

## Pynchon Takes the Fork in the Road<sup>\*1</sup>

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*"Even if you forget everything else," Rinpungpa instructs the Yogi, "remember one thing—when you come to a fork in the road, take it." Easy for him to say, of course, being two people at once.*

(Pynchon, *Against the Day* 766)

The enigmatic seal, inscribed in Tibetan, on the dust jacket and final front-fly-page of Thomas Pynchon's *Against the Day* can, with a stretch of the imagination, be interpreted as a caricature of the Tibetan yogi coming to the fork in the road to mythical Shambhala and then looking both ways. The actual quotation is that of the legendary baseball player and Mets manager, Yogi Berra, giving directions to his New Jersey home which was equally accessible along either of the two roads branching out from the fabled fork. This passage in the novel is not just a comic replay of Berra's most famous remark, for "being two people at once" is a recurring theme in *Against the Day*. Pynchon traces the phenomenon back to "the mysterious shamanic power known as bilocation, which enables those with the gift literally to be in two or more places, often widely separated, at the same time" (*Against* 143). The Tibetan scholar W. Y. Evans-Wentz (152, 177, 178) records legends of Padmasambhava's shamanic bilocal power to transform "himself into a pair of hawks," into "Three Chief Teachers" or even into "Five Dhyani Buddhas" (see also Kohn, *Ambivalence* 110). The "memory we carry of having once moved at the speed and density of light," Pynchon explains, makes us "once more able to pass

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\*For debates inspired by this article, please check the *Connotations* website at <<http://www.connotations.de/debkohn01813.htm>>.

where we will, through lantern-horn, through window-glass, eventually, though we risk being divided in two, through Iceland spar" (*Against* 688). The shadowed print on the dust jacket of *Against the Day*, a visual metaphor for the doubly-refractive property of Iceland spar, can be easily replicated with a crystal of this unique but plentiful mineral. When Pynchon fancies bilocated persons—such as Renfrew and Werfner, who were "one and the same person, had been all along," but "somehow had the paranormal power to be in at least two places at the same time, maintaining day-to-day lives at two different universities"—he is perhaps intimating that there are two Pynchons authoring the novel along dissimilar narrative roads (*Against* 685).<sup>2</sup>

I interpret the two roads simultaneously taken in *Against the Day* as the two antithetical approaches to writing identified by Peter J. Rabinowitz. In the first of these, an author of fiction connects with his or her anticipated audience on the basis of mutually established rules; this is what Rabinowitz means when he argues that authors "usually write for readers who are capable of taking *pleasure* in certain aspects of their texts," and it is those readers whom the author takes to be his or her "authorial audience" (7). Along the second authorial road there are *no* rules, and connections between author and readers are problematic because "you can't perform the task unless you know beforehand what [the] directions [for reading] *are*" (Rabinowitz 51). This "Quixotic [...] or idiosyncratic" approach to writing, which Rabinowitz (58) disparages, likewise troubles William Logan, who complains that "[i]t isn't clear whether Pynchon plots by the seat of his pants or has his own secret and impenetrable designs" (233). As befits Rabinowitz's negative appraisal of idiosyncratic writing, some reviewers of *Against the Day* deemed it a failure. "[D]espite its partial achievements," concludes Tom LeClair, this "novel as a whole resembles the zeppelin that appears in its first pages, a giant bag of imaginative hot air." Louis Menand calls it "a very imperfect book. Imperfect not in the sense of 'Ambitious but flawed.' Imperfect in the sense of 'What was he thinking?'" (170). Alternatively, Liesl Schillinger's (10) praise for Pynchon's "idiosyncratic genius" may

signal that some critics are starting to think, as Rabinowitz allowed they might, in terms of some new generic placement within which idiosyncrasy “makes sense” (63).

The authority on idiosyncrasy in postmodern art is Donald Kuspit, and what he says of the idiosyncratic artist helps us to understand the road taken by the second Pynchon: “In this situation, in which every kind of art has been assimilated into the mainstream and seems ‘relevant,’ only the idiosyncratic artist appears to make sense—indeed, the only kind of sense that can be made: personal sense” (3). With some of the same words that Kuspit uses, Rabinowitz hedges his disavowal of idiosyncratic writing by explicitly recognizing the “need to distinguish *interest in the personal* from encouragement of the idiosyncratic” (52; italics added). Though Kuspit suggests that the idiosyncratic artist seems to create “an aurá of intimacy with the viewer in which unconscious communication occurs” (6 *sic*), the communication in *Against the Day* may be subtle but it is hardly unconscious. And there is no question in the case of Pynchon’s novel, that “the idiosyncratic work seems to encourage, even induce it” (Kuspit 6). In this essay I discern special connections between author and readers along the second road, in which individual readers’ “own secret idiosyncrasy can safely, if unexpectedly appear” (Kuspit 7). This second road in *Against the Day* is for an audience attuned or attunable to the idiosyncratic. LeClair cynically suggested that “[t]he only readers (besides responsible reviewers) I can imagine finishing *Against the Day* are the Pynchonists, the fetishizing collectors of P-trivia.” However, there are many such readers, and they are part of a much larger interpretative community that, if Kuspit is correct, takes aesthetic pleasure in the idiosyncratic. Stanley Fish anticipated such an interpretive community in which the only proof of membership is “the nod of recognition from someone in the same community, someone who says to you what neither of us could ever prove to a third party: we know” (173). Crystal L. Downing clarifies Fish’s concept when she notes that “‘interpretive communities’ establish the

meaning of a text, reading it according to the assumptions, values and goals of their particular subculture" (90).

The contrasting roads in *Against the Day* correspond to Ihab Hassan's contention that "modernism [...] is largely formalistic/hierarchical" and "postmodernism, [...] antiformalistic/anarchic" (xiii). This suggests that the first Pynchon in our model, being formalistic, is modernist and the second, being idiosyncratic, is postmodernist. Logan invokes the modernist/postmodernist dichotomy when he speaks of the "bittersweet sadness" of *Against the Day* in "a *fin de siècle* world [1893 to 1913] that had only begun to adore science and invention, a world that had not yet learned to distrust them" (246). The American years, *circa* 1893 to 1960, of naïve enthusiasm for scientific and technological progress, are now called modernist. Although World War I was a "heroic disaster," Logan sees the period that followed it as one in which "the common man might have thought things were looking up. Pynchon's task has been to remind us that the worse was to come" (246). Logan foreshadows postmodernism's backlash against the utopian expectations of modernity (see Kohn, "Unwitting Witness"). Pynchon's transition from *The Crying of Lot 49* to *Against the Day* traces his own path from ethos-based postmodernism to late-postmodern stylistics (see Kohn, "Pynchon's Transition").

The postmodern ethos is aptly described by Andreas Huyssen, as a cultural reaction "to a one-way history of modernism which interprets it as a logical unfolding toward some imaginary goal" (49). "Postmodernism is far from making modernism obsolete," insists Huyssen; what

has become obsolete, however, are those codifications of modernism in critical discourse which, however subliminally, are based on a teleological view of progress and modernization. Ironically, these normative and often reductive codifications have actually prepared the ground for that repudiation of modernism which goes by the name of the postmodern. (49)

Huyssen reiterates that "such rejection affects only that trend within modernism which has been codified into a narrow dogma, not mod-

ernism as such" (49). That "narrow dogma," which is often distinguished as 'modernity,' was the one-sided celebration of science, technology and progress, which in turn privileged elitist intellectualism and pompous rationalism. In Pynchon's words, written almost midway between *The Crying of Lot 49* and *Against the Day*, what doomed modernity and triggered postmodernism was that "cheerful army of technocrats who were supposed to have the 'future in their bones'" ("Luddite" 41). These utopian modernists naively believed that they would cure cancer, prevent nuclear extinction, end starvation, eliminate pollution and "realize all the wistful pipe dreams of our days" ("Luddite" 41). Their expectations for science, technology, progress, and rationalism were carried to such excess that Jean-François Lyotard was moved to "define *postmodern* as incredulity toward metanarratives," which was his word for sweeping, utopian conceptual schemes (xxiv). One of those modernist metanarratives was that science had obviated religion. Crystal L. Downing bitterly blames nineteenth-century scientists for having "demolished the Christian edifice for the English speaking world" (63). In turn, she is grateful to postmodernists for "undermin[ing the] assumptions of secular humanism," which they did by crediting sources other than science alone for knowledge and discernment (26). It is compatible with these views of Hassan, Huyssen, Lyotard and Downing that Brian McHale sees modernism as "dominated by epistemological issues" and postmodernism as "dominated by ontological issues" (xii).

The first section of this essay, following the introduction, focuses on the rules-oriented road taken by the first Pynchon, particularly as it applies to history. The second section examines the idiosyncratic road that the second Pynchon travels, giving special attention to his surreptitious communications with individual readers. The third section builds on implications in *Against the Day* that modernity wasn't as naïve as the rules-oriented Pynchon and other scholars once took it to be. The fourth section follows the idiosyncratic road as far as it goes. In the concluding section, the two roads and the two Pynchons come together to mark the dead end of the postmodern ethos. *Against*

*the Day* starts at the onset of what Franco Berardi calls “the beginning of the century that believed in the future” (39), the century that subsequently included Pynchon’s “cheerful army of technocrats” who had “the future in their bones” (“Luddite” 41). It was in that century that Alvin Toffler foresaw “a roaring current of technological and sociological change, which would usher in “shattering stress and disorientation” (3, 4). We are now, Berardi says, at “the beginning of the century with no future” (39). In this new age of aggravated change, uncertainty, and complexity, the old modernism has evolved into a dystopian modernism that cannot be repudiated as the old one could. What Robert L. McLaughlin calls “for lack of a better term, post-postmodernism” (55), Paul Virilio aptly calls “hypermodernism” (18, 98).<sup>3</sup> This name for the new modernism hauntingly resonates in the repetitious reference to a “hyper-hyperboloid” on the final page of *Against the Day* (see also Goldford, Irvine and Kohn).

### The Rules-Based Road

The road taken by the first Pynchon corresponds to the approach to writing in which author and reader participate in a “rule-governed activity” (Rabinowitz 48). The over-arching rule in *Against the Day*, as perceived by Logan, is that “Pynchon writes neither counterfactual history nor historical fiction” (227). According to that double standard, all the historical background events of the novel are necessarily factual, but in no way do the characters that experience those events recreate any of “the small details” that make up the genuine “archeological” reality of that past (Logan 227). This is not as easy a rule for the authorial audience to pick up as Rabinowitz might have thought, because the first road is frequently obstructed by ‘red herrings’ which falsely suggest that individual historical events are fictional. There is the alleged attendance at the 1893 Columbian Exposition in Chicago of the ill-fated Austrian Archduke Franz Ferdinand, that seems counterfactual because it appears in a paragraph that suspiciously ends

with the archduke perceiving his visit as “a warm invitation to rewrite history” (*Against* 45). There is a hurricane in Galveston that kills six thousand people, the description of which is enigmatically followed by a reference to “that frightful bomb,” and finally, the “rising dust-cloud” that the Campanile in Venice “collapsed into” in 1902 is witnessed along with “two skycraft slid[ing] away at angles” (*Against* 188, 256). Pynchon’s almost-subliminal red herrings suggest that these particular happenings are fake surrogates for the tumultuous assassination that started World War I, the atomic bombing of Hiroshima, and the devastating collapse of the World Trade Center Towers on 9/11. Because so many of the novel’s events, though they are staged in the early 1900s, portend crises that subsequently occurred in the reader’s era, he or she is likely to be surprised to learn, most likely through internet searches, that the Archduke *did* attend the Exposition in 1893, that a hurricane *did* kill thousands of Galvestonians in 1900, and that the Campanile *did* collapse in 1902, but from structural faults. Logan must also have been diverted by the same red herrings, because the three examples he uses to illustrate how “Pynchon bends his narratives around historical events” are “the Exposition, the collapse of the Campanile in Venice, [and] the Galveston hurricane” (227).

It is a *tour de force* on Pynchon’s part that he makes important events *seem* to be counterfactual even though they turn out to have been real. This misleadingly inclines the reader to believe that arcane but feasible details associated with the genuine events are likewise factual. With some surfing on the internet, one discovers Hubert Bancroft’s voluminous reportage of the Exposition which confirms that “Archduke Ferdinand, heir apparent to the throne of Austria, was among the [royal] pilgrims of the Fair” (971). This validation—presumably it was from Bancroft that Pynchon acquired this esoteric bit of information in the first place—sets up the reader to believe Pynchon’s intriguing account of Franz Ferdinand telling his Chicago hosts that back in Austria, “we have forests full of game and hundreds of beaters who drive the animals toward the hunters such as myself

who are waiting to shoot them,” then asking his hosts if they “think the Chicago Stockyards might possibly be rented out to me and my friends, for a weekend’s amusement? We would of course compensate the owners for any loss of revenue” (*Against* 46). What appears to be a juicy bit of historical fiction is not that at all, because it is totally inconsistent with supplementary information in Bancroft that, though the Archduke attended the fair, “few at the time were aware of it, for he came merely as a visitor and avoided all publicity” (971). That two skycraft slid away at angles over the Venice tower illustrates the kind of red herrings Pynchon uses to give the impression that historical events are counterfactual, which they never are, whereas the archduke’s hunting escapade in the Chicago stockyards illustrates the kind of red herrings that give the impression of being historical fiction, which they never are (Logan 226).<sup>4</sup>

There is an extravagant claim in the novel about a heat wave in Europe during World War I that sent me beyond the internet for validation. According to Pynchon,

That summer had been memorable for its high temperatures. All Europe sweltered. Wine grapes turned on the vine to raisins overnight. Piles of hay cut and gathered early as June burst spontaneously into flame. Wildfires travelled the Continent, crossing borders, leaping ridgelines and rivers with impunity. Naturist cults were overcome with a terrible fear that the luminary they worshipped had betrayed them and now consciously planned Earth’s destruction. (1018)

I contacted Ahira Sanchez-Lugo at the National Climactic Data Center, Asheville, North Carolina, who sent me a copy of an article entitled “Heat Wave Decreases Wine Production in Madeira,” published in the October 1919 issue of the *Monthly Weather Review* (Vol. 47.10), advising that in August of 1919 the island of Madeira “was almost ‘smothered’” by extreme warmth (750). During that period, the

temperature in the sun was as high as 135°. The grapes dried up rapidly, and although many of them were just about ready to be picked at that time, [...] this year’s wine production [...] represented] a depreciation of nearly 40% on the previous estimate. (750)



However, Madeira is off the coast of *Africa* and the event occurred *after* World War One ended. With regard to the alleged heat wave in Europe proper, Ms. Sanchez-Lugo directed me to Peer Hechler and Gerhard Müller-Westermeier of Deutscher Wetterdienst, Offenbach am Main, who in turn sent me the following graph produced by Deutscher Wetterdienst indicating that there could have been a relative heat wave in Germany in 1917. However, when I asked Enric Aguilar of the Geography Department at the University Rovira i Virgili de Tarragona if that 1917 heat wave, presumably in June according to Pynchon's novel, had been experienced in Spain, he found that "nothing really exceptional" in the way of monthly maximums or number of hot or very hot days had been reported for that June, either at stations near the shore or in the interior of Spain.

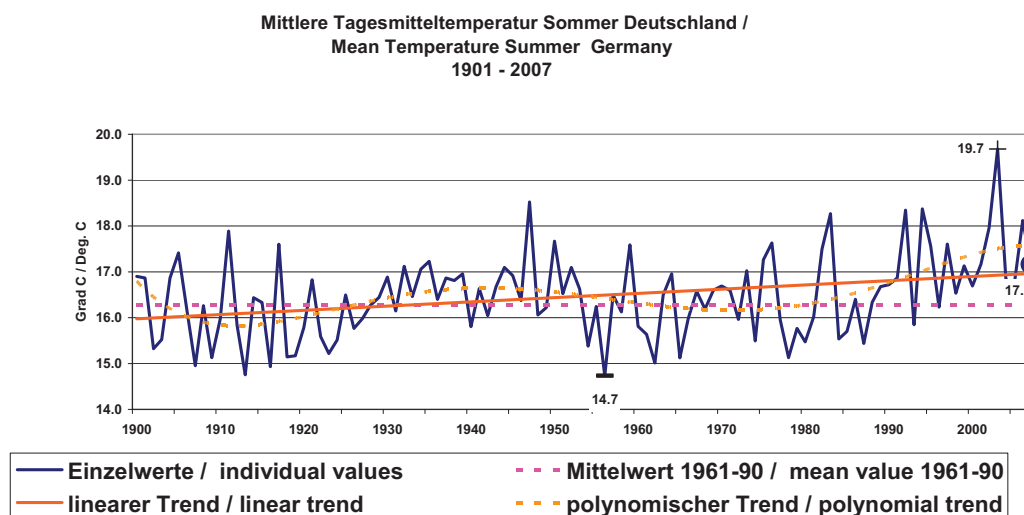


Figure 1. Mean Summer Temperature in Germany, 1901-2007

The biggest heat wave recorded on the Deutscher Wetterdienst graph took place in 2003, and it occurred throughout Europe as well as in Spain. It killed over 50,000 people, withered crops, dried up rivers and spread fires, making it one of the deadliest climate-related disasters in Western history. Just as the Galveston hurricane is conflated with Hiroshima, and the collapse of the Campanile with 9/11, so Pynchon may be conflating a relatively minor heat wave in 1917 with the catastrophic heat wave in August of 2003. The fact that rivers dried up in 2003 could have given him the idea to have wildfires leap across

“rivers with impunity” (*Against* 1018). In the case of the counterfactual heat wave, Pynchon appears to have honored his rule *against* historical fiction, because the paragraph immediately following the above includes some of the novel’s main characters. This particular red herring may have something to do with the unfortunate fact that *Against the Day* was published when George W. Bush’s administration was disputing the mainstream science on global warming.

Why has Pynchon written a novel that is “neither counterfactual history nor historical fiction” (Logan 227)? Surely this quixotic jumble of truth and falsehood is what Joseph Carroll calls “a source of confusion and disorientation.” According to the new field of literary Darwinism, “the arts evolved as a means for counterbalancing this [kind of] confusion” (Carroll, *Darwinism* 82). The psychological function of literature, in Carroll’s view, is to provide “order by depicting the peculiarities of time and place—of cultural context, individual circumstance, and personal character—and by integrating these particularities with the elemental structures of human concerns” (*Darwinism* 115-16). There is evidence in *Against the Day* that Pynchon was aware of the meteoric rise of evolutionary literary studies; its most ardent advocate could deservedly boast that “[m]ore than a hundred articles, three special journal issues, four edited collections, and about a dozen free-standing books have been devoted to the topic” (Carroll, “Evolutionary” 103). However Pynchon would surely have recognized that this new movement was the latest of the “grand narratives that claim to be based on, or compatible with, science and which offer comprehensive accounts of human existence” (Seamon 262). In Carroll’s words the most ambitious of the literary Darwinists “aim at fundamentally altering the paradigm within which literary study is now conducted” (“Evolutionary” 105). With respect to the discombobulating mixture of the factual and the counterfactual in *Against the Day*, Torben Grodal, one of many literary theorists who welcome evolutionary literary studies as an augmentation, not a replacement of existing critical methodologies, argues that confusions in artistic presentation can serve “as means of strengthening

mechanisms for imagining counterfactual situations" (193). Whereas Carroll's emphasis on literature that integrates "particularities with the elemental structures of human concerns" was probably more adaptive in the Victorian period (see Chapter 8 in Carroll's *Literary Darwinism*), counterfactual and disorderly presentations may be more adaptive in our hypermodern age.<sup>5</sup> To Carroll's credit, he "continue[s] to refine [his] understanding of the elements in the model" and is extending its purview to "dystopian literature" and "counterfactual reasoning" (Carroll, "Rejoinder" 315, "Evolutionary" 131; Swirski 298).

### The Idiosyncratic Road

Schillinger observes that one of this "novel's *idées fixes* is that mysterious agents are trying to send messages to individuals and to humanity at large" (10). The messages are typically incorporated in idiosyncratic pieces of text—Logan calls them "*culs de sac*"—that make "the reader wonder whether Pynchon's novels are planned in any conventional sense or [are] mere constructions of whim plus steroids" (Logan 233). I was especially intrigued by three such *culs de sac* that mention "wrathful deities." Nodding "at a scroll on the desk," Lew Basnight guesses that it represents "a series of wrathful deities from Tantric Buddhism" (*Against* 612). Next, Kit Traverse enigmatically comments that "Out here pilgrimage is a matter of kind and wrathful deities" (774). In the third example, the skyship comes close to the ground, and Lieutenant Prance, who is on the ground searching for Shambhalla, shouts up to the crew: "'Are you kind deities? Or wrathful deities?' 'We endeavor to be kind,'" one of the crew shouts back and another snarls "Me, I'm wrathful" (787). Kuspit's view that idiosyncrasy makes only "personal sense" suggests that the references to "wrathful deities," which have nothing substantive to do with any on-going narratives in *Against the Day*, may be meant as personal communications. I dared to think that Pynchon had read my 2003 essay on *The*

*Crying of Lot 49* in which I compared Dr. Hilarius's "Fu-Manchu" face, his "number 37," to "that of a Wrathful Deity in the *Bardo*" ("Seven Buddhist Themes" 81). Could my mention of the *Bardo* have likewise prompted Pynchon to idiosyncratically compare Kit's slipping from the hold of the Habsburg steamship to his being "reincarnated from some intermediate or Bardo state" (*Against* 521)?

Carried away by the novel's aura of intimacy and my own vanity, I began to imagine that Pynchon was signaling me his assent to the opening sentence of my 2003 essay in which I claim that "*The Crying of Lot 49* can be better understood (or at least some of its ambiguity resolved) in the context of Tibetan Buddhism" ("Seven Buddhist Themes" 73). I went so far as to imagine that the round red seal inscribed in Tibetan on the novel's dust-jacket was a communication meant for me, though it is much more likely—because I first learned about the 49-day limit of the *Bardo*, and hence the connection of *The Crying of Lot 49* to Tibetan Buddhism, from earlier works by Robert D. Newman (82), Pierre-Yves Petillon (137) and Judith Chambers (116)—that if Pynchon were communicating with anyone about Buddhism in *The Crying of Lot 49*, it would be with them. It made sense that he would do so, given that *Against the Day*, published 40 years after *The Crying of Lot 49*, may have been meant in part to communicate with the hundreds of literary critics who have written books and articles about this seminal postmodern novel. Surely a 40th anniversary, the author's 70th birthday, and a third of a century of presumably lonely reclusiveness from his authorial audience could explain why Pynchon might want to create the "aurá of intimacy" with particular readers that Kuspit associates with idiosyncrasy (6 *sic*). Actually, if Pynchon had read my article and did send a message to me, like the snarling "Me, I'm wrathful," it may have been sardonic. Alternatively, it is well known that Pynchon admired Jorge Luis Borges—he specifically mentions his name on page 264 of *Gravity's Rainbow*. Borges wrote two erudite non-fiction articles on Buddhism, which were fortuitously translated and published when Pynchon started work on *Against the Day* (*Borges: Selected Non-Fictions*). Indeed, the games that Borges plays

with history in *Ficciones* may have inspired the comparable games in *Against the Day*.

In much of the novel, Kit Traverse searches for “Shambhala,” (257, 435-36, 447, 550-51, 607, 609, 628, 631, 686, 735, 748-50, 766, 772, 790-91, 793, 975, 1081), an “ancient metropolis of the spiritual, some say inhabited by the living, others say empty, in ruins, buried someplace beneath the desert sands of Inner Asia. And of course there are always those who’ll tell you that the true Shambhala lies within” (*Against* 628). When Kit Traverse decides that “Tannu Tuva” is the hidden Shambhala (790), he strikes an idiosyncratic chord with a whole generation of readers who collected stamps in their childhood and remember the dramatic, brightly-colored triangular-shaped stamps imported at a pittance, un-cancelled and in mint-condition, from Tannu Tuva, which between 1926 and 1933 had produced them primarily for the western philatelic market, rather than for domestic postage. A small country on the border of Russia, Mongolia and Tibet, Tannu Tuva was absorbed into Russia before World War II. Not until the end of the novel does Pynchon explicitly refer to the “mint, never-hinged, superbly-centered Shambhala postage stamps” (1081). It is rare, and possibly nostalgic on his part, that the usually cryptic author would explain an enigmatic signifier that appeared earlier in the same novel.

An intimate scene in the novel involves Dally Rideout in New York “in her first time in a department store” (*Against* 346). At some distance, she sees a woman shopper with an “egret plume on her hat” whom she thinks is her mother, Erlys Zombini. The woman is

not looking at Dally in particular but somehow demanding her attention. Before the clarity of the apparition, Dally knew she had to get an immediate grip on herself, because if she didn’t, the next thing she knew, she’d be running over there screaming, to embrace some woman who would of course turn out to be a stranger, and all the embarrassment, maybe even legal action, that was sure to go with that. (347)

Surely, no novelist has ever simulated so accurately the intrusive thoughts symptomatic of OCD (obsessive-compulsive disorder). Their

typical pattern is all too familiar to those who suffer from it. First there is the idiosyncratic and seemingly unpreventable urge to precipitate some inappropriate act; next there is the imagined embarrassment of being confronted by the shocked and innocent victim; then the imagined shame and loss at facing severe but deserved legal punishment. Finally there are the compulsive rituals to reduce the mounting anxiety; in Dally's case, she has to go all the way down to the basement, making "sure on every floor to look for her, but the woman, tall, fair, perhaps not real to begin with, had vanished" (347). To heighten the idiosyncrasy of this strange insertion, the psychiatric syndrome is not mentioned by name in the text, but is sequestered in subsequent references to a "compulsive promenade" and to an "obsessive friend" (561, 1046).

In the same area of mental illness, there are a number of gratuitous references in *Against the Day* to "idiots," "madness," "lunatics," "insanity," and to going "mad" or "a little crazy" that are likewise idiosyncratic (825, 1074, 790, 828, 863, 864, 902, 908, 870, 880). Kit's confidence that Shambhala is located at Tannu Tuva, for example, is based on nothing more substantive than that he "left somebody there at the edge of madness who was making a good argument that's where it is" (*Against* 790). It is possible that Pynchon is signifying Brooks Adams's posthumous republication of his brother Henry's *Letter to American Teachers of History*, an arcane source for Pynchon's thoughts on entropy, in which Brooks inserted 46 new lines that do not appear in the original. This 46-line insertion, the only substantive alteration made by Brooks, concludes with the assertions that the human race is "progressing in a downward direction" and, based on numbers published by Dr. Forbes Winslow, "that in three hundred years one half the population should be insane or idiotic" (*Degradation* 254). The spurious lines, based on Brooks's flagrant misreading and mishandling of Winslow's data, would explain Pynchon's (102) charge in *The Crying of Lot 49* that "the 'Whitechapel' edition [of 'The Courier's Tragedy' ...] abounds in such corrupt and probably spurious lines" that it "is hardly to be trusted," as well as the allusion in the

context of Rinpungpa and the “fork in the road” in *Against the Day* (766) to “a variant currently for sale, which contains lines that do not appear in other versions” (see Kohn, “Corrupt”). One wonders whether Pynchon gave watery names to the two wayward Traverse siblings, “Lake” and “Reef,” to make a connection to “Brooks A[dams].” Alternatively, it may be that all of the references to madness, lunacy and even OCD in *Against the Day* are meant to signify what Toffler called “the cumulative impact of sensory, cognitive or decisional overstimulation” that is “increasingly mirrored in our culture” and has “become a staple in literature” (324).

The idiosyncratic writing of the second Pynchon peaks with the psychotic who, as a psychiatrist tells Kit, “has come to believe that he is a certain well-known pastry of Berlin—similar to your own American, as you would say, *jelly-doughnut*” (*Against* 626). To get him to “accept the literal truth of his delusion,” he is brought “to a certain Konditorei” in nearby Göttingen,

where he is all over powdered with *Puderzucker* and allowed to sit, or actually recline, up on a shelf ordinarily reserved for the pastries. When he starts in with his “*Ich bin ein Berliner*,” most customers try only to correct his diction, as if he is from Berlin and has meant to say “*Ich bin Berliner*”—though sometimes he is *actually purchased*—“Did you want a bag for that, madam?” “Oh, no, no thank you, I’ll eat it right here if I may.” (*Against* 626-27)

*That* should “bring him back to reality,” Kit says to the psychiatrist who is telling him this story; “*Ach*, but no,” the doctor replies, “he only remains inert, even when they attempt to ... *bite into*—” (627). Although this idiosyncratic foray verges on the bawdy—unless I am misreading that final dash through my own secret idiosyncrasy—it is at the same time sophisticated, given the allusion to the hullabaloo over correct German diction that John Kennedy set off a half-century later in Berlin.

## Modernism Becomes Complex along the Rules-Oriented Road

Modernism is said to have begun in America with the Chicago Columbian Exposition of 1893, which may explain why Pynchon began *Against the Day* in that venue. In his eponymous biography, Henry Adams recorded the enthusiasm for human progress through scientific and technological advancement that he felt in his visit to the Chicago World's Fair. Although he marveled at the exhibits on railroads, explosives, dynamos, electric batteries and telephones, Adams was most impressed by the fantastic displays of the Cunard Steamship Company before which, this "student hungry for results found himself obliged to waste a pencil and several sheets of paper trying to calculate exactly when, according to the given increase of power, tonnage, and speed, the growth of the ocean steamer would reach its limits" (341). His on-the-spot calculations resonate on the penultimate page of *Against the Day* in the description of an airship "grown as large as a small city" (1084).

Modernism is hailed by turn-of-the-nineteenth-century denizens of *Against the Day* for its "electric runabouts, flush toilets, 1,200-volt trolley dynamos and other wonders of the modern age" (65). In this fabulous *fin de siècle* world, there was plenty of bell-hanger work for Merle Rideout:

[A] sudden huge demand was spreading throughout the Midwest for electric bells, doorbells, hotel annunciators, elevator bells, fire and burglar alarms—you sold them and installed them on the spot, walked away down the front path counting out your commission while the customer stood there with her finger on the buzzer like she couldn't get enough of the sound. (*Against* 72-73)

This delightful passage echoes the beginning of capitalistic consumerism, abetted by the utopian promise of Nikola Tesla's "project of free universal power for everybody" (158). The mere mention of words like "laboratories" and "experiments" stirred excitement, as did the anticipation of scientific miracles like "wireless waves, [...] Roentgen rays, whatever rays are coming next. Seems every day somebody's



discovering another new piece of the spectrum, out there beyond visible light" (670).

But modernism had more to it than people's enthusiasm for scientific and technological progress. There was a utopian anarchism in the early twentieth century, with which Pynchon originally sympathized. This sympathy appears to have been foreshadowed in *The Crying of Lot 49* by the deaf-mute dancers in the ballroom of the Claremont Hotel in Oakland:

Each couple on the floor danced whatever was in the fellow's head: tango, two-step, bossa nova, slop. But how long, Oedipa thought, could it go on before collisions became a serious hindrance? There would have to be collisions. [...] But none came. (131)

That none came—"Jesús Arrabal would have called it an anarchist miracle"—could only have been explained by "some unthinkable order of music, many rhythms, all keys at once, a choreography in which each couple meshed easy, predestined. Something they all heard with an extra sense" (*Crying* 131, 132). The very idea of an "anarchist miracle" intimates that Pynchon himself had thought in modern utopian terms. Joseph Losos reveals that Henry Adams "claimed to have been a conservative anarchist," which might have pointed Pynchon in that direction—though Losos argues that "in truth he [Adams] was nothing of the sort" (411). Disturbed by the Vietnam War and by underhanded government crackdowns on drug use, Pynchon might have been theoretically open to an anarchy in which socially responsible citizens acted on their own, unconstrained by narrow-minded bureaucrats.

Forty years later, in *Against the Day*, on another dance floor, couples are "dancing at a number of different speeds, trying to arrive someplace recognizable at the end of each four bars, everybody crashing into furniture, walls, each other, staggering away from these collisions at unpredictable angles, giggling incessantly" (902). The rules-oriented Pynchon appears to have backed away from the utopian vision of anarchy in his earlier novel, though he remained sympathetic, arguing in their favor that anarchists in the American

west avoided bloodshed and intended to blow up only “company outbuildings” and “electric power junctions” (*Against* 217). Reef Traverse pointedly expressed the view that “as civilization comes creeping out from back east, authorities tend to [...] tell you, ‘Don’t take the law into your own hands’” (654). Pynchon may have turned away from anarchism because its position “that the centralized nation-state [...] has lost all credibility with the population” sounded too much like the now discredited Reaganesque view that government is the problem, not the solution (938). The novel describes a deadly suicide bombing in a crowded café in Nice, “just the kind of bourgeois target anarchists love to bomb” (850). Suddenly it happened,

this great blossoming of disintegration—a dense, prolonged shower of glass fragments, [...] human blood everywhere, blood arterial, venous and capillary, fragments of bone and cartilage and soft tissue, wood splinters of all sizes from the furniture, shrapnel of tin, zinc and brass, from torn ragged sheets down to the tiny nails in picture frames, nitrous fumes, fluid unfurlings of smoke too black to see through. (850)

That Pynchon occasionally expresses a utopian nostalgia for anarchy in *Against the Day*—he goes so far as to capitalize the word (as for example on pages 175, 181 and 372), which he never did in *The Crying of Lot 49*—may reflect his dismay that the foremost doomsayer for biodiversity, Edward O. Wilson, demeaned “philosophical postmodernists [as] a rebel crew milling beneath *the black flag of anarchy*, challeng[ing] the very foundations of science and traditional philosophy” (40; emphasis added). Pynchon would not be alone in such a reaction to the environmentalist’s latest book; Frank Kelleter deplors that “the neo-natural turn” that Joseph Carroll envisions for the humanities “quotes Wilson’s agenda of ‘consilience’ as if it was an uncontroversial, almost self-evident program” (222, 228).

Much of *Against the Day* takes place in Europe, where modernity’s fascination with science and technology was also taking place. It was in Venice around 1910 that Dally met another of the novel’s fictional characters, the painter Andrea Tancredi, who “sympathized with Marinetti and those around him who were beginning to describe

themselves as ‘Futurists’” (*Against* 584). This historic movement, an aggressive response to modernism, began in Milan in 1908 under the leadership of Filippo Marinetti. Its “first manifesto demanded the destruction of the libraries, the museums, the academies, and the cities of the past that were themselves mausoleums. It extolled the beauties of revolution, of war, of the speed and dynamism of modern technology” (Arnason 212). In what readers might at first take to be an example of the second Pynchon’s idiosyncrasy, Tancredi tells Dally, as he scowls at Venice:

“Look at it. Someday we’ll tear the place down, and use the rubble to fill in those canals. Take apart the churches, salvage the gold, sell off what’s left to collectors. The new religion will be public hygiene, whose temples will be waterworks and sewage-treatment plants. [...] All these islands will be linked by motorways. Electricity everywhere, anyone who still wants Venetian moonlight will have to visit a museum. Colossal gates out here, all around the Lagoon, for the wind, to keep out sirocco and bora alike.” (*Against* 585)

Though it does sound idiosyncratic, Tancredi’s vow to tear Venice down is compatible with the creed of Italian Futurism, and is therefore the kind of factual history that Logan expected from the rules-oriented Pynchon. Although Tancredi later confesses to Dally that, unlike “Marinetti and his circle, [...] I really love the old dump,” it would violate Logan’s rule against historical fiction that a character in *Against the Day* would correctly express the attitudes of his time. In this case, however, the historicity is violated by the implication that colossal sea-gates for Venice were conceived back in 1910, which they were not, and that they were intended to keep out sirocco and bora winds. The siroccos are a cause of flooding only because they stir up the ocean. The gates were planned much later, in 1995, to protect Venice from flood, not wind. That last sentence of Tancredi’s incredible monologue is the red herring that upholds the first Pynchon’s rule against historical fiction.

In contrast to modernity’s view of itself as utopian, the first Pynchon emphasizes its darker side. The Italian Futurists’ “comfortless faith in science and rationality” (*Against* 585) was evolving into an extreme

political activism, rooted in “the prevalent atmosphere of anarchism” and in hostility to “a lopsided aristocratic and bourgeois society” that “unfortunately became a pillar of Italian fascism” (Arnason 212). America too had its brush with fascism. Late in the winter of 1914, near the end of *Against the Day*, Estrella (Stray) and her son Jesse are among the sympathizers living in the “tent colony at Ludlow,” occupied mostly by striking coal miners and their families (1007). When the Colorado National Guard, which the governor called up to support the mine owners, finally closed in on the strikers, tents were set on fire, and

the troopers made sounds of animal triumph. Shots kept ripping across the perilous night. Sometimes they connected, and strikers, and children and their mothers, and even troopers and camp guards, took bullets or fought flames, and fell in battle. But it happened, each casualty, one by one, in light that history would be blind to. The only accounts would be the militia’s. (*Against* 1016)

In his review of a new book on the 1914 Ludlow strike, Caleb Crain confirms, although he does not use the word “fascism,” that “[o]nce the National Guard was deployed, its general claimed the powers of martial law, holding prisoners incommunicado, setting up a military commission to review detention, and threatening to jail a local district attorney if he interfered” (80). In testimony before Congress, John D. Rockefeller, Jr. claimed “that the miners were striking against their will, coerced by outside agitators, and that his company was fighting for the workers’ freedom” (Crain 80).

It would violate Logan’s rule against historical fiction that the characters, Stray and Jesse, shed light on a tragic, but short-lived triumph of fascism in America. The red herring here is Pynchon’s statement that the account of the miners’ deaths “would be that of the militia’s only.” It is well-known that the best records were kept, not by the mine company’s militia, but by the United Mine Workers, which purchased Ludlow after it became a ghost town and erected a monument on which are inscribed the names and ages of the 19 men, women, children and babies that were killed. It attests to the connection

of the Ludlow strike to modernism that the tent colony “was nicknamed White City, for the color of its tents and in homage to the white buildings at the 1893 Chicago World’s Fair” (Crain 78).

Just as modernism was less utopian than postmodernists believed, so it was more spiritual. Whereas critics like John A. McClure and Crystal L. Downing accentuate modernity’s secularism, the first Pynchon uncovers a host of arcane but flourishing spiritualities in that supposed heyday of secular humanism. The morphing of mathematics and physics into spirituality is exemplified at the University of Göttingen where Leopold Kronecker “believed ‘the positive integers were created by God’” and that “‘all else is the work of man’” (*Against* 593). So intense was the mixture of mathematics and faith in Göttingen that, when the brilliant “Yashmeen had to leave” the university, it was like her being “expelled from the garden” (663). For Pynchon, who writes of “invisibility [as] a sacred condition,” imagines “the invisible taking on substance” and senses “affirmation from the far invisible,” the very word “invisible” is a metaphor for transcendence (*Against* 43, 164, 165). The modernist contradiction between religion and rationality is resolved by buildings “solidly constructed on the principles of Invisibilism, a school of modern architecture which believed that the more ‘rationally’ a structure was designed, the *less visible* would it appear” (*Against* 625). Pynchon’s use of “invisibility” as a metaphor for spirituality appears to have been inspired by Thomas Luckmann’s book, *The Invisible Religion*. Although Luckmann admitted to statistical evidence of declining church populations, he argued that “church-oriented religion is merely one and perhaps not even the most important element [...] that characterizes religion in modern society” (28). The “[human] organism,” he explains, “transcends its biological nature by developing a Self” in a “fundamentally religious” process that is “mysterious” (50, 58). Because “individual religiosity” is not as visible as “church-oriented religiosity,” Luckmann calls it invisible religion (70, 76).

The intermixture of the sacred and the profane explains the brief appearance of “the noted Uyghur troublemaker Al Mar-Fuad” in his

“English tweeds,” his “deerstalker cap turned sidewise,” and “an ancient Greening shotgun whose brasswork carried holy inscriptions in Arabic” (*Against* 757). Because English speakers generally pronounce Uyghur as “Weegur” instead of the native “Oogur,” this Uyghur troublemaker announces “Gweetings, gentlemen, on this Glowious Twelfth! [...] I am here to deliver a message fwom my master, the Doowswa [. ...] Them I am going out after some gwouse,” sounding very much like Looney Tunes’ harmless Elmer J. Fudd (757). There’s a political message here because 17 Islamic Uyghurs had been prisoners at Guantanamo Bay since it opened, even though “the Bush administration had conceded that none of [them ...] were enemy combatants” (Glaberson A6). Not until June 12, 2009 were the first of the Uyghurs released, prompting a specialist on detention issues at the Center for American Progress in Washington to exult: “This is ‘closing Guantanamo.’ This is what it looks like” (Glaberson A6).

#### Along the Idiosyncratic Road as Far as it Goes

Using hyperbole and ridicule, the second Pynchon mocks modernity’s enthusiasm for science. Immediately after his bilocated other zealously describes Merle Rideout’s commercial success selling electric doorbells, he comes up with a burlesque tale of Merle’s next, brief hitch—selling lightning protection. On “his first, and as it turned out only, ball-lightning job,” Merle tries to catch one upstairs in a Midwestern farmhouse, using an “insulated cage” that is “hooked to a sal ammoniac battery to try and trap the critter in” (*Against* 73). Eventually the ball lightning starts to trust his pursuer and approaches him. “Merle thought he could feel a little heat, and of course his hair was standing on end” (73). He addresses the ball lightning, who replies, “My name is Skip, what’s yours?” (73). He gets Merle to agree to never “send [him] to ground, it’s no fun there” and to “forget that cage,” and from “then on the ball lightning, or ‘Skip,’ was never far from Merle’s side” (73, 74).

The idiosyncratic Pynchon has a heyday with relativity theory. He describes an advanced weapons-sighting device, allegedly in use in 1900, with which “gunners were abolishing Time—what they saw ‘now’ in the sights was in fact what did not yet exist *but would only be* a few seconds from ‘now’” (*Against* 256). Even Luca Zombini, the professional magician in *Against the Day*, had “long been interested in modern science and the resources it made available to conjurors, among these the Nicol prism and the illusionary uses of double refraction” (*Against* 354). Luca explains to his daughters, including his step-daughter Dally, how he saws his assistants in half:

“You already know about this stuff here.” Bringing out a small, near-perfect crystal of Iceland spar. “Doubles the image, the two overlap, with the right sort of light, the right lenses, you can separate them in stages, a little further each time, step by step till in fact it becomes possible to saw somebody in half *optically*, and instead of two different pieces of one body, there are now two complete individuals walking around, who are identical in every way, *capisci?*” (355)

In the ensuing exchange with her father, Bria asks Luca if it’s “a happy ending. Do they go back to being one person again?” (355). A little defensive, Luca stares at his shoes and replies:

“No, and that’s been kind of a running problem here. Nobody can figure out—”  
 “Oh, Pop.”  
 “—how to reverse it. I’ve been everywhere, asked everybody, college professors, people in the business, even Harry Houdini himself, no dice. Meanwhile ...”  
 “[D]on’t tell me.”  
 “Yeah.”  
 “Well, how many?”  
 “Maybe ... two or three?”  
 “*Porca miseria*, so that’s four or six, right? You realize you could get sued for that?” (*Against* 355)

Coming only eight pages after Dally has the episode of OCD, it appears that her catastrophizing half-sister, Bria, has the same genetic disorder. We almost wonder whether Pynchon, having imagined

himself passing “through Iceland spar” and “being divided in two,” is starting to worry about himself (*Against* 688).

Kitsch, which is garish art or text generally considered to be in bad taste, has long been postmodernism’s in-your-face response to modernity’s intellectual elitism. The idiosyncratic Pynchon takes kitsch well over the top when Reef, thinking that there was something “flirtatious” going on between Mouffette and himself, gets an erection and invites her to jump on his lap:

“Oboy, oboy.” He stroked the diminutive spaniel for a while until, with no warning, she jumped off the couch and slowly went into the bedroom, looking back now and then over her shoulder. Reef followed, taking out his penis, breathing heavily through his mouth. “Here, Mouffie, nice *big dog bone* for you right here, lookit this, yeah, seen many of these lately? *come on*, smells good don’t it, mmm, yum!” and so forth, Mouffette [...], sniffing with curiosity. “That’s right, now, o-o-open up ... *good girl*, good Mouffette now let’s just put this—*yaahhgghh!*” Reader, she bit him. (*Against* 666)

The grammatically incorrect “smells good don’t it,” in which the “don’t” could be facetiously taken as a contraction of “donut,” is reminiscent of the human jelly-doughnut, similarly(?) bitten only 40-pages earlier in the novel. But we must be careful of what Pynchon masquerades as kitsch; Reef’s sexual interaction with Mouffie, especially with its implication of a bedroom invitation by the dog, invokes Virilio’s concerns about “*new relationships between species*” and “*the loaded terms of bestiality*” (61). Virilio not only adds his anxiety to those of Toffler and Birardi about the “general speeding-up of phenomena in our hypermodern world,” but is alarmed that “geneticists are now using cloning in the quest for the chimera, the hybridization of man and animal” (51). Virilio’s paranoia over “that *great transgenic art* in which every pharmacy, every laboratory will launch its own ‘lifestyles,’ its own transhuman fashions” (61) seems over the top, but it resonates ominously in Kelleter’s fear of “the adaptive capacities of high intelligence [...] turning evolution into history” (227). If eugenics doesn’t do it, consider Peter Swirsky’s prediction about a “thinking computer” that “will build itself by modifying its rulebook, erasing



some pre-loaded instructions, adding new ones, and turning itself effectively into an intentional black box. In other words, it will evolve" (296).

### Conclusion: The Dead End of the Postmodern Ethos

The two roads come together in the final hundred pages of *Against the Day*, and despite Bria Zombini's forebodings, so does the bilocated author. For the reader, the double standard of the first Pynchon has become more idiosyncratic, and the idiosyncrasy of the second Pynchon begins to make sense in terms of futuristic writings in contemporary cultural theory. The idea, for example, of gunners sighting "what did not yet exist *but would only be* a few seconds from 'now'" seems less idiosyncratic when Virilio tells us, not only of the need for "a car that actually sees other vehicles over the horizon, so that car speed and audiovisual speed are rendered compatible" but also that "European companies [... are] actually working on such an idea" (*Indirect* 69).

Given "Pynchon's giddy use of coincidence," what Logan calls "the mulligan stew of *Against the Day*" could more aptly be called a "Brownian stew" after the random zigzagging molecular motion in liquids that Einstein famously explained (232, 247). That Umeki, by marrying Yashmeen's adoptive father, beomes the grandmother of her former lover's niece (*Against* 974); that Stray, whom Reef had abandoned years ago in Colorado along with their infant son, finds Reef's mother, Mayva living with the parents of her new partner, Ewball Oust (976, 979); that Scarsdale Vibe's menacing bodyguard, Foley, who has protected him for 30 years, abruptly turns his gun on Vibe, and to settle his own score, proceeds "to empty all eight rounds into" his astonished employer (1006); that Lake, who magnanimously fell in love with and married Deuce Kindred, although he and Sloat Fresno had savagely beaten her father to death, would have rowdy sex with Basnight when he came to Hollywood looking for information on a

local murder case (1052); that Deuce, who had become a trusted sheriff after Lake presumably straightened him out, is now the “little runt of a studio cop” that Basnight intends to arrest “for a whole string of orgy-type homicides” (1059); that the two main characters, Dally and Kit, should not only meet but become involved in a sadly dysfunctional marriage (1067); that after Reef, Yashmeen and their daughter Ljubica emigrate to Colorado, Stray and Yashmeen, both parents of a child by Reef, become involved in a lesbian relationship (1075-76); it is as though Pynchon is anticipating the “breakdown[s] in rejection, separation, abandonment, violent struggle, abuse, and even murder” that a few years later Carroll would acknowledge are counter-adaptative (“Evolutionary” 113). Despite his utopianism, it is Carroll himself who reminds us that: “Civilizations, like species, have often come to bad ends” (“Rejoinder” 368).

The enormous complexity of *Against the Day*, as well as that of the characters that people it, is a metaphor for the complexity of human life in our disorienting hypermodern world. In the 40-plus years since Pynchon wrote *The Crying of Lot 49*, there has been “the roaring current of change,” that Alvin Toffler foresaw, “a current so powerful today that it overturns institutions, shifts our values and shrivels our roots” (3). In those years, the population of the earth has doubled, and the complexity of life for that doubled population has been geometrically intensified by globalization, new communication technologies, new weaponry, and so forth. We have come so far from the utopian modernism that peaked in the 1950s that the postmodern ethos is no longer relevant, but has become what John V. Knapp calls “a moment in critical history rather than something current” (qtd. in Kohn, “Unwitting” 314).

The penultimate page of *Against the Day* is symbolic of the new age of hypercomplexity:

The [air]ship by now has grown as large as a small city. There are neighborhoods, there are parks. There are slum conditions. It is so big that when people see it in the sky, they are struck with selective hysterical blindness and end up not seeing it at all. (*Against* 1084)

That there are “slum conditions” in the sky is a dramatic sign of the dead end of utopian modernity. The “selective hysterical blindness” speaks to the dulling “aesthesia” associated with “the transition from a realm of conjunction to one of connection” (Berardi 42, 43). To facilitate “this transition,” Berardi explains, “a mutation of the conscious organism is taking place,” in which “our cognitive system” is being

reformatted. This appears to generate a dulling of the faculties of conjunction that had hitherto characterized the human condition. [...] Central to this mutation is the insertion of the electronic into the organic, the proliferation of artificial devices in the organic universe [... We are] confronted with the effort of the conscious organism to adapt to a changed environment and a readjustment of the cognitive system to the techno-communicative environment. This generates pathologies of the psychic sphere [, ...] slows down processes of interpretation and renders them aleatory and ambiguous. (42, 43)

Symbolic of the hypermodern age, the boys’ airship, whose ordinary landing in Chicago began the novel, is now able to dock in “remote stations high in unmeasured outer space,” hurtle “at speeds that no one wishes to imagine,” and fall “for distances only astronomers are comfortable with” (*Against* 1084). Despite “invisible sources of gravity rolling through like storms,” the airship is inevitably “brought to safety, in the bright, flowerlike heart of a perfect hyper-hyperboloid that only Miles can see in its entirety” (1084-85). Remembering that this particular member of the crew “suffered at times from a confusion in his mental processes” (*Against* 4), the novel’s readers will not be surprised to discover that the “perfect hyper-hyperboloid,” which is a reference to Willem De Sitter’s solution to Einstein’s cosmological field equations, is a four-dimensional hyper-hyperboloid embedded in a (4+1)-dimensional Minkowski space-time. Miles could not possibly have been able to see it “in its entirety” because the space-time that it describes is matter-free, that is, completely empty, which, according to Michel Janssen, is why Albert Einstein, who believed that there could be no space-time without matter, rejected De Sitter’s solution.<sup>6</sup>

"In the expression of contemporary poetry, in cinema, video art and novels," Berardi insists, "the marks of an epidemic of psychopathology proliferate" (43).<sup>7</sup> Pynchon's emphasis on the "hyper-hyper" in the final page of *Against the Day* may signal the hypermodernism that is replacing the old modernism. Whereas the old modernism confidently lionized science and progress, the new hypermodernism, which is its opposite, is based on "resistance against science" (Armitage 37). This dramatic turnaround of attitude is for Virilio, "extraordinary, unheard of" (37). To Berardi's fear of "an epidemic of psychopathology" spawned by the new "techno-communicative environment" are added Virilio's confident forecasts of an "integral accident" which will knell "modernism's end," the ascension of "technological fundamentalism [, ... a] religion of those who believe in the absolute power of technology," and extreme miniaturization by which "the machine enters into the human [, ...] no longer a prosthesis, [...but] a new eugenicism" that can be "forced on people who don't need or want them" (Armitage 26, 44, 50).

The concluding paragraph of *Against the Day*, presumably the denouement in the iconic airship's future, if it has a future, is a kind of literary equivalent of Iceland spar. Some readers will find, as reviewer Sophie Ratcliffe does, that this "final scene has disturbing resonances," as if the crew "were setting out on a self-effacing mission to destruct" (22). "Of all the attempted explosions in the book," Ratcliffe concludes, "this is the biggest" (22). Other readers will find, as reviewer Denis Scheck does, that this paragraph is "perhaps the loveliest happy end in modern literature." Whatever future is promised in that final paragraph is expunged by its contradictions. In Berardi's words, "dystopia" has taken "center stage," conquered "the whole field of the artistic imagination," and drawn "the narrative horizon of the century with no future" (43). It was the modern world, wrote Logan, "that had not yet learned to distrust" science and invention (246). "Postmodernism [...] doesn't make any sense to me," wrote Virilio (Armitage 25). But it was postmodernism that made us aware

of modernity's naïve trustfulness and is now absorbed into the frightened distrust that characterizes hypermodernism.

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## NOTES

<sup>1</sup>I am grateful to Leona Toker for making me aware of postmodern idiosyncrasy and giving me advice and encouragement on an early draft of this essay. For their information on summer temperatures in Europe almost a century ago, I am indebted to meteorologists Ahira Sanchez-Lugo, Peer Hechler, Gerhard Müller-Westermeier and Enric Aguilar.

<sup>2</sup>I am not the first to associate *Against the Day* with two Pynchons and contrasting authorial roads. Daniel Grausam places *Against the Day* "at the intersection of two diverging historical trajectories, one into the past and one into the future" and imagines "either a sharply deterministic and teleological Pynchon who sees history as a process of entropic slide into greater states of disarray or [an] antithetical Pynchon of potentiality, whose historiographic investigations continually gesture towards lost possibilities and alternative paths not taken" (221).

<sup>3</sup>This term hypermodern comes from an article in the journal *Theory, Culture & Society* in which John Armitage asks Paul Virilio about his thoughts on "the problem of what might be called 'super' or 'hypermodernism'" and is answered that "As far as 'hyper' or 'super' modernism is concerned, I think we are not out of modernity yet" (26). In a footnote to his question, Armitage lays claim to "Hypermodernism [, ...] a term I reserve for a forthcoming book on Virilio" (52). That book, a page by page reproduction of the journal issue plus an index, is entitled *Paul Virilio: From Modernism to Hypermodernism and Beyond*.

<sup>4</sup>There is a growing, interactive website, "Pynchon Wiki: *Against the Day*," in which self-selected aficionados of this novel anonymously verify historical events that appear fictional and discredit background material that deceptively appear to be factual.

<sup>5</sup>For a discourse supportive of confusion and disorientation in contemporary fiction, see Kohn, "Postmodernist" 341-45.

<sup>6</sup>I am grateful to John Stachel, the founding editor of the Einstein Papers Project at the Institute for Advanced Studies, for correcting and explaining this technical material. In his personal communication, dated 06/12/09, he informed me that "the fact that a hyper-hyperboloid is four-dimensional already rules out any visualization of [...] images that it could cast on our visual system."

<sup>7</sup>For an example of hypermodern video art, see Kohn *Motorization*.

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