of *Gravity's Rainbow*, in which Slothrop's schizoid disintegration overpowers the coherent, linear account that Their rationality would produce, allegorizes revolutionary communism's explosion of means of control and its proliferation of collective affiliations. The protagonists of the California novels, doomed by the indicative history of late capitalism, spiral inward toward empty centers—the crying of lot 49, the reinstatement of a "home" and a family life that were always already mediated and commodified to begin with—that evoke nothing as much as the deconstructive thesis of centerlessness and deferred meaning that dominated theory in the 1980s and is still on occasion erroneously identified with postmodernism itself.

Slothrop, the Counterforce, Mason, and Dixon move in the opposite direction, approaching escape velocity along a line tangent to the orbital pull of global capitalism, a line that gestures allegorically toward new worlds, expansive futurities, and subjunctive, even as yet unimaginable spaces. These are formal traces of the vast metasynchronous clash between global capitalism and global communism.

In concluding this section, I want to highlight some important implications of my metasynchronous reading of Pynchon's canon for the fields of postmodernism and globalization studies. What (high) postmodernism's early hostile critics failed to see is that its less desirable or politically debilitating qualities are only one side of postmodern culture, the side that expresses the reigning ideology or "cultural logic of late capitalism," as Jameson's subtitle puts it. However, Jameson also points out that ideology simultaneously has a utopian valence. As I discussed earlier in connection with Jameson's reinterpretation of the form of content (see sec. 2.1), ideological constructs serve an indispensable figurative or heuristic function, notwithstanding their very status as ideology and their consequent buttressing of reigning class structures. Jameson's example concerning social class is again instructive: "No one has ever seen a social class or experienced one immediately," so one therefore needs an ideological narrative or ideologeme of a given class—even one's own—as a placeholder for the class itself, a utopian figuration or "express[ion of] the unity of a collectivity" (*Modernist* xiii; *Political* 291). Grasping both of these poles at once is paramount, Jameson claims, for a Marxist criticism that would avoid instrumental or mechanical theories of culture without betraying the Marxian commitment to ideology critique and the insistence on the economic as the final determining instance (see *Political* 281–99, esp. 296).

This bifocality is also crucial, I argue, in the context of postmodernism studies. The postmodern waning of historicity and spatialization of history have as their unexpected utopian offshoots the politicization of instantaneous, nonsynchronous communication—which exploits the “video time” of late capitalism identified by Pynchon in his sloth essay (“Nearer”)—and the resultant forms of democratic coordination and organization demonstrated by the social movements of the 1990s. The saturation of social space by the image and simulation, notwithstanding their biopolitical functions under global capitalism, also opens a possibility, however slim, of collective reappropriation by means of social media and the democratization of the Internet. The disintegration of stable subjectivities not only curtails political agency as it is traditionally understood but also makes possible new forms of collectivity and their revolutionary mobilization under the banner of Slothrop’s creative paranoia or Deleuze and Gattari’s schizophrenia, or, for that matter, Baraka’s self-fragmentation. To focus exclusively on the ideological functions of postmodernism is to reduce postmodern culture to a mere instrument of late capitalism and to ignore the radical or antisystemic uses to which it can be put—uses that must be recognized and exploited if there is to remain any utopian hope or revolutionary aspiration in postmodernity.⁸⁴

For similar reasons, contemporary pronouncements of the death of postmodernism are, for now, premature. Just as the ideological limitations of high

⁸⁴ Meanwhile, defenders of postmodernism against Jameson’s perceived attacks make the complementary error. As Wegner points out, what most such critics object to in Jameson’s account of postmodernism is his symptomatic reading of late capitalism (*Life* 170–71); thus, they reduce Jameson’s concept of the postmodern exclusively to its ideological functions and ignore the crucial utopian horizon of the postmodern that Jameson gestures toward in his call for postmodern cognitive mapping. If there is a critique of Jameson to be made in this regard, it is perhaps that postmodern novels like *Gravity’s Rainbow* had already begun the effort at cognitive mapping for which he calls and which, on his take, “does not exist,” at least as of 1988 (“Cognitive” 347).

postmodernism have their utopian counterparts in late postmodernism, the very characteristics frequently taken to indicate a passage beyond postmodernism are themselves products of postmodernity. For example, the contemporary experience of aftermath (McHale, “What”) and global capitalism’s naturalization of itself as “eternal” (Hardt and Negri, *Empire* 11 et passim) are merely historical and political analogues to the notorious waning of historicity that Jameson identifies in 1980s postmodern culture.⁸⁵ More importantly, globalization itself—from a Marxist perspective, the likeliest or most compelling candidate to replace postmodernism as a critical paradigm—is a thoroughly postmodern version of capitalism. Hardt and Negri persuasively make this point when they discuss the rhizomatic dispersal of control through biopower; the crucial role of information, discourse, and affect under real subsumption of capital in postmodernity; marketing’s exploitation of difference and identity politics; and other indices of the “postmodernization” of labor and capital alike.⁸⁶ Thus, if what they term “postmodernist” theory is to be understood as a “symptom of passage” from modern monopoly capitalism (or imperialism) to postmodern global capitalism (or Empire), then their call for critics to abandon postmodernism should likewise be read as a symptom of passage between high and late postmodernism—not a passage out of postmodernity itself.

⁸⁵ The same holds in the more localized context of Pynchon’s aesthetics. For example, although *Vineland* mounts a powerful symptomological critique of American television culture, it does so using tactics drawn from television itself—episodic structure, cross-cutting, flashbacks, and so forth. Or, to use Cowart’s terminology, it is by means of “play” and pastiche that the novel pursues its “purpose” (Cowart, “Attenuated” 4). Furthermore, in light of the political function of nostalgia in *Vineland* in comparison with *Mason & Dixon*, it makes more sense to locate a shift or transition out of (high) postmodernism in the later novel. Cf. Palmeri.

⁸⁶ See, e.g., Hardt and Negri, *Empire* 22–27, 280–303, 150–54.

4.5 Day, 2006/2009—*Against the Day*, *Inherent Vice*

However, between the late-postmodern 1990s and Pynchon's most recent novels lies another historical marker: 9/11. In addition to its wide-ranging historical significance, 9/11 has had several consequences that pose specific problems for the politics of Pynchon's two strains. The years since 9/11 have seen a proliferation and intensification of surveillance and control, as evinced in the U.S. context by the passage of the Patriot Act, the use of electronic wire-tapping to monitor citizens, and massive expansions of counter-terrorist agencies. In concert with the Bush doctrine of preemptive warfare, these actions seem to indicate a vehement resurgence of a nationalism that the counter-globalization movements of the 1990s had begun to erode. Consequently, those social movements themselves seem in the minds of many seem to have expired prematurely. As Jameson puts it in his contribution to the collection *Dissent from the Homeland: Essays after September 11*, a special issue of the *South Atlantic Quarterly* consisting of dissenting leftist reactions to 9/11 (eds. Stanley Hauerwas and Frank Lentricchia, 2002), "bin Laden's most substantial political achievement has been to cripple a nascent left opposition in the West" ("Dialectics" 303). From this perspective, the prospects for today's praxis and resistance appear in many ways no more promising, and perhaps even less so, than they had in *Vineland's* Reaganite 1980s.

However, the chief critical task facing radical theorists and activists in the twenty-first century is nonetheless fundamentally the same as it always has been under capitalism: finding—or creating—and exploiting openings for resistance and anti-systemic revolt. What has changed is the specific historical configuration of political and economic power under capitalist globalization. Hence, *Against the Day* and *Inherent*

Vice, Pynchon's post-9/11 novels, continue the longstanding projects of symptomology and cognitive mapping that run throughout his oeuvre, only this time operating in the aftermath of a perceived sea change in geopolitics following 9/11.

My readings of these novels focus on two related problems facing today's left: the intensification of surveillance and control, and the precarity of contemporary resistance. As with my other comparative readings, this analysis hinges upon a common set of concepts and metaphors that each novel alternately transcodes and deploys. However, whereas scholarly consensus acknowledges the prevalence and importance of the concepts that guide my earlier readings, in this section I introduce a new key term that is largely absent from or unthematized in Pynchon's earlier novels as well as in the critical literature: *day*. Furthermore, while entropy, paranoia, and nostalgia function primarily as theoretical/philosophical concepts and ideologemes, the term that I introduce here serves a more traditionally symbolic or metaphorical function that allows the post-9/11 novels to coordinate and transcode a wide variety of political and historiographic positions that are crucial to Pynchon's larger interventions.

My treatment of *Against the Day* and *Inherent Vice* exploits two alternate connotations of the term *day*. First, *day* functions as a temporal concept, introducing a whole field of temporal or historical propositions. The passage of days amounts to the passage of time and history itself, with promises, however dubious they may be, of futurity; as characters in *Inherent Vice* are wont to say, "Tomorrow is another day" (13). If *day* functions as a chronological unit or a periodizing term, it is also therefore possible to rebel against the dominant logic or power of one's own time; that is, to be against the *day*. But the term *against the day* also carries another meaning: in photography,

backlighting a subject—lighting it *contre-jour*, against the day or against daylight—produces, in the extreme, a silhouetted image that obscures detail and color and emphasizes line, shape, and contrast (see Hicks). *Day* thus also connotes light and illumination, along with related tropes of visibility, invisibility, sight, and a whole range of lighting-related phenomena. *Against the Day* and *Inherent Vice* mobilize this manifold of associations with day, as both time and light, in their investigations of and interventions in the present, their “negotiat[ions] with the day” (Pynchon, *Against* 87).⁸⁷

Leading up to its publication, *Against the Day* had been widely anticipated as Pynchon’s response to 9/11 and post-9/11 politics. The novel does not disappoint in that regard. Relatively early on, an unspecified city suffers catastrophic damage at the hands of an unnamed, literally inhuman “Figure.” The harm to the city is enormous: “charred trees[....] steelwork fallen or leaning perilously, streets [...] jammed with the entangled carriages, wagons, and streetcars which the population had at first tried to flee in, then abandoned, and which even now lay unclaimed, overturned, damaged by collision and fire” (150). This description, however, comes after the event itself: the novel omits the punctual moment. Recall that similarly, the hegemonic official image of 9/11 is the smoldering towers after, not at, the moments when the planes crash into them.⁸⁸ What *Against the Day* provides instead is the event’s aftermath, a description of

⁸⁷ Henceforth, I distinguish between the word *day* and the concept of day typographically, with italics honoring the conventional use/mention distinction and roman denoting one or more conceptual meanings or thematic associations.

⁸⁸ Indeed, as Jameson points out, it is dubious whether 9/11 even counts as a punctual moment at all (“Dialectics” 301). Rather, cultural representations of 9/11 often tend to partake of the “experience of aftermath” that McHale argues characterizes both post-9/11 U.S. culture generally and Pynchon’s *Against the Day* specifically (“What”). Art Spiegelman’s graphic novel *In the Shadow of No Towers* (2004), however, is an interesting exception: in addition to its more metaphorical representations of the planes crashing into the World Trade Center towers, it includes one comparatively mimetic depiction of a moment of impact (10).

a city physically broken and psychically traumatized: the municipal leadership has been killed, the economy has ground to a halt, troops and volunteers are being mobilized, and “that Panic fear” rules the streets (150–52).

This episode stands as an anachronistic representation of 9/11 itself. *Against the Day* does not state explicitly that the Figure’s attack occurs in New York, but there are certainly enough clues to infer that it does. A neighborhood specified to be in New York is described later in the novel as littered with “decaying animals, piles of refuse, and the smoldering fires of homeless denizens of the quarter” (401), evoking the postapocalyptic feel associated with the Figure’s attack (even if it also conjures turn-of-the-century slums more generally). Moreover, the “boroughs” of the city had been “recent[ly] incorporat[ed]” just before the attack (153), which happens circa 1899, whereas the boroughs of historical New York were incorporated in 1898. Perhaps most compellingly, citizens with suspect explanations of the event are kept “safely away in the upstate security of Matteawan” (145), an asylum for the criminally insane (now Fishkill Correctional Facility) in the city of Beacon, north of New York (see “Fishkill”). Such marginalization of heterodox interpretations, of course, also happened in the aftermath of 9/11, when anyone who questioned the ethical status of the United States or the terrorist “evildoers” was branded unpatriotic, a terrorist sympathizer, or a lunatic conspiracy theorist.

In addition to that relatively empirical textual evidence, *Against the Day* also provides another, more conceptual justification for this interpretation. Among the novel’s recurrent themes is the optical phenomenon of double refraction. Iceland spar (the mineral calcite) possesses the capacity to doubly refract light, producing a second,

fainter image of whatever is viewed through it. In the novel's *fin-de-siècle* universe, however, amid feverish excitement surrounding electricity and light—the novel features appearances by Nikola Tesla, Sir Oliver Lodge, William Crookes, and other scientists and inventors, as well as allusions to Thomas Edison—double refraction is more than just an optical phenomenon. If engineered properly, it can actually split one person into two. The character Luca Zombini, a traveling magician, explains: “with the right sort of light, the right lenses, you can separate [doubly refracted images] in stages, a little further each time, step by step till [...] there are now two complete individuals walking around, [...] identical in every way” (355). Hence the novel's equally intense obsessions with doubles, bilocation, parallel universes, twin worlds, and other dyads. My point in mentioning double refraction here is to suggest that *Against the Day* actively encourages the kind of doubly refracted reading that I propose here. Just as Ratty McHugh's map of the Belgian Congo turns out, toward the novel's end, to be “really [a map of] the Balkan Peninsula,” “in code” (935), the novel is likewise, I contend, a sort of coded map, a cognitive mapping, connecting the Figure's attack of 1899 with the terrorist attacks of 2001.

Thus the fictional New York's reaction to the attack is appropriately resonant with the official, media-sanctioned reaction in the U.S. immediately following 9/11. Witness the city's transformation into a “material expression of a particular loss of innocence—not sexual or political innocence but somehow a shared dream of what a city might at its best prove to be” (153). I surely do not need to quote mass-media rhetoric regarding the “first attack on American soil” or the Bush administration's concomitant mobilization of the trope of a “loss of innocence”—not to mention the popular romanticization of New

York in the American psyche recently evident, for example, in ubiquitous “I ♥ NY” t-shirts and “NYFD” baseball hats—to demonstrate the parallels here. *Against the Day*, however, forces a wedge of critique into its allegorical, anachronistic echo of 9/11, first in terms of the attack’s supposed unexpectedness: “they’d been warned, repeatedly, about just such a possibility. The city more and more vertical, the population growing in density, all hostages to just such an incursion[...]. Who outside the city would have imagined them as victims taken by surprise—who, for that matter, inside it? though many in the aftermath did profit briefly by assuming just that affecting pose” (151). Not only does this passage echo revelations that there really had been warnings and CIA intelligence regarding a potential attack on the World Trade Center; it also corroborates Slavoj Žižek’s pertinent reminder that “the space for [9/11] was already prepared in ideological fantasizing” (the reference is to Hollywood disaster movies of the 1990s) as well as Jameson’s skepticism concerning the “break” and loss of innocence allegedly represented by 9/11 (Žižek, “Welcome” 386; Jameson, “Dialectics” 299). *Against the Day*’s double refraction, as all this goes to show, is already slightly askew and given a critical bent. Doubly refracted anachronism therefore counts as one form of opposing the dominant ideology of the present: of being against the day.⁸⁹

⁸⁹ An excellent visual representation of both double refraction and *Against the Day*’s critical use of the concept is the cover to the novel’s first edition. Centered on the cover are the title and Pynchon’s name, in a boldface, sans-serif font. Layered behind or beneath these are two fainter reproductions; however, the reproductions are not exact copies. Each layer uses a slightly larger font size than the one above it, and each is in a different typeface—the second layer uses a serif typeface, while the third uses a sans-serif typeface distinct from the first layer’s. Notwithstanding Luca Zombini’s description of doubly refracted entities as “identical,” then, double refraction in *Against the Day*, like subjunctive historiography in *Mason & Dixon*, provides a means for not only recording but critiquing history (not only marking the day but pushing against it).

Copyright laws render it impractical for me to reproduce the novel’s cover in this dissertation, but images can be viewed on Penguin’s Web site (us.penguin.com; search “against the day” and click the link for the hardcover edition) as well as on the Pynchon Wiki.

However, the novel's larger overall intervention in the post-9/11 context is not to be found in connection with the Figure's attack: this strand of the narrative remains largely distinct from the rest of the novel. With the exception of the later, oblique evocation of the scene of the attack cited above, this incident is never again directly addressed. As in Pynchon's work generally, this apparently abortive narrative strand is typical of the novel as a whole: a great many characters make an appearance, play a vital role in furthering the plot of whatever episode they happen to be involved in, disappear for a few hundred pages, and then crop up again unexpectedly, in a new context and with a different function.⁹⁰ One would therefore reasonably anticipate that this post-9/11 theme could resurface elsewhere in the text. What might be surprising, however, is the way in which this strand continues: *Against the Day* transposes the contradictions and antinomies of our post-9/11 moment back into the historical context of World War I. What unites these admittedly disparate pivotal moments in world history, which nonetheless remain incommensurable except perhaps in the global scope of their consequences, is the novel's portrayal of the plight of resistance movements.

More specifically, the many anarchists of *Against the Day*—the novel's exemplary leftists—stand to have their resistance neutralized by the outbreak of World War I.⁹¹

Toward the close of the novel, Ratty McHugh, a former British espionage agent who is

⁹⁰ Such seemingly discontinuous character development poses one of the great difficulties of reading Pynchon and is surely one factor, among several, justifying the publication of so many reader's guides to his novels. This difficulty is further exacerbated with *Against the Day* by the novel's sheer bulk: all of Pynchon's historical novels are long, but this one comes in at just under 1,100 pages. Therefore, I would like now to acknowledge the debt that I owe to Aaron Cerny and Andrew Gordon, colleagues of mine at the University of Florida. The three of us read *Against the Day* together over the course of a semester; without the mutual support and invigorating discussions that emerged from our collaborative reading, it is quite possible that I would never have finished the novel, let alone taken on the task of periodizing Pynchon's whole oeuvre.

⁹¹ For an analysis of anarchism in *Against the Day* that also contextualizes it in light of the antisystemic, "antiauthoritarian" politics that runs throughout Pynchon, see Benton.

by now a member of an anarchist collective, comments presciently on anarchism's precarity: "A general European war, with every striking worker a traitor, flags threatened, the sacred soils of homelands defiled, would be just the ticket to wipe Anarchism off the map." All of anarchism's gains "would simply turn to dust" under a nationalism rejuvenated by wartime patriotism: "Today even the dimmest of capitalists can see that the centralized nation-state, so promising an idea a generation ago, has lost all credibility[...]. If a nation wants to preserve itself, what other steps can it take, but mobilize and go to war? Central governments were never designed for peace[...]. The *national idea* depends on war" (938). Ratty's anachronistic invocation of the obsolescence of the nation-state, itself the topic of considerable debate in our own moment, serves a critical function much like that of the subjunctive anachronisms of *Mason & Dixon*. Indeed, it is comprehensible only as a critical historical projection into the past of certain perceptions of geopolitics just preceding 9/11. One thinks immediately, of course, of Hardt and Negri's postnationalist theory of Empire; substitute "multitude" or "counter-globalization movements" for "anarchists," and "global war on terror" for "general European war," and the passage reads much like the widespread anxiety on the left regarding the post-9/11 status of global anti-systemic movements. Indeed, "the national idea" seemed once again to have been "reborn" with a vengeance during the Bush administration, with dissent frequently equated to terrorism, just as World War I would cast "every striking worker [as] a traitor." Whereas Ratty fears this as a possible outcome, as the subjunctive *would* indicates—a subjunctive whose distance from the subjunctivity of *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Mason & Dixon* I elaborate on

later in this section—9/11 has already really happened for the reader, and many of its consequences seem all too similar to what Ratty dreads.⁹²

Nevertheless, like *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Mason & Dixon*, *Against the Day* refuses to abandon hope in utopian possibilities altogether, even if utopia itself takes on a different value here than in the other historical novels. Rather, this novel is concerned to explore precisely the dilemma facing resistance movements after 9/11 which Ratty identifies in the context of World War I. *Against the Day* narrates the rise and, crucially, foreclosure of two divergent utopian impulses that emerge from today's post-9/11, late-capitalist historical moment.

Ratty, his fellow anarchists, and the labor movement of which many of them are a part embody the first of these utopian configurations. They are also repeatedly associated with the novel's day symbolism. Telluride, a mining town in southwest Colorado where anarchists perform both waged and political work, is first depicted in against-the-day lighting: its "famous electric street-lighting" produces "an unholy radiance," much like the overpowering, indistinct glare that can result from backlighting in photography, and the Uncompahgre Plateau, visible from Telluride, is "fearsomely backlit" by an impending sunrise (281). Imagery of light and illumination, of course, are traditionally associated in Western metaphysics with knowledge and truth. However, against-the-day lighting produces a specific kind of knowledge for the anarchists. In sacrificing fine detail and color for stark contrast and sharp definition of shapes and lines, against-the-day lighting emphasizes difference and, in the context of radical

⁹² However, given my earlier arguments about the distinction between narrative time and the reader's historical time in *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Mason & Dixon*, the fact that 9/11 has happened for us, indicatively, is not in itself conclusive. Nonetheless, as my reading of *Against the Day* goes on to demonstrate, anarchism becomes neutralized as a radical threat within the confines of the novel itself.

praxis, antagonism. Telluride is a fitting locale for revelations of such oppositional knowledge. While working in the Uncompaghre, Webb Traverse, a miner and labor activist—and also grandfather to Jesse Traverse and great-great-grandfather to *Vineland's* Frenesi Gates—is murdered by mine owners' hired guns (*Against* 195–98). Webb's ghost later visits his son Frank, who has carried on his father's work as a radical labor activist; Telluride provides the setting for a renewal of Frank's revolutionary commitment when, while speaking with Webb's ghost, he has an auditory hallucination of detonating dynamite, "the bone-deep voice of retribution long in coming" (316). Thus against-the-day lighting both reveals and reinforces Frank and the anarchists' oppositionality, serving an indispensable function to the extent that it illuminates and clarifies the vast, muddled scene of the capitalist world-system and contemporary history; as Thelonious Monk puts it in the slogan taken by Pynchon as the epigraph to *Against the Day*, "It's always night, or we wouldn't need light." Seeing against the day allows the novel's anarchists to grasp labor relations under capitalism as a whole in order to identify contours of class struggle as well as to affirm their being-against-capitalism.⁹³

Early on, Webb himself personifies this simultaneously political and epistemological sense of seeing against the day. In addition to labor organizing, Webb engages in more direct forms of praxis through political violence. When he first appears, he recognizes a scent resembling that of nitroglycerine, and he compares his

⁹³ It is also possible, therefore, to think of against-the-day consciousness in more explicitly Marxian terms. To the extent that seeing against the day combines epistemology (grasping the social totality in terms of class antagonism) with political commitment (partisanship and revolt against the capitalist system and the bourgeoisie), it approximates the classic vocation of Marxism as the unity of theory and praxis.

occupation to a “[s]ort of mine engineer. Not as well paid as that, but same idea” (76). What accounts for this familiarity is his practice of the “Propaganda of the Deed,” the explosive demolition of railroads and other components of mining infrastructure (81; see 81–96). Moreover, after his death, his children speculate that he had also been “the notorious dynamiter of the San Juans [a Colorado mountain range] known as the Kieselguhr Kid” (171).⁹⁴ “[L]ong-sought” by mine owners and law enforcement, the Kieselguhr Kid is surrounded by an outlaw mythology rivaling that of Butch Cassidy—indeed, Cassidy’s gang, according to some accounts, “coo[s] like a barn full of pigeons whenever the Kid’s in the county” (171, 172). The mythology of the Kieselguhr Kid not only shrouds him in mystique, it also resonates with the Kenosha Kid, an alias of Tyrone Slothrop in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, and the resonances come from more than just the name: “eyewitnesses could never swear beyond a doubt who [...] had done [what...]—it was as if physical appearance *actually shifted*, causing not only aliases to be inconsistently assigned but identity itself to change” (*Against* 172). Like Slothrop, the Kieselguhr Kid stands as a revolutionary figure in *Against the Day* partly because of his ability to evade the determinations and limitations imposed by rigidly defined individual identity. Because his identity remains unknown to capitalists and the state, “[n]o shortage of legendary deeds” can be attributed to the Kieselguhr Kid, who therefore becomes—again, like Slothrop for the Counterforce—a mythical figurehead for a whole revolutionary movement (172).

Not surprisingly, then, the Kieselguhr Kid is also, like the anarchists more generally, associated with against-the-day imagery. He first appears in *contre-jour*

⁹⁴ As Pynchon’s narrator explains, kieselguhr is “a kind of fine clay, used to soak up nitroglycerine and stabilize it into dynamite” (*Against* 171).

lighting resembling that of the Uncompahgre Plateau as seen from Telluride, a black, backlit “figure” visible only in “silhouette” (171). His against-the-day appearance, of course, is the visual analogue to his revolutionary vocation. In addition, however, it is also connected with the trope of westward travel: an image of an outlaw riding off into the sunset is always necessarily backlit. According to popular accounts, the Kieselguhr Kid first emigrates with his family from Germany to San Antonio and then continues along that westerly trajectory to the San Juan Mountains (171–72). Westward travel remains an important trope associated with *Against the Day*’s chief anarchist characters. It also provides an important point of comparison between that novel and *Mason & Dixon*: the west is heavily loaded with symbolic political values in both novels, but with significantly different consequences in each case. Later in this section, I explore those differences as a way to determine the relation between *Against the Day* and the other historical novels. For now, let me simply point out that traveling west results in an interesting paradox with respect to the metaphorical valences of day: westering produces against-the-day lighting, but the movement itself, in temporal terms, follows the sun and therefore travels with, not against, the day.

Other symbolic associations of revolutionary impulses with the temporal sense of day, however, are less complicit with the passage of historical time than westering might be. The Cohen of the True Worshippers of the Ineffable Tetractys (or T.W.I.T.), a neo-Pythagorean sect of mystics based in London, explains the mechanism by which other worlds or alternate realities intrude upon each other: “An unscheduled Explosion, introduced into the accustomed flow of the day, may easily open, now and then, passages to elsewhere...” (221). The resemblance of this mystical or spiritual

happening to Alain Badiou's notion of the event, though, suggests in addition that explosions like the one described by the Cohen also represent revolutionary openings or ruptures of the present. In Badiou's definition, an event, like an explosion into the "flow of the day," disrupts "situation[s], opinions, instituted knowledges," precisely because it is "something that happens in situations as something that they and the usual way of behaving in them cannot account for." The event consequently "compels us to decide a *new* way of being" (67, 41). Or, in Wegner's words, "the Event is the very possibility of a radical new beginning, the inauguration of that which was unexpected, unknown, and uncounted" (*Life* 23). The revolutionary impulse embodied by anarchists in *Against the Day*, translated here into the Cohen's language of mysticism, explodes onto the present, demolishing the status quo and redirecting the flow of the day in radical new directions and toward utopian ends that, from the standpoint of the present, can only have come from elsewhere.

Such an "elsewhere," in fact, is the setting for a second moment of against-the-day perspectival clarity for Frank, which not only combines the Cohen's mysticism with the anarchists' revolutionary commitments but also unites the luminous/epistemological and temporal/historical senses of day. After sustaining an injury while fighting alongside Francisco I. Madero's revolutionaries in the Mexican Revolution, Frank experiences a peyote-driven hallucination that affords him a vision of utopian collectivity and alternative history. He finds himself—from a third-person perspective, as if viewing his doubly refracted self—in "a city not yet come fully into being, but right now [...] being collectively dreamed by the community in their flight" (925–26). That city is an imagined Aztlán left intact and autonomous, an Aztlán from "before the Broken Days" of Spanish

colonization (924). The collective utopian dream of a thriving, independent Mesoamerican culture not only projects an alternative history of the so-called new world but, in so doing, also mounts a political critique of the indicative history of colonialism and imperialism, just like the subjunctive historiography of *Mason & Dixon*. In casting that violent and barbaric history as “the Broken Days,” Frank’s vision of a utopian Aztlán denounces as atrocity the domination of a whole culture and the upending of its history. Frank’s hallucination, like his experiences in Telluride, illuminates exploiter and exploited in sharp relief and reaffirms the necessity of revolting against the present.

The most explicit statement of the anarchists’ rejection of the historical day of the present comes from the character Yashmeen Halfcourt, who is central to the rest of my analysis of the novel’s anarchists. Her reflections following a brief time at an important utopian enclave, which I discuss below, articulate in poetic terms anarchism’s utopian vocation in the novel and the indispensable function of utopian thinking in the present: “This is our own age of exploration [...] into that unmapped country waiting beyond the frontiers and seas of Time. We make our journeys out there in the low light of the future, and return to the bourgeois day and its mass delusion of safety, to report on what we’ve seen. What are any of these ‘utopian dreams’ of ours but defective forms of time-travel?” (942). *Against the Day*’s anarchist utopianism simultaneously grasps the present in *contre-jour* lighting and seeks a means of escape or flight from the history of that present. Theory and praxis alike require a commitment against the day.

Significantly, the anarchists’ against-the-day consciousness finds a parallel in Lew Basnight’s dawning awareness of class struggle. Lew begins the novel as an agent for White City Investigations, but notwithstanding his position as an enforcer of capitalist

control, he also espouses sympathy for the working class and at times collaborates with anarchists.⁹⁵ His work as an investigator slowly exposes him to the larger class relations that ultimately define the system he serves. Although the finer details of the individual cases he investigates escape his recall, he comes to grasp class conflict between owners and workers as an antagonistic whole organized around networks of distribution and exploitation, just as *contre-jour* lighting effaces detail in exchange for a contrasted view of subject and background: “it wasn’t just unconnected skirmishing[...]—it was a war between two full-scale armies, each with its chain of command and long-term strategic aims—civil war again, with the difference now being the railroads, which ran out over all the old boundaries, redefining the nation into exactly the shape and size of the rail network[...]” (177). An empirical view of isolated incidents in the clash between labor and capital would fail to identify the underlying contradictions and antagonisms that are only momentarily glimpsed in “a dynamite blast here and there, a few shots from ambush” (177).⁹⁶ Just as against-the-day photography emphasizes line and contrast over color and detail, and cognitive mapping substitutes figurative totalization for totality itself, Lew’s against-the-day view of class conflict, in shifting attention away from empirical details, provides him with a means for imagining

⁹⁵ As a class traitor, Lew therefore has something in common with characters in Pynchon’s other historical novels (as, for that matter, does Ratty McHugh). As I discussed above, characters like Roger Mexico in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, the Rev^d Cherrycoke in *Mason & Dixon*, and that novel’s title characters are all members of the bourgeoisie who nonetheless align themselves with the Counterforce or the subjunctive Mobility. Significantly, however, *Against the Day* ends with Lew wealthy and successful as an independent private investigator in L.A., “one more old goat of the region with a deep suntan,” not any sort of leftist partisan (1041).

⁹⁶ Lew’s against-the-day perspective also therefore has something in common with Jameson’s methodology of the ideology of form, which, as I have already discussed, grasps discrete incidents as manifestations of a deeper underlying “cultural revolution.”

and projecting a model of the fundamental antagonism at the heart of capitalist labor relations.

Lew is also one of several nodes connecting the anarchists' narrative and that of the Chums of Chance, an aeronautical surveillance outfit with which Lew works at the novel's outset and which embodies a utopian impulse the inverse of that of revolutionary anarchism. Like the anarchists, the Chums of Chance conceptualize history and politics in terms of the two senses of day that I have been discussing. For the Chums of Chance, however, light and time are the purview not of revolutionary theory and praxis but of science, technology, and industry. The inextricable connection between the Chums' storyline and the role of scientific discovery and technological innovation suggests a logic of technological determinism. Indeed, one of the Chums, Lindsay Noseworth, approximates just such a view when he postulates that light itself, not metaphorically but as a physical phenomenon, "might be a *secret determinant of history*" responsible for political and historical consequences ranging from the outcomes of military battles to political decisions made behind closed doors (431). In itself, the proposition that light influences historical events is not incompatible with the anarchists' temporal and epistemological conceptualizations of day. However, the Chums exploit the senses of day for vastly different ends than do the anarchists.

The Chums' relation to the theoretical and practical valences of day imagery is not oppositional; rather, it propagates capitalist dynamics of instrumentalization, exploitation, and profiteering. In the novel's opening chapters, the Chums conduct surveillance at the 1893 World's Fair in Chicago from aboard their skyship, the *Inconvenience*. As Nate Privett of White City Investigations explains, the Chums' "view

from overhead” gives them a privileged vantage from which to perform surveillance in the service of “[a]nti-terrorist security”—and crucially, Nate identifies “anarchistic murderers” as the terrorists in question, mirroring the post-9/11 right-wing equation of resistance with terrorism (25). Working in this capacity, the Chums use their perspectival advantage, which of course depends on not only altitude but also light and visibility, as loyal and unquestioning agents of the Chums of Chance organization’s High Command, or Hierarchy, and the capitalist interests to which the latter is connected.

However, the Chums’ relation to light also influences their gradual distancing from High Command. A cluster of episodes late in the novel centers on the Tunguska Event of 1908. Scientific consensus now attributes the Tunguska Event to a falling meteoroid that exploded over Siberia, but for characters in *Against the Day*, the event is bound up in the larger context of scientific experimentation and the investigation of strange lighting phenomena, and concomitantly in the novel’s metaphorical discourses on day. The Chums of Chance first perceive the event as a “heavenwide blast of light” followed by “sound [...] ripping apart the firmament” (*Against* 779, 792). The cosmic or apocalyptic overtones of their experience of the event also signal irrevocable changes in their relation to the world at large: “the great burst of light had [...] torn the veil separating their own space from that of the everyday world” (793). Henceforth, the airborne Chums can no longer entertain fantasies of separation from telluric reality or of purity from “contamination by the secular” (113). On the contrary, the Tunguska Event propels the Chums ever further into the thoroughly material history of late capitalism.

Moreover, the Tunguska Event not only forces modifications in the Chums’ relation to historical and political reality, it also effects changes in that reality itself. Leaving

Siberia aboard the *Inconvenience*, the Chums “[find] the Earth they [had] thought they knew changed now in unpredictable ways” (795). The event comes to take on the character and proportions of historical change in its tendential universality and massive, irreversible momentum; it is compared to “countless tiny engagements of an unacknowledged war [...] expressed as a single explosion,” “general war [...] collapsed into a single event” that “really originat[es] in the future” (796, 797). Crucially, the violence of the event and the martial comparisons it suggests do not exhaust its significance; in addition, the Tunguska Event also marks a moment of transition in the Chums’ relation to High Command—a transition that, I argue later, allegorizes the twentieth century’s historical passage into global capitalism. Unlike other lighting phenomena they investigate or other missions they pursue, the Chums’ exposure to the Tunguska Event has nothing to do with High Command: “At least we cannot say this time that we were *sent here*” (793). The Chums have by now severed ties with High Command; instead, they work independently, invest in multinational industry and finance, and are considering incorporating (795). The Tunguska Event punctuates this unmooring from Hierarchy by both transforming and illuminating a new, decidedly twentieth-century political and economic landscape.

At the novel’s end, the Chums pursue their own relatively autonomous goals by exploiting their sophisticated grasp of the physics of light: “As a results of advances in relativity theory, light is incorporated [into the *Inconvenience*] as a source of motive power [...] and as a carrying medium [...] occupying [...] a relation to the skyship much like that of the ocean to a surfer on a surfboard” (1084). Even after their break with

High Command, the Chums continue to depend on visible light as their condition of possibility. Day is thus just as crucial to the Chums' narrative as it is to the anarchists'.

For both the Chums of Chance and the anarchists, political possibilities and openings for praxis correspond to permutations of the temporal and luminous senses of day, as well as that metaphor's epistemological and practical corollaries. Moreover, the polyvalence of the novel's day imagery also determines the ways in which characters in each strand conceive of and act on desire. This, in turn, has direct political implications: the degree of political freedom and the extent of revolutionary openings associated with each strand—or the curtailment of freedom and squelching of resistance—hinge directly on the configurations of desire that emerge from specific crystallizations of day.

Anarchism serves as the novel's emblematic resistance movement and as the stand-in for leftist praxis generally, as is evident not only in passages I analyzed above but also in numerous labor strikes, most notably the strike leading up to the 1914 massacre at Ludlow, Colorado (see 1000–17). Moreover, the continuity of this utopian resistance, the pleasure of collective praxis, is punctuated by a series of more libidinal manifestations of utopian collectivity. Reef Traverse (Webb's son and Frank's brother), Yashmeen Halfcourt, and Cyprian Latewood, an erstwhile self-debasing "sod" who takes up with various resistance movements in the buildup to World War I, stumble late in the novel upon "the Anarchist spa of Yz-les-Bains, hidden near the foothills of the Pyrenees." The spa is populated by "dozens of small groups" living "like bathers at the seaside" (931). It even features an "[a]narchists' golf course [...] in which there [is] no fixed sequence—in fact, no fixed *number*—of holes," which players are free to play out, or for that matter not play out, in any manner they wish, even to "come there at night

and dig new [holes]" (934). To be sure, the inhabitants of the spa are not given solely to pleasure and luxury—they assemble and live according to a revolutionary impulse: “these solemn young folks carried with them an austerity, a penultimacy before some unstated future, a Single Idea, whose power everything else ran off of” (931). As do Frank and Webb at Telluride, the spa’s residents stand in stark opposition to the present; their commitment against the day, like the mystical explosions described by the Cohen of T.W.I.T., demolishes the day and welcomes a utopian future.

The libidinal character of anarchism’s against-the-day spirit reaches its most intense fever pitch and most literally erotic manifestation in the sustained *ménage à trois* among Yashmeen, Reef, and Cyprian. Of these three, Yashmeen acts as a sort of spokesperson for the affair, and she is by far the most consistently polymorphous. For Yashmeen, moreover, polymorphousness and promiscuity are not just personal preferences but are endowed with political value and a utopian charge, as her comments to Cyprian regarding love and sex bear out: “We can do whatever we can imagine. Are we not the world to come? Rules of proper conduct are for the dead and dying, not for us” (879). For Yashmeen, a freed libidinal impulse is constitutive of possibilities of political and social freedom generally. The freedoms Yashmeen anticipates in that “world to come” require that sexuality and desire be given free reign.

The first glimpse of the sexual freedom championed by Yashmeen takes place at the annual Carnesalve ball. Carnesalve functions as a “secret counter-Carnevale” that extends “an enthusiastic welcome to the flesh in all its promise” (hence its name, which translates from Latin as “hello to the flesh”) (880). The narrator’s description of the ball highlights its similarities to the practices associated with historical carnival, the

canonical account of which remains Mikhail Bakhtin's (see *Rabelais*). "With no interference from authority, church or civic," the narrator explains, Carnesalve is governed by "a masked imperative" under which "all hold on verbatim identities loosen[s] until lost altogether in the delirium" (Pynchon, *Against* 880). Unlike Bakhtin's carnivalesque, however, which functions as a social safety valve by granting temporary expression to class antagonisms, Carnesalve aspires to lasting revolutionary change and seeks to free its anarchist participants from the hold of the present.⁹⁷ For Yashmeen, this necessarily entails an anarchistic effacement of social norms governing sexuality and the emancipation of sexual desire. Cyprian attends the ball in drag, wearing a wig made from Yashmeen's hair. Reef, already sexually attracted to Yashmeen, becomes aroused at seeing Cyprian, and the three of them retire to an unused room. At this first collective coitus, Cyprian functions largely as a go-between: initially, by performing oral sex on Reef and then Yashmeen; next, by continuing to perform oral sex on Yashmeen while Reef engages him anally (881–83).

The sexual permeability here, however, appears incomplete, insofar as Cyprian's position mediates between heterosexual and homosexual desire, thereby allowing Reef to maintain a dominant, heterosexist position. This begins to change when Yashmeen realizes that she is pregnant and that the child would be not only hers and Reef's but

⁹⁷ If carnival counts as a (temporary) negation of the dominant social order, then perhaps Carnesalve, the "counter-Carnevale," stands as a negation of the negation. Moreover, the relation between historical carnival and Carnesalve also corresponds, to an extent, with Hardt and Negri's distinction between emancipation and liberation, or to that between freedoms of liberalism and the "critical freedom" that Paul Patton identifies in Deleuze (Hardt and Negri, *Commonwealth* 331–32; Patton 85). Whereas the former free subjects *in* their identity—including the subject positions that comprise identity, along with the forms of manipulation and exploitation related to race, class, gender, ethnicity, and so on—the latter free subjects *from* their identity in order to pursue their free becoming. Like historical carnival, then, emancipation and liberal freedoms leave intact the cultural, social, political, and economic mechanisms through which subjectivity is exploited, manipulated, and managed, whereas Carnesalve, liberation, and critical freedom seek to erode those mechanisms themselves and the class structures that they support.

also, “in some auxiliary sense,” Cyprian’s (891). In addition to the expected consequence of binding the trio closer together, Yashmeen’s pregnancy also breaks down Reef’s heteronormativity, the sole remaining impediment to the full freedom of sexual imagination and practice that she envisions. “The rule,” Yashmeen reminds Cyprian and Reef, “[...]is that there are no rules” (943). This standard of anarchist sexuality prompts Reef to welcome the possibility of “Cyprian fuck[ing] him for a change” (943). It is important to recall that this sexuality is a utopian impulse as well, constitutive of a utopian “world to come.” Radical, polymorphous sexuality and the emancipation of sexual desire provide new structures for collective subjectivity among the anarchists. Yashmeen, Cyprian, and Reef’s collective desire stands as the most overtly utopian version of desire in *Against the Day*.

However, that collective desire soon undergoes a process of neutralization and recuperation. Almost immediately after Reef acknowledges his tentative desire for Cyprian, the group disbands when Cyprian decides to join a convent in the Balkan Range (958–62). Heartbroken, Yashmeen resorts to compensatory fantasies: “I could pretend to be him for you,” she tells Reef, “I could wear his shirts, his trousers, you could tear them off, and take my arse and fuck my mouth, and imagine that he’s...” (962). Significantly, Yashmeen’s suggestion reproduces the polymorphous sexuality that defines her utopian vision of the future, but it does so on an exclusively symbolic level. Her faltering at the end of the sentence seems to tacitly admit that she is proposing heterosexual (even if not quite heteronormative) play-acting. Likewise, the novel’s final configuration of this impulse relegates the permeability of sexual desire to a secondary role: having journeyed west through Europe during the war, Reef,

Yashmeen, and their daughter Ljubica—the three by now coalesced into a recognizable family, if not a fully traditional one—reunite with Frank, his wife Stray, and their child. Although Yashmeen and Stray acknowledge and presumably act on mutual desire (“We about to do something stupid here?” “Sure hope so” [1077]), the fraternal relation between Reef and Frank reinstates, through the incest prohibition, masculine heterosexuality as sexuality’s ultimate limit; the quartet demonstrates only a faint echo of the multiple permutations and combinations made possible by the earlier *ménage à trois*. This recuperation of anarchist sexual desire by the ideology of the family contains and neutralizes the revolutionary promise first affirmed by against-the-day consciousness. The anarchists’ utopian impulse ends in suspension and deferral.

The narrative of the Chums of Chance expresses an alternative utopian impulse, one facilitated by science and technology. In addition to the evolving uses of visible light that I discussed above, the skyship undergoes vast, dramatic changes in its technological capabilities more generally. On the novel’s opening page, the *Inconvenience* is little more than a dirigible, a flying gondola, but it gradually grows more and more massive, with increasingly cutting-edge technology, acquiring internal sources of power, a full-blown “mess hall [... larger] than the entire gondola of the [original] version of the ship,” and so on (3, 55, 1019). Three-fourths of the way into the novel, it has grown so large that along with the *Bol’shaia Igra*, a Russian skyship, it “account[s] for a quarter of the visible sky” (794). Even this enormity, however, is dwarfed by the proportions that the *Inconvenience* takes on by the end of *Against the Day*, when it “by now has grown as large as a small city” and flies “high in unmeasured outer space”

(1084). Thus the ship becomes the site of its own community, a sort of techno-utopia opposite the libidinal utopia of the anarchists.

However, technology in Pynchon is always at least two-faced. On the one hand, technological development often helps facilitate liberation and radical praxis. For example, the quasi-hypertextual form of *Gravity's Rainbow* serves as a crucial model for creative paranoia, and *Mason & Dixon's* mechanical duck makes it possible to imagine radical new configurations of interspecies collectivity.⁹⁸ On the other hand, Pynchon's Luddism consistently grasps technology not on its own or as a creature of pure science but as a tool for capitalist exploitation. The clearest example of this is the V-2 rocket in *Gravity's Rainbow*, which embodies the violence and fascism at the heart of extreme nationalism as well as capitalism's vested interest in maintaining a permanent state of war. But Pynchon's Luddite understanding of the interconnection of capital, science, and technology is also evident in Mason and Dixon's anxiety over the consequences of the Enlightenment science of cartography, or in the Reagan administration's use of information technologies to manage, sustain, exploit, and eventually replace Brock Vond's informer program in *Vineland*. Technology is a cog in the capitalist machinery, or else a brick to be thrown through a window by a Luddite Badass.⁹⁹ There is no neutral technology in Pynchon's universe.

⁹⁸ Even the California novels occasionally touch on radical political functions of technology. Whereas the examples that I just cited from *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Mason & Dixon* illustrate those functions positively, *Vineland* registers them negatively: on Isaiah Two Four's take, the '60s generation's ignorance concerning television and the "digital time" of Pynchon's sloth essay is partly to blame for the failures of '60s politics.

⁹⁹ I take this conceit from Brian Massumi: "A concept is a brick. It can be used to build the courthouse of reason. Or it can be thrown through the window" (xii).

This holds for the *Inconvenience* as well. Although the ship is susceptible to both capitalist exploitation and, potentially, use for revolutionary praxis—as Ani DiFranco sings in the lyric used by Hardt and Negri as an epigraph to *Empire*, “Every tool is a weapon if you hold it right”—it always bears some direct relation to capitalism. Moreover, it is continually produced and reproduced by capitalism itself. This point is crucial: utopian spaces associated with the anarchists, such as Frank’s hallucinatory, utopian Aztlán and the spa at Yz-les-Bains, are produced by the collectivities that inhabit them, and they represent or anticipate forms of flight and escape from the capitalist world-system. The *Inconvenience*, in contrast, is first a vessel designed to serve ends dictated by Hierarchy, whose centralized authority mirrors not only the logic of nationalist sovereignty but also the structure and organization of industrial capitalism. The utopian space that the *Inconvenience* becomes is, above all else, a capitalist space.

Consequently, the freedoms imagined by the utopian impulse associated with the *Chums of Chance* and the *Inconvenience* are not the political freedoms of revolutionary anarchism or the libidinal freedoms of anarchist desire, but rather the economic freedoms promised by capitalism itself. Desire in this case aims not at revolutions in production and reproduction—the labor-movement wing among the anarchists aspires to freedom in the realm of material production, while anarchist sexuality aims at liberation of the production of subjectivities—but instead seeks to modify relations of production and networks of distribution and consumption within the framework of the capitalist system: the aim, in short, is reform, not revolution.

I have already briefly discussed one unanticipated benefit of this desire to reform or modify capitalism: the gradual loosening of Hierarchy's control over the Chums and the latter's increasing entrepreneurial independence. There is, however, a brief moment when this reformist desire comes close to imagining a full alternative to capitalism. At first, the crew of the Russian skyship *Bol'shaia Igra* operates as a paramilitary vessel under the command of the Okhrana, a secret police answerable to Tsar Nicholas II. The Okhrana sends the ship on missions in which the crew bombards cities with large pieces of masonry and then recycles the resultant debris as ammunition for later missions. After the onset of World War I, however, the *Bol'shaia Igra* becomes a courier ship, rechristened the *Pomne o Golodayushchiki*, "Remember the Starving." The *Pomne o Golodayushchiki* redistributes "food, clothing, and [...] medical supplies," providing nonprofit humanitarian relief beyond the control of any one national power (1024).

Forming a brief alliance with Igor Padzhitnoff, captain of the *Bol'shaia Igra/Pomne o Golodayushchiki*, the Chums of Chance spend the war assisting him, eventually taking over the task of transporting wounded high-profile prisoners and political leaders into and out of Switzerland. The Chums accept their charge and devote themselves to their share of the war effort with zeal, negotiating for the release of prisoners and exposing themselves to barrages of gunfire (1027). The signing of the armistice brings with it the end of the Chums' humanitarian work. They accept a contract offer—notably, in California—worth "about twice the combined net worth of everyone" in the crew, but they do so not without a certain guilt: as Randolph St. Cosmo, commander of the Chums, confesses to Padzhitnoff, "it feels like we're deserting you[...]. Deserting—' he

waved his hand [...] as if to include all the waiting populations of unconnected souls adrift, orphans and cripples, unsheltered, sick, starving, incarcerated, insane, who must yet be helped to safety” (1029). In the end, the drive for profit trumps preterite concerns; the Chums accept the offer and head for California, sending the *Inconvenience* to its last great technological metamorphosis into a city of the sky.

Against the Day ends with the Chums of Chance aboard a vastly enlarged, impossibly advanced *Inconvenience*. The *Inconvenience* grows not only in its technical capabilities but also in its sheer size, eventually reaching municipal scale. With these urban dimensions comes an urban composition: in addition to the Chums of Chance, the *Inconvenience* now houses a social totality in its own right. In this final form, the ship becomes the fullest expression of the techno-utopian impulse that persists throughout the Chums’ story. The high-tech *jouissance* that springs from the ship’s velocity and altitude; its commingling of all sorts of animals—“dogs, [...] cats, birds, fish, rodents, and less-terrestrial forms of life” (1085); “[i]ts corridors [...] teem[ing] with children of all ages and sizes” (1084): all of this speaks to that utopian impulse. The *Inconvenience* is now guided by “the supranational idea [...] literally to transcend the old political space, the map-space of two dimensions, by climbing into the third” (1083). The mobility of an airship—in an age when an ascendant railroad system was still working to establish itself as the dominant mode of transit in many parts of the world—clearly symbolizes freedom from spatial constraint as well as the political constraints of the nation-state.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ The utopian aspects of the *Inconvenience*’s mobility and freedom, along with its high-tech reliance on and incorporation of light, are underscored in juxtaposition with the theory of cyborg subjectivity developed by Donna Haraway. For Haraway, the cyborg represents a radical, “ironic political myth faithful to feminism, socialism, and materialism” in no small part because of the utopian potential she

Yet transcending or superseding the nation-state is not the same as escaping capitalism. Notwithstanding the utopian impulse that undergirds the flying city, the *Inconvenience* is still subsumed within capitalism: it has “neighborhoods [...] and] parks,” but also “slum conditions.” It hosts commerce so complex as to require “contracts [...] overflowing the edges of the main table in the mess decks,” evoking the immense corporate legality that informs our own current economic context (1084). The utopian impulse of the *Inconvenience* is under constant threat of being reabsorbed within a now seemingly inescapable capitalist logic.

Nowhere is this tension between utopian longing and recontainment clearer than in the novel’s closing paragraph:

Never sleeping, clamorous as a nonstop feast day, *Inconvenience*, once a vehicle for sky-pilgrimage, has transformed into its own destination, where any wish that can be made is at least addressed, if not always granted. For every wish to come true would mean that in the known Creation, good unsought and uncompensated would have evolved somehow, to become at least more accessible to us. No one aboard *Inconvenience* has yet observed any sign of this. They know [...] it is there, like an approaching rainstorm, but invisible. Soon they will see the pressure-gauge begin to fall. They will feel the turn in the wind. They will put on smoked goggles for the glory of what is coming to part the sky. They fly toward grace. (1085)

The utopian impulse is, to be sure, more vivid here than perhaps anywhere else in the novel: witness the vivacity of the airborne community, the pleasures of desires fulfilled, the impending change comprehensible only through metaphors of transcendence or sublimity. The sky will be parted, like the Red Sea in the biblical exodus. However, the utopian impulse is also arrested and incomplete; the *Inconvenience* possesses a

sees in technologies of the 1980s, let alone today (7). Haraway writes: “Our best machines are made of sunshine; they are all light and clean because they are nothing but signals, electromagnetic waves, a section of a spectrum. And these machines are eminently portable, mobile...” (12). Haraway could be just as easily describing the *Inconvenience* in these lines as, say, the latest innovations in personal communications technologies.

hitherto unseen capacity for the satisfaction of desires, but desire still remains subject to structural constraints.

I would like to connect this limiting of satisfaction to a key moment in the Chums of Chance narrative: their rejection of Hierarchy control. Although the Chums' resentment of authority inaugurates their decoupling from Hierarchy, this act does not constitute a rejection of the concept of control *tout court*. Rather, control is transferred, between the Chicago Expo of 1893 and the flying city of the late 1910s or early '20s, from Hierarchy to the Chums themselves: hence the enormous and presumably Byzantine contracts that control transactions and set parameters for business. That is, the Chums do not reject control, they internalize it. In place of the control exercised by Hierarchy—hierarchical authority being a distinctive organizing principle of the factory system under industrial capitalism—late capitalism installs a form of control that is horizontal and collaborative but not thereby any less hegemonic or pervasive than its predecessor.

For it is in fact late capitalism itself that ultimately governs this erstwhile utopian space. Several factors attest to the submission of the Chums of Chance and the *Inconvenience* to the demands of capitalism and the imperative to exchange. In addition to sticking out like a sore thumb amid the utopian tumult of the *Inconvenience*, the ship's slums attest to the exhaustiveness of capitalist exploitation. In *Commonwealth*, Hardt and Negri argue that the expropriation of wealth under globalization today increasingly takes the form of rent, "an external mode of extraction" that operates "at a level far abstracted from the labor process" (141–42).¹⁰¹ No one personifies this parasitism and accumulation of wealth unearned more than a slumlord,

¹⁰¹ For other autonomist/workerist perspectives on the centrality of rent to contemporary capitalism, see also Marazzi 44–66; Negri, "Postface"; and Vercellone.

a bourgeois who profits off tenants without meeting such minimal criteria as, say, proper maintenance of appliances or adherence to safety codes. Furthermore, earlier in the novel, the Chums' increasing autonomy from High Command coincides with the Tunguska Event, which symbolically carries all the weight of an against-the-day explosion onto world history. Notably, at this juncture the Chums also support themselves in part through financial investment. Both of these factors are congruent with Giovanni Arrighi's now classic analysis of the contemporary capitalist world-system in *The Long Twentieth Century: Money, Power, and the Origins of Our Times* (1994). According to Arrighi, transitional moments in the history of capitalism between what he calls "cycles of accumulation" entail a shift in the primary means for generating profit from production to investment and finance. Thus, the Chums' recourse to financialization and rent in a transitional historical moment allegorizes our own historical transition out of the "long twentieth century" that was dominated by American economic interests and our entry into a properly global period of capitalism. The pleasures and gratifications offered aboard the *Inconvenience* are, I contend, precisely those of late capitalism.

The key characteristic of those gratifications is that they remain constitutively incomplete: a "good unsought and uncompensated" would escape or short-circuit the capitalist regime of exchange. What is really at issue, then, in the structural limits placed on desire here is not desire itself but what Žižek calls the "drive" of capitalism. For Žižek, "desire is grounded in its constitutive lack"; marketing works because it persuades subjects that they have some void which needs filling (*Parallax* 61).¹⁰²

¹⁰² Cf. Marx: "No production without a need. But consumption reproduces the need" (*Grundrisse* 92).

Desire is thus the motor force of consumption: it “strive[s] toward impossible fullness and, being forced to renounce it, gets stuck onto a partial object [i.e., the commodity] ... as a stand-in...” (63). In contrast, drive exceeds the phenomenological frameworks that account for desire. It is possible to make sense of desire from the standpoint of the individual subject, but not so with drive. Žižek writes: “drive is that which propels the whole capitalist machinery, it is the impersonal compulsion to engage in the endless circular movement of expanded self-reproduction. We enter the mode of drive the moment the circulation of money as capital becomes ‘an end in itself’” (61). Drive works as an expansive force in capitalism. As any student of thermodynamics knows, equilibrium is the enemy of exchange. Drive therefore must “introduce [...] radical imbalance” as a precondition for the circulation of money (63). This need for imbalance undergirds the insatiable expansiveness of capitalism under real subsumption as well as the exponential spatial and social growth of the *Inconvenience*. It explains such wide-ranging features of capitalist globalization as interest charged on loans to so-called developing nations, the restoration of class power under neoliberalism, and the globalization of poverty, in which what used to be called the first and third worlds now exist in an internally stratified close proximity.¹⁰³ And it is why, despite the ship’s restless excitement, high-tech pleasures, and transcendence of nationalism and nation-state politics, the utopian space aboard the *Inconvenience* is nevertheless pockmarked with poverty and slums.

¹⁰³ On interest, see, e.g., Harvey, *Brief* 74. On class inequalities, see, e.g., Harvey, *Brief* 74, 82, 84, et passim. On the globalization of poverty and the interpenetration of the “first” and “third” worlds, see Hardt and Negri, *Empire* xiii, 251–54.

The tension between utopia and recuperation by capitalism also colors the metaphorical language in the novel's closing paragraph. That language bears repeating: "it is there, like an approaching rainstorm, but invisible. Soon they will see the pressure-gauge begin to fall. They will feel the turn in the wind. They will put on smoked goggles for the glory of what is coming to part the sky. They fly toward grace." Both the utopian impulse and its ultimate deferral are evident in these lines. On the one hand, the Chums' anticipation and pursuit of an unknown future, just beyond the horizon of the present but announcing itself barometrically, has something of Benjamin's "weak messianic force"—indeed, the simple fact that it is, after all, the future that the passage describes should count for something. On the other hand, that future is described by means of weather metaphors, which have the effect of naturalizing historical change, and metaphysical concepts associated with redemption and the sublime, which uproot that future not just from the history of the present but from material history itself.

Casting historical change as natural (therefore inevitable) and metaphysical or cosmic (therefore beyond the reach of human influence), rather than attending to the immanent structural constraints of the *Inconvenience's* social and economic organization, attests to the internalization of mechanisms of control and containment onboard the ship. Here we have starkly illuminated biopower at work: so thorough a reproduction of ideology that subjects become their own self-reflexive police force and can no longer conceptualize change outside the confines of their present system (see Hardt and Negri, *Empire* 22–30). The Chums' utopian impulse is reterritorialized in the service of capitalist reproduction. Whatever else might be different in the future

glimpsed from the Chums' late-capitalist vantage aboard the *Inconvenience*, capitalist drive still reigns.

Against the Day thus ends with both its utopian impulses effectively neutralized. The Chums of Chance narrative posits theology or a hope for transcendence in the place occupied, in radical utopian thinking, by revolution itself, while the liberated anarchist sexuality that had constituted revolutionary collectivity is now annulled by the resurgent ideological apparatus of the family. Significantly, the paths followed by these foreclosed utopian impulses are parallel with each other in more than just a political or theoretical sense: in both cases, utopia dies in the west. The Chums end the novel flying west to pursue business interests in California—a place as we have seen characterized in Pynchon's canon by the closure through capitalism's exhaustive social control of possibilities for radical praxis. The brothers Traverse, meanwhile, follow an itinerary that "keep[s them] heading west," away from "the capitalist/Christer gridwork," and that ends on Washington state's Kitsap Peninsula, which is about as far west in the contiguous U.S. as one can go (963, 1075, 1076–77).¹⁰⁴ In comparison with the liberated sexuality and the ceaseless revolutionary flight that guides the earlier movements of Reef and Yashmeen particularly, the containment of that sexuality in this remote outpost of the Pacific Northwest takes on the character of retreat from battle—in notable, dramatic contrast with the subjunctivity of the west in *Mason & Dixon*, which stands there as a space of the possible or, in phrasing drawn from *Vineland*, a future yet-to-be-born. The problem with westering in *Against the Day*, of course, is that there

¹⁰⁴ Given the political and economic colorations of Pynchon's distinction between the elect and the preterite, the Traverses' flight from "Christers" (what one would today call evangelical Christians) counts as an attempt to escape not only the elect themselves but also all the ideological scaffolding that reaffirms election and preterition—class striation—as preordained, inevitable, natural, and so on.

is nowhere to run from global capitalism under real subsumption, “a world-system from which ‘delinking’ ... is henceforth impossible and even unthinkable and inconceivable” (Jameson, “Notes” 57). *Against the Day* concludes with resistance to capitalism trapped in an antinomy between market reformism and the wishful thinking of opting out.

* * *

Inherent Vice likewise registers antinomies in the post-9/11 context. However, whereas *Against the Day* ends in antinomy, double binds are the order of the day from the outset in *Inherent Vice*. Indeed, the protagonist of Pynchon’s most recent novel, Larry “Doc” Sportello, seems to personify a range of irreconcilable oppositions. In the opening scene, Doc, a private investigator, is approached by Shasta Fay Hepworth, a recent ex-lover who wants Doc to take on a case involving a possible conspiracy against a married man with whom she is having an affair, and whose later abduction Doc spends most of the novel trying to solve. Shasta’s request reactivates a variety of conflicting interests and competing motives. Doc is bound by professional obligation to pursue the case diligently, but he also remains sexually attracted to Shasta: “Okay, nothing romantic tonight. Bummer” (1). That lingering attraction is itself opposed by Doc’s cynicism concerning love: “the word [love] these days was being way too overused. Anybody with any claim to hipness ‘loved’ everybody” (5; cf. 288).¹⁰⁵

¹⁰⁵ Doc’s comment on love continues a theme that runs throughout the California novels. Recall Inamorati Anonymous, the support group for recovering love addicts in *The Crying of Lot 49*, as well as the cynical depiction of Frenesi’s conception of love in *Vineland* (see sec. 3.2 and 3.3, above; see also *Crying* 93–94, *Vineland* 217). All three of these instances suggest that romantic love, at least in its ideologically overdetermined forms, holds little political promise for the left. In contrast, the historical novels encourage a different perspective on love. Those novels deal primarily not with the sentiments of romantic love but rather with practices of sex and desire, especially deviant or subversive forms. Moreover, love, sex, and desire in the historical novels repeatedly function as a means for establishing or sustaining oppositional collectivities. Taken together, these contrasting portrayals of love in Pynchon’s

Furthermore, both Shasta's new fashion and her lover's implied cultural status run counter to Doc's own ethos: she wears "flatland gear," in contrast to the beach attire that Doc remembers¹⁰⁶—"sandals, bottom half of a flower-print bikini, faded Country Joe & the Fish T-shirt"—while her lover is a "[g]entleman of the straightworld persuasion" rather than a member of the hippie counterculture with which Shasta had run and of which Doc is still a part in the novel's present of 1970 (1, 2).¹⁰⁷ These social and cultural differences also indicate a vast economic disparity between Doc and the lover, Mickey Wolfman, a wealthy Los Angeles real-estate mogul with land holdings scattered throughout California and Nevada. In taking on the case, Doc would be required to act in the interests of the propertied class and against those of his own.

Incongruities between Doc's subject position and his professional duties are in fact characteristic of his PI work generally, notwithstanding the unique predicament in which his former romance with Shasta places him at the novel's opening. His politics, values, and lifestyle are rooted in hippie counterculture, but they are also at odds with his work; his occupation and his hippie persona seem only uneasily reconciled in the name of his agency, LSD Investigations—"Location, Surveillance, Detection"—and in another character's description of him as "a private gumshoe, or do I mean gumsandal" (14, 239). These tensions reverberate beyond questions of lifestyle or image. Doc's

canon, I suggest, highlight both the radical political potential of love and its susceptibility to recuperation in the guise of ideological narratives. See also sec. 1.4, above.

¹⁰⁶ *Flatland* refers to middle-class inland suburbs near foothills of a handful of coastal mountain ranges, in distinction to "hipper" beach communities such as Gordita Beach, Doc's residence and, on McCann's take, a fictionalized Manhattan Beach ("Lighting" 1), Pynchon's home where he wrote the manuscript for *Gravity's Rainbow*.

¹⁰⁷ Crucially, *Inherent Vice* is thus unique among the California novels in that it is in a sense also an historical novel, given the gap between its 1970 plot and its 2009 publication.

personal loyalties are with the working class, yet he effectively serves capitalist interests, and not only in the Wolfmann case. Betrayal of his own class is a fundamental precondition for entry into PI work: when his car is repossessed, the repo firm Gotcha! Searches and Settlements “hire[s] him on as a skip-tracer trainee and let[s] him work off the debt that way” (51). Regardless of good intentions and personal convictions, Doc’s subsequent career enacts a double bind between his class loyalties—he often takes on cases with no hope for compensation, except perhaps in the form of “a small favor down the line”—and an occupation that nonetheless makes him a “hopeless stooge of the creditor class” (314, 303). If *Against the Day* presents antinomian possibilities in the field of praxis, *Inherent Vice* thus attests to the internalization of antinomy on the level of the individual subject.

However, antinomy in *Inherent Vice* is not exclusively internal in that sense; Doc also has an externalized foil in the figure of Lieutenant Christian “Bigfoot” Bjornsen, a detective with the LAPD. The relationship between Doc and Bigfoot dramatizes and externalizes the tensions that inhere within Doc’s own individual subjectivity; simultaneously, it highlights the awkward proximity of Doc’s countercultural values and establishment-serving practice as well as the ultimate impossibility of reconciling or synthesizing the two. Bigfoot personifies straightworld disdain for countercultures. He tolerates Doc only to the extent that the tactics and demands of his detective work require; invariably, he condescendingly refers to Doc as “hippie scum,” accuses him of “some kind of [Charles] Mansonoid conspiracy,” bemoans Doc’s “unabridged paranoid hippie monologues,” and scarcely masks his indignation at having to collaborate with

Doc (22, 29, 138).¹⁰⁸ And yet, collaborate they must, since each periodically has intelligence that the other needs. Bigfoot acknowledges their mutual dependence early on when he offers to hire Doc as a snitch for the LAPD (32). For his part, and despite his repulsion at the notion of being purchased by the police, Doc is willing to accept a tip from Bigfoot that links the Wolfmann case with a seemingly unrelated missing-person investigation (210–12).¹⁰⁹ On more than one occasion, therefore, Doc and Bigfoot appear to be doubles of each other, unified in their antinomian opposition. Doc observes this reciprocal effect when he notes that each has a “*mysterious power to ruin [the] other’s day*” (33). Even more telling is Doc’s fear that his kinship with Bigfoot might efface the difference between them altogether and lapse into sheer identity—an impression that Shasta echoes when she describes the pair as “[b]oth [...] cops who never wanted to be cops” (313; cf. 207). (Shasta is partly alluding to Bigfoot’s show-business aspirations, which I discuss below.) Like the strange and perhaps untenable

¹⁰⁸ Bigfoot’s allegation of “Mansonoid conspiracy” opens onto a series of Charles Manson allusions throughout the novel. Many of those allusions highlight the ways in which Bigfoot and other straightworlders identify all hippies with Manson and the Family. Regarding hospitality, one character complains that “[...]Manson and the gang have fucked that up for everybody,” since nobody is willing any longer to open their home to complete strangers (38). In addition, the LAPD institutes a profiling program, “Cultwatch,” in which “males with shoulder-length or longer hair”—popularly taken as signifiers of hippie subculture—on account of that fact alone can be questioned by police (179). Bigfoot himself, despite his own association of all hippies with Manson, admits that “fear” of Manson dominates L.A. culture, including the LAPD (208). Crucially, however, the hippie character Denis implies that widespread fear resulting from the Manson murders is actually part of a larger vicious circle, in which fear and hostility are in fact what produces Manson in the first place: “Southern California [...] has n]o sympathy for weirdness[...]. And people wonder why Charlie Manson’s the way he is” (135). Bigfoot’s association of Doc’s hippie ethos with Manson and the Family thus indexes the larger conservative backlash against not just hippies but 1960s culture more generally under Nixon. For other references to Manson and/or the Family, see 48, 53, 107, 119, 138, 199, 280, 283, 292–93, 304, 308, 311, and 332.

¹⁰⁹ Notions of selling out or being bought off constitute an ongoing concern of Doc’s and a recurrent theme in *Inherent Vice*; for example, in addition to Bigfoot’s job offer, FBI agents Flatweed and Borderline likewise attempt to purchase Doc’s cooperation (75). Other characters suspected of selling out include Bigfoot himself, Shasta, and Coy Harlingen, whose apparent death from heroin overdose and subsequent reappearance are connected with the Golden Fang as well as right-wing political groups. See, e.g., 84, 95, 122, and 257.

conjoining of counterculture and establishment in the name “LSD Investigations,” Doc’s relationship with Bigfoot assembles a set of oppositions that can be neither reconciled nor avoided.

In a sense, then, *Inherent Vice* multiplies oppositions and antinomies much like *Against the Day*. In *Against the Day*, oppositions and antinomies function on two levels. First, each of that novel’s main storylines pits a collective protagonist against an opposite number: anarchists against capitalists, the Chums of Chance against first, “terrorists” and later, Hierarchy. Second, those two storylines figure a pair of apparent options for resistance to global capitalism—retreat and reform—which, despite their antinomian incommensurability, tend essentially toward the same result: political ineffectiveness. Doc and Bigfoot’s doubling of each other suggests a similar convergence of opposites. However, just as the antinomian political poles of *Against the Day* can be distinguished by means of specific systemic tactics of neutralization—the ideological containment of desire with the anarchists and the structural drive of capitalism with the Chums—Doc and Bigfoot likewise work according to distinct logics.

Differences between those logics are evident, first of all, in the epistemological models and practical methods used by each man in his detective work. Bigfoot takes a pragmatic, commonsense approach to empirical evidence, one that is appropriate for life “[h]ere on Earth,” in contradistinction to the otherworldly, hallucinatory realms in which he derisively locates Doc and other hippies (23). Because his empiricism assumes evidence to be accessible to careful observation and sound interpretation, surveillance—the gathering of evidence—is possible everywhere, at all times. When Doc asks whether someone might be listening in on a private conversation, Bigfoot

responds: “Everybody. Nobody. Does it matter?” (272). Bigfoot’s premise here is that the paranoia he attributes to Doc is ultimately pointless, since no amount of conspiratorial speculation can trump empirical observation and commonsense judgment.¹¹⁰ One must of course discriminate between relevant and irrelevant evidence and draw the proper connections—“Figure it out. Use what’s left of your brain” (272)—but those tasks fall to clear-minded deduction, not hippie intuition. Detective work for Bigfoot thus entails the collection of a broad base of empirical evidence and the careful, calculated interpretation of the latter. In this, Bigfoot is consistent with larger patterns of intelligence-gathering practices used by state agencies in the novel. In particular, the ARPAnet (Advanced Research Project Agency Network), a precursor to the Internet, is susceptible to surveillance via wiretapping (258). One character even predicts that electronic surveillance will eventually advance so far that “someday everybody’s gonna wake up to find they’re under surveillance they can’t escape. Skips won’t be able to skip no more[...]. It’s all data. Ones and zeros. All recoverable. Eternally present” (365). From the perspective of Bigfoot’s hardboiled pragmatism, this exhaustive surveillance is the first step toward total mastery of information: if, as he holds, the methodical application of common sense and sound judgment reveals the truth that underlies collected evidence, then having all possible evidence is tantamount to having access to all knowledge.

¹¹⁰ Bigfoot’s calling Doc paranoid is not unjustified. Doc often uses paranoid speculation as a means for cataloguing potential outcomes of his cases, such as when he considers possible perpetrators of Mickey’s abduction and their motives, or when he explores conspiratorial connections among the FBI, the mob, and Mickey (95–96, 220–21; see also 193–94, 217, 293, 306, 350). In the discussion that follows, however, I focus not on paranoia but on epiphany as the salient feature of Doc’s detective work and epistemology: paranoia certainly constitutes much of Doc’s practice, but it seldom yields fruitful results. It is epiphany rather than paranoia that actually guides Doc toward useful leads and valid conclusions—and, crucially, that enables *Inherent Vice*’s unique political allegory and prevents the novel from merely repeating what would be by now worn-out tropes from the Pynchon canon.

Doc's method of detective work, by contrast, relies on mental experiences expressly ridiculed by Bigfoot: epiphanies, or, as Doc remembers Bigfoot calling them, "hippiphanyes" (207). Just as Bigfoot's reliance on observation and surveillance marks his membership in the official law-enforcement establishment, Doc's epiphanies are a trademark of his belonging to drug subculture: they tend overwhelmingly to be induced or facilitated by the use of drugs.¹¹¹ Early on, when Doc speculates—correctly, it turns out—that Sloane Wolfmann, Mickey's wife, and Riggs Warbling, her yoga trainer, are sleeping together, Doc attributes his epiphanic insight to drug use: "if acid-tripping was good for anything, it helped you tune to [...] unlisted frequencies," that is, to connections and details that remain lost on sober straightworlders. *Inherent Vice* abounds with similar narcotic epiphanies. After Shasta, like Mickey, mysteriously disappears, Doc has an acid trip in which he sees her onboard a ship at sea (109–10). This apparent hallucination, however, is also confirmed by Shasta as in some sense real when she later recalls having "felt" Doc's presence, "like ... being haunted" (306). Moreover, shortly before the novel's climax, Doc escapes captivity at the hands of Adrian Prussia—a loan shark connected with the disappearances of Mickey and Shasta as well as the long-ago murder of Bigfoot's partner—thanks in part to "some kind of flashback": "he [Doc] understood for a second and a half that he belonged to a single and ancient martial tradition in which resisting authority, subduing hired guns, defending your old lady's honor all amounted to the same thing" (326). Doc's epiphanies clearly stand as a countercultural foil to Bigfoot's straightworld pragmatism. What is surprising is that they

¹¹¹ In addition to Doc, the subcultural character Jade, a.k.a. Ashley, has an acid-induced epiphany pertaining to the centrality of sexuality to her sense of identity (*Inherent* 136). In this, *Inherent Vice* is also consistent with the logic of narcotic epiphany that occasionally operates in *Gravity's Rainbow*, for example, in Slothrop's sodium amytal-induced, hallucinatory trip down the toilet (60–71).

work: narcotic epiphanies improbably yet consistently lead Doc toward essential clues and otherwise hidden connections which, according to Bigfoot's assumptions, are properly discovered only through sober realism.

Crucially, the different epistemologies undergirding Doc's and Bigfoot's investigative methods correspond as well to competing economic principles. Bigfoot's realist epistemology and pragmatist method take a calculative, rational approach to all observation, evidence, and knowledge; his detective work is methodical and goal-directed. Following from this, evidence is nothing other than information or intelligence to be gathered, managed, and distributed as necessity and common sense dictate. Access to information is controlled based on the assessment of cause and effect: Bigfoot shares tips with Doc and later reveals select details concerning the death of his former partner because, as the narrative eventually shows, he is ultimately attempting to manipulate Doc in pursuit of vengeance for his partner's murder (see 328–29). Investigation, intelligence, and interpretation—respectively, the act, object, and end of surveillance—are therefore subject to laws of exchange and equivalence. Bigfoot shares intelligence only when he receives something in return; as he admonishes Doc, “nobody owes you anything” (273). Knowledge must be paid for. In Bigfoot's book, there is no such thing as a free hunch.¹¹²

Knowledge is therefore a commodity in Bigfoot's accounting, and paying for it means balancing debits with credits—that is, managing debt. The concept of debt is utterly central to the economic relations that structure *Inherent Vice*, even when debt is

¹¹² A pun, coming a few pages after the conversation between Doc and Bigfoot that I have just quoted, humorously alludes to the occasionally dear price of such knowledge. In an echo of the Book of Job, the restaurant The Price of Wisdom is upstairs from the bar Ruby's Lounge; or, “THE PRICE OF WISDOM IS ABOVE RUBY'S[...].” (276; cf. Job 28.18).

not monetized. Bigfoot seeks revenge for his partner's murder as a way to satisfy an obligation: "...I owed him so much" (331). Debt arranges characters into columns of creditors and debtors, perpetuating a whole series of dues and repayments that further concentrate wealth under capitalism. Recall that Doc first enters the PI field as a way to work off his own debt, collecting from others on behalf of the same capitalist class that repossesses his car. Relationships of debt indenture vast swaths of the novel's social world, including, for example, what the narrator calls "plasticratic yachtsfolk." Sauncho Smilax, a maritime lawyer, explains: "It isn't new money exactly, [...] more like new debt. Everything they own, including their sailboats, they've bought on credit cards [...] that you send away for by filling out the back of a match cover" (90). The fly-by-night character of credit card companies whose applications are found on matchbooks—frequently given away for free at bars or with the purchase of tobacco—cannot but evoke the scandalous predatory lending practices that led to the 2007 crisis in the U.S. housing market. Subprime home loans, of course, were attractive to lenders for the same reason long shots are enticing to gamblers: the greater the risk, the greater the potential profit. When liquid assets fall short of a commodity's price, debt—the "indebted consumption of wage earners" that helps sustain profits under financial capitalism when "wages [themselves] are reduced and precarized" (Marazzi 34)—therefore provides a means for not only keeping capital in circulation in order to satisfy desire for commodities but also accelerating and exacerbating the "radical imbalance[s]" on which, according to Žižek, capitalist drive depends.¹¹³ Relations of debt are

¹¹³ As Richard Dienst points out, this relation between debt and radical imbalance results in a vicious circle of expropriation: "Insofar as all those debts will be held and enforced by a class of creditors keep to preserve the prerogatives of free-ranging capital, the only economic trend that seems certain to continue is the ongoing transfer of wealth to those who already have a lot of it" (28). Moreover, the

therefore crucial for maintaining consumer demand and class inequality under capitalism.

It is in light of debt's role in capitalism that the subversive qualities of Doc's epiphanies begin to appear. Those epiphanies violate the laws of commodification, exchange, and debt that determine Bigfoot's management of intelligence. Whereas knowledge only ever comes with a price in Bigfoot's system, Doc's epiphanies simply arrive, unbidden and unexpected. Therefore, the notion of exchange value that underwrites both capitalist circulation and Bigfoot's commerce in intelligence has no corollary in epiphany: exchange value presupposes commensurability between commodity and money, or between intelligence and whatever payment Bigfoot demands, but there is no comparable counterbalance to epiphany.

The logic of epiphany thus constitutes a radical alternative to the capitalist market of exchange. *Inherent Vice's* resident expert on epiphany, as well as a host of other mystical, mythological, and occult knowledges, is the character Sortilège, whose name alludes to practices of divination.¹¹⁴ When Doc comes down from his first acid trip, disturbed and disoriented, it is Sortilège who explains that hallucinatory experiences help reveal "some secret aspect of our personality" (106), a proposition that reverberates in acid-users' attunement to "unlisted frequencies" and in Doc's

contemporary regime of debt also becomes one more vehicle for capitalist biopower, as Stefano Lucarelli argues: debt and financialization produce the ideological ruse that "[individual] wealth depends more on financial markets than demands for wages..." (126). On Lucarelli's take, such a precept exacerbates the tendency of real wages to fall and was a major contributor to the 2007 subprime mortgage crisis (131–37). David Graeber's pathbreaking study, *Debt: The First 5,000 Years* (2011)—a theoretical touchstone for the Occupy movement—provides a sweeping comparative historical overview of debt that is simultaneously an anarchist-inflected critique of the interrelations among debt and interest, international finance, militarism, global immiseration, and commonsense morality.

¹¹⁴ The *OED* defines *sortilege* as "[t]he practice of casting lots in order to decide something or to forecast the future; divination based on this procedure or performed in some other way..." ("sortilege, n. 1").

investigative use of hallucinations and flashbacks. Sortilège also articulates the structure of epiphanic experience in a way that highlights its crucial differences from capitalist exchange: “Sortilège, who liked finding new uses for the term ‘Beyond,’ thought this [i.e., an inexplicable and unexpected divulging of information] was a form of grace and that he [Doc] should just accept it, because at any instant it could go away as easily as it came” (224). Although Sortilège is referring specifically to an awkward personal confession made to Doc by one of his clients, it is nonetheless applicable to the logic of epiphanic experience. In both cases, knowledge comes without either warning or intention, violating normal expectations and conventions. More importantly, the excessiveness and incommensurability with quotidian experience signified in the term “Beyond,” here rendered a proper noun, emphasize the impossibility of determining an equivalent value for epiphany or of assimilating it into a regime of economic exchange. Rather, epiphany as “grace” has something of the character of Derrida’s notion of the gift: like the workings of grace, a gift must be “something that remains inaccessible, unrepresentable, and as a consequence secret,” lest it impose an obligation on the receiver and thus fall back into the logic of economic transaction (*Gift* 29).¹¹⁵ However, unlike this gift—which is necessarily and constitutively impossible, along with other acts that would satisfy unconditional, absolute ethical laws¹¹⁶—Doc’s epiphanies actually happen. They therefore count, in *Inherent Vice*’s figuration of late

¹¹⁵ Cf. Geoffrey Bennington’s explanation: “For your gratitude toward a gift I give you functions as a payment in return or in exchange, and then the gift is no longer strictly speaking a gift” (Bennington and Derrida 188).

¹¹⁶ Among the impossible ethical imperatives analyzed by Derrida are forgiveness (“On Forgiveness”), hospitality (*Of Hospitality*), democracy (*Rogues*), justice (“Force”), and mourning (*Memoires; Work*), to cite some of the best-known cases.

capitalism and alternative regimes of exchange, as live possibilities carrying all the weight of Jameson's notion of symbolic acts.

Narcotic epiphanies might be hallucinatory, but that doesn't mean they don't really happen. Like symbolic acts, Doc's epiphanies require both aesthetic and political/ontological interpretation. Politically and ontologically, they represent an escape from the capitalist market, a breakdown in equivalence and exchange value. Aesthetically, however, they do indeed take the form of hallucinations: experiences that a hardboiled realist like Bigfoot would never recognize as valid, authentic, or conclusive. Nonetheless, given the independent confirmations and remarkable accuracy of Doc's epiphanies, the hallucinatory nature of these experiences must count as something other than pure fantasy or sheer illusion. Rather, to the extent that they reveal truths—even partial ones—they are better understood, metaphorically, in terms of alternative perceptions of light itself. In photography, filters modify or absorb some of the light that enters a camera lens, but they still document the physical presence of light, not falsify it.¹¹⁷ Astronomers use filters on telescopes to block interference, sharpen images of celestial bodies, and reveal selected wavelengths of visible light, resulting in greater accuracy and practical usefulness. And infrared technologies register wavelengths of light beyond the threshold of visibility to the human eye—but infrared light isn't unreal just because humans can't see it. In a similar vein, Doc's epiphanies use hallucination to reveal aspects of reality that remain hidden from ordinary, sober experience. They do not obscure reality: they illuminate it.

¹¹⁷ See Roland Barthes's discussion of photographic presence in his canonical *Camera Lucida*: "I call 'photographic referent' not the *optionally* real thing to which an image or sign refers [as in most signifying systems] but the *necessarily* real thing which has been placed before the lens, without which there would be no photograph.... [I]n Photography I can never deny that *the thing has been there*" (76).

Epiphanies therefore provide a crucial analogue in *Inherent Vice* to the luminous senses of day in *Against the Day*: like the oppositional subjectivities that grasp history and politics in *contre-jour* lighting, Doc's epiphanic experiences exploit alternatives to the wholesome, straightworld light of day to take a non-normative, subversive perspective on social reality. Later in this section, I analyze important differences between figurative uses of light in these two novels as well as the political implications of Doc's epiphanies. For now, I want to identify the central figuration of the thematic of day in *Inherent Vice*'s system of debt and exchange to which the illumination of Doc's epiphanies stands as a utopian other.

Crucially, just as day is bivalent in *Against the Day*, alternately denoting both light and time, the predominant transcoding of day in *Inherent Vice*'s portrayal of capitalist exchange also transposes day from the context of illumination to its parallel context of temporality. For the novel's capitalists and creditors, time itself becomes one more object of exchange and circulation. As Puck Beaverton, one of Adrian Prussia's stooges, explains to the Doc during his captivity, "what people were buying, when they paid interest, was time"—specifically, time to raise money before a loan comes due. Continuing on, Puck connects the time purchased by interest with retribution leveled by loan sharks against delinquent debtors: "the only fair way to deal with that was to take their own personal time away from them again [... through s]evere injury[...]. Time they thought they had all to themselves would have to be spent now on stays in hospitals, visits to doctors, physical therapy, everything taking longer because they couldn't move around so good" (320–21). Thus, the principle of exchange value dominates not only the literal marketplace of consumer goods and Bigfoot's practices of controlling and

distributing intelligence, but also phenomenological experiences of freedom, pain and suffering, and even mortal life itself (loan sharks repossess time “up to and including the time [a debtor has] left to live” [321]). Once subjectivity and experience are measured in terms of exchange value, time itself comes to play a role analogous to money: like money, time becomes the privileged abstraction in terms of which other goods are valued. Moreover, time and money are mutually convertible, allowing otherwise disparate categories like “outstanding debt” and “human suffering” to be balanced against each other. This holds not only for loan sharks but for the creditor system generally: when Doc works off his debt as a repo man at Gotcha!, he is paying the firm a quantity of time commensurate with his monetary obligation, commensurability itself being determined by dynamics of the market. Like money, much of time’s value originates in finitude and inequality: if money and time were inexhaustible or shared in common, expropriation would be a zero-sum game. Control over the distribution of time is thus a lynchpin of the regime of debt.

Between commodified, repossessed time and epiphanic illumination, then, *Inherent Vice* follows *Against the Day* in mobilizing conceptual associations with day, even if the more recent novel does not directly play with the word *day* itself to the same extent as its predecessor. Despite that fact, the luminous and temporal thematics associated with day accumulate in *Inherent Vice* beyond the central examples I have just given. Indeed, while Doc’s epiphanies are the most notable instance of subversive, antisystemic uses of light, they are not alone. For example, evading the FBI, Doc’s friend Tito Stavrou drives his limo fast enough to compress approaching light and redshift receding light (249); these phenomena are produced by the Doppler effect,

working over cosmic distances, and are typically detectable only by suitably sensitive equipment. In the context of dodging a repressive apparatus of the state, such a conceit amounts to a superhuman effort at revolutionary flight. Moreover, epiphanic illumination and relativistic redshift both seemingly violate the laws that structure commonsense empiricism and Newtonian physics, underscoring the kinship between alternative lighting in *Inherent Vice* and *contre-jour* symbolism in *Against the Day*.

However, antisystemic lighting in *Inherent Vice* is also opposed by recuperative uses of light by the creditor system and hegemonic U.S. culture. In an analepsis recalling a failed dope run, Doc compares unforgiving sunlight to “the sort of perfect daylight you always saw on TV cop shows” (164), a visible analogue to the unquestionable authority of rational empiricism in Bigfoot’s investigative method. The police dramas with which Doc associates perfect daylight also open onto a broader social and political critique. *Inherent Vice* singles out police dramas as especially pernicious forms of the eroticization of fascist authority, earlier encountered in Frenesi’s sexual attraction to uniformed men in *Vineland*, and the demonization of subversion as criminal behavior—the latter coinciding with the ideological effacement of the distinction between Charles Manson and hippies generally (see note 105). *Inherent Vice* makes much of the fundamentally conservative function of series like *Adam-12* (aired 1968–75), *Hawaii Five-O* (1968–80), *The Mod Squad* (1968–73), and others (see, e.g., 32, 97, 261). Moreover, Bigfoot himself is frequently and derisively described using imagery drawn from TV shows like these or, even worse, painted as a TV-cop-wannabe. Early on, Bigfoot strikes Doc as emerging “[r]ight out of the background of some *Adam-12* episode, a show which Bigfoot had in fact moonlighted on once or twice”; even a

colleague in the LAPD resentfully implies that Bigfoot would jump at the chance to star in a made-for-TV movie about the Manson case (32, 48). The “perfect daylight” that reminds Doc of cop TV is thus necessarily incompatible with epiphanic light.¹¹⁸

Although Bigfoot’s light of day is anathema to Doc’s narcotic epiphanies, insufficient light is even more noxious. The “low-light” section at the Waste-a-Perp Target Range where Doc trains reminds him of his film hero “John Garfield dead in the gutter, and dead from real-world Hollywood betrayal and persecution, and the controlling order under which outcomes like this were unavoidable, because they ran off [...] rounds discharged in the dark” (269).¹¹⁹ (Doc is alluding to the death of Garfield’s character in *He Ran All the Way* [dir. John Berry, 1951], his final movie and, on Doc’s

¹¹⁸ In addition to its critique of cop dramas, *Inherent Vice* also follows its predecessor in the California trilogy, *Vineland*, in presenting television in general as a vehicle for ideology: “some wholesome family will quite soon be gathering night after night, to gaze tubeward [note the echo of *Vineland*’s “Tube”], gobble their nutritious snacks, perhaps after the kids are in bed even attempt some procreational foreplay[...].” (*Inherent* 22). However, just as *Vineland* does not dismiss the moving image entirely but rather contrasts reactionary television with radical documentary film, *Inherent Vice* discriminates among genres of television, notwithstanding its overall role as superstructural support. During a narcotic epiphany that I have already discussed, the three revolutionary or quasi-radical practices central to that epiphany—“resisting authority, subduing hired guns, [and] defending your old lady’s honor”—correspond to three pairs of antagonistic cartoon characters: “Dagwood and Mr. Dithers, Bugs [Bunny] and Yosemite Sam, [and] Popeye and Bluto” (326). Moreover, in a conversation with Sauncho, Doc laments the triumph of cops over PIs as screen heroes, the latter “always smarter and more professional than the cops, always [...] solvin the crime while the cops are followin the wrong leads and gettin in the way” (97). This discrimination between television genres implies that not all of them are equally reactionary, despite the medium’s predominately reactionary systemic function. It also recalls Pynchon’s distinction between a Luddite and a “technophobic crazy.” On the other hand, though, this could also simply be a self-serving indulgence on Doc’s part, given his dread of becoming Bigfoot. On both television in *Vineland* and Pynchon’s Luddism, see sec. 3.3, above. On Bigfoot as TV/movie cop, see also *Inherent* 9–10, 202, 328.

¹¹⁹ Like social and political critique of television, the Waste-a-Perp range—which features an “Urban, Gang-related and Hippie [...] section,” and presumably other similarly themed areas, in addition to the “low-light” section (*Inherent* 269)—marks a notable similarity between *Inherent Vice* and *Vineland*. In that earlier California novel, *Isaiah Two Four*, not only an occasional social critic of the ’60s generation but also a “violence enthusiast,” envisions a line of “violence centers, each on the scale [...] of a small theme park” and featuring ranges and courses with names like “Third World Thrills,” “Scum of the City,” and so on (*Vineland* 18–19). In addition to highlighting or parodying right-wing glorifications of violent heroism, both Waste-a-Perp and *Isaiah*’s business idea also evoke that infamous embodiment of postmodern Californian commodification, Disneyland, with its equally overdetermined if superficially harmonious variety of themed “lands.”

take, a relic of McCarthyism, and to attacks on Garfield by the House Committee on Un-American Activities; see 254.) If blinding daylight represents an ideological, commonsense sobriety that is intolerant of Doc's narcotic epiphanies and all other things countercultural, this darkness at the shooting range corresponds to the screen or camouflage of ideology behind which the real repression and brutality of capitalism evade detection.

However, by far the most prevalent sources of opacity in *Inherent Vice* are fog, haze, smog, and the like. Fog obscures and disorients. At times, the confusion produced by fog is analogous to (non-epiphanic) drug experiences: "all was fuzzed, as if by the fog of dope" (45). At other times, fog and related phenomena symptomatically indicate baleful effects of late capitalism. Driving through fog, Doc experiences familiar city streets as an "alien atmosphere, with daylight diminished, visibility reduced to half a block, and all colors, including those of traffic signals, shifted radically elsewhere in the spectrum" (50). Under such conditions, of course, given the difficulty of getting one's bearings, cognitive mapping in the original geographical sense of the term becomes simultaneously all but impossible yet all the more crucial—just as the totalizing aesthetic practice of cognitive mapping, in Jameson's account, is precisely what postmodernism tends to prevent as it simultaneously provides the "vocation" of radical politics in postmodernity. Indeed, under the right circumstances, fog produces a perceptual depthlessness, analogous to postmodernism's privileging of surfaces over depths: "The third dimension grew less and less reliable—a row of four taillights ahead could either belong to two separate cars in adjoining lanes a safe distance away, or be a pair of

double lights on the same vehicle, right in front of your nose, no way to tell” (*Inherent* 367).

Unsurprisingly, smog is associated with the urban sprawl emblematic of L.A. and the American automobile culture to which sprawl gives rise: freeways run through “great horizonless fields of housing, under [...] the white bombardment of a sun smogged into only a smear of probability, out in whose light you began to wonder if anything you’d call psychedelic could ever happen” (19). These observations by Doc link together several important symbolic features of smog. Produced by commuters traveling from suburban “fields of housing,” smog attests to the ideological victory of middle-class consumerism in postmodernity while also highlighting the straightworld intolerance that renders “anything you’d call psychedelic” seemingly impossible. As such, smog represents conformity and a foreclosure of the radical alternatives metonymically associated in this novel with hippie culture and drug experiences: “smoglight [...] is] appropriate to ends or conditions settled for, too often after only token negotiation” (316). The notion of settling—often indistinguishable from selling out, or even betrayal—reopens the question, central to Pynchon’s oeuvre, of the legacy of the 1960s and fidelity to that decade’s radical political potential. The visual impact of fog in *Inherent Vice* is thus all at once a matter of phenomenology, culture, economics, politics, and ultimately history itself.

However, at this point, fog begins to pass from the thematic field of visibility to that of temporality—from day as light to day as time—where it joins the commodification of time in the guise of interest as capitalism’s two crucial ideological uses of time and temporality. Capitalism does not have a monopoly on the temporal connotations of day

in *Inherent Vice*; just as light and illumination have subversive as well as hegemonic valences, so too is time not only an object of capitalist exchange and the postmodern waning of historicity but also a site of contestation and struggle. More than just a missing-person investigation, Doc's pursuit of the Wolfmann case is a claim staked in both the history of the 1960s and, even more importantly, the future of radical politics.

Doc's investigation dramatizes those historical and political struggles by pitting the epiphanic logic of grace against the system of capitalist exchange. As I argued above, the incommensurability of grace subverts capitalist circulation by rendering exchange value impossible. I can add now that under capitalism, violations of the rule of exchange value by grace must never go unpunished. Indeed, an offense as venial as "rogue profit-sharing activities"—profit-sharing not even an instance of grace but rather a reform (no more radical than anything aboard the *Inconvenience*) that merely adjusts the distribution of profits—is enough to sentence to death the dentist Rudy Blatnoyd (318).

Similarly, capitalism's interdiction against grace is ultimately what accounts for Mickey's disappearance. Like any good capitalist, Mickey has an extensive history of strategic philanthropy. Philanthropy, however, yields returns: tax breaks, good publicity, legislative consideration or other political favors, and so forth. As such, philanthropy poses no threat to capitalist exchange; it merely counts as one more item in the debit column, to be repaid with one form or another of credit down the road. Mickey transgresses when he crosses a threshold between profitable philanthropy and unmitigated, unprofitable giving: "This was the deepest shit he could get in. All because of this idea[...]. All the money he ever made—he was working on a way to just give it

back” (150).¹²⁰ His crime is to envision a utopian community that would provide housing without rent or profit, called *Arrepentimiento*: “Spanish for ‘sorry about that.’ His idea was, anybody could go live there for free, didn’t matter who you were, show up and if there’s a unit open it’s yours” (248). The operative logic of *Arrepentimiento* therefore would not be profitable exchange, the capitalist justification for philanthropy, but excessive grace, approaching the Derridean notions of not only the gift, but also hospitality, in its unquestioning, unconditional welcome to the other who simply “show[s] up.”¹²¹

I want to emphasize the way that Mickey’s utopian vision not only fails to honor the capitalist imperative to accumulate but also, in so doing, counts as a radical threat to the whole system this imperative supports. Describing Mickey’s plan, an FBI agent expresses the same vitriol and abhorrence for marginalized subjectivities that Bigfoot typically reserves for hippies: “Suddenly he decides to *change his life* and give away millions to an assortment of degenerates—Negroes, longhairs, drifters” (244). Those recipients are a far cry from charitable groups, political campaigns, and other entities whose straightworld respectability underwrites their continued receipt of capitalist philanthropy. Given the middle class’s demonization of Charles Manson and its equation of the latter with hippies generally—as well as its parallel moral denunciation of

¹²⁰ Mickey’s generosity thus actualizes Oedipa’s temptation to redistribute Inverarity’s estate to W.A.S.T.E. users in *The Crying of Lot 49*, while the punishment he suffers in consequence confirms Oedipa’s apprehension concerning likely reactions to such a move (*Crying* 150). See also sec. 3.2, above.

¹²¹ Notably, both the would-be tenants of *Arrepentimiento* and the other welcomed by Derridean hospitality are *arrivants*, those who arrive. Articulating the law of unconditional hospitality, Derrida writes: “Let us say *yes to who or what turns up*, before any determination, before any anticipation, before any *identification...*” (*Of Hospitality* 77)—or, in Pynchon’s words from *Inherent Vice*, “didn’t matter who you were, [just] show up.”

Black Nationalism, which it blankets with the label “Black Nationalist Hate Groups” (74; see Chapter 3, above)—Mickey’s hospitality to what Deleuze and Guattari call minoritarian subjects would undermine commonsense acceptance of middle-class ideologies and practices while enabling new collective associations and manners of living that fall outside the jurisdiction of circulation and exchange.¹²²

It comes as no surprise, then, that the reigning capitalist order in *Inherent Vice* resorts to any means necessary to prevent Arrepentimiento from becoming reality. In fact, Mickey’s entrenchment within that order is what facilitates his punishment. Several of his business connections link him to a secretive capitalist network known as the Golden Fang. On site at Channel View Estates, one of Mickey’s housing development currently under construction, is Chick Planet Massage, an erotic massage parlor that also provides a front for a Golden Fang heroin operation (20–22, 159). In addition, Mickey apparently is a donor to the Chryskylodon Institute, “a high-rent loony bin” and rehab facility in the city of Ojai, where Tito reports Mickey had requested to be picked up shortly before his disappearance (111, 184; cf. 60). Significantly, the institute’s name translates roughly from Greek as “gold tooth” or “[g]old fang” (185). Furthermore, Prussia’s henchman Puck also works as a bodyguard for Mickey and has ties to a known heroin dealer (149, 211). Prussia himself is connected to the Golden Fang: his file at the District Attorney’s office, Doc eventually discovers, includes a photograph of him holding “CIA Nixonhead funnymoney”—counterfeit twenties featuring a portrait of Nixon—in front of the *Golden Fang*, a schooner recently spotted near L.A. (286). Much like Oedipa’s quest for the Tristero in *The Crying of Lot 49*, sorting out both the hydra-

¹²² On minoritarian subjectivity, see sec. 2.2, above.

headed Golden Fang and Mickey's many tangled connections to it occupies Doc for most of the novel: "Let's see—it's a schooner that smuggles in goods. It's a shadowy holding company. Now it's a Southeast Asian heroin cartel. Maybe Mickey's in on it" (159); "if the Golden Fang could get its customers strung out, why not [...] also sell them a program to help them kick?" (192); "the Golden Fang not only traffick in Enslavement, they peddle the implements of Liberation as well" (294). The Golden Fang seems to be everywhere, except where you want to find it ("Doc [...] thought he saw something[...]. But the fog coming in made everything deceptive" [87]). Like capitalism itself, it is ubiquitous and unavoidable, but also unobservable.¹²³

Above all, the Golden Fang is unforgiving: it is responsible for both Mickey's abduction and the death of Rudy Blatnoyd, the profit-sharing dentist. Before his death, Blatnoyd had been a member of a dentists' "syndicate" known as the Golden Fang and headquartered in "a six-story-high *golden fang!*" (169, 168). In an epiphanic hallucination late in the novel, Doc meets the Golden Fang incarnate, a "presence, tall and cloaked, with oversize and wickedly pointed gold canines, and luminous eyes," who personifies the darkest underbelly of capitalist society and admits to killing Blatnoyd: "they have named themselves after their worst fear. I am the unthinkable vengeance they turn to when one of them has grown insupportably troublesome, when all other sanctions have failed" (318). Although the Golden Fang does not mention Mickey in its conversation with Doc, there is reason enough to conclude that it plays a key part in Mickey's return to the capitalist fold and Arrepentimiento's premature foreclosure. In

¹²³ Cf. the narrator's description of capitalists in Las Vegas: "somewhere out of the light the landlord, the finance company, the loan-shark community sat invisible and unspeaking, tapping feet in expensive shoes, weighing options for punishment, leniency—even, rarely, mercy" (229; note also the insufficient lighting).

addition to Mickey's grace making him, like Blatnoyd, "insupportably troublesome," there is also Shasta's captivity at sea to consider: she is, after all, aboard the *Golden Fang* when Doc hallucinates seeing her and she feels his presence (109). Moreover, the link between the Golden Fang organization and Prussia also connects the former to a vast network that includes two powerful repressive apparatuses. First is organized crime, which covertly controls much of Las Vegas, where Mickey is ultimately apprehended and near the site of Arrepentimiento. Second, the network also includes the LAPD, which, Doc eventually learns, contracts Prussia to perform hits on a long "list of wrongdoers the Department would happily see out of the way," especially "political—black and Chicano activists, antiwar protesters, campus bombers, and assorted other pinko fucks" (323). Both the mob and the cops would have obvious reason to prevent the founding of Mickey's utopian community: namely, its disabling of capitalist exchange through grace and its embrace of and material support for new collectivities. The one nullifies exchange value, thereby removing all grounds for equivalence and thus for capitalist drive itself. The other awakens—and worse still for the Golden Fang and company, might actually be able to satisfy—desires for collective forms of living that give the lie to the capitalist ideology of atomized consumer subjectivity and to the social and political conservatism that derides utopian thinking as hippie delusion.

It therefore matters little that Mickey returns to L.A. in the company of the FBI rather than meeting a fate similar to Blatnoyd's. Doc sees Mickey with FBI agents in Las Vegas—"Hard to say if they had him in custody or if they were conducting him on [...] a walk-through" of a casino—and he later learns that Mickey has "made a deal with the Justice Department," which oversees the FBI (243, 252). If anything, however,

these facts attest more to the pervasive hegemony of capitalist drive and exchange than to any weakness on the part of the Golden Fang. The Justice Department would rather Mickey than a mobster purchase and renovate a Vegas casino (240), but that preference nowise translates into a warm welcome for Arrepentimiento or its inhabitants. The feds have as much interest in preventing Mickey's plan as the Golden Fang does; both parties share, if nothing else, an allegiance to capitalist exchange and class structure, which evinces capitalism's saturation of the social whole. It is everywhere but, for that very reason, nowhere localizable: "like the space aliens of nearby Area 51, [Mickey's] abductors remain inaccessible to ordinary legal remedy" (361).

In place of a legal remedy, then, *Inherent Vice* imagines a hallucinatory, epiphanic one. The groundwork for the novel's imaginary solution is laid over the course of a single fateful day, the events of which propel Doc toward several crucial resolutions. The day in question begins with a brief, seemingly innocent marker of the passage of time: "Next day was as they say another day" (281). As the day unfolds, however, it becomes progressively clearer that it is not just another day like any other but rather another day altogether, of an entirely different temporal order than any old day: "The clock [...] read some hour that it could not possibly be" (282). Yet despite the day's objective impossibility, it, like Doc's epiphanic hallucinations, nonetheless reveals subversive truths and produces real results.

The day's first revelation bears directly on Doc's investigation of Mickey's disappearance and his connections with the Golden Fang. Doc gains access that day to the sealed Department of Justice file on Prussia. The file provides Doc with several

key pieces of information which reveal Prussia's responsibility for the death of Vincent Indelicato, Bigfoot's late partner, whose identity Doc only now discovers; recount Prussia's history as a "contract killer" for the LAPD; connect Prussia with Mickey through the latter's hiring of his former employees; and implicate Prussia in the Golden Fang's counterfeiting racket (283–86). I have already discussed the important role that these facts play in accounting for Mickey's disappearance. What I want to emphasize now is the way Doc gains access to this information in the first place: at great personal and professional risk to herself, Penny Kimball, a deputy in the District Attorney's office and a sometime romantic interest of Doc's, shares the file with Doc—she gives him access. This episode thus mediates between Bigfoot's capitalist economy of intelligence, in accordance with which the Justice Department compiles and distributes Prussia's file, and the epiphanic logic of grace, which shapes the dynamics of Penny's gift to Doc.

Grace and epiphany figure even more prominently as the day progresses. As useful as Doc's access to the DOJ file is, it is only the first of the day's many significant events and, for a political interpretation of *Inherent Vice*, far from the most important. As the day continues, significant epiphanic realizations come about concerning politics and economics, and crucial groundwork is laid for Doc's final, dramatic epiphany concerning history itself.

This last epiphany only comes in the novel's final pages, but Doc's experiences throughout the day help prepare him for its arrival. Earlier, Doc gets "caught in a low-level bummer he couldn't find a way out of, about how the Psychedelic Sixties, this little parenthesis of light, might close after all, and be lost, taken back into darkness ... how a

certain hand might reach terribly out of darkness and reclaim the time, easy as taking a joint from a dooper and stubbing it out for good” (254–55). Doc’s premonition of the closure of the 1960s connects several themes that I have been developing throughout this section. The apparent inescapability of historical closure (“he couldn’t find a way out”) and the futility of resisting it (“easy as taking a joint from a dooper”) attest to the ubiquity of capitalism under real subsumption and to its naturalization as so-called human nature, a.k.a. ideology. Moreover, that ideological naturalization results in part from the conceit of capitalism’s invisible hand, recast here in sinister light as a force of recuperation exercising monopolistic control over history. If the ’60s is a joint, capitalism bogarts time. The passage bespeaks the irreversibility of history and lost opportunities (“stubbing it out for good”) at the same time as it also expresses a sense of the uniqueness of the 1960s as a utopian moment—the decade’s being extinguished “for good” means in part that there will never be another ’60s—a “parenthesis of light” to which Pynchon’s entire career following his late modernist beginnings is in many ways a single, massive literary testament. Finally, these lines bundle together several of the metaphorical functions of day that are central to Pynchon’s post-9/11 micro-period: utopianism is here a “parenthesis of light,” while the agent of its cancellation emerges “out of darkness” to “reclaim [...] time.” The utopian light of the ’60s is thus engulfed in capitalism’s systemic darkness, a darkness that confuses and disorients. Like a loan shark’s thug collecting time as replacement for interest, the invisible hand of the market and the long arm of the state force compliance from late capitalism’s delinquent decade.

Doc’s anticipation of the fate of the 1960s represents an attempt to accept that decade’s passing, but it remains a “bummer,” bound up with sentimental nostalgia.

Later experiences inch Doc toward a more critical assessment. On the same day as he reads the dossier on Prussia, Doc recognizes nostalgia as “a fool’s attempt to find his way back into a past that despite them both [i.e., Doc and Shasta] had gone on into the future it did” (314). The day thus reinforces Doc’s thoughts on historical irreversibility and the futility of nostalgia. If utopianism in the U.S. is to survive the death of the ’60s, it must relinquish nostalgic attachments to the past, without thereby betraying its inheritance, and instead grasp in the present the makings of alternate futures.

Doc’s subsequent epiphanies help him begin to adopt this perspective. Later that day, in a pizza joint called the Plastic Nickel and frequented by a wide variety of drug users, Doc experiences a hallucinatory epiphany in which he converses with a plastic bust of Thomas Jefferson. The epiphany begins with a comment by Jefferson, which I have quoted already, on the Golden Fang: “the Golden Fang not only traffick in Enslavement, they peddle the implements of Liberation as well.” Jefferson goes on to lecture Doc on the importance of revolution:

“The tree of Liberty must be refreshed from time to time with the blood of patriots and tyrants[...]. It is its natural Manure.”

“Yeah, and what about when the patriots and the tyrants turn out to be the same people?” said Doc, “like, we’ve got this president now...”

“As long as they bleed,” explained Jefferson, “is the thing.” (294)

The epiphany concludes with Jefferson advising Doc not to “trust” the Golden Fang or any parties connected to it, but then “[falling] abruptly silent” when Doc’s dining companions return to the table, just as he is preparing to offer some crucial recommendations for Doc’s next step (“What you *do* have to do, however, is—”) (295).

Doc’s hallucinated conversation with Jefferson is significant for several reasons. On the basic level of the novel’s plot and Doc’s investigative quest, Jefferson’s comments corroborate Doc’s suspicions concerning the Golden Fang’s promotion of

apparently conflictive ends as a way to maximize profit (think heroin and rehab). More importantly, this is the first time in the novel that Doc openly entertains ideas of political revolution, as opposed to cultural or social revolution, and political violence. His insinuation that Nixon is both a patriot and a tyrant, immediately after Jefferson calls for bloodshed, marks a shift from decrying evils of the fascist state to flirting with direct action against it.

Finally, several threads running throughout other novels of Pynchon's intersect in this conversation. The targeting of Nixon, critically and also perhaps violently, recalls *Gravity's Rainbow's* parodic Richard M. Zhlubb as well as *Vineland's* indictment of the Nixon 1970s along with the Reagan 1980s.¹²⁴ Furthermore, like the subversive portrayal of the Founding Fathers in *Mason & Dixon*, the hallucination dislodges the figure of Jefferson from the conservative context of nationalism and patriotism, positioning him instead as a revolutionary against not only tyranny but also a late capitalism metonymically represented by the Golden Fang.¹²⁵ Last, the episode's closing gesture—the deferral of insider's truth or gnostic knowledge—recalls *The Crying*

¹²⁴ I cite in passing another of *Inherent Vice's* irreverent references to Nixon, this one coming in Doc's reflection of the disproportionate power granted to the FBI: "You could catch the FBI in the act of sodomizing the president in the Lincoln Memorial at high noon and local law enforcement would still have to stand around and watch[...]" (282). It is not uncommon to hear mention in the same breath of Pynchon and Robert Coover, a contemporary of Pynchon's (Coover was born in 1932, Pynchon in 1937; Coover's debut, *The Origin of the Brunists*, appeared in 1966, the same year as *Crying*). For example, Hutcheon lists Coover's *The Public Burning* (1977) as an example of historiographic metafiction, along with *Gravity's Rainbow* (e.g., *Poetics* 112). Doc's vision of the FBI "sodomizing the president," however, is a particularly vivid point of connection with Coover. A guiding conceit of *The Public Burning* is that each U.S. president—in this case, Richard Nixon (Vice President under Eisenhower at the time of the novel's plot)—must submit to anal sex with Uncle Sam, who is, like the FBI in *Inherent Vice*, a personification of state sovereignty (see Coover, *The Public Burning* 470–85).

¹²⁵ Pynchon's Jefferson is thus much like Michael Hardt's. Hardt compellingly locates Jefferson not in a tradition of American nationalism but rather in a revolutionary tradition whose heirs have included Lenin, Che Guevara, Mao, and Subcommandante Marcos. For Jefferson—both on Hardt's take and under Pynchon's treatment—"[t]he processes of constituent power ... must continually disrupt and force open an establishment of constituted power" (Hardt, "Thomas Jefferson" xii). See Hardt, "Thomas Jefferson."

of *Lot 49*, both Oedipa's quest generally and the crying of lot 49 itself, which the novel leaves Oedipa awaiting. Doc's Jefferson hallucination resonates on several crucial frequencies, ranging from the most limited context of Doc's detective work up to the novel's political allegory and that of Pynchon's work as a whole.

As in the rest of his oeuvre, commitment to the preterite remains central to the politics of *Inherent Vice*. Fittingly, then, the day that brings Doc his epiphanic flash of revolutionary consciousness also witnesses critical reflection concerning his impact on the preterite. Following his conversation with Jefferson, Doc begins to question the effective political and economic loyalties performed by his work as a PI (as opposed to the affective loyalties he unambiguously feels for hippie counterculture, the working class, and so forth). He goes so far as to speculate that his own contradictory politics might have formerly driven Shasta to use heroin, "just to be back for a while among the junkie fellowship, to have a break from this hopeless stooge of the creditor class" (303). In addition to expressing a multifaceted sense of guilt, Doc tellingly contrasts political commitments in terms of their respective forms of collectivity. Heroin users might be junkies—and it should be noted that heroin is endowed in Pynchon's canon with virtually none of the liberatory or radical potential associated with other drugs such as pot and acid—but junkies nonetheless partake in a "fellowship." The notion of fellowship—crucially, the same word used to describe the collective bond of the Mobility to be in *Mason & Dixon*—is perhaps colored here by Pynchon's longstanding reevaluation of the categories of elect and preterite; I have in mind the rhetoric, prominent especially among smaller Protestant churches, touting fellowship (and using the word *fellowship*) as a chief benefit of church life. However, in keeping with Pynchon's valorization of the

preterite, fellowship is here associated not with upstanding middle-class churchgoers but with drug users. It is they who foster an accepting, mutually supporting community. By contrast, Doc describes the collectivity of the elect with the word *class*, more analytically rigorous than *fellowship* but also, when applied to “creditors,” lacking a sense of common belonging predicated on anything other than the accumulation of wealth. The capitalist accumulation of wealth tends both to presuppose and to construct subjectivities as isolated agents engaged in competition rather than collaboration: hence, Doc is not a fellow member of that class—or even, say, a helper or apprentice, either of which could imply some kind of personal connection between Doc and the “creditor class”—but rather a mere “stooge.” There is a payoff, however: in order to remain a faithful stooge of capitalism, one needs to buy into the myth of upward mobility. Doc’s recognition that he is but a stooge casts into doubt the social function of his PI work, along with the capitalist system it supports: “Forget who—*what* was he working for anymore?” (314). The shift from *who* to *what* is analogous to the difference between ethical critique, which evaluates actions of individual agents in terms of moral categories, and political critique, which focuses instead on systems of exploitation and power. As Doc’s investigation zeroes in on the Golden Fang—decidedly a *what* rather than a *who*—and as he scrutinizes the political consequences of his own practices, he approaches a standpoint that grasps capitalist society systemically, as a network coordinating and controlling flows of wealth.

It is in flouting the rules and dynamics that govern those flows that the significance of this epiphanic day finally fully emerges. The excessive grace demonstrated in epiphanic experience not only structures the day’s individual epiphanies but also,

crucially, underwrites the day itself: the day does not belong to the hegemonic official history of late capitalism but is rather a gift whose temporality cannot be assimilated into the quotidian experience of postmodern time. In terms of “real” historical time, *Inherent Vice* is dated more precisely than any other novel by Pynchon. I have said already that the narrative is set in 1970; more precisely, it runs from Tuesday, 24 March to Friday, 8 May 1970, a span of a month and a half. These dates are anchored by references to basketball games during the 1970 NBA playoffs; using the historical dates of those games in conjunction with narrative time markers—which the narrator, in the main, is remarkably diligent in pointing out—it is possible to date every day of the narrative. In the chronology that emerges, Doc’s epiphanic day is impossible to account for (see table 4-1). The day does not exist on the calendars of indicative history. It is literally an extra day: recall the narrator’s announcement, “Next day was as they say another day,” and the clock “read[ing] some hour that it could not possibly be.” This freely given day must originate, therefore, in some utopian, revolutionary temporal order that stands outside the dark history of a capitalism which chokes parentheses of light, an order whose distribution of wealth—time is money—can only scandalize a credit economy that generates profit by commodifying time.¹²⁶ Another day, indeed.

Over the subsequent four days that conclude *Inherent Vice*, the potentially revolutionary fruits of this extra day flower as a series of epiphanic realizations concerning history. By the beginning of the penultimate chapter, the erosion of Doc’s nostalgia begun during the extra day develops into a critical assessment of nostalgia’s

¹²⁶ In connection with this point, it is worth recalling the crucial role played by historically specific, economically determined conceptions of time that Pynchon highlights in his discussion of sloth as a violation of “clock-time” (“Nearer”).

fundamental limitations. Examining a series of enlarged stills taken from security-camera footage at Channel View Estates, Doc is unable to identify his subject of interest. Phenomenologically, his initial experience of the defamiliarization resulting from the images' poor resolution resembles an LSD hallucination: "each image [...] began to float apart into little blobs of color." Just as in properly narcotic epiphanies, the visual decomposition of the images begins to morph into an intuition, in this case of "some kind of limit" circumscribing the past, "whatever had happened." Then, in a bolt of realization characteristic of ephanic experience, Doc's perceptual difficulties with the images becomes simultaneously an allegory for the impossibility of historical return and for the bad faith of nostalgia for the past: "It was like finding the gateway to the past unguarded, unforbidden because it didn't have to be. Built into the act of return finally was this glittering mosaic of doubt" (351). Nostalgia for the past receives no interdiction because it poses no meaningful threat to capitalist order: as long as nostalgia remains content to mourn, as it does in *Vineland*, it stops short of identifying openings in the present through which radical inheritances from the past might be channeled toward a revolutionary, utopian future, the latter evident in *Mason & Dixon's* nostalgia for the future. Because its primary critical function is to emphasize present failures of past promises, nostalgia for the past remains trapped in an experience of history whose continuing usefulness for praxis, by virtue of the very pastness of the past and the irrevocability of history's forward momentum, can be dubious at best. As pleasing and poignant as nostalgic memories or reconstructions of the past are, they remain "glittering mosaics of doubt." (Or, even worse, their glitter is none other than the luster of the commodity: the reduction of history to period style under the postmodern waning

of historicity, disseminated as media commodities to consumers of television like Prairie Wheeler.) Only a bad faith that refuses to believe in historical change and history itself (think Thanatoids)—or, perhaps, a bad analysis that simply fails to recognize commodities as such (think Isaiah Two Four’s bourgeois, post-hippie parents)—can fail to see this structural failure of nostalgia for the past, its “inherent vice” (351).

Pynchon takes the novel’s title from actuarial terminology. As Sauncho explains to Doc, the term *inherent vice* applies to unavoidable and therefore uninsurable risks, “like eggs break[ing]” (351). No two ways about it: eggs break. Likewise, time passes; sooner or later, the present becomes the past. A nostalgic insistence on reassembling the past from its fragments cannot thereby circumvent the movement of a history that has already contained and commodified what in the 1960s used to be radical.¹²⁷ Doc’s extra day and this ensuing epiphany reveal the inherent vice of nostalgia for the past and discredit it as a political strategy.

In my analysis of nostalgia in *Vineland* and *Mason & Dixon*, I argued that differences between political functions and historical perspectives of nostalgia in those novels also correspond to the distinction between the indicative and the subjunctive. Similarly to *Mason & Dixon*’s nostalgia for the future, *Inherent Vice* expresses a utopian impulse in the subjunctive discourse of mythology. The myth of the lost continent of Lemuria, in particular—“The Atlantis of the Pacific” (101)—functions as a subjunctive corrective to the inherent vice of nostalgia for the past. Moreover, it is also connected to epiphany and grace, and not merely because Sortilège—who articulates the principle of

¹²⁷ It is fitting that Sauncho uses eggs’ fragility as an example of inherent vice: while the reconstruction of fragments of the past strikes Doc as a “glittering mosaic of doubt,” it also recalls the desperate, futile attempts of the king’s horses and men to reassemble Humpty Dumpty in the nursery rhyme.

grace that accounts for epiphany's unaccountability—is its most vocal believer. Like epiphany, Lemuria cannot be summoned; rather, Sortilège claims, it arrives on its own, unexpectedly: “We can't find a way to return to Lemuria, so it's returning to us. Rising up out of the ocean” (167). Furthermore, also like epiphany, the myth shines alternative light on the present, illuminating the gulf between indicative reality and the subjunctive possibilities of myth. In that sense, the myth of Lemuria is similar to the more critical or oppositional forms of nostalgia for the past found in Pynchon, such as Ditzah Pisk Feldman's nostalgia in *Vineland*, or DL Chastain's. Unlike those nostalgias, the Lemuria myth stands outside indicative history entirely. Its function is therefore pedagogical rather than mournful; and because it refuses mourning, it is not subject to nostalgia's inherent vice.

In the wake of the insights gained by Doc during the novel's extra day, the myth of Lemuria allows Doc to assess the shortcomings of present-day mainstream U.S. culture. Stuck in rush-hour freeway traffic—a source of the smog that symbolizes a foreshortening of historical perspective—Doc imagines how Angelenos would react to the resurfacing of Lemuria: “People [...] saw only what they'd all agreed to see, they believed what was on the tube or in the morning papers [...], and it was all their dream about being wised up, about the truth setting them free. What good would Lemuria do them?” (315). The failure to recognize the subjunctive, epiphanic, or hallucinatory truths of Lemuria is an index of the impoverishment by capitalist media apparatuses of the utopian imagination; those apparatuses' enshrinement of exchange value and ideological construction of common sense, among other things, preclude the grace that Sortilège sees in Lemuria's return and the epiphanic insight that pierces through the fog

of postmodernity. Through the myth of Lemuria, grace and epiphany register the imaginative and revolutionary sterility of the present, just as they reveal the political and historical insufficiency of nostalgic attachment.

If Doc's critical appraisal of the present by means of epiphany takes the form here of imaginative, hypothetical speculation revealing the limitations of commonsense experience, elsewhere it illuminates and indicts the underlying material basis of middle-class common sense, eventually flowering into a full-fledged critique of class society. The first step of this process following Doc's comparison of L.A. with Lemuria is his encounter with the Golden Fang incarnate. That epiphany, I have argued, allegorizes capitalism's absolute allergy toward grace and its brutal efficacy at enforcing the rule of profit. In addition, it has the effect of clarifying Doc's sense of class identity and renewing Doc's loyalties to preterite subjectivities—loyalties that he had begun to doubt in his epiphanic self-critique during the extra day. Following his Golden Fang hallucination, as well as his stern education in time and interest under Puck's tutelage, Doc demonstrates a newfound stridency as an advocate for capitalism's dispossessed. When Golden Fang member Crocker Fenway accuses Doc of being an inauthentic hippie because he pays rent—on the face of it, an absurd charge to begin with, since it assumes that there are viable alternatives to the capitalist housing market—Doc responds: “when the first landlord decided to stiff the first renter for his security deposit, your whole fucking class lost everybody's respect” (346). In addition to denouncing injustice, Doc's retort also identifies the contradiction and hypocrisy occupying the gap between the logic of commensurability inherent in exchange, with its pretenses to so-called fair market value, and the compulsion to maximize profit, by whatever means.

The pursuit of profit, of course, tends toward expropriation pure and simple, or what David Harvey calls “accumulation by dispossession” (see *New* 137–82). Unchecked, however, capitalist expropriation can also lead to the unintended consequences of class solidarity and resistance: “After a while that starts to add up. For years [...] there’s been all this class hatred, slowly building. Where do you think that’s headed?” (Pynchon, *Inherent* 347). Doc is markedly more radical here than in such earlier critiques of capitalism as his complaint that suburbia prevents “anything psychedelic,” or even the “bummer” he feels at the passing of the 1960s. Whereas those instances grapple with cultural incompatibilities between the bourgeoisie and hippie counterculture, Doc’s confrontation with Fenway grasps antagonism in material terms as an inevitable product of capitalist class society. His threat that working-class and lumpen subjects might one day “turn into a savage mob” is nothing short of an anticipation of class consciousness and revolution itself. If the Lemuria myth exposes the feebleness of the middle class in imagining alternative worlds, and the Golden Fang hallucination reveals the cruelty of the pursuit of profit, Doc’s diatribe against Fenway apprehends exploitation and immiseration in the present as fuel for a dramatic explosion of revolutionary futurity.

That futurity constitutes the final temporal horizon against which Doc’s epiphanies over the novel’s closing chapters emerge; crucially—and in marked contrast with Pynchon’s other two California novels—that futurity also remains open. Even Bigfoot, surprisingly, acknowledges the possibility of historical change: “Like a record on a turntable, all it takes is one groove’s difference and the universe can be on into a whole ‘nother song” (334). The topography of history in Bigfoot’s analogy resembles another figure familiar to readers of Pynchon: a passage from *V.*, used above as an epigraph,

imagines history as a cloth “rippled with gathers in its fabric,” forming “sinuous cycles” of “crest[s]” and troughs (161–62). Bigfoot presents history congruently to the extent that grooves in a record likewise form a concentric series of peaks (or perhaps plateaus) and valleys. However, his simile differs from the earlier metaphor when it comes to historical agency: the “fold[s]” and gathers of the fabric of history in *V.* obscure historical connections among past, present, and future, condemning subjects to stumble ineptly through the passage of time, blind and impotent—“We are [...] lost to any sense of a continuous tradition”—while Bigfoot’s turntable of history can be accelerated by the revolutionary skipping of a track or two.

Lest *Inherent Vice*’s metaphor for history and time be too quickly dismissed on account of its source, I point out that Doc likens it to a drug experience: “Been doing a little acid, there, Bigfoot?” (*Inherent* 334). Although Doc’s quip clearly is playful antagonistic banter, it is also more than that. Not only does Bigfoot’s comparison, like hallucinations, stretch the limits of credibility, it also, as with Doc’s epiphanies, defies the odds in turning out to be true. In Doc’s view, developed epiphanically in the remaining two scenes that I analyze before concluding, historical change really is possible. Despite the ideological dominance of capitalism’s blinding daylight, despite the Golden Fang’s complementary mastery of darkness and its commodification of time, and despite the closure of the utopian “Psychedelic Sixties, this little parenthesis of light”—not only here but also in the alienation and deferral suffered by Oedipa in *The Crying of Lot 49* and the nostalgic recuperation of radicalism in *Vineland*—revolution can still happen in the world of *Inherent Vice*.

In the first of the two final epiphanic moments, revolution takes the form of alternate history combined with a utopian future, as if someone had skipped a track or perhaps even changed the record on Bigfoot's turntable. Dreaming, Doc witnesses the redemption of "the schooner *Golden Fang*, which [has] reassumed its old working identity, as well as its real name, *Preserved*" (340). Four factors make Doc's dream of the ship's restoration significant. First, and most obviously, the ontological status and quasi-hallucinatory nature of dreams in general are consistent with Doc's narcotic epiphanies, which bear a similar relation to sober waking reality. Second, the very act of renaming further connects the dream to epiphany. When Doc views Shasta aboard the *Golden Fang*, in an earlier epiphanic hallucination, his "Lemurian spirit guide" chastises him for using that name: "*Preserved*, Kamukea silently corrected him" (109). Thus the boat's names alternately attest to its subsumption under late capitalism and submission to the law of exchange or, conversely, insist on a utopianism that perseveres despite all that, preserved somehow by epiphanic grace.

Third, if the renaming of the ship counts as a performative speech act that installs grace in place of exchange, it also has economic reverberations. At one point in its storied past, the *Preserved* had been owned by (fictitious) actor Burke Stodger—like John Garfield, a victim of blacklisting and McCarthyism. Following a mysterious disappearance and an absence of "a couple years," Stodger resurfaces to star in "a big-budget major-studio project called *Commie Confidential*," while the *Preserved*, "refitted stem to stern," reappears as the *Golden Fang* (92–93). The restoration of the ship's original name in Doc's dream, then, renounces those deals with the devil while

reaffirming working-class solidarity (the *Preserved* had been a fishing schooner) as well as anti-systemic and perhaps even communist revolt.

Fourth and finally, the somnolent return of the past and the notion of preservation participate in a distinctively epiphanic relation to the past. Unlike indicative nostalgia's attempts to reconstruct a mosaic from fragments of the past—which is the only way to proceed in indicative discourse, since all that is left of a recuperated, neutralized past is fragments and ruins—Doc's dream restores the past of the *Preserved* in a wholeness that flouts common sense and indicative history. Mosaics are made incrementally, bit by glittering bit, much like the way Bigfoot manages intelligence, amassing a broad base of evidence and assigning to each fact a commensurate exchange value. In both cases, the whole emerges over time and through careful application of method. In contrast, Doc's epiphanies arrive in a flash, usually fully formed, irrespective of orthodox epistemologies and commonsense methodologies. Thus the schooner is not reassembled out of fragments but rather preserved as an integral whole, as if by supernatural or magical means: "the [...] exorcist [...] clear[ed] away the dark residues of blood and betrayal[...]. Whatever evil had possessed her was now gone for good" (340). The ship's redemption through grace does not reassemble a past; it writes history anew.

Crucially, that rewritten, epiphanic history also opens onto a utopian future. In Doc's dream, Sauncho delivers "a kind of courtroom summary" that is simultaneously a eulogy for the *Preserved* and a commentary on history: "...yet there is no avoiding [...] the years of promise, gone and unrecoverable, of the land almost allowed to claim its better destiny, only to have the claim jumped by evildoers known all too well, and taken

instead and held hostage to the future we must live in now forever.” Thus far, Sauncho’s critique has exuded bitter regret, indignation, and resignation, all affects rightly associated with nostalgic lament. Continuing on, however, Sauncho’s valediction begins to pass from the funereal discourse of mourning—“May we trust that this blessed ship is bound for some better shore”—to the mythical discourse of alternative futures: “some better shore, some undrowned Lemuria, risen and redeemed, where the American fate, mercifully, failed to transpire...” (341). Sauncho’s commentary reproduces in miniature the evolution of the historical thinking fostered by Doc’s extra day and developed through epiphany: it critiques the present, focusing on failed promises and betrayals of the past, à la *Vineland*; it figures a mythical past that reveals the paucity of imagination at the heart of the ideological regime of common sense; and it projects a utopian future engendered by Lemuria’s imaginary restoration, which is at the same time an experience of grace arising from “the sea of time, the sea of memory and forgetfulness” (341). Epiphany thus leads Doc to an historical perspective from which he can unflinchingly assess the failures of the past and the consequent limitations on the present without giving up on utopian futurity in the process. His refusal to abandon utopian hope allows him to conceive of the future as a live possibility and as an open field of contestation—a far cry from the deferral and foreclosure symptomatically registered in *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Vineland*.

The utopian dimension of Doc’s emergent historical consciousness reaches its theoretical and poetic climax in the closing pages of the novel. *Inherent Vice* ends with a grand gesture toward utopian futurity that also resonates with many of the novel’s central motifs. Driving, once again, through the fog—the same fog whose erosion of the

third dimension I have read as a metaphor for postmodern depthlessness—Doc experiences a resounding epiphanic moment of collectivity, grace, and utopian anticipation. This experience begins with the unexpected formation of a temporary collectivity: as a precaution against the hazards of driving in fog, “across a patch of blindness” so impenetrable that exiting the freeway is “always [...] one of those last-possible-minute decisions,” Doc and other drivers spontaneously form “a convoy of unknown size [...] like a caravan in a desert of perception” (368). Both uncommodified and voluntary, the convoy thwarts capitalism on two fronts. Like Mickey’s aborted utopian community at Arrepentimiento, it acknowledges and validates a desire for collectivity, the very existence of which reveals purportedly natural or innate individualism to be the ideological construct that it is. Further, as freely given assistance that stands outside the reach of the profit motive and capitalist exchange, the convoy operates in accordance with the principle of excessive, generous grace. It therefore creates a temporary, contingent utopian community in the midst of the fog of late capitalism.

This collective experience of grace shared in common occasions Doc’s most sweeping and dramatic historical epiphany, one that is a matter simultaneously of temporality and visibility, the dual cores of *Inherent Vice* and *Against the Day*’s day symbolism. In the final paragraph, Doc entertains two scenarios. First, he imagines that the fog will linger and prove inescapable. However, he also wrests the fog symbolically from the clutches of capitalism and claims it for the preterite: “Maybe [...] it would stay this way for days, maybe he’d have to just keep driving [...] across a border where nobody could tell anymore in the fog who was Mexican, who was Anglo, who was

anybody” (369). Whereas fog predominately functions in *Inherent Vice* as a figure of capitalism’s pervasiveness and its capacity for ideological, political, and historical disorientation, here it renders incomprehensible categories according to which privilege is granted or revoked.¹²⁸ Doc puts opacity and low light to work against the social order that they had previously sustained. Instead of fostering class striation, the fog now obliterates class distinction. Instead of masking the ideological means for policing identities, the fog renders race and ethnicity not merely indeterminate but also irrelevant to social status. Released from class fetters and overdetermined identities that trap subjectivities in their being and delimit material freedoms, subjectivities become free to pursue their own becoming. Fog becomes a tool for liberation and revolution.

The second possibility imagined by Doc pushes this liberatory, revolutionary thinking further still, at the same time that it layers an historical dimension atop the visual symbolism reclaimed in the previous one. I quote the novel’s final lines:

Then again, he might run out of gas before that happened, and have to leave the caravan, and pull over on the shoulder, and wait. For whatever would happen. For a forgotten joint to materialize in his pocket. For the CHP [i.e., California Highway Patrol] to come by and choose not to hassle him. For a restless blonde in a Stingray to stop and offer him a ride. For the fog to burn away, and for something else this time, somehow, to be there instead. (369)

Like its temporal neighbor *Against the Day*, *Inherent Vice* ends with utopianism. Although Doc’s withdrawal from the caravan ends his participation in a collectivity, in light of the overall symbolic function in the novel of freeways and traffic, it also signifies a refusal of the workaday pragmatism that gets the middle class from suburb to office

¹²⁸ In a sense, then, the fog at the end of *Inherent Vice* it is somewhat akin to the clouds that provide cover for Slothrop during his pie fight with Major Marvy in *Gravity’s Rainbow*. In both cases, the weather facilitates logics and practices that empower preterite subjectivities against capitalism and constituted power.

and back. Rather than pursue a utilitarian goal, Doc waits. This waiting is different, however, than that at the end of *The Crying of Lot 49*: whereas Oedipa awaits a resolution that never arrives, Doc's waiting extends an epiphanic welcome to "whatever would happen." The answer to be provided by the crying of lot 49 would presumably account for Oedipa's decentered, chaotic world, but the imaginary contents that fill the slot of Doc's "whatever" all exhibit one form or another of unaccountable utopian grace. Any pothead who has ever found weed when there was none to be found knows well the generosity of that moment of discovery. Moreover, in a novel where drug use is not merely a means for self-discovery or spiritual revelation of a strictly metaphysical variety, but rather a figuration of epiphanic knowledge of the social world and human history, the fortuitous finding of an unaccounted reefer amounts to a potential opening onto further epiphanies that can be put to political use. Meanwhile, the highway patrol's simply letting Doc be is also a gift of time—time which, according to the anti-hippie police agenda in Doc's California (see note 105), ought to be spent on interrogation, running license plate numbers, checking warrants, and all-around "hassle." Even bumming a lift from "a restless blonde" has the chance of widening the social field in which Doc is able to act: at the very least, it presents an opportunity for forming, however briefly, a common bond with an erstwhile stranger.

But the most radical, utopian incarnation of this grace, of course, is the final line. The dream of "something else" is ultimately at the core of utopia itself, insofar as the latter is marked most of all by its difference from things as they are. That dream is unlikely, its realization inexplicable: Doc is at a loss to imagine how it might come about, except through a vague "somehow." But "somehow" is also precisely how grace works:

somehow, an acid trip reveals Shasta's whereabouts and implicates the *Golden Fang* in her disappearance and in Mickey's. Somehow, Doc receives the gift of an uncounted day, the events of which, somehow, catalyze his political commitments and transform his perspective on history. And somehow, the fog of late capitalism might finally lift, revealing a landscape miraculously transformed, somehow, into something else. Something else is utopia; somehow is revolutionary grace.

This imaginary anticipation of utopia and revolution provides a reference point for charting Doc's politicization. At the beginning of *Inherent Vice*, Doc perceives and experiences politics primarily as a function of culture: Mickey is "straightworld," not bourgeois; Shasta's getup is "flatland," not conservative or middle class. Even his antagonism toward Bigfoot is motivated not by a critical awareness of the fascist social function of the police but by cultural opposition between hip and square, in light of which Bigfoot is less an agent of the state or of capitalism than an extra on *Adam-12*: "Jive-ass sideburns, stupid mustache, haircut from a barber college [...] far from any current definition of hipness" (32). Doc stands outside and opposed to the dominant culture, but he conceives of that difference culturally, not politically. It is only as the epiphanies accumulate that Doc begins thinking of himself as not only countercultural but also politically resistant. By the end, of course, his political stance and historical perspective congeal into a radical imagination of a social order other than capitalist.

Crucially, Doc's political trajectory is opposite that of the anarchists in *Against the Day*. Yashmeen Halfcourt and the Traverse family start out as militant radicals using propaganda of the deed against capitalist infrastructure and practicing anarchist sexuality as a means for eroding the ideological bases of patriarchy and

heteronormativity and constructing oppositional collectivities. By the end, however, from their retreat in Washington state, they pose little revolutionary threat. Their movement, from revolutionary praxis to countercultural retreat, is thus the reverse of Doc's.

The Chums of Chance, meanwhile, follow a different course altogether. They begin *Against the Day* conducting surveillance work under the direct authority of Hierarchy. In that capacity, they are subject to a form of command consistent with both military discipline and industrial capitalism: orders are irreversible and unquestionable, emanating out from the center and down from the top. However, the Chums subsequently move from surveillance into other fields—investment, courier work, unspecified but lucrative business in California, perhaps housing and real estate aboard the city-sized *Inconvenience*, and so forth—while also gradually freeing themselves from Hierarchy. Their consequent autonomy, I have argued, corresponds to the internalization of social control, or biopower, under real subsumption. They are permitted to be capitalist free agents precisely because capitalism is woven into their social organization. Capitalist drive continues to rule on the *Inconvenience*, scaling back any desire for meaningful change to the modest proportions of market reform.

However, there is yet another element to consider in connection with the Chums' relative autonomy and the political interpretation to which it gives rise. In addition to their antinomian relation to the Chums, the anarchists also follow a political course opposite Doc's. *Inherent Vice* describes a similar tendency, which, although not embodied in individual characters in the same way as the other three movements I have just described, nonetheless reverses the direction followed by the Chums. The tasks of

debt management and surveillance are initially performed in *Inherent Vice* by independent firms that pursue capitalist agendas but act more or less independently or even roguishly, most notably LSD Investigations, Gotcha! Searches and Seizures, and, most prominently of course, the Golden Fang. In addition, however, *Inherent Vice* also anticipates, from the standpoint of narrative time, or records, from that of empirical history, the absorption of such work by information technologies: recall the ominous prediction, quoted above, of inescapable surveillance through the ARPAnet or the Internet.¹²⁹ The recent history of cyberspace incursions against individual privacy, ranging from the wide availability of consumer credit reports to cases of identity theft and cyberbullying, attests to the massive success of such surveillance. Once personal information is brazenly sold by Facebook or is only a click of the mouse or tap of the touchscreen away, PIs, repo men, and loan shark's thugs become obsolete; at best, their work becomes less sexy and glamorous, and more clerical and administrative.¹³⁰ The tendency here is to invalidate proprietary claims to specialized expertise on the part of PIs and the like, and to make that expertise an immanent property of the capitalist system of exchange itself: capitalism now manages intelligence as a commodity to be traded or sold, as we see in Bigfoot's method. Significantly, it is the same late capitalism that accounts for the opposite movements of surveillance in *Inherent Vice*

¹²⁹ See also Dienst: "The techniques of confinement that characterized disciplinary societies [i.e., in Foucault's famous studies] have been reconfigured into the 'instant communication' and 'continual monitoring' of control societies.... [S]urveillance can work even more effectively when people are set loose and left to their own devices" (120).

¹³⁰ Stephen Paul Miller highlights sundry ways in which functions formerly performed, in Doc's world, by PIs and other independent agents of surveillance came to be increasingly systematized over the course of the 1970s: "Credit checks became more centralized. Governmental agencies ... used tools such as computer matching to cross-reference computer files, thereby ... finding lawbreakers. Body identification tools ... eventually made it impossible to supply an unidentifiable Vietnam War victim's corpse for the Tomb of the Unknown Soldier" (2-3).

and *Against the Day*: late capitalism can eschew the vertical hierarchies of an earlier industrial capitalism because biopower makes such structures inefficient, just as the system-wide commodification of information and access render specialized surveillance redundant.

Thus, *Inherent Vice*, the California novel—which is also in a sense an historical novel, published in 2009 but set in 1970—imagines not only capitalism’s systemic management of information through biopower but also sites of revolutionary struggle and utopian enclaves indicating a potential escape from capitalism. Conversely, the historical novel, *Against the Day*, attests to the antinomian bind of resistance in the post-9/11 world, suspended between capitalist reform and countercultural retreat. Once again, the semiotic rectangle productively illustrates my political reading (see Fig. 4-4). It would seem that with this final micro-period, the political valences of the two strains in Pynchon’s canon get crossed up: *Inherent Vice* now sounds the clarion call of utopian thinking and cognitive mapping, while *Against the Day* narrates an arrest of radical thought and praxis that is symptomatic of life under real subsumption.

Things are ultimately never quite so straightforward as that. First, the utopia imagined in Doc’s vision of the lifting fog remains strictly metaphorical, especially in comparison with the utopianism of the earlier historical novels. Even there, of course, utopia remains dubious from the perspective of Their rationality, indicative history, and capitalist biopower. Nevertheless, the narrator of *Gravity’s Rainbow* assembles a preterite collectivity at the Orpheus Theater, just as the Rev^d Cherrycoke summons the Mobility into the LeSpark house in *Mason & Dixon*. Similarly, the conclusions to those novels insist more adamantly than that of *Inherent Vice* on the reality of their utopias,

tenuous though those realities may be: in *Gravity's Rainbow*, the narrator is able at least to call on "everybody" to sing before the "final delta-t," while Dr. Isaac and William, Mason's grown sons, fully commit to the utopian promise of a subjunctive America. *Inherent Vice*, in contrast, is explicit in portraying Doc's final epiphanic vision as hypothetical and provisional, even within the confines of the novel's fictional world: "Doc figured"; "he'd lose the fog, *unless* it [...] settled"; "*Maybe* [...] the fog] would stay"; "he *might* [...] wait" (368–69; my emphases). Even some of Doc's expressly hallucinatory experiences make a stronger claim on reality than this. For comparison, although *Against the Day* indeed ends in antinomy, that novel's more radical moments—for example, the scenes centered on Webb Traverse/the Kieselguhr Kid—still manage to achieve concrete results. The ending of *Inherent Vice* certainly marks its difference from the other California novels, but its utopianism does not for that reason alone stand on equal footing with comparable moments in the historical novels.

A second complication arises from the conclusion of *Against the Day*. If Doc's closing epiphany in *Inherent Vice* is utopian only within limits, the final paragraph on the *Inconvenience* in *Against the Day* is similarly subject to qualification. The Chums' airship certainly is a capitalist fantasy, but it is perhaps more than that as well. I return to the closing lines of *Against the Day*: "They will put on smoked goggles for the glory of what is coming to part the sky." In connection with the meteorological imagery that I have already analyzed, the donning of goggles by the Chums is a reasonable precaution, with the "rainstorm" "approaching," the barometer dropping, and the

ominous winds.¹³¹ The fact that the goggles are smoked, however, suggests another purpose. In addition to its religious connotations, the term *glory* is also a synonym for the lighting phenomenon anthelion: under the right conditions, with an observer looking away from the sun and positioned between the sun and clouds, the observer's shadow appears to possess a halo, as in Christian iconography.¹³² The observer is facing the direction of the sun's rays—with the day, not against it. At the end of the novel, however, the Chums are traveling west; thus, "what is coming to part the sky" must be coming from the west and heading east—temporally against the day. For all their acquiescence to capitalist drive, their internalization of biopower, their propagation of poverty and class stratification, there is nevertheless an intimation of opposition or resistance about the Chums here, a hint of potential revolt against what would become the twentieth century, postmodernity, and late capitalism.

Furthermore, the abnormal visual quality of glory also suggests a kinship with the alternative lighting of Doc's hallucinatory epiphanies. The final line of *Against the Day*—indeed, the final word—is therefore all the more significant: "They fly toward grace." *Toward*, but not *to*: the Chums approach grace but do not arrive, much like they flirt with alternatives to capitalism during their partnership with Igor Padzhitnoff only to revert following the armistice. This incomplete progress is consistent not only with the arrest or suspension of the utopian impulse at the novel's end, and not only with the element

¹³¹ Furthermore, by this time in the novel (ca. 1920), flight goggles would be standard issue for normal aircraft, since cockpits then were predominately open; whether goggles would be necessary on a craft as advanced as the *Inconvenience*, however, is unclear.

¹³² See, in the *OED*, "anthelion, n."; "glory, n.," def. 9c.

of deferral present in the conclusions to the other historical novels, but also, crucially, with the anticipation of grace that colors Doc's closing epiphany in *Inherent Vice*.

Against the Day contains other points of overlap that potentially connect Pynchon's two canons. At the risk of stating the obvious, it is worth noting that the Chums are bound for California. The anarchists, too, link up with that other strain via Jesse Traverse, whose family settles in Washington at the end of *Against the Day*. By *Vineland's* 1984, Jesse will have migrated to Vineland, married Eula Becker, joined the IWW, organized loggers, been murdered by capitalists, become a Thanatoid, and, with all that accumulated history, continued to preside over the annual Becker–Traverse picnic (also dropping the “e” from his name somewhere along the way). In light of all this, the separation between the California novels and the historical novels seems slimmer in *Against the Day* than elsewhere.

Although *Inherent Vice* lacks this kind of strong connection with the historical novels, Doc himself shares some similarities with characters in those novels. While Doc's investigative work resonates most clearly with Oedipa's quest for the Tristero and Prairie's search for Frenesi, it also connects him to Lew Basnight of White City Investigations in *Against the Day*. Not only is Lew a fellow PI, but he also temporarily sides with anarchists and labor unionists; if only for a moment, his political commitments are thus congenial with Doc's. (Recall also that for Doc, “subduing hired guns”—a task of supreme tactical importance for *Against the Day's* labor wing—is both revolutionary and heroic.) Closer still is the connection between Doc and *Mason & Dixon's* Dr. Isaac, also called Doc for short. The significance to that novel of Dr. Isaac's role, limited though it is, is evident not least in pride of place at the novel's conclusion. *Mason &*

Dixon ends with Dr. Isaac and his brother William, in their paeon to Mason and to the dream of a subjunctive America, inaugurating the American line of the Mason family (“William and Dr. Isaac [...] would stay, and be Americans” [772]).¹³³ Similarly to Doc’s epiphany of the fog lifting to reveal a utopian “something else,” Dr. Isaac and William’s closing dialogue announces a utopian impulse that unfolds along an axis of futurity. *Against the Day* is not alone, then, in bridging the gap between the California novels and the historical novels in the period since 9/11.

Taken together, all of this points toward the possibility that in *Against the Day* and *Inherent Vice*, the two strains of Pynchon’s canon begin to converge. Indeed, aside from the specific examples that I have just discussed, a broad view of the prospects for praxis imagined in these two novels implies that such a reading deserves consideration. Even though it persists in reserving space for utopian figurations of a future beyond capitalism, illuminated by glory and underwritten by grace, *Against the Day* nonetheless strikes an unmistakably less hopeful tone than its predecessor, *Mason & Dixon*. Moreover, the suspended animation of revolution and resistance following 9/11 is at least as baleful to today’s left as the threat of apocalypse that hovers over the final scene of *Gravity’s Rainbow*. At least that latter fate remains deferred, whereas *Against the Day* substantiates Ratty McHugh’s trepidation over “general European war” and its devastating consequences. *Inherent Vice*, meanwhile, retains its family resemblance to *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Vineland*, but it also stands unquestionably as the most optimistic iteration of utopianism among the California novels. Likewise, it is the closest

¹³³ Without making much of this, I point out in passing another potential overlap between *Mason & Dixon* and *Inherent Vice*, one that almost certainly is nothing but fortuitous but not for that reason uninteresting: namely, the nominal near-coincidence of Charles Ma(n)son.

of the California novels to the rejection of instrumental capitalist rationality and the vocation of subjunctive historiography that we find in the historical novels. Perhaps paradoxically, then, the California strain—formerly the terrain of the worst grievances in late capitalism’s closure of radical politics and utopian openings—begins after 9/11 to take over some of the work previously assigned to the historical novels. In turn, that canon, once Pynchon’s vast laboratory for experiments in cognitive mapping, collective resistance, subjunctive historiography, and utopian figuration, now comes to exhibit symptoms of late capitalism hitherto characteristic of its opposite number: the suffocation of community, the triumph of capitalism as a master narrative of history, and an atrophied imagination of social and political alternatives. Pynchon’s two postmodernisms begin to bleed into each other. The high postmodernism of the California novels levels off; the historical novels’ late postmodernism is now, perhaps, simply too late.

4.6 Pynchon and the Futures of Postmodernity

In concluding this long metasynchronous periodization of Pynchon’s massive corpus, I want to return to a cluster of topics with which I began my discussion of Pynchon: Pynchon, postmodernism/postmodernity, and late capitalism/globalization. Pynchon’s novels, I have argued, simultaneously reflect the shifting periodic fortunes of radical praxis in postmodernity at the same time that they reveal, beneath the postmodern flux, fundamental, metasynchronous contradictions at the heart of late capitalism. These correspond to capitalism’s apparently unassailable success as a total system of accumulation and expropriation and, conversely, to the precarious yet perennial desire for a fulfilling, utopian life in common. Further, those contradictory impulses have as their radical critical vocations, on the one hand, the symptomological

diagnosis of the social and political malaise of capitalism, and on the other, the figurative cognitive mapping of capitalism that reveals fissures to be opened and weaknesses to be exploited for collective, utopian ends. Those hermeneutic agendas find formal expression in Pynchon's California novels, in which California itself becomes a metonymic representation of commodity culture, a sinister space for the recontainment of utopian longing; and in the historical novels, which not only reflect the historical emergence of capitalist globalization but also, more significantly, seek out or construct imaginary utopian sites of resistance and revolt against the capitalist order.

Pynchon's literature since 9/11, however, complicates my account. *Against the Day* and *Inherent Vice*, I have argued, continue to pursue the projects that have defined Pynchon's career since *The Crying of Lot 49*; but their pursuit brings cognitive mapping and symptomology asymptotically closer to each other, at times rendering them indistinguishable. This complication raises several important theoretical questions; I limit myself here, however, to just two that are particularly important for postmodernism studies, globalization, and radical praxis alike.

The first question concerns causality: what accounts for the dramatic shift in the relation between cognitive mapping and symptomology in *Against the Day* and *Inherent Vice*? I want to answer that question by taking up each of those critical operations in turn.

Against the Day attempts a vast, ambitious cognitive mapping of late capitalism following 9/11, yet it apparently fails in the end to map out suitable spaces for revolutionary praxis or utopian alternatives. In another sense, however, that failure is a mark of the novel's success. Part of the fervor of the counter-globalization movements

during the 1990s arose from the perceived newfound opportunities for resistance presented within capitalist globalization itself. As Hardt and Negri argue, the same network structures and productions of affect from which capitalism extracts value are also the very means by which the multitude revolts against capitalism through self-organization and the production of the common by love (see, e.g., *Commonwealth* 179–88; *Multitude* 285–88). Hence the vividness of *Mason & Dixon*'s utopian visions of subjunctive spaces, of what might yet be during the possibilities experienced during the 1990s. In the opening decade of the twenty-first century, however, global capitalism under real subsumption advanced even further along its seemingly inexorable path, with ever more intensive means of propagating and ensuring control. Consider the single but paramount example of Citizens United: that Supreme Court decision, *Citizens United v. Federal Election Commission*, legally formalized the relation between capital and electoral politics that had already functioned practically, moving the U.S. even further toward unabashed plutocracy. When even the pretense of a distinction between government and capital is discarded, it is little wonder that a cognitive mapping worthy of its name would struggle to imagine alternatives within the capitalist world-system, even with the openings of the '90s only recently passed. This is precisely, I contend, what accounts for both the nullification of meaningful radicalism among the anarchists and the institutionalization of a capitalist state, not just ideologically but also formally and practically, aboard the *Inconvenience*. The project of cognitive mapping, at least as practiced by Pynchon throughout the historical novels, becomes inadequate after the advent of real subsumption.

Things are rather different when it comes to symptomology in *Inherent Vice*. I have shown that novel to be the most optimistic among the California novels; I can now add that just as the failure of *Against the Day*'s cognitive mapping to delimit utopian spaces in today's late capitalism is in fact a mark of its success, so also is the dramatic utopianism of *Inherent Vice*'s symptomology, otherwise an instrument for detecting and identifying symptoms of closure under capitalism, an indicator of the novel's successful diagnosis. Despite the herculean difficulty of finding utopian openings in global capitalism—or rather, precisely because of that difficulty—the latter appears, in many ways, to be clinging desperately to its remaining vestiges of legitimacy as a just system for distributing wealth globally. Since recent global recession has proved capitalism incapable of providing equitably for the needs of all, and since the capitalist system itself leaves virtually no room for any but the most inconsequential reforms, it is all the more expedient and timely to reject capitalism altogether as a global economic system. Such rejection is evident in widespread revolt, such as the global Occupy movement, just as it is registered symptomatically as fomenting class hatred in *Inherent Vice*. The externality to capitalism of *Inherent Vice*'s utopias attests to a mounting, widespread desire to do away with capitalism itself in favor of “something else”—this novel's ultimate codeword for utopia.

The symptomatic revolt against systemic oppression and exploitation recorded by *Inherent Vice* also opens onto a second question: what do the post-9/11 novels reveal about current prospects for meaningful, revolutionary change? Let me respond by exploring three hypothetical scenarios.

First is the most obvious scenario, and the most depressing: in all likelihood, global capitalism will recover from its current woes and recuperate the widespread opposition that is momentarily expressed in popular revolt but ultimately susceptible, like so many earlier moments even more radical than ours, to strategies of containment, management, and neutralization. In the U.S. alone, and limited to the twentieth century, capitalism has succeeded in squelching radical movements in the 1920s and '30s, the 1960s, and *perhaps* the 1990s. In this reactionary if not dystopian scenario, neoliberal postmodernity will stick around; Doc's postmodern fog will neither lift to reveal utopia nor provide cover for the autonomous formation of collectivities by free subjectivities. Postmodernism might revert to the reactionary high postmodernism of the 1980s, or it might shift yet again, requiring the construction of yet another internally differentiated periodizing vocabulary, but the material basis of which postmodernism is the cultural logic—late capitalism—will remain fundamentally the same.

The second scenario likewise assumes a continuation of the postmodern period. In this case, the expressions of revolt symptomatically registered in *Inherent Vice* are the heirs and the continuance of the counter-globalization movements of the 1990s. In this view, Hardt and Negri have been right all along, and, as they argue in *Declaration* (2012), their most recent collaboration, today's concerted protests are in fact the latest manifestation of the global multitude that first crystallized in the 1990s. Contemporary anti-systemic movements are therefore to be coordinated as autonomous distributed networks using postmodern labor and postmodern expertise in the service of democratic-cum-communist revolution. Eventually, that revolution, in turn, would presumably lead a way out of the postmodern morass, the latter being a properly late

capitalist cultural constellation unfit for a global communism of the multitude. As dubious as this possibility might seem, it is surely to be preferred over the previous one—there but for the grace of Doc go I.

Third, however, is the most radical historical possibility. It is also, for that reason, the least likely. It is nonetheless possible that the mounting dissatisfaction with capitalist rule will successfully topple the market *and* that it will do so in an entirely new historical form, founding a future that stands outside both capitalist exchange and the tradition of the counter-globalization movements of the 1990s. This scenario would therefore count as a realization of Doc's utopian desire for something else.

Both this and the previous possibility seem today to be long shots. Yet Pynchon's fiction provides an invaluable aid to their realization in relentlessly mapping the terrain of global capitalism, searching out and identifying its vulnerabilities, and insisting on the necessity of sustaining utopian impulses against stacked odds and nigh-invincible adversaries—which is really what utopian thinking is all about anyway. Utopian thinking is indispensable if there is to be any hope that the fog of postmodernity and late capitalism might someday, somehow, finally lift, revealing something else and escorting all of us, "Now everybody—", into the daylight of indicative history in our "proud Fellowship in a Mobility that is to be."

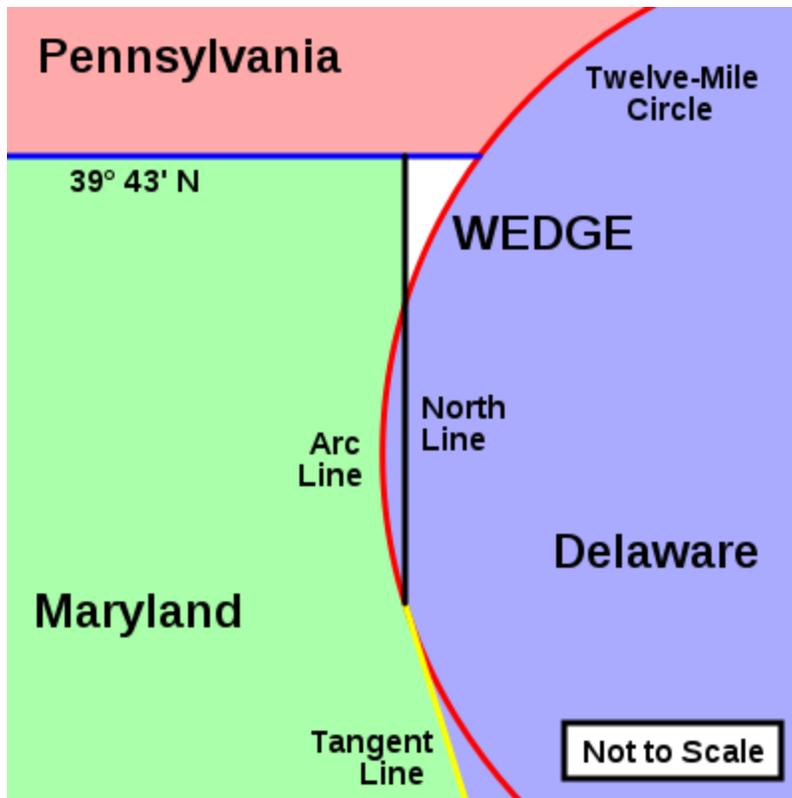


Figure 4-1. *Delaware-wedge*, map showing lines surveyed by Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon. Source: Lasunncty [username] at English language Wikipedia. Licensed under the Creative Commons Attribution–Share Alike 3.0 Unported license.

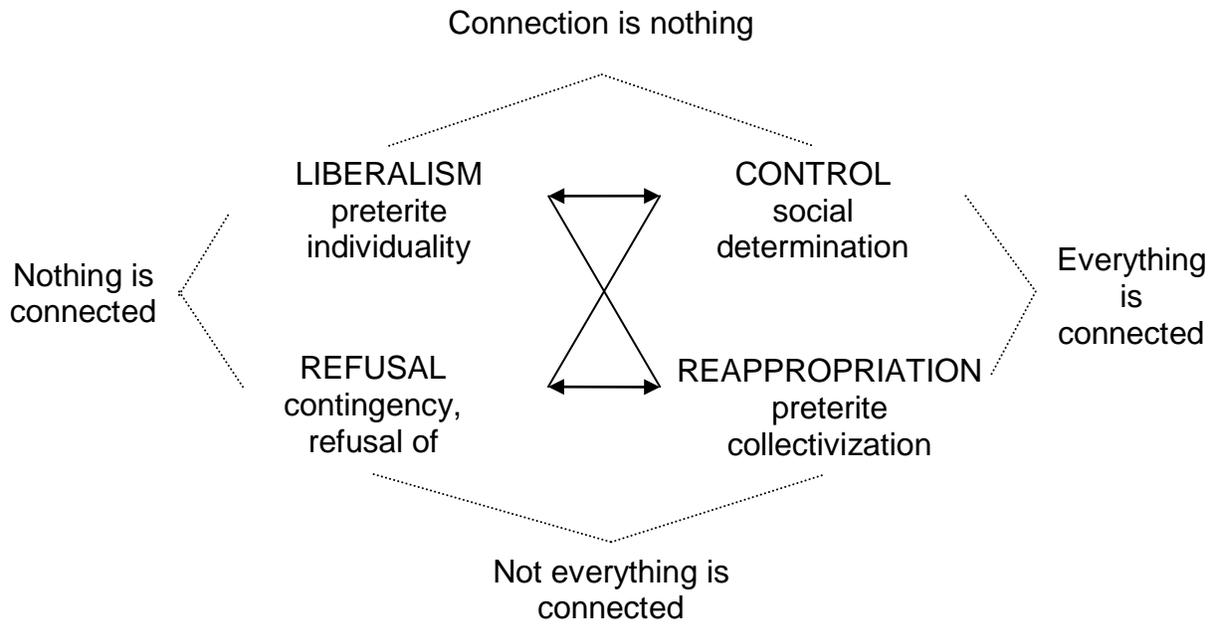


Figure 4-2. Semiotic mapping of paranoia in *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Gravity's Rainbow*.

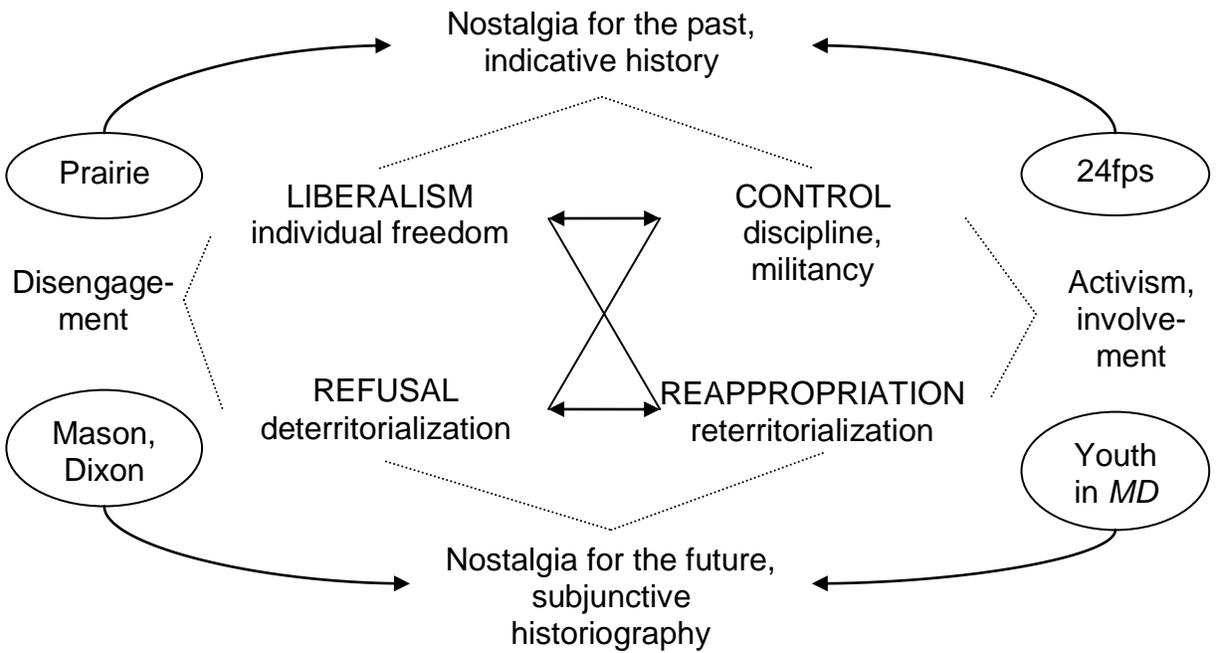


Figure 4-3. Semiotic mapping of nostalgia in *Vineland* and *Mason & Dixon*.

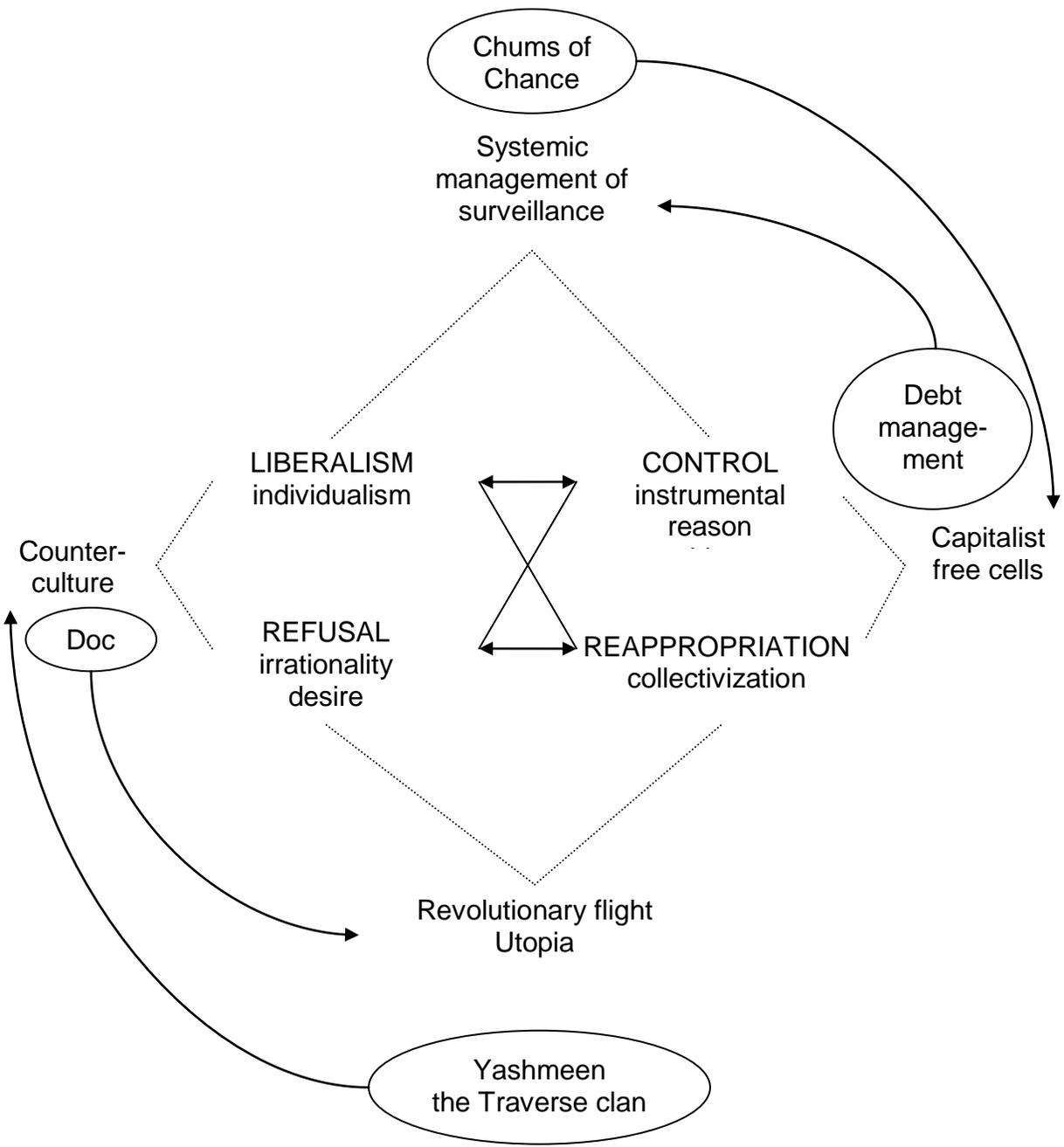


Figure 4-4. Semiotic mapping of the metaphors of day in *Against the Day* and *Inherent Vice*.

Table 4-1. Narrative time and historical time in *Inherent Vice*

Day of narrative	Time markers	NBA playoff references	Date (1970)
1	“This happened [...] every Tuesday...” (11)		Tuesday, 24 March
2	“Doc finally woke up [...] and had breakfast[...].” (12)		Wednesday, 25 March
3	“At the office next day” (34)		Thursday, 26 March
4	“Today, after a deceptively sunny and uneventful spin” (50)		Friday, 27 March
5	“Doc called Sauncho next morning” (89)		Saturday, 28 March
6	“Sunrise was on the way” (98)		Sunday, 29 March
7	The previous day ends with Doc on a drug trip; after a chapter break, Doc converses with Aunt Reet, apparently during business hours (111 ff.)	“Doc was home watching division semifinals between the 76ers and Milwaukee[...].” (113). The Milwaukee Bucks defeated the Philadelphia 76ers four games to one; games were played on 25, 27, 30 March, 1 April, and 3 April.	Monday, 30 March
8	“Next morning” (117); the day ends with Doc watching a televised Nixon rally (123)		Tuesday, 31 March
9	“that afternoon” (124)		Wednesday, 1 April

Table 4-1. Continued.

Day of narrative	Time markers	NBA playoff references	Date (1970)
10	Doc “visit[s] Bigfoot now,” during business hours (137)	“wasn’t it something like this postseason the Lakers were having, and did he happen to catch that game with Phoenix” (138) The Los Angeles Lakers and the Phoenix Suns played in the Western Division Semifinals on 25, 29 March, 2, 4, 5, 7, and 9 April. Game 2 (29 March) was played before Doc’s reference, but recently enough to justify calling it “that game.”	Thursday, 2 April
11	“Around lunchtime next day” (142)		Friday, 3 April
12	“Looking forward to a peaceful morning” (145); Doc orders “the All-Nighter Special” after last call (162)		Saturday, 4 April
13	Doc goes to his office the next day (163)		Sunday, 5 April
<i>INTERLUDE: Doc’s car is in the shop for “a few days” (180), but based on historical events anchoring the second half of the novel, the period must actually be 20 days. In addition, Riggs Warbling, previously clean-shaven, has “a couple weeks’ start on a beard” on the twentieth day of the narrative (250).</i>			
14	“I’ll buy you lunch” (182)		Saturday, 25 April

Table 4-1. Continued.

Day of narrative	Time markers	NBA playoff references	Date (1970)
15	“reaching the Ojai turnoff just before lunchtime” (186), but after Doc has lunch with Tito and has a phone conversation; since Doc must also drive to Ojai, it is reasonable to conclude that his trip occurs the day after his lunch with Tito		Sunday, 26 April
16	“Next morning” (197)		Monday, 27 April
17	“He woke up [...] and] walked around well into the morning” (206); “there’s the rent coming due” (226—note the date)		Tuesday, 28 April
18	“early afternoon” (232)		Wednesday, 29 April
19	“next morning” (246)		Thursday, 30 April
20	“in the first light” (249); “Doc didn’t fall asleep till close to dawn” (255)		Friday, 1 May
21	“Around nightfall”—the narrative resumes after a full day of driving with Tito (256)		Saturday, 2 May
22	“Next morning [...] Doc was [...] going through the Sunday <i>Times</i> ” (261)		Sunday, 3 May

Table 4-1. Continued.

Day of narrative	Time markers	NBA playoff references	Date (1970)
23	Doc visits the Hall of Justice during business hours (275)	“the playoffs, even though it was Eastern Division tonight, might still be on” (280) Game 5 of the NBA Finals was played on this date. “Eastern <i>Division</i> ” is most likely Doc’s mistaken reference to the Eastern time zone: New York hosted game 5, so the game would likely be over by the time Doc gets to his TV set in the Pacific time zone. The Lakers and the New York Knicks played in the NBA Finals on 24, 27, 29 April, 1, 4, 6, and 8 May.	Monday, 4 May
24	“Next day was as they say another day” (281); “The clock [...] read some hour that it could not possibly be” (282)	<i>This is an extra day, unaccountable in any calendar</i>	
25	“still another classic day” (315)		Tuesday, 5 May
26	“around noon” (340)		Wednesday, 6 May
27	“tomorrow evening” (248)		Thursday, 7 May

Table 4-1. Continued.

Day of narrative	Time markers	NBA playoff references	Date (1970)
28	“Next morning” (354)	“the Lakers would lose Game 7 of the finals to the Knicks[...].” (364)	Friday, 8 May
		Game 7 of the NBA Finals was played on 8 May.	

This table supplements and formalizes material first developed for the Pynchon Wiki; see “Real Time and Narrative Time in *Inherent Vice*.” Dates and results of NBA playoff games are taken from “1970 NBA Playoffs Summary.”

CHAPTER 5

CONCLUSION: ON SINGULARITY, IDENTITY, AND ACTUALLY EXISTING POLITICS

It does not take a particularly attentive reader to notice the disproportion between my treatments of Amiri Baraka and Thomas Pynchon. This disproportion, however, is not a result of some authorial disregard for balance or—appearances to the contrary notwithstanding—the vagaries of whims or obsessions. Rather, this disproportion is produced by the juxtaposition of two distinct but nonetheless complementary methodologies for historicizing culture. The history of linguistics demonstrates the same alternation as this dissertation between synchronic and diachronic approaches, between momentary snapshots of linguistic structures frozen in time and dynamic narratives of change unfolding across time.

The clearest example in this dissertation of synchronic interpretation is found in Chapter 2, where I use the semiotic rectangle—an obviously and explicitly structuralist device—to chart the proletariat and the multitude. Notwithstanding the latter's clear political and conceptual indebtedness to the former, which is indeed its precursor, the function of the semiotic rectangles is not to demonstrate the diachronic processes by which the contemporary multitude develops out of the classic proletariat but rather, by reading those collectivities adjacently, to highlight specific differences between them. The chief value of that comparison lies in revealing and emphasizing the composition and the stakes of the multitude as an influential and perhaps potent figure of collective praxis. My figuration of the multitude provides a synchronic account of one way to conceive of the dialectic of form and content in political thinking and praxis today.

There are, of course, some important differences between the synchronic and diachronic perspectives I adopt in this dissertation and their counterparts in linguistics. For one thing, the scientific character of Saussurian linguistics in particular is far more sanitary than the synchronic readings I offer here, where linguistic difference gives way to outright political antagonism. For another, philology and other diachronic approaches to language seek historical origins through the mists of the *longue durée*, whereas I take a diachronic view of a considerably more limited span of time, studying literature published between 1959 and 2009, in order to identify forces that remain in play and options that remain open or that reopen in the present. The question, ultimately, is less “How did we get here?” than “Where do we go now?”

Baraka and Pynchon each help answer that question. The synchronic reading I propose of Baraka’s *6 Persons* focuses on a moment of emergence of minoritarian postmodern oppositional politics. The composition of *6 Persons* in 1973–74 occupies a threshold not only between Baraka’s Black nationalist and Marxist phases but also between experiences of the 1960s and the full-fledged postmodernism that, according to Fredric Jameson’s and other canonical accounts, really coalesces in the early 70s. My reading of the novel grasps it as a phenomenology of minoritarian praxis which, like the multitude at its best, constitutes an oppositional subjectivity that vexes the striated space of capitalist control and restores bonds of collective agency which capitalism in general and postmodern late capitalism in particular dissolve in the solvent of consumerist ideology and global market fundamentalism. The minor current in postmodernism, manifested in *6 Persons*, arises coeval with the major current of real subsumption. That the novel sat silently for more than 25 years before finally being

published in 2000 is in a sense a testament to that minor current: perhaps it took the visible eruption of that minor current in the late-postmodern 1990s to prepare a broader readership than the novel was taken by publishers to have had in the mid-1970s. In any case, *6 Persons* stands as one snapshot of the fitful, momentary emergence of oppositional collectivities that continue to reemerge—that must continue to reemerge—in the perpetual struggle and permanent cultural revolution between global capitalism and the constituent power of the multitude.

But it is in my diachronic reading of Pynchon's corpus that the historical modulations of this epochal conflict are most vivid. There are at least two lessons to be learned from the dialectical transformations of paranoia, nostalgia, and day in Pynchon's postmodern micro-periods. First, these ideologemes' susceptibility to revolutionary as well as reactionary or recuperative uses signals both the intimate connectedness and the irreconcilable contradiction between postmodernism's major and minor currents. Paranoia marks Oedipa Maas's imprisonment in middle-class suburbia and prevents her from establishing the collective bonds for which she longs in *The Crying of Lot 49*; however, as "creative paranoia" or schizophrenia, it enables Tyrone Slothrop and the Counterforce's flight from and sabotage of Their powers in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Nostalgia for the 1960s traps praxis in a paralysis of mourning in *Vineland*, but the revolutionary nostalgia of *Mason & Dixon* reanimates a lost subjunctive praxis that constitutes an indispensable part of the inheritance of the idea of America. Finally, in *Against the Day*, the Traverse clan and the Chums of Chance travel west, with the day, their utopian impulses recontained and neutralized, even as chronological time itself is disrupted by a gift of an unaccounted day in *Inherent Vice*

that cements Doc's oppositional consciousness and allows him to imagine a utopian "something else" besides capitalist exchange. Postmodernism's major and minor currents mobilize the same conceptual tools and political metaphors, but to antithetical ends each time.

Second, a diachronic view of Pynchon's oeuvre also reveals the metasynchronous dialectic between revolution and recuperation. Notwithstanding the chronological linearity of Pynchon's micro-periods, in which each micro-period enlarges Pynchon's conceptual lexicon while displacing and transforming previously dominant ideologemes, the broader historical pattern of revolutionary eruption and retreat suggested by the alternation of the California and historical novels speaks to the metasynchronous continuance of revolutionary struggles. The ideologemes, agents, and practical strategies change with each micro-period, just as they do from one social upheaval or political revolution to the next. But as Jameson argues in *The Political Unconscious*, such "punctual event[s]" are "the passage to the surface of ... permanent struggle[s]" rather than discrete, isolated skirmishes (97). The persistence of utopian thinking in Pynchon's postmodern fiction reveals contours of diachronic, historical processes in which the emergence of Baraka's different revolutionary persons is a crucial but single episode.

Baraka's and Pynchon's texts also bespeak another tension that is equally deserving of critical scrutiny: that between the praxis of singularity and the ethics of identity. I have already discussed the relation between singularity and identity at the close of my reading of Baraka, where I argued that Baraka's dogmatism during his Third World Marxist period is best explained in terms of the overcoming of singularity and

becoming by identity and being. What I can add now is that this same tension also operates in Pynchon's novels as well. Oedipa's search for the identities of the Tristero and the W.A.S.T.E. network contrasts with Slothrop's endless transformations in which he constantly becomes other than himself. Prairie Wheeler's ambiguous identification with her mother Frenesi Gates in *Vineland* marks a very different nostalgia than Charles Mason, Jeremiah Dixon, and the Rev^d Cherrycoke's nostalgia for what might yet be. And the Traverses end *Against the Day* in retreat from praxis and united by family identity, while *Inherent Vice* closes with Doc's utopian epiphany of a sociality in process of becoming other. Whereas Baraka ultimately succumbs to the temptation of identity in *6 Persons*, Pynchon's novels provide a cautionary tale about the political risks of choosing identity over praxis.

That risk is very real for today's actually existing oppositional politics. In section 4.4, I briefly discussed the Occupy movement as one contemporary manifestation, among others, of the metasynchronous resurgence of revolutionary praxis and utopian critique. At its peak, the Occupy movement held promise as a potentially powerful agent for political, economic, and social change. Speaking at an early Occupy Wall Street demonstration at New York's Zuccotti Park in November 2011, Slavoj Žižek defined and defended the Occupy movement through a series of attributes that explicitly underscore the movement's congruence with the multitude. Like the multitude, the Occupy movement is "the free egalitarian community of believers united by love" who "care for the commons—the commons of nature, of knowledge—which are threatened by the [capitalist] system" ("Actual"). For several months in late 2011 and early 2012, it seemed possible that the Occupy movement might have widespread political and social

effects. However, success, of course, is never guaranteed for oppositional movements like Occupy: not only do such movements face external threats from the state in the form of riot police, FBI probes, and the like, but they also suffer constant threat of apathy, burnout, or complacency.

Žižek recognized that threat in his Zuccotti Park speech, which has since been transcribed and published under the title “Actual Politics.” Žižek urges Occupy activists to remain committed to praxis rather than basking in oppositional self-identity: “Don’t fall in love with yourselves, with the nice time we are having here. Carnivals come cheap—the true test of their worth is what remains the day after, how our normal daily life will be changed. Fall in love with hard and patient work...” Žižek’s exhortation hinges upon the difference between identity and singularity. Don’t be content merely to be a protester, he warns—protest. Don’t be oppositional—oppose. Don’t be revolutionary—revolt.

The emblematic slogan of the Occupy movement, “We are the 99%!”, hangs in the balance between these poles of singularity and identity. As a speech act asserting the political and economic rights of the vast majority of the world’s population, the 99% who control a mere 1% of global wealth, the slogan symbolically reveals as farce the last vestiges of perceived legitimacy of global capitalism, already in crisis for decades. But insofar as it speaks the identitarian language of being, the slogan is in peril of becoming a badge of membership: we, the Occupy movement, speak for the global multitude of which you, middle-class consumer, are a part but for which you are unqualified to speak. At this point, as I have shown earlier, political praxis devolves into ethical discourse: we are revolutionaries, and we have the correct platform. We are the

nostalgic inheritors of the 1960s, and we mourn its loss. We are the Traverses, outsiders to the “capitalist-Christer gridwork,” and we retreat to our solitude in the Northwest. I am a protester, and I have told you so on my sign: we are the 99%.

As a counterpoint to this language of identity, it is worthwhile to recall that among the most radical actions taken in connection with the Occupy Movement has been refusal, in particular the refusal to vacate a foreclosed home. Contemporary squatting amounts to an utter rejection of the terms and conditions of a distributive system designed for the benefit of the infinitesimally few and to the cost of nearly everybody. If exodus—in Michael Hardt and Antonio Negri’s work, a privileged form of refusal and oppositional praxis—conventionally means leaving, this is stationary exodus, one which transforms and reterritorializes the space itself of the foreclosed home rather than fleeing the striated space of capitalism. Such refusal would make Bartleby the Scrivener proud (see Hardt and Negri, *Empire* 203–04). The difficulty, though, lies in perseverance in the face of eviction notices, destroyed credit, state violence in the form of the sherrif knocking on the door (which always seems a hair’s breadth from knocking it down). As encouragement despite such odds and as a rejoinder to the identitarianism of the Occupy movement’s best-known slogan, one would do well to heed the central imperative of Alain Badiou’s “ethic of truth”: “Keep going!” (52).

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BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

James Liner was born in the Pacific Northwest, where his family on one side has lived for generations, with roots spread throughout the remote outpost of the Kitsap Peninsula. He received a bachelor's degree in English and philosophy at Seattle University before pursuing his master's in English at the University of Oklahoma, with a focus on literary theory, postmodernism, and globalization. James holds a doctorate from the University of Florida, where he studied contemporary U.S. literature and critical theory. He currently teaches twentieth-century American literature at the University of Washington–Tacoma.