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Universidad del País Vasco Euskal Herriko Unibertsitatea

ARC OF THE ABSENT AUTHOR:

THOMAS PYNCHON'S TRAJECTORY FROM ENTROPY TO GRACE

A Dissertation

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Abstract

The central thesis of this dissertation is that Thomas Pynchon has come to occupy a specific position in the field of literature and that this can be seen in his latest novel, *Against the Day*, in which he is not so much writing about the past or even the present, but about what the present can become, about where it might be driven. Pynchon is self-consciously exploring the politics in the discursive field in which his book is situated, using the fin-de-siècle to highlight the ways that the present is geared toward catastrophe and that people, in a *dans macabre*, hurl themselves toward that endgame.

The theoretical view and methodology behind my analysis of the novel draws to a great extent on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, specifically his sociological literary analysis. This sets an academic precedent in studies of Pynchon's novels but it also requires applying an approach that has several necessary and onerous steps. In order to see how the social space of the novel is a refracted image of the author's own social world one must analyse the field of power, after that the literary field and the positions of agents, next the space of possibilities, all of which help one understand the genesis of the author's habitus and thus his trajectory and the creative project that develops. In the end Pynchon's position in the literary field should be clearer as should the position of *Against the Day* in Pynchon's trajectory. As such this approach requires more than just an analysis of the text; it must make use of reviews, essays or letters written by Pynchon, book sales numbers and even appearances on *The Simpson's*.

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In the course of the UPV doctoral program I was exposed to many new thinkers and authors thanks to its cross-departmental nature that allowed me to study under professors from various faculties; a most enriching experience for a fledgling academic. Special thanks is in order for Professor María Felisa López Liqueste for supervising my dissertation and putting me on the path to serious Pynchon study, which has been nothing short of marvelous. The time and help she has given me along the way cannot be easily summarized.

It would not only be thoughtless but dishonest not to mention the friends and fellow scholars that have also helped me along the way. First, I must thank John Krafft at the University of Miami. A walking Pynchon database that constitutes a major pillar in the Pynchon academic community (a co-founder of the now defunct *Pynchon Notes*) and a very kind person, Professor Krafft has always been very helpful and taken time to respond to my inquiries. I will also extend thanks here to all the people who contribute to the Pynchon list serve and thus constitute a community of readers (composed of specialist and non-specialists) who are an example of the way that readings of a book are exchanged and circulated. Beyond the world of Pynchon scholarship I want to express my heartfelt thanks to Bo Ekelund (Stockholm University) and John Speller (University of Lodz) for their help and encouragement regarding the application of Pierre Bourdieu’s work to literary study. I should thank my friend David Choberka (University of Michigan) for the help he has given me over the years in proofing and editing as well

as his ever fruitful view as a scholar of intellectual history. Thanks also to my friend John Wright (University of Guelph) for firing my inquiry into philosophical works and thinkers.

Thanks also goes out to my wife Belén and my parents for playing their own part in my pursuit of a doctorate. My wife has accepted the cost and accumulation of books and conferences over the years without a murmur, and helped me where she could. My parents have both helped me obtain materials and tried to provide me counsel based on their own postgraduate experience.

The people mentioned above, professors, parents and friends, are the ones who often inspire us or make our intellectual pursuit possible and so they are responsible in part for the work herein. However, they cannot share any part of the blame for the deficiencies that this work may suffer from, for these are all of my own making.

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Abbreviations

In order to facilitate in-text citation of some of the books that are frequently referred to in this dissertation, I provide the following list of abbreviations.

<i>AD</i>	<i>Against the Day</i>
<i>BL</i>	<i>Bourdieu and Literature</i>
<i>FCP</i>	<i>Field of Cultural Production</i>
<i>IOW</i>	<i>In Other Words</i>
<i>RA</i>	<i>The Rules of Art</i>
<i>SL</i>	<i>Slow Learner</i>
<i>RL</i>	<i>The World Republic of Letters</i>

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Dedication

I dedicate this dissertation to my parents, Homer and Bonnie Cissell, without whom my past is unimaginable. And to my wife Belén without whom the present is less bearable. And finally, to my daughter Gaia who helps me hope for tomorrow.

- How could they ever have crossed trajectories? (AD 1030)

Chapter 1

Introduction

“To argue on behalf of Pynchon’s importance as a writer would be supererogatory. Placing him in a larger context is more difficult. More difficult, because he seems aware of all the literature that preceded him as well as writing that surrounds him,” (90) as critic and scholar Tony Tanner wrote in 1982 in his book *Thomas Pynchon*. Since then Pynchon has published five more novels spanning eras and genres, his oeuvre has grown and along with it his reputation and, it will be argued herein, his importance, so that Tanner’s words are as true now, or more so, as they were 33 years ago.¹ Tanner goes on to situate Pynchon within the literary field putting him alongside writers such as Norman Mailor, Saul Bellow, Ishmael Reed, Joseph Heller, William Burroughs, Robert Coover and John Barth. He extends the list to the wider global literary field and cites the influence Borges and Marquez, Nabokov, Beckett, Calvino, and even Günter Grass. From this contemporary field Tanner looks back to Pynchon’s literary heritage mentioning Faulkner and Melville but also Sterne, Cervantes and Rabelais. Other scholars have also made similar proposals of kinship or influence (Mendelson 1978; but also Charles Hollander (1990) who sees Pynchon in the tradition of satirists from Varro to Swift). Pynchon’s stature as an author can hardly be disputed. And yet given his sizeable reputation and cultural significance Pynchon has managed to remain fairly unknown (Tanner 12), an apparently absent author² about whom very little is known, but that has slowly become more present and apparent than in the past.

Heir to more than one heritage, Thomas Pynchon is more important today than when he entered the literary field more than fifty years ago. His generally encyclopedic (Mendelson 9) and often lengthy novels have been awarded or nominated for prizes and included in Great Books lists. But what do we make of the literary legacy that he has given us? In 2006 Pynchon published *Against the Day*, his sixth and biggest book to date

¹ One way to see this is by looking at the number of PhD dissertations focusing on Thomas Pynchon; Martin Eve has done some informal and unpublished work on this but only in relation to the UK.

² Some choose to associate this absence with Barthes’ ‘death of the author’ that appeared in the late 1960’s, just as Pynchon’s career was taking off and he was going underground.

that provides the author with a large narrational tapestry in which genres and narratives interweave with longstanding Pynchonian themes and concerns. Over the course of his career Pynchon has constructed a literary world (not unlike those of Faulkner or Marquez) that becomes most clear with *Against the Day*, that literary behemoth that critics have assailed for its excess and enormity. But what are we bequeathed with this tome? We may ask: What is produced or reproduced in the writing of this novel? What is produced or reproduced when we read it? Perhaps we might echo Walter Benjamin and inquire about “the function the work has within the literary relations of production of its time?” (Benjamin 81).

This dissertation studies *Against the Day*, primarily through the theoretical lens of Pierre Bourdieu’s work, to see to what degree the structure of the social space of the novel in which the events unfold is homologous to the structure of the of the social space in which the author is situated. Since it may be assumed that neither the novel nor Bourdieu’s work are well known, I shall take some time preparing the groundwork before I raise my edifice, setting cornerstone and keystone in place at the right time.

The central thesis is that Thomas Pynchon has taken a certain position in the field of literature and that this can be seen in his largest novel in which he is not so much writing about the past or even the present, but about what the present can be pushed towards becoming, about where it might be driven³. Or in the words of Edward Mendelson, “He is always pointing towards the real conditions of a world more serious than the world in his imagination: *pointing towards*, not embodying, not displacing” (4). Pynchon’s world is peopled by his creatures and his characters, a world his readers know, but there is another world, the social world that Pynchon inhabits. *Against the Day* probes and explores the politics in the discursive field in which the production of the book is situated, using the fin-de-siècle to highlight the ways that the present is potentially geared toward catastrophe and that people, in a *dans macabre*, hurl themselves toward that endgame.

³ Kathryn Hume, in “The Religious and Political Vision of *Against the Day*”, sees on Pynchon’s part “intensified personal convictions or increased desperation over the direction America is taking” (168).

Overview of Objectives, Methods, and Dissertation Structure

Several aims are included in the development of this thesis. The first objective is to expand the study of the author Thomas Pynchon by focusing on *Against the Day*, but also by studying new material such as letters by the author, reviews and/ or information obtained in my research or that of others. There is a need for this study based on the fact that most scholarly work on the novel has not availed itself of this range of material in this way,⁴ and almost no scholarly work has been done on Pynchon's novel's using the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu.

The second objective follows from the first, to analyse the structure and genesis of the novel in relation to the position of the author in the field of literary production and the greater social field. This approach has not been widely applied (which is addressed further on in the section on methodology), but where it has been, it has formulated systems of relations "making sense of sentient data" (Bourdieu 1992: xviii).

The final aim is to question whether this apparently absent author, Thomas Pynchon, is the recluse some imply, or rather an aloof observer, more intellectual than hermit. In the age of the ubiquitous camera, what does one make of the 'absent author'? This line of research and the ones above should help form a better understanding of the trajectory of an author, so well-known for his use of entropy, but whose longest book ends with the word "Grace".

Although this thesis concentrates on *Against the Day*, it does so by looking at its position in the literary field as well as in the trajectory of the author, which also involves consideration of the history of possible positions and the positions occupied by others. As such it will consider Thomas Pynchon's other works: *Slow Learner*, *V*, *The Crying of Lot 49*, *Gravity's Rainbow*, *Vineland*, and *Mason & Dixon*. Additionally, some of Pynchon's non-fiction writings (e.g. essays and introductions to books) will be included in the study in order to provide a further reaching analysis. To a lesser extent works by other authors, primarily from the latter twentieth century, will also figure in the examination. Writers of various movements and groups may play a significant part in

⁴ The essays in *Pynchon's Against the Day: A Corrupted Pilgrim's Guide* are important for any scholarly study of the novel, however, as essays they have a more narrow scope and do not make use of information as is done in this dissertation.

regard to the structure and genesis of the novel and/ or in shaping the contours of the literary field as well as the possible positions for agents to occupy. For example, the thesis makes references to writers that range from Jack Kerouac to Tom Clancy due to their own positions as agents of cultural production in the literary field and their relevance to Pynchon's own position taking e.g., choice of genre, use of poetics or structuring devices in the novel. Looking beyond the literary field to the wider social field and the field of power the study may refer to works that influenced the budding author, for example Norbert Wiener's book on cybernetics (*Slow Learner*, xxii).

Having stated the objectives of this dissertation and the method to be used, the progression of the chapters can now be set out. The chapters build towards and around the steps of Pierre Bourdieu's method of sociological analysis of literature as set forth in his various works. Clearly, this first chapter provides the reader with a basic orientation regarding objectives, method and procedure in this dissertation. The second chapter is composed of two parts: first, it explains my decision to use Bourdieu's method as well as my choice of author, and then it provides a synopsis of the novel *Against the Day*. The third chapter offers a more detailed outline and explanation of the dissertation's research program, aims, and methodology; the chapter then shifts into an application of Bourdieu's work to locate Pynchon in the literary field by analysing the reviews of the novel. This leads to the fourth chapter which focuses in part specifically on the intersection of Pynchon's trajectory with that of book critic James Wood in an attempt to expose the dynamics of the struggle at the heart of the literary field. However, it also addresses Pynchon's readership. With this view of the author as a social agent in a specific field, the thesis proceeds to chapter five in which the strict application of Bourdieu's method begins by analysing the field of power and the literary field in the US. This chapter discusses positions occupied by Pynchon as well as the beginning of his launch into the literary field, the basic structure of which should be clearer at this point. Additionally, note is made of Pynchon's publishing history. Chapter six is a further step in Bourdieu's method as it analyses the author's habitus and trajectory; this chapter draws on information discovered in the course of the research project and which adds significantly to Pynchon studies. Chapter seven follows another step in the method by analysing the space of works (as Bourdieu calls it), this then allows the dissertation to

proceed to the study of the various strategies that Pynchon makes use of in his novel as he positions himself in the literary field but also in the greater social field. Chapter eight draws on the previous chapters to posit what Pynchon's point of view as an author is. It also argues for the idea of a creative project that has guided much of his work. The chapter finishes by contemplating the idea of *Against the Day* as a global novel.

Having established this view of the literary field as well as Pynchon's point of view and creative project, the dissertation progresses to chapter nine and an analysis of those elements in *Against the Day* that arc through Pynchon's novel as much as his other works. Here one starts to see how the author's world is refracted through the world of the novel, that is to say that there are certain homologies between the social spaces of the novel and that of the author. Following on that analysis, chapter ten focuses on the structuring elements of the novel and their relation to his creative project and the social space and literary field in which Pynchon acts. This chapter establishes the importance of *Against the Day* in Pynchon's project and trajectory. The brief penultimate chapter serves as a prelude to the conclusion and demonstrates the significance of Thomas Pynchon's position in the literary field and his continuing relevance. The twelfth and final chapter concludes the dissertation with a summary and indicates possible future lines of research and study. Several appendices are placed just after the conclusion and before the bibliography.

Chapter 2

Explanation and Synopsis

Bourdieu's Challenge

The methodological basis for this study of *Against the Day* draws on an interdisciplinary approach based on the idea that texts are best understood when considered along with the webs of social and historical relations within which they are produced, circulated, and consumed. As such the methodology derives from literary and cultural studies as well as other disciplines within the humanities and human sciences. This crossdisciplinary approach renders more nuanced studies and explanations of texts and avoids the impasses of other traditional approaches.⁵ The theoretical orientation, from which this approach originates, locates itself predominantly in the work of Pierre Bourdieu and more specifically in his book *The Rules of Art* (1992) in which he presents a sociology of literature as part of a general theory of practice.

The decision to follow this methodological and theoretical course is due in part to a line in *Distinction*, a mammoth tome on taste, in which Pierre Bourdieu invites his readers “to join in the game [...] and pursue the search for equivalents, which would have to be sought in song and cinema” (Bourdieu, 1984: xii). I accept this invitation but choose to make my pursuit with books and literature, as Bourdieu did in *The Rules of Art* (1992). Though I explain more about my use of Bourdieu’s work in the section on methodology, I will limit myself here to explaining my choice of Bourdieu based on the constellation of thinkers he drew upon, his use of empirical data, and the tools and concepts that he added to the human sciences.

Although Pierre Bourdieu was a French sociologist, he “always reacted with extreme hostility to the suggestion of any affinity between himself and those French intellectuals generally considered ‘postmodernist’” (Lane 6); and even if Bourdieu had some influences in common with those other ‘French intellectuals’ (such as may be the

⁵ This is akin to what Dominick LaCapra proposes in *History and Reading* (2000), but also not very different from Gerald Graff’s idea of “teaching the cultural text” as he argues in *Professing Literature: An Institutional History* (1987).

influence of Sartre or Levi-Strauss), he had his own specific orientation that set him apart from other scholars. Whereas many thinkers have adhered to Marxist theory in some way (from Lucien Goldmann to Terry Eagleton), Bourdieu was equally marked or more so by the works of Max Weber and Emile Durkheim (Lane, Ch. 1). Moreover, Bourdieu drew on a range of scholars far from commonly cited by 'postmodern' theorists, that is to say that his work owes less to Roland Barthes or Jacques Lacan than to the likes of Gaston Bachelard, Edmund Husserl, Ernst Cassirer or Erwin Panofsky. Indeed, it is the interdisciplinary nature of Bourdieu's intellectual plurality that sets him apart from other sociologist or French scholars.

Something else that sets Bourdieu apart from others is his use of empirical data that he gathered and/or analysed in his research in various fields. Starting with his work in Algeria in the late 1950's and up to his later works (e.g., *Homo Academicus*, 1984 or *The Rules of Art*, 1992), Bourdieu worked with statisticians to quantify his research and to develop "scientific instruments which would be capable of grasping the relational dimension of social reality" (Lebaron 12). One of his most important contributions was the use of Multiple Coordinate Analysis (also known as Geometric Data Analysis) to create data maps that show the structure of the field and demonstrate relations between agents and the positions they occupy. This part of Bourdieu's work is being continued by scholars such as Gisèle Sapiro and Bo Ekelund who continue to use MCA to study literary fields.

Throughout his work Bourdieu stressed the importance of several ideas, one of which is Reflexivity in practice, regardless of the nature of the project. In *The Rules of Art* Bourdieu writes:

To adopt the viewpoint of reflexivity is not to renounce objectivity, but to question the privilege of the knowing subject, which the anti-genetic vision arbitrarily frees, as purely noetic, from the labour of objectification. To adopt this viewpoint is to strive to account for the empirical 'subject' in the very terms of the objectivity constructed by the scientific subject (notably by situating it in a determined place in social space-time) and thereby to give oneself awareness and (possible) mastery of the constraints which may be exercised on the scientific subject via all the ties which attach it to the empirical 'subject', to its interests, motives, assumptions, beliefs, its *doxa*, and which it must break in order to constitute itself. (RA 207)

This virtuous imperative obliges scholars and researchers to objectify their "own social universe, its history, structure and mechanisms" (Speller, 75), this requires vigilance of

the epistemological regard of the subject towards its scientific object of study; it involves asking what led up to me picking Pynchon, or to his books picking me.

Additionally, Bourdieu emphasized the importance of Ernst Cassirer's relational thinking and symbolic logic (Vandenberghe 1999; Swartz 1997), which is especially useful given the vast canvas that *Against the Day* is, and the manner in which it connects to the rest of Pynchon's oeuvre and the thematic threads and concerns which run through his work. Instead of thinking of the genius behind the work (Bourdieu was critical of the idea of an 'uncreated creator') we should consider the genesis of the work through the systems of relations that bring that cultural product forward (this is only one example of "relation thinking"). Certain relationships prove crucial for the development of the author and his/her work; we have only to think of such cases as T.S. Eliot and Ezra Pound, Thomas Wolfe and Maxwell Perkins, Picasso and Matisse, different as they are, to indicate the importance of various types of relations.⁶ In the case of Pynchon we would have to look at his relations with other writers as well as agents or editors, plus certain friends and contacts from his time at Cornell that proved essential in his career. Pynchon himself recognizes the importance of these relationships very clearly in a quote from David Hajdu's *Positively 4th Street* when he states of Herbert Gold, who taught English Literature at Cornell in 1958, and James Silberman, who as editor at *Dial* rejected his short stories but recommended the aspiring writer to the young agent Candida Donadio that, "Probably if it hadn't been for those two guys, I'd be in some other racket or something" (270). The question then arises as to what the other racket would be, a somewhat Bourdieusian exercise in which the agent (and his/ her habitus) is switched to another field. However, before answering that question I must address another one first: How did I come to engage with the work of Thomas Pynchon?

⁶ We must look not only at the webs of relations in the novel and between it and other novels, but also at the webs of relations around the author of the cultural product. An example of this can be found in Joshua Shenk's *Powers of Two* in which he rejects the idea of an 'uncreated creator' by studying the important relationships that stand behind many great cultural products. In an article he states: "At its heart, the creative process itself is about a push and pull between two entities, two cultures or traditions, or two people, or even a single person and the voice inside her head." (*New York Times* 19 July 2014 "The End of 'Genius'")

My Route to Pynchon's Historical Novels

In order to avoid what Bourdieu calls the scholastic fallacy⁷ some effort should be made toward objectifying my objectification of *Against the Day* by applying the tools of analysis to my own habitus and position in the field of cultural production and thus the social conditions of the possibilities that lie behind my own production. How have I come to intersect with this novel I now take as an object of study? What path through literature has led me here? Unlike some readers, my start with Pynchon came late in life, and of course this makes a difference.⁸ At university in a course on “Postmodern literature” I failed to encounter Pynchon because the professor wanted to avoid the hegemonic presence of white male authors as the sole examples of the type (thus no Barth, Pynchon, etc.) Ironically, the first Pynchon book I saw was *The Crying of Lot 49*, on a friend’s bookshelf some years before the course, yet it would not be until years later and across the sea in another country that I would first be asked to read work from Pynchon. Perhaps had I read him early in my university career (in the midst of the so called culture wars) while acquiring my primary university scholastic habitus, I might have been enthralled and enchanted with the heady theories and ideas that came to be called ‘postmodernism’ and my reading of *Against the Day* would be quite different. The fact is that reading Pynchon at the University of the Basque Country, so far in time and distance from my undergraduate career, alongside authors like Georges Perec and Julio Cortázar and thinkers such as Wilhelm Dilthey or Stuart Hall that were new to me, forced me to question my own thoughts regarding literature and its study. Around this time Pynchon reappeared in my life but this time in the media.

The first time was when *The Onion*, a farcical newspaper with satirical news pieces, ran an article titled “Man Reading Pynchon on Bus Takes Pains To Make Cover Visible”,⁹ which made me think about the social aspect of reading and its significance in terms of status. Then there was a second occurrence in 2004 when Pynchon appeared

⁷ Bourdieu deals with this in chapter 2 of *Pascalian Meditations*.

⁸ In Illinois, where I received basic education, the better schools are in the north and schools in the poorer southern part of the state do not prepare students as well for further schooling and students from the south score lower on state exams; this supports Bourdieu’s idea that physical distance from centers of cultural capital – cities with their libraries and other institutions – equals a social distance from the means of obtaining cultural capital.

⁹ “Man Reading Pynchon on Bus Takes Pains to Make Cover Visible” *The Onion* 20 Dec. 2000

on *The Simpsons* – with a bag on his head. It struck me as curious that a writer of whom not that many have heard would have a cameo on such a widely viewed program.¹⁰ All this affected my engagement with Pynchon's writing, so that when it came time to choose an author for my dissertation, I switched rather easily from my first inclination (James Joyce) at Professor Lopez Lique's suggestion to work with another writer, and thus I chose Pynchon. The fact that he has written several new books over the last two decades has been serendipitous and given me much more to think about.

And yet despite the intentionally low-visibility of the author, he came more and more to my attention. In 2004 when Elfriede Jelinek won the Nobel Prize for Literature she exclaimed her incredulity that she had won the prize and not Pynchon, claiming him superior to authors such as Philip Roth.¹¹ This high praise comes from other quarters as well. As far back as 1982 Don DeLillo said, "If we're not as good as we should be it's not because there isn't a standard. And I think Pynchon, more than any other writer, has set the standard. He's raised the stakes."¹² Later, in the 2005 Summer issue of *Bookforum*, the cover and a large section were dedicated to Pynchon's influence, allowing many contemporaries and successors to show their appreciation; David Cowart refers to this as the 'Tribe of Pyn' (Cowart 205). Pynchon's visibility was increased yet further by director Paul Thomas Anderson's adaptation of Pynchon's novel *Inherent Vice* (2009) into a film of the same name in 2014 which coincided with publication of Pynchon's most recent book *Bleeding Edge* (2013).¹³ This is an indication of how the influence and significance of Pynchon's writing compares to other writers from his cohort such as John Barth, Raymond Coover, or Joan Didion (this point receives greater treatment later in the study).

¹⁰ John Dugdale noted Pynchon's growing presence writing, "In fact, Pynchon is everywhere in today's pop culture," an observation that lacks greater empirical support than the list of examples that Dugdale proposed.

¹¹ From an interview in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* 7 Nov. 2004.

¹² Interview by Robert Harris in *New York Times Book Review* 10 Oct. 1982.

¹³ The director Paul Thomas Anderson has stated that he initially wanted to make a movie version of Pynchon's 1990 novel *Vineland*.

Pynchon: Novelist of Historical Fiction or Postmodernism?

Pynchon and many of the writers with whom he is often grouped or compared to are typically branded as Postmodernists, a term he himself does not seem inclined to use, very different to someone like Barth who clearly positioned himself in his 1967 “The Literature of Exhaustion”.¹⁴ Pynchon considers himself a writer of historical fiction; we know this because he has used the term to describe his writing. In an open letter of support for Ian McEwen printed in *The Guardian* in December 2006, Pynchon avoided using the term “historiographic” fiction that has also often been applied to his writing since Linda Hutcheon coined it in her *Poetics of Postmodernism*. Pynchon’s application of the term “historical fiction” to his own work prompts David Cowart to posit that Pynchon may run the risk of “such obloquy as may still attach to the label” (160), a concern that Cowart derives from a derogatory claim made by Henry Adams. However, his apprehension is unfounded given that historical fiction is a well-established and respected literary genre; there is no need for critics or writers “to repudiate the contumely” (Cowart 162) heaped upon it. Here it may be pertinent to consider an author’s perspective. Robert Coover has stated that he and some other writers “did feel a little like a literary generation” (Ekelund 2000); however, Coover rejects the label of “postmodernism” in an interview from 2015 in which he states that, “some ways of naming a generation are fruitful and some are not. Postmodernism is not. It doesn’t really say anything. It says something about architecture, but it doesn’t say much about writing.” (Interview from *The Believer Magazine*)

If then we accept the author’s use of the term, we must call Pynchon’s novel historical fiction, which has been a central genre of the novel since Sir Walter Scott wrote *Waverly*, and as Jerome de Groot writes, “The Historical Novel is in robust health critically, formally and economically” (1). The genre has grown in part because, “A historical novel might consider the articulation of nationhood via the past, high-light the subjectivism of narratives of History, underline the importance of the realist mode of

¹⁴ Bourdieu’s thoughts on this contested term are instructive: “There are cases [...] that of ‘postmodernism,’ where it is the circulation itself that produces the whole reality of a cultural phenomenon through the accumulation of misunderstandings it generates, without either an object or a subject. Thus arises a huge collective artifact, transcendent to those who believe they are participating in its production and its reception and of whom it would be hard to say whether they are mystifiers or mystifieds, cynics or innocents.” (Calhoun et al 1993: 263)

writing to notions of authenticity, question writing itself, and attack historiographical convention” (De Groot 2). Of course these thematic concerns course through Pynchon’s work as can be seen from a cursory study of articles in the now defunct but ever important Pynchon Notes.

Writers now as before use history to comment on the present, a practice that carries over (*tradere*) from literary forbearers. Shakespeare’s history plays can be seen at least on one level as deliberations on monarchical power, *Richard III* an example of abuse of power and the Henry plays about good Kingship. This use of history is also present in Schiller’s *Wilhelm Tell*. Inge Stephen writes that “Despite the historical distance of the material, its relationship to the German present was still apparent [...] Schiller was less concerned in this play with middle-class aspects of the liberation struggle, than with national issues” (180). Walter Scott’s use of history as he wrote romantically about the past helped in the present to unite disparate peoples under the concept of Britons (Colley 15, also chapter 3). We may say of history in literature what David Mitchell says: “If History is the family tree of Now, a historical novel may illuminate the contemporary world in ways that straight history may not” (*The Telegraph* 8 May 2010, Book Reviews).

This view of novels is not limited to authors like Mitchell. Noam Chomsky has somewhat differently stated: “Thus it is quite possible—overwhelmingly probable, one might guess—that we will always learn more about human life and personality from novels than from scientific psychology” (159). And John Speller identifies something similar in Bourdieu’s relationship to literature. He states that, “What Bourdieu claims to admire in Grass’s work is in fact his ‘search for means of expression to convey a critical, subversive message to a very large audience’” (143). Speller later adds that “Bourdieu himself took inspiration from literary texts... and he found in the multi-layered prose of Proust, and in the polynomiasie of Flaubert, Joyce, or Faulkner, techniques to help him describe the complexity of reality” (187). It could be argued that Pynchon fills this role for many readers.

Pynchon’s use of history might give one cause to think that he shares Mitchell’s opinion about history in novels. There is a glimmer of this view in the blurb for *Against the Day* in which it is written that, “[...] Contrary-to-the-fact occurrences occur. If it is

not the world, it is what the world might be with a minor adjustment or two. According to some, this is one of the main purposes of fiction.”¹⁵ Pynchon has made good use of history from the start, something not lost on Tony Tanner when he wrote of the short story “Under the Rose” that, “it revealed for the first time another dimension of Pynchon’s imagination: his ability to reconstruct history for his own purposes (the astonishing range of this reconstructive gift was only to emerge fully in *Gravity’s Rainbow*)” (Tanner 35). The same is true for the novel that this study centers on, *Against the Day*, which is not unlike Pynchon’s magnum opus *Gravity’s Rainbow*, a book that was ostensibly about WWII but was written during the height of the Viet Nam war. However, despite the thematic concerns the two novels might share, they are very different books written by an author whose place in the literary field is very different from the early 1970’s and who operates in a social field that is quite different from what Pynchon knew as the world in the 1970’s.¹⁶ But what can be said of this book that has been called “chaotic”, “gargantuan” and a number of other things to indicate its size and scope? First one needs an idea of the novel’s unruly and sprawling content that points the reader toward the history of organized labor, heady mathematics, metallurgy and chemistry, and dozens of other directions.

Against the Day: A Synopsis

Everyone who has been faced with the intimidating task of summarizing *Against the Day* recognizes the difficulty involved. Bernard Duyfhuizen, a long standing Pynchon scholar, aptly states: “Summarizing fully and accurately the plot of *Against the Day* would be a daunting task, and even then the numerous intersections of plotlines are likely to end up a tangled mass”(2012, 71). In order to structure and simplify the

¹⁵ This line and another were removed from the blurb which first appeared on Amazon; both versions are on Tim Ware’s very useful Pynchon wiki for *Against the Day*. In the second paragraph which mentions “worldwide disaster looming” and “unrestrained corporate greed”, the ironic line: “No reference to the present day is intended or should be inferred,” was removed. Also removed was the line quoted above about the purpose of fiction. The blurb was attributed to Pynchon and would appear to be a rare address to readers. The original blurb ended: Let the reader decide, let the reader beware. Good luck.” The redacted blurb appeared on the book jacket, thus lacking these apparently authorial statements.

¹⁶ One might note the changes in publishing, ever important for an author, or the geopolitical shifts that have occurred as well as the cultural developments regarding arts and entertainment, but perhaps most importantly technological advances.

summary, one reviewer, John Clute, broke the book down into four major narrative lines with associated genre characteristics. Clute writes, "All the same, at least four story clusters might be sketched in. They flow together, separate, knot and vanish into thin air." The division is fairly useful and accurate and is as follows: 1) The Airship boys; 2) The Western Revenge; 3) The Eccentric scientists; and 4) Espionage adventurer. Although this organizing device is effective, it leaves out an important narrative line and genre that runs through the book in the character of Lew Basnight a detective who may not be as central as the Airship boys to the novel, but is less fleeting than many other characters. Clute's summary of the events and story lines of each cluster outlines the various plots within the novel; I shall try to do the same.

On the Cover

Thinkers as different as Gerard Genette and Roger Chartier would agree on the importance that font, images, divisions, page layout, or even the publisher and of course the format (digital or print) can have on the construction of meaning.¹⁷ In the case of *Against the Day*, the reader is confronted by a huge text, but if it is in print one is dealing with a weighty tome that many critics seized upon for critique. What is most striking upon first impression, when looking at the first edition, is not the size of the book, but rather the apparently minimalist cover that seems to only state the author's name and the title.¹⁸ However, on closer inspection one sees that the white cover is in fact a white background contrasting the edge of what looks like old parchment with a stark font standing in front of two sets of less visible, ghostly letters, each set in different font, slightly off-set from the bold print title; the title and name now appear to be haunted by different reiterations of themselves. This doubling of an image is a property of Iceland Spar which appears in the novel; once the reader learns of this it makes it seem that

¹⁷ Roger Chartier writes: "In print writings, for instance, the format of the book, its page layout, the ways the text is divided, and typographical conventions all have an "expressive function" and contribute to meaning" (82). See also Gerard Genette's *Paratexts*.

¹⁸ According to copies of letters by Pynchon that I have obtained from the Harry Ransom Center at Austin University, after his experience publishing *V.* the young author was determined to have more input on the cover of his future novels. In a letter dated 1 Oct. 1962 Pynchon writes about the jacket of his debut novel: "Next time (if there is a next time) I will (D.V) design my own." Since then he has been involved in the cover design of his books.

s/he has read the title through a piece of the crystal, and to a degree this doubling runs through the book. Also, a strange emblem is partially stamped in red on the lower left corner, drawing the readers gaze off the page to the left; the missing part of the emblem is located on the spine off the book. Another paratextual feature worth mention is the quote, attributed to jazz pianist Thelonious Monk, at the beginning of the novel: “It’s always night, or we wouldn’t need light.” It will later be seen that this part prepares the reader for one of the central themes in the book: light and corresponding darkness, inviting Manichean readings. On the next page the emblem is repeated, prompting a number of readers to pursue its origin and significance.¹⁹

Thus the reader begins the engagement when s/he opens the massive tome and finds the first chapter, ‘The Light Over the Ranges’, which provides a general geographical location for the unfolding events in the two major narrative lines introduced. As Tore Andersen writes: “The prospective reader of *Against the Day* is thus already met with a barrage of phrases underscoring the global scope of the novel before s/he begins reading the actual novel itself, and the important thing to bear in mind is that this focus was specifically chosen by Pynchon himself.”²⁰ Later the reader will see that the cover, emblem and chapter title presage various themes in the novel that include light/ dark, anarchy, terrorism, nationalism, labor struggles, complex and radical developments in math and science with accompanying changes in technology, plus geopolitics, religion and more. Between the covers lies a maximalist novel on encyclopedic overdrive forcing the reader to navigate unknown regions of history and knowledge.

The Chums of Chance

Against the Day starts with an imperative rendered in direct speech: “Now single up all lines!” (3) These words are spoken by one of the Chums of Chance, a crew of youths who pilot an airship, as they prepare to set out for Chicago’s Colombia Exposition in 1893. The command is a nautical one (a pre-undocking procedure that reduces

¹⁹ It is a Tibetan seal.

²⁰ Tore Andersen “Mapping the World: Thomas Pynchon’s Global Novels” 4(1): 1 *Orbit*, 2016.

multiple mooring lines to one) that is used in other Pynchon novels²¹, but it might also serve as a cue to the reader to single up the narrative lines that double and redouble the length of the book, as well as connecting it to other novels. Or as Bernard Duyfhuizen has written in his review of the novel, “We need to recall Pynchon's publishing history for any assessment of *Against the Day* because in this new novel Pynchon is particularly aware of his earlier texts.” (1) The opening line lightly echoes the opening lines of both *Gravity's Rainbow* and *Mason & Dixon* in that the mooring lines of the airship may hang in catenary curves that reflect the parabolic flight of rockets or the arcs of snowballs. This double harkening back to previous novels justifies the reader familiar with Pynchon in thinking that this novel ties into the other novels and makes them part of a greater whole, not unlike Faulkner's Yoknapatawpha County. In his review Duyfhuizen notes that one can see “vectors [...] that clearly connect it to the earlier novels. The most obvious is arguably the major plot line in the saga of the Traverse family and their response to Webb Traverse's murder,” (6) which he traces back to Pynchon's *Vineland*. A number of other intertextual details that connect the novels have been indicated by the community of readers/ scholars that have contributed to the *Against the Day* Wiki, an essential source for anyone who wants to read the book.

Of course not only the words but the speakers and time and place are important. This youthful crew of boy adventurers presents the reader with a genre type that Pynchon had not made use of previously.²² It consists of “a five-lad crew” (3) and a dog named Pugnax that is reading the Henry James novel *The Princess Casamassima* when the reader first encounters them. Although a literate dog may seem absurd or fantastical on the surface, it may work in two ways. First, it is reminiscent of the LED (Learned English Dog) in *Mason & Dixon*, but more importantly it is a significant referent. On one hand it introduces the theme of anarchy, but it also functions as Bourdieu describes thus: “This reference by one character in a novel to another character in a novel marks the access of the novel to a reflexivity that, we know, is one of the foremost manifestations of the autonomy of a field: the allusion to the internal history of the

²¹ Pynchon was in the Navy.

²² Given the multiple narratives and genres in *Against the Day*, scholars have focused more on genre recently; see, for example, Brian McHale's “Genre as History: Pynchon's Genre-Poaching” or Amy Elias' “Plots, Pilgrimages, and the Politics of Genre in *Against the Day*.”

genre, a sort of wink at a reader able to appropriate this history if works" (RA 101). This group introduces the reader to one of the main story lines as The Chums of Chance narrative line arcs through the book. (Narrative arcs, with their respective genre traits, stretch thru the book: the Chums of Chance narrative begins and ends the novel, like bookends, and thus acts as a framing narrative that envelopes the other narrative lines.) The do-good juvenile crew must keep their distance from affairs on earth even as they engage in missions ordered from some unknown power. Perhaps it is pertinent here to point out that on the first page the reader encounters a parenthetical comment from the Narrator who, while describing one of the crew, says, "as my faithful readers will remember". This voice is doubled in that it is the ostensible voice of the narrator of a series of novels about the Chums of Chance (these other fictional novels that would seem to lay outside of *Against the Day's* narrative frame are referred to throughout the novel), but it also allows the authorial voice to address the reader. The presence of this narrative voice is a bit surprising given Pynchon's record for not addressing the reader directly.

The Chums of Chance start the novel but it is the time in which it is set that allows Pynchon to exploit various themes to fill his canvas. The temporal setting is at the end of the nineteenth century, which started with what Richard Holmes describes in *The Age of Wonder* and ended with what J.W. Burrow examines in *The Crisis of Reason*,²³ and it is in this period that the fantastic (as Gothic or occult but also as early science fiction) and emergent technologies swirl around together.²⁴ The boy crew's airship, *The Inconvenience*, is an example of how Pynchon uses technology to evoke the fantastic as he did with Vaucanson's Duck in *Mason & Dixon*;²⁵ in 1893 airships existed but not as portrayed in the novel. More importantly, this *fin de siècle* period saw rising nationalism (with WWI on the not-so-distant horizon), various crises (apart from the crises in thought in Europe, there was also a financial crisis in 1873 and the Great Strike in the US

²³ These two works of intellectual history, especially the latter, are more than pertinent to a reading of *Against the Day*, they describe how contending systems of thought or competing concepts shaped the woof and warp of human history at that time.

²⁴ Consider for example Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* or works by Jules Verne and later H.G. Wells.

²⁵ In the 1997 novel there is a mechanical duck that pursues a French chef, though the latter part is fantastic, many readers would surely be surprised to find that in fact there did once exist a mechanical duck made by Jacques de Vaucanson; see Minsoo Kang's *Sublime Dreams of Living Machines: The Automaton in the European Imagination*.

in 1877), and revolution and change in mathematics and sciences, all of which plays a part in the novel.

The place is equally important to the time. The Chicago Columbia Exposition involved a number of things that are significant for the novel. Perhaps one of the most important is that the Exposition had designed a White City that would be all electric and the contract was awarded to Nicola Tesla and Westinghouse who were in fierce competition with Edison and General Electric.²⁶ But there is much more. Frederick Jackson Turner read his "The Significance of the Frontier in American History" to the American Historical Association during the 1893 Expo. Ottomar Anschütz demonstrated his electrotachyscope. A replica of a Viking ship was sailed to Chicago from Norway (some might see this as connected to the novel *Vineland*). And apart from all these events that occurred during the Exposition, there were other historical moments close in time to the period that are referenced in the novel, such as the Haymarket Square Riot that became a central event in the history of organized labor. This was the time when Chicago was becoming the "Hog butcher for the World", the very image of Modernity and all the problems that come with it. It is an ideal point and place in time for Pynchon to start his ambitious novel, with the Victorian era giving way to the Edwardian era in England, the Belle Époque tumbling toward war in Europe and the American century poised to start.

One final note is necessary about the place of action when the novel starts. Most of Pynchon's novels have taken place on the East or West coast, not surprising since he was born in New York and in later life spent time in California and Washington.²⁷ In *Against the Day* significant sections of the text that are set in the US occur in the Midwest or Great Plains, a turn away from the centers of cultural capital and consumption to the sites of brute production and labor (no Oedipa in L.A. or Benny Profane in New York); here the symbolic violence of language is converted into the physical violence of action. This choice of location is not only advantageous in terms of

²⁶ See Terry Reilly's "Narrating Tesla in *Against the Day*" in which he argues for Tesla's importance in the novel.

²⁷ Despite the author's attempts to maintain his private life and history out of the public eye, some information has been gathered over the years. For example, Phyllis Gebauer wrote a memoir called *Tom and Us* in which she mentions meeting him in Seattle.

historical material to mine, it also connects itself to other Pynchon novels geographically, and acts as a bridge between the narrational boundaries of earlier and later novels.

The Traverse Family

Aside from the Chums of Chance, there is another, less fantastic, main narrative line in the novel, the Traverse family. In terms of genre, this is a western of the revenge variety. The father is Webb Traverse, a miner who uses his dynamite to attack mine owner's property but is then killed by thugs hired by the mine owner, Scarsdale Vibe who is the arch-antagonist of the novel. Both Webb and Scarsdale are patriarchs though in different ways; Scarsdale's lineage appears in the novel, but Webb's heirs stretch through the novel and over and into other Pynchon novels. Webb dies fairly early in the novel so it is the exploits of his children which are followed as they seek revenge or struggle to cope with the events they are involved in.

The Traverse family, working in Colorado, appears for the reader even further out west than the Chums of Chance. This takes the reader from an urban place with all its production and consumption and its labor disputes and conflicts, to a more rural scene with its own labor disputes, where the raw sources for material production and the growing economy were obtained. And though this is where the reader first finds the family, s/he will eventually follow them to Europe and beyond with each one coursing a trajectory by taking certain positions or not, by accepting or rejecting offers. Their individual paths bring them into contact with a number of other characters, sometimes forming other plotlines or sub-plotlines.

In fact, before the reader meets the Traverse family, s/he encounters a significant subplot in Chicago in the form of Lew Basnight; unlike many of the numerous minor characters who appear and disappear in *Against the Day*, Basnight has significant experiences and relationships with other main characters. Moreover, it will be seen that Basnight, a detective, is not unlike earlier Pynchon protagonists that were sleuthing after some mystery (Stencil in *V.* and Oedipa in *The Crying of Lot 49*). This line of

'seeker/detectives' then carries over to the books that Pynchon has written after *Against the Day*.²⁸

Scientists, Mathematicians, and Spies

There are two other clusters whose narrative lines thread through the book and are worth mentioning. The first regards espionage and involves a fairly central character, who appears late in the novel, by the name of Cyprian Latewood, a masochistic bisexual spy whose own story entwines with a couple of the protagonists; this element of espionage genre²⁹ brings with it themes that course through the novel (sex and relations of power, religion, geopolitics/ the Great Game). The second cluster includes the not unimportant important figure of Nicola Tesla who corresponds to what Clute calls the "Eccentric Scientist" cluster, which includes other characters, some of whom are rather important like Merle Rideout. To this "cluster" I add the mathematicians such as Yashmeen Halfcourt, a fairly significant character in the book. This narrative line, in terms of genre, makes use of "steampunk," a subgenre of science fiction, and as such shares some elements of the fantastic with the Chums of Chance (both enjoy fictional technology that, like the duck in *Mason & Dixon*, is a careful blend of fact and fiction to create the fabulous). Tesla employs Kit, the youngest of the Traverse brothers, but also has an important relationship to Scarsdale Vibe, the principal antagonist. The characters from both clusters engage in struggles that also shape the contours of the wider social field they are a part of.

As reviewers do, I have provided this brief summary of narrative lines and characters to orient the reader, knowing in this case that it is painfully insufficient for a book of this breadth and depth. (Reviews of *Against the Day* are more completely addressed in a section further on.) And although this introduction has already referred

²⁸ In 2009 Thomas Pynchon's *Inherent Vice* was published and in 2013 his novel *Bleeding Edge* came out; both have protagonists who are private detectives.

²⁹ In the Introduction to *Slow Learner* (1984), Pynchon recalls "reading a lot of spy fiction, novels of intrigue" (xxviii); this recollection is mentioned in his discussion of his short story "Under the Rose" written in for writing seminar at Cornell with Baxter Hathaway. That story would later become Pynchon's debut novel *V*. Both the short story and novel are seriously influenced by spy fiction. Thus it is that Cyprian and his narrative line connect *Against the Day* back to Pynchon's first novel.

to one reviewer, I would like to cite another at greater length to borrow a more comprehensive statement for this summary. John R. Holmes, in a review for Salem Press, wrote:

Against the Day is not light reading and would not be even at two hundred pages. It is dense with the necessary density of a novel that, like all of Pynchon's fiction, spiritualizes the mathematical and mathematizes the spiritual. Pynchon's conflation of electromagnetic physics and spiritualism in this novel is no random syncretism: It is an accurate portrayal of the interconnection of both disciplines in the years between 1893 and 1922. [...]The interplay of religion, physics, and the material world may well be best summed up by Pynchon's choice of title for his sixth novel. (21)

The last sentence indicates that the title can be read apocalyptically as it appears in the bible or in reference to photography and themes of light and darkness. This gargantuan novel is the object of my study, which does not aim to make a complete and totalizing study but rather to study the novel in a complete manner that strives to make sense of the data that I have gathered and analyzed in my research. But, it is fair to ask, how does one handle such an unwieldy thing? How does one go about such an analysis?

Chapter 3

Outlining the Research Project and Approaching the Literary Field

As stated previously above, this dissertation takes a sociological approach, inspired by Pierre Bourdieu, to study Thomas Pynchon's *Against the Day*, but this does not inform one about what the project is and how it proceeds. To answer this requires further explanation but also provokes the question: Why Bourdieu? Explaining that is a step toward presenting an answer.

Acquiring an upper level educational habitus in the humanities (or human sciences) in the late 1980's or in the 1990's as I did, meant doing so in an environment and period that James D. Hunter has referred to as the "Culture Wars"; in conversation and confrontations over national political issues names like Derrida, Chomsky, Said or Foucault were often invoked and quoted to argue against neoliberal policies. One became a deconstructionist or post-modernist. However, at that time Bourdieu's name was not nearly as familiar as his French colleagues; I myself came across it only in passing in a course on Michel Foucault and it would be some years before I went to back to study his work in depth. Bourdieu's concern to resolve certain dichotomies and his willingness to criticize what he thought wrong appealed to my own thoughts about how best to study a cultural product like a novel.³⁰ John Speller's words best reflect my own belief: "Bourdieu's work on literature provides a wide-ranging and theoretically sophisticated framework for understanding the process and patterns of literary production and reception" (185).

What does this approach entail? First, Bourdieu's sociology of literature is rather different from most sociological literary criticism; it is not primarily Marxist, and it neither follows the Frankfurt school nor resembles other sociologists' forays into literature, although there are some like Norbert Elias or Raymond Williams that are

³⁰ After all, the professionalization of literary studies over the last century has generated a great variety of approaches to the study and analyses of texts, reflecting the diverse concerns and systems of thought that have come to be applied to literature: New Critics, Marxism, Feminism, existentialism, structuralism, but also the emerging digital humanities (for example Franco Moretti's "distant reading"). Especially in the late 20th century there was a burst of bold young thinkers emerging in the intellectual field, from both Europe and the US. (Of course, one should not forget the importance of work coming out of the former USSR or Latin America.)

closer to Bourdieu's thinking which emphasizes what he called "relational thinking" (Vandenberghe 1999; Mohr 2013). Pierre Bourdieu developed a general theory of practice that looks at how agents in society reproduce it (its values, codes, and structures) while in competition for capital, he then applied this to a number of fields. Randal Johnson explains Bourdieu's concept of the cultural field as,

structured by the distribution of available positions (e.g. consecrated artists vs striving artist, novel vs poetry, art for art's sake vs social art) and by the objective characteristics of the agents occupying them. The dynamic of the field is based on the struggles between these positions, a struggle often expressed in the conflict between orthodoxy of established traditions and the heretical challenge of new modes of cultural practice, manifested as *prise de position* or position-takings. (Johnson 16)

This radical and exhaustive contextualization draws on traditional critical approaches and material such as biography and the study of letters, but also on close reading, the work of Russian Formalists and structuralists. Bourdieu's approach avoids explaining the book through either a strictly internal or external reading of the text.

Despite the increased citation and use of Bourdieu's concepts over the last two decades, there are still not very many full-length literary studies involving his approach, so it is difficult to find examples to study.³¹ However, there are some invaluable sources to orient one's project. First of course is Bourdieu's *The Rules of Art*, although some of his other works are not just helpful but necessary for understanding his theory and practice.³² In addition to this one would have to add John Speller's *Bourdieu and Literature* which explicitly presents the steps of the method at the center of Bourdieu's sociology of literature. More broadly, applications of Bourdieu's approach can be found in work by Gisèle Sapiro, Andrew Milner, Bo Ekelund, and Norbert Christian Wolf, although for the purpose of this study it is the latter two that are most pertinent as they focus their efforts on individual writers.³³ I should add that in my review of the literature available I found almost no examples of scholarly work on Pynchon using Bourdieu's

³¹ John Speller explains this in part by citing Toril Moi who claims that the Bourdieu's philosophical inheritance is poorly understood in the US. (Speller 21)

³² *Pascalian Meditations*, for example, is also relevant to Bourdieu's sociology of literature.

³³ Bo Ekelund, whose work will be used and cited more in depth further along, has studied the US author John Gardner; Norbert Wolf has used Bourdieu's ideas to create a thorough study of Robert Musil's *The Man Without Qualities*.

ideas; one exception was a dissertation,³⁴ but it did not focus strictly on Pynchon nor was it primarily oriented by Bourdieu's work.

In Bourdieu's *The Rules of Art*, and more clearly in Speller, the steps of the method are presented. Speller writes:

Bourdieu presents his method of literature analysis as a response to a challenge laid down by the French poet and literary critic Paul Valéry [...] to reconstruct the problematic (or 'space of possibilities [*espace des possibles*]) as it faced a particular author, and to try to understand, as if from 'the author's point of view', why the author responded in the way (s)he did, given the manifold pressures and constraints(s)he was under. (45)

This involves three different analytic steps (Speller describes them as "Chinese boxes," one set within the other) that I will list and then briefly explain. First, the scholar must analyze the position of the literary field as it is within the 'field of power'. Next, one "maps the positions of the individuals, groups, and institutions in the literary field" (45). The final step is to "trace [sic] the genesis of the agents' habitus"; to this last procedure Speller adds "the analysis of literary texts in the 'space of works' (Speller 46). I supplement this method with a rather close study of the critical response to *Against the Day* as an example of position-taking in the sub-field of book reviews; this is followed by a specific focus on the critic James Wood and his own history of position taking in regard to Pynchon's novels. This very concise summary of the method belies the difficulty and amount of work involved.³⁵

Prior to carrying out these steps, the dissertation begins its engagement with the text by taking a close look at the critical reviews that shaped *Against the Day's* entry into the book market and thus its arrival to the hands and minds of readers. These reviews are where the circulation of the book begins and where conversations and competing interpretation and evaluations start to interact. Here one sees how reviewers position themselves and attempt to act as arbitrators of taste. It is where one first begins to locate the absent author and see the positions he has occupied. After the critical review of review criticism is finished, the dissertation proceeds to apply Bourdieu's method.

³⁴ Scott Drake's "Departure Acts: Anonymous Authorship in The Late Twentieth Century" 2011

³⁵ In private correspondence with Prof. Ekelund, he informed me that for the study of US author cohorts he and two colleagues spent two weeks at the Library of Congress scanning the debut works of authors, calling it "a great amount of work."

The first phase of analysis requires looking at the field of power and locating the literary field within it; this involves determining the degree of autonomy of the literary field, which is explained further on. Bourdieu defines the field of power as, “the space of relations of force between agents or between institutions having in common the possession of the capital necessary to occupy the dominant positions in different fields (notably economic or cultural). The field of power is the site of struggles between holders of different powers (or kinds of capital)” (RA 215). This element of struggle or contest (agon, but not as Harold Bloom uses it) is central to the dynamics of the field. However, it is not simply a case of Hobbesian *bellum omnium contra omnes*. The field has a structure, based in part on the unequal distribution of capital, with dominant and dominated parts that have corresponding poles and agents that occupy positions between these poles.

In *The Rules of Art* Bourdieu provides a figure (see Figure 1) to visualize the position of the literary field within the field of power, both of which exist within the greater social space of society. One should note that within the literary field there are smaller subfields, and also that there are other fields which may border the literary field but are not shown. Power pervades these fields, but is diffuse and nebulous; or as Bourdieu writes of it in *Language and Symbolic Power* (1991): “[...] we have to be able to discover it in places where it is least visible, where it is completely unrecognized – and thus, in fact, recognized. For symbolic power is that invisible power which can be exercised only with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it or even that they themselves exercise it” (164). And yet despite differences between these diverse fields, there are structural homologies between them. So, relations of the dominant to the dominated in one field have their counterpart in another field.

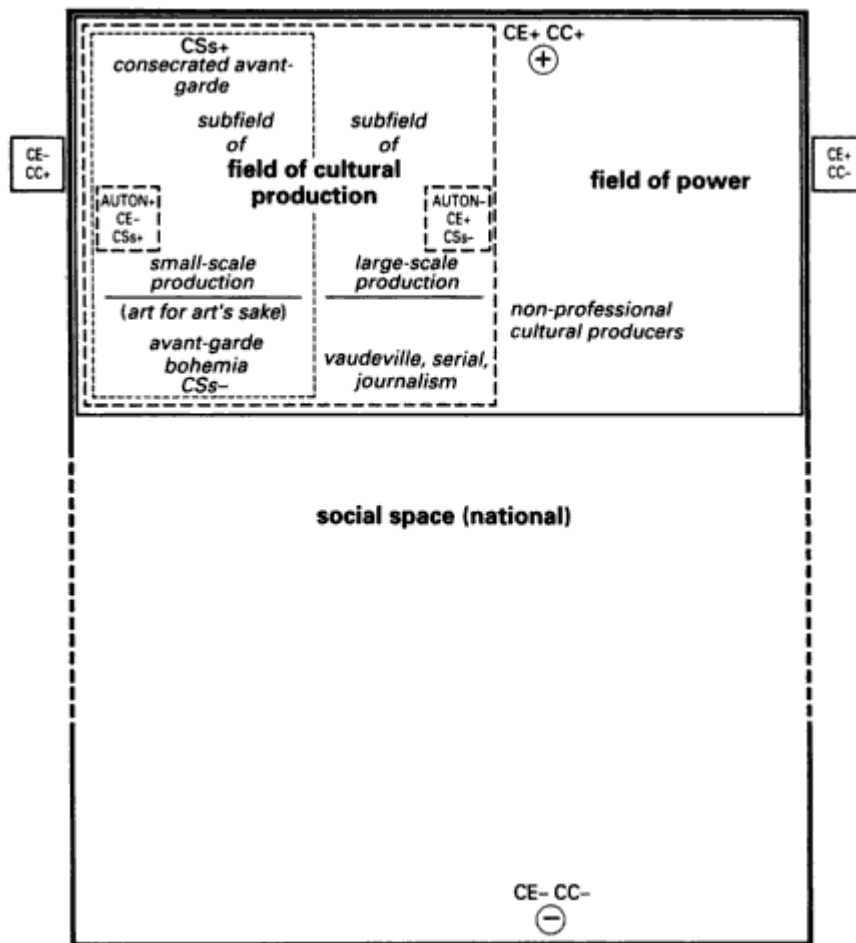


Figure 1: The field of cultural production in relation to the field of power, both within the wider social space of relations (from Bourdieu's *The Rules of Art*).

Having gauged the relation of the literary field to the field of power, the second phase of the method “is to plot the positions of writers in the ‘literary field’ (Speller 50). This is determined in part by the pole of the field towards which writers gravitate; for example, Tom Clancy as ‘bestseller’ with success judged by sales, or the ‘pure’ writer judged by the accumulation of symbolic capital in the form of prizes, awards or honorary degrees. Or, as Speller writes, “The dominant positions at the autonomous pole are occupied by consecrated authors [...] The dominant positions at the opposite pole are occupied by authors who cater to the dominant faction of the general public” (52). This phase of the method will focus primarily on authors from Pynchon’s cohort while bearing in mind that there are numerous other agents in the literary field whose position-taking affects the trajectory of the author studied here. The difficulty of this

endeavor³⁶ is only partly due to the numbers involved; the fact that Bourdieu and others have used a statistical analysis tool called Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) that most humanities scholars are not familiar with only complicates the work.

Once the positions of agents have been mapped, the dissertation proceeds to the final stage of Bourdieu's method of sociological literary analysis in which the genesis of the author's habitus is studied and outlined, and the author's trajectory through the literary field is traced. This part of the study is difficult given the dearth of information about Pynchon, and although this approach is not biographical per se, it does make use of biographic information (Speller 59). The habitus, which first takes shape in the close social circle of the family, is central to the position-taking that leads to a vocation, and in the case of a writer to the problem that s/he sets for her/himself and the development of what Bourdieu calls the "*projet créateur*." At this point what Bourdieu calls the "Author's point of view" (not to be mistaken for some intentional fallacy) should be clearer.

To the three steps described, John Speller adds another step: the analysis of the space of works as it stands in relation to the space of positions and position-takings (this will be further explained in the section on method). It is this final step that allows Bourdieu to overcome the antimony of external and internal readings, represented respectively by the objectivist orientation of early structuralist or Marxist critics on the one hand and/or subjectivist approaches of existential or psychoanalytically minded critics on the other. For Bourdieu the text stands as a position-taking itself, it marks a position in its relation to other works by echoing themes, parodying scenes, or quoting other texts in satire or praise. Here one sees Bourdieu's idea of intertextuality, a term often associated with Mikhail Bakhtin, whose work has some similarities to Bourdieu's (Holton 2000). John Speller explains the operation thus:

³⁶ Ekelund explains: "For a study of a single author's trajectory, however, Bourdieu's method presents various problems. The point with the field method is to have the analysis grasp the entire world in which the author moves as author: it is the sum of taken and available positions within the relevant field that orients the individual's strategies. Moreover, it is certainly plausible to assume that the relations between the literary field and the fields of education and of power are decisive for each trajectory, and with this assumption one is obliged to map thousands of positions and trajectories. Counting only American prose writers of the sixties and seventies with a degree of academic recognition, the figure is over fourteen hundred." (Ekelund 2000, 218)

Micro-textual analysis and macro-social analysis are thereby linked in a sort of hermeneutical circle (not a term Bourdieu uses), in which our understanding of the 'part' (here, a singular text, defined within a web of intertextual relationships, the 'space of works') is informed by our understanding of the 'whole' (the author's position, again defined relationally in the literary field and in the field of power), which in turn increases with our understanding of the 'part', and so on. (Speller 64)

Between the space of positions and the space of works "the space of possibles interposes itself [...] an oriented space, pregnant with position-takings identifiable as objective potentialities, things 'to be done', 'movements' to launch, reviews to create, adversaries to combat, established position-takings to be 'overtaken' and so forth" (RA 235). To this list we can add reviews and blurbs written or rejected. It is the interplay of these spaces and forces that gives rise to the work of art and through their study not only does one learn more about the genesis of the work of art but also of the author's point of view.

Having worked through these laborious steps, it remains to be seen to what degree the structure of the social field of the author can be said to be refracted (not reflected) through the reading of the novel *Against the Day*. As a final attempt to see where the novel fits in Pynchon's trajectory, the novel is considered in regard to the world literary space and as a quasi-global novel that occupies a key position in the author's creative project and thus also in his trajectory through the literary field.

In *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Pynchon*, Hanjo Beressem proposes that Pynchon "has always been, and still is, writing *A Portrait of America*", and of course this is true in the sense that many writers are or have been dedicated to writing their own Portrait of America. But what do we see in the prose portrait of *Against the Day*? And from whence the artist's creative project? With these questions stated, this research project has been guided in part by the following quote from Raymond Williams:

In its most general sense, the writing of prose is a transaction between discoverable numbers of writers and readers, organized in certain changing social relations which include education, class habits, distribution and publishing costs... It is always so, in the relation between literature and society: that the society determines, much more than we realize and at deeper levels than we ordinarily admit, the writing of literature; but also that the society is not complete, not fully and immediately present, until the literature has been written...so that we can see the rest of our living through it as well as it through the rest of our living. (*Writing in Society* 72)

Hopefully, the introduction will help readers follow this study as it analyses the novel *Against the Day* and examines how it fits in the author's trajectory through the

literary field. This introductory section makes clear that this dissertation is an original and innovative contribution to sociological approaches to literature and specifically to the study of Thomas Pynchon's novels by drawing on the ideas of Pierre Bourdieu.

A Note on Terms and Method: Why Bourdieu?

Given that the ideas and work of Pierre Bourdieu may still be less well-known to some than those of his, until recently, more famous academic peers such as Jacques Derrida, Julia Kristeva, Michel Foucault, etc. (Wacquant 1993:242; Swartz 1997: 5; Sallaz and Zavisca 2007) it may prove more than a bit helpful to outline some of his key concepts and briefly explicate his theory and practice before applying them to the study of *Against the Day*.³⁷ I shall first locate Bourdieu in the intellectual field, and from there indicate his theoretical approach and after that the key concepts in his theory and method.

It must be said at the outset that Bourdieu comes from a mixed intellectual background that he himself recognized (Bourdieu in Calhoun et al. 268; also Speller, especially chapter 1) as fundamental to his own trajectory. Although he initially studied philosophy, he switched over to sociology (Lane 10) but was engaged in ethnographic research of the Kabyle during the Algerian War, a phase that marked his intellectual growth. Bourdieu noted that at that time (1950's France) the two dominant intellectuals and paradigms of thought were Levi-Strauss (with his structural anthropology) and Sartre (existential phenomenology). Bourdieu's own sociological influences were just as marked by Durkheim or Weber as they were by Marx. From this milieu Bourdieu developed his general theory of practice, a constructivist structuralism (Bourdieu 1989) that studies how society reproduces itself through various practices (for example, the genesis of the literary field); ostensibly this approach overcomes the shortcomings of other approaches while dissolving dichotomies and antinomies such as the subject/object or extrinsic versus intrinsic readings. Loïc Wacquant has called Bourdieu's work

³⁷ Since this dissertation is in no way focused on Bourdieu in particular, there will be no consideration of the debates about and critiques of his work, but this should not be taken for uncritical acceptance. There are a number of scholars engaged, both positively and otherwise, in critical evaluation of Bourdieu's contribution to the human sciences, (see Calhoun et al 1993; Lane 2000; also Michèle Lamont as well as John Guillory).

“a generative anthropology of power with special emphasis on its symbolic dimension” (Calhoun et al, 235). His theory, when applied to the world of books and reading and literature, does not render a hermeneutical *explication de texte* so much as it lays out the entangled web of relations and social conditions that lie behind the creation of a book or the reading that one constructs upon engaging with the text; it abandons the myth of the ‘uncreated creator’ and turns to study the creation of a creation as well as the creation of the creator.

In the words of David Swartz, “Compared with other leading contemporary cultural theorists, Bourdieu alone manages to combine abstract theory reflecting his Continental philosophical heritage with empirical research and an explicit reflection upon method” (147). The use of empirical data made Bourdieu’s arguments all the more compelling, although some criticize it for reducing literature to numbers. In particular his use of MCA (Multiple Correspondence Analysis), which was very novel at the time, provided a new tool for researchers. However, Bourdieu, in contrast to many scholars, had the great advantage of access to data and studies from *EHESS (École des hautes études en sciences sociales)* and the Collège de France, as well as statisticians and graduate students to help him in his research.

Over the course of his career Pierre Bourdieu developed a number of terms that are central to understanding his theory. Following Moishe Postone et al we can say: “Three fundamental concepts lie at the heart of this project: “habitus,” “capital,” and “field” (Postone et al. 4). Bourdieu sees people as agents³⁸ in a given social space which itself is composed of various fields that may be adjacent, overlapping or rather separate, and that there are homological relations between fields and agents and the positions available. Agents acquire a habitus that predisposes them to certain behaviors, tastes and practices and thereby also to certain positions within social space. These agents compete in an antagonistic struggle for capital of which there are different types. Or in the words of Bourdieu, “The process of transformation through which one becomes a miner, a farmer, a priest, a musician, a teacher, or an employer is long, continuous and

³⁸ This term avoids the subject/ object duality and with it Bourdieu claims, “...I wanted to emphasize that this ‘creative’, active, inventive capacity was not that of a transcendental subject in the idealist tradition, but that of an acting agent,” (*In Other Words* 13). He opposes this to Rational Act theory or rule following subjects.

imperceptible [...] It starts in childhood, sometimes even before birth [...] and it is never possible, in any case, to determine who, the agent or the institution, really chose" (*PM* 165).

The reference to childhood in the quote above points to the first term: habitus. This is not a term completely of Bourdieu's invention, but one that he adopted and adapted from others (Bourdieu 1990; Greenfell 54-59). In *Pascalian Meditations* Bourdieu writes: "Acquisition of the primary habitus within the family is very far from being a mechanical process of simple inculcation, analogous to the imprinting of a 'character' imposed by constraint. The same is true of the acquisition of the specific dispositions demanded by a field" (164). Habitus is durable because it has such a deep base, but it is also transposable because it can be applied in other fields and positions. It is a, "system of acquired dispositions functioning on the practical level as categories of perception and assessment or as classificatory principles as well as being the organizing principles of action." (Bourdieu, 1990 *In Other Words*, 12-13) As such, an agent's habitus is both structured and structuring.

Still, this agent is born into a specific social space which Bourdieu saw as composed by myriads of fields. With this term, "he grounds the agent's actions in objective social relations, without succumbing to the mechanistic determinism of many forms of sociological and 'Marxian' analysis" (Johnson, 2) The social field has fields within it that may contain other fields, for example the field of literary production, which is part of the field of cultural production, sits inside the field of power, which in turn is subsumed by the field of class relations. The field may also have some degree of autonomy, depending on its history. A novel comes out of the field of literary, which is in the dominated part of the field of power (*FCP* 38) and therefore sits at the negative pole of economic capital. However, the literary field also has its poles determined by what Bourdieu calls the heteronomous principle and the autonomous principle. One who enters the literary field will gravitate toward one or the other. The heteronomous pole appeals "to those who dominate the field economically and politically (e.g., 'bourgeois art')", or those who see themselves aligned with that dominant sector. On the other hand the autonomous pole draws those who reject economic profit as the sign of success and pursue 'art for art's sake', willing to see wide commercial failure as proof

of dedication to the altar of pure art. The struggles that occur are in great part what shape the field, and the history of the field is the history of positions taken by the agents in the field. In regard to literary study Bourdieu wrote:

The theory of the field does lead both to a rejection of the direct relating of individual biography to the work of literature (or the relating of the 'social class' of origin to the work) and also to a rejection of the internal analysis of an individual work or even of intertextual analysis. This is because what we have to do is all these things at the same time. (*IOW* 147)

So, seeing authors as agents in the literary field may require more work, but it also avoids the pitfalls of strictly intrinsic or extrinsic readings.

The competition that agents engage in is not simply for the crude material wealth of mere economic capital (expressed in the thoughtless untruism: "Money makes the world go round," a neoliberal inversion of Marx's materialism). Bourdieu was not enough of a Marxist to take the term without changing it. Equally marked by Max Weber, Bourdieu wanted to give more consideration to cultural practices than has sometimes been the case in Marxist analyses that overemphasize the importance of base.³⁹ Also, the influence of Ernst Cassirer's symbolic philosophy and relational logic inspired Bourdieu to give an old Marxian term, *Das Kapital*, a new orientation. Eventually, Bourdieu arrived at four types of capital, all of which can be converted into the other types of capital. First, there is the economic capital that one gains in the form of money or liquidable assets. Secondly, there is cultural capital which includes the competences and skills (speech, education, etc.) recognized by society as legitimate and that allow one to participate in exchanges and competitions, and be mobile in social space. Finally, social capital is best expressed by Bourdieu's own words: "Social capital is the aggregate of the actual or potential resources which are linked to possession of a durable network of more or less institutionalized relationships of mutual acquaintance and recognition – or in other words, to membership in a group" (*The Forms of Capital* 1986). Additionally, and somewhat apart from the other forms of capital, there is what Bourdieu calls symbolic capital, "another name for distinction" (Bourdieu 1991); Bridget Fowler explains that it "legitimizes other forms of capital" (34) and that it "consolidates a

³⁹ See Raymond Williams' "Base and Superstructure" in *Marxism and Literature*, for example.

group". This type of capital may come in the form of awards, prizes and/ or praise that confer prestige upon someone (for example, an honorary degree given to an author).

Cultural capital can exist for agents in different states. Embodied capital is economic capital made a part of the person, integrated into their being; it is gained slowly and cannot be given away or otherwise transferred. This may be seen in celebrities who shape their body at the gym, investing economic capital in their appearance (embodied capital) to gain economic capital. Of course capital is not only embodied, it can also exist in an objectified state. Objectified capital are physical objects such as machines or monuments but can also be media like books or paintings, these latter objects require economic capital for their purchase but they cannot be consumed unless one has embodied the corresponding cultural capital. (In other words, one may win a great sum of money and be able to buy a famous painting or opera tickets, but would likely lack the cultural capital that allows one to "properly" enjoy the product.) The last form in which capital can exist is in an institutionalized state. In this case an agent's cultural capital is recognized by some institution that then legitimizes that capital by conferring upon the agent some degree, qualification or certificate that can then be exchanged for some other form of capital. As a final statement on capital I take this quote from Bourdieu: "The volume of the social capital possessed by a given agent thus depends on the size of the network of connections he can effectively mobilize and on the volume of the capital (economic, cultural or symbolic) possessed in his own right by each of those to whom he is connected" (*Forms* 1986).

There are numerous other terms that Bourdieu uses that would be helpful to mention and explain (for example: hexis, misrecognition, or disposition), but this is not the place for that. Hopefully this section on Bourdieu's terms will help orient readers as I employ his concepts and ideas in this sociological literary study of Thomas Pynchon's *Against the Day*. However, this summary is not enough, it requires the addition of a brief word on methodology.

The methods that Pierre Bourdieu employed throughout his studies were various, but there has always been an emphasis on incorporating an empirical approach that takes account of data. That might include analyzing the responses in an interview or survey, or the statistical analysis of data. One of the most interesting tools that

Bourdieu and his colleagues have made use of Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) which produces a 'data map' that demonstrates the social worlds as both relational and spatial, where distance from the centers of cultural capital translates into distance from access to capital.⁴⁰ This data analysis technique was very new when Bourdieu started to use it in the 1970's and it is still not widely known, making it difficult to use for scholars from the humanities/ liberal arts (Speller 55). In fact, when I began reading Bourdieu I was intrigued by his use of MCA, but I did not know how he had employed it, nor was I sure how to use it for literary analysis in my own work. I was a bit surprised when I read in John Speller's *Bourdieu and Literature* that Bourdieu's use of sociogrammes in *The Rules of Art* was "rather impressionistic [...and] rely less on qualitative data than on wide knowledge and intuition" (BL 53). Furthermore I learned that,

Indeed, although he did involve himself at all stages of the collection process, Bourdieu did not always do his own data analysis, but collaborated for this purpose with statisticians [...] It is also worth remembering that Bourdieu himself does not use MCA in *Les Règles de l'Art*, but instead relies on discursive indicators such as first-hand accounts (in letters and journals), reviews, literary history and criticism, and so on. (BL 55-56)

In order to better understand the application of MCA in literary study I looked for other examples of its use. Although there are more scholars using Multiple Correspondence Analysis now than fifteen years ago, there are still not that many using it for literary study; however, I did find several interesting examples. One of the first that I came across was Gisèle Sapiro's "The structure of the French literary field during the German Occupation (1940–1944)" (2002).⁴¹ Another study, "Comparing Literary Worlds: An Analysis of the Spaces of Fictional Universes in the Work of Two US Prose Fiction Debut Cohorts, 1940 and 1955" by Bo Ekelund et al, is more pertinent to this dissertation because it focuses on the US literary field. Curious about the 1970 cohort mentioned but not included in the study, I contacted Professor Ekelund to learn more. His communication⁴² made clear the labor involved in the analysis of a cohort and, for

⁴⁰ See Frédéric Lebaron's "How Bourdieu 'Quantified' Bourdieu 2009; for the application of MCA see Stephen Paling's "Mapping Techno-Literary Spaces: Adapting Multiple Correspondence Analysis for Literature and Art Informatics." (2007)

⁴¹ Sapiro's study concludes that "While at the heteronomous pole, most writers supported the newly established powers (Vichy or the Nazis), at the autonomous pole, most writers chose to fight them."

⁴² Personal correspondence in February of 2016.

the purposes of this dissertation, the impossibility of doing it alone and unfunded. Fortunately, as the above quote from Speller indicates, MCA was not heavily relied upon in Bourdieu's *The Rules of Art*, and in a similar vein this dissertation will avail itself of data analysis when it can to understand the series of positions that Thomas Pynchon has occupied in the literary field from the point at which he entered to the present day, and how *Against the Day* fits into that.

Although Bourdieu's ideas and methods have not been widely adopted in literary study, their use is growing in its prevalence. A most impressive application can be found Norbert C. Wolf's *Kakanien als Gesellschaftskonstruktion* (2011), a lengthy and in depth study of Robert Musil's *A Man Without Qualities*. Not unlike Bourdieu's *Rules of Art*, Wolf focuses on a sole novel by an author. In addition to Wolf and the scholars mentioned above, I should add Andrew Milner's *Locating Science Fiction* (2012) in which he draws heavily on Bourdieu's work to take a wider view of literature by studying a genre.

And yet despite the increasing application of Bourdieu's work to the literary field, almost no one has studied Pynchon through that theoretical lens. In my research I came across one Robert Holton whose PhD dissertation (McGill 1992) looked at Pynchon's *V.*; but more importantly he has continued to seriously engage Bourdieu and Pynchon. Holton wrote an essay called "Closed Circuit': The White Male Predicament in Pynchon's Early Stories" that was published in a collection of essays on Pynchon (Abbas 2003). Others have been more cursory in their treatment. For example, Stefan Matessich's *Lines of Flight: Discursive Time and Countercultural Desire in the Works of Thomas Pynchon* mentions Bourdieu, but only in passing and does not use his ideas or methodology. And similarly, Mitchum Huehls' "The Form of Historicity in *Mason & Dixon*" makes a reference to Bourdieu, but only in footnote.⁴³ I have found no instances of Pynchon's *Against the Day* being studied or analyzed with Bourdieu's work.

If one accepts that, "Bourdieu's work on literature provides a wide-ranging and theoretically sophisticated framework for understanding the process and patterns of literary production and reception" (Speller 185), then surely it is time to apply this

⁴³ Less relevantly, I found that Scott McLemee wrote a review of Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon*, but also wrote an obituary for Pierre Bourdieu in the *The Chronicle of Higher Education*.

approach to the work of Thomas Pynchon. It is clear that this requires a great effort (Speller 69) because:

It demands that you do everything done by the adepts of each of the methods known (internal reading, biographical analysis, etc.), in general on the level of one single author, and that everything that you also do has to be done in order to really construct the field of works and the field of producers and the systems of relations established between these two sets of relations. (IOW 148)

And yet despite the amount of work involved, I think the results are fruitful and useful. What follows is an effort to contribute to literary studies, specifically the study of Thomas Pynchon's novel *Against the Day*; by drawing on the work of Pierre Bourdieu, I hope to add something new and worthwhile to the conversation around this important US author.

*Locating Pynchon in the Literary Field: A Critique of Reviews of Against the Day*⁴⁴

Much has been made of Pynchon's lack of public visibility. The word "recluse" is often implied or stated and now part of the mythos. Although people have tried to find him (where he lives or has been) or place him somewhere in the grand scheme of cultural producers, they have either mistaken the person for the author or have not looked well enough to locate him. To find the position of an author in his/her social field requires understanding something about the circulation of her/his text (novel, play, etc.) and the readings of that text that in turn circulate.⁴⁵ Since reviews are a fundamental point of origin for the social dialogue about and the circulation of a text, they are important for the scholarly study of the author as a cultural producer.

The aim here is to examine the critical reception of *Against the Day* in order to locate the author's position in the literary field and the broader social field, and to better

⁴⁴ This section was originally presented in a shorter version as a paper at the International Pynchon Week in Lublin, Poland 2010; it was subsequently expanded into an essay that was included in a published collection of essays from the conference called *Thomas Pynchon & the (de)vices of global (post)modernity* (2012).

⁴⁵ Guglielmo Cavallo and Roger Chartier, introduction, *A History of Reading in the West*. "When we start from the circulation of objects and similarities in practice, rather than from classes or groups, we can recognize the many principles of differentiation that explain cultural variety, such as belonging to a common sort or generation or sharing a religious affiliation, community solidarities or educational or corporative traditions" (4).

understand this massive work of fiction itself. Despite the importance of studying reviews, this is not the strict focus here. This section progresses from a discussion of reviews to an analysis of the publishing and reviewing industries' strategic engagement, including the tactical use of embargoes, to see how Pynchon has positioned himself in response to the review industry. At this point the image of the Invisible Author gives way to a different picture as it becomes clear that Pynchon is not a disinterested, 'pure' artist (unconcerned with his work after writing the last word), a recluse in an ivory tower, but rather an astute player in the literary field, a view supported in part by some of Pynchon's own letters. We find the place of the author by "constructing that place as such, as a *position*, a point (the basis of a point of view) in a social space that is nothing other than the literary field within which the author is situated" (PM 88). After locating the author in this manner, the analysis proceeds to a reading of *Against the Day* that reveals something that reviewers left unexamined.

First, it must be said that the reception of and critical responses to Pynchon's work have changed over the course of his career. His early works (*V.*, *The Crying of Lot 49*, and *Gravity's Rainbow*) met with widespread praise both in the form of book reviews and also in scholarly journals and publications, even if there were not a great number of the latter in the beginning. Thus it was reasonable for a scholar like David Cowart to write in 1980 that dissenting opinions regarding "Pynchon's greatness" were "isolated voices" and that "generally the negative reviews and references appear in out-of-the-way places, and none come from critics with the authority of Pynchon's champions" (Cowart, 8). It is worth noting how Cowart's language shows what it cannot say: that the negative opinions are of no worth because they are far from the centers of cultural capital, their word holds no sway over the field and they cannot confer or deny symbolic capital to an agent because they lack the legitimate authority to do so. But now, thirty-five years and five novels later, the situation is rather different. Pynchon has, since the publication of *Vineland* (1990), received more than a few negative reviews and some from former champions.⁴⁶ Moreover some newer, younger critical voices have made a career out of criticizing Pynchon's work. For example, both Michiku Kakutani and James

⁴⁶ Frank Kermode, who has written positively about Pynchon's early work, gave a negative review to *Vineland*, finding it lacking, "on the one hand, the beautiful ontological suspense of *Lot 49*, and on the other, the extended fictive virtuosity of *Gravity's Rainbow*" (3).

Wood have been very hostile towards Pynchon's novels and they are both critics of major stature in the world of book reviews that have seen their negative reviews of Pynchon go to print in major publications. And in regard to these negative reviews we cannot discount them by saying that they are, "simply reacting to the bandwagon effect of Pynchon's popularity" (Coward 6) as that fails to take into account the position that that agent is in and his or her own dispositions that predispose him/her to certain categories of thought, tastes, or practices. To understand positive and negative criticism, a simple tally is not enough, but it is a place to start.

In the introduction to *Pynchon's Against the Day: A Corrupted Pilgrim's Guide*, one of the first full length books to focus on Pynchon's weightiest novel, Christopher Leise calls the reviews "mixed" and states that "The diversity of critical reactions was doubtlessly a product of the book's own heterogeneity" (1). However, From a Bourdieusian view it appears differently. A review almost always bears an evaluation, it is an aesthetic judgement, and as such there are only a few positions to take: a reviewer may like or dislike a work or take a middle position that itself may lean one way or another. The reasons and arguments may be various, but one generally likes or dislikes a thing. The individual position-taking must be studied and thus move from the particular to the general and not the other way around.

A naive analysis of reviews can be found on websites such as *Metacritic*, which aggregates reviews and scores them (incidentally, *Against the Day* got 68), but it cannot explain why the *New York Times* printed two rather different reviews of *Against the Day*. In other words, why would the newspaper use valuable printing space (here one must consider the economy and logic of newspaper printing) to give contrary views about the same book? To understand the role that reviews play in the reception of a literary work and its entrance into social circulation, one has to look carefully at the world of book reviews. This matter deserves detailed study, unfortunately though it cannot be fully investigated within the confines of this project. Still, a cursory study will prove illuminating.

First, it should be noted that the world of reviews is almost as dynamic and diverse as the world of literature. There are reviews of books, games, films and more. They may appear in newspapers, magazines, or journals and of course on webpages; the

reviewers may be authors, academics, or professional reviewers. They, too, are agents competing in a field for capital, occupying positions that stand in objective relation to each other and producing texts for consumers in a limited market. So, what does the reviewer's product achieve?

On a superficial level the review can inform and make a recommendation to the reader, the consumer of the review, about something, in this case a book. Less obviously, it can gain capital for the producer of the review (both writer and publisher), or lose it. A publication may spend economic capital to maintain its cultural capital – hedging its bets - as the *New York Times* did with *Against the Day* by first printing a negative review by Michiko Kakutani in the daily paper on Monday 20 November, 2006 and then a positive one by Liesl Schillinger in the *New York Times Sunday Book Review* on 26 November. (This strategy is limited to newspapers with significant economic capital since they pay two people to review the same book and also give double the space to one book when many books will never even get a review in the paper.) One primary way to achieve prestige is by being first to print, effectively leading the pack; another is by declaring something a success or failure before it becomes one. One may also excel by excess in praise or criticism, comprehension or complexity. Accumulation of symbolic capital can even propel the reviewer to great status - think of Robert Parker with wine or the book critic James Wood, whose trajectory from *The Guardian* to Harvard exemplifies the stakes of playing the game well. Of course, reviews may also affect a cultural product's social reception, a subject addressed later on. But first a look at reviews of *Against the Day*.

To avoid sample selection bias this study looked at almost one hundred reviews taken from various publication types from several countries (U.S., UK, Germany, Switzerland, and Australia). Still, there is a degree of bias in that the reviews were all gathered from webpages and mostly from Anglophone countries. The selection began by using a search engine to find reviews and later also drew from compiled lists on webpages such as *The Modern World* the *Against the Day* Wiki, and *Metacritic* (some reviews were unavailable without subscription). Thus, any review not present on the Internet could not be included and, more importantly, reviews from many countries were excluded. For example, the Spanish daily *El Pais* was not included, but would be

worth studying due to its being less a review than a repetition and recycling of things written about Thomas Pynchon or *Against the Day*; a good example of how the discourse around a novel is shaped or misshaped by reviewers in their role as taste makers. Briefly, it begins by referring to Richard Lacayo's review in *Time*, but by taking Lacayo's comparison of *Against the Day* to a toaster out of its context, it creates a more negative tone than is present in Lacayo's review, which is mixed. Additionally, the *El Pais* review repeats stock descriptors - "hermitical, enigmatic, clandestine" - to describe Pynchon as a recluse hiding from the world. A small part of the review gives a very brief summary of the novel extracted from a text that briefly appeared on and then disappeared from the Amazon website, generating speculation and discussion about its significance and authorship. The review ends by quoting Michiko Kautani's *New York Times* review. The overall effect is negative simply by repeating negative texts in circulation. However, this exclusion, which is a necessary result of selection, should only cause concern if it is problematically biased e.g., limited only to U.S. newspapers, left-leaning publications, etc. The selection of reviews in this study attempts to minimize the possibility of error through selection bias.

Reviews necessarily lie between the positive and negative poles of evaluation (exposing the range of possible positions for the reviewer to occupy), but since they rarely have scores it is more difficult to qualify the evaluation. The concern here is to avoid subjective bias in classifying the review, so reviews were first gathered then read and classified. In some cases the review was clearly negative, as in the oft cited Kakutani piece, or positive where descriptive, opinionated language indicated an endorsement. More often the tone was mixed and therein lay the difficulty of classification. The method here partially follows that of Alan Sorensen and Scott Rasmussen's study of negative publicity⁴⁷ (referred to further on). Since the analysis herein did not employ the algorithm that Sorensen used in his study, it is not as rigorously statistical in its approach; however, I have taken the same approach of calculating the ratio of positive sentences to negative sentences in a review, and have also additionally considered their placement in the review. Thus a negative or positive statement at the beginning or end is given

⁴⁷ Alan Sorensen and Scott Rasmussen, "Is Any Publicity Good Publicity?"

more weight than one in the middle of the review. (Occasionally, volunteers were asked for their impression of the review in order to confirm the evaluative tone.)

Richard Lacayo's "Pynchon vs. The Toaster" provides an example. It begins: "Ordinary novels have readers. Thomas Pynchon has decoders". This comment elevates Pynchon above the level of 'common' writers and the straightforward readings of their novels, it asserts his cultural capital as one of the high priests of contemporary fiction to be grouped with other 'big names'. After three introductory paragraphs the reader comes across the toaster from the title; an attempt at humor based on the weight of the novel *Against the Day*. But Lacayo, immediately after comparing the weight, writes, "But my toaster doesn't offer the tantalizing music of Pynchon's voice ... will never lay before me a vision of a world in which technology is stripping away all the ancient, vital magic." After this glowing observation Lacayo adds, "On the other hand, my toaster makes toast, and nothing quite so graspable ever pops out of this predictably bewitching, predictably bewildering book." A negative after a positive. This procedure is reversed at the end of the review where Lacayo writes, "For all its brilliant passages, this is the book that makes you wonder whether even Pynchon knows what lies behind all those veils he's always urging us to part. But wouldn't you know it? Even when he jumps the shark, he does it with an agility that can take your breath away." A positive after a negative. The review begins and ends positively but contains enough criticism to appear critically ambivalent. For this reason Lacayo's review is classified here as positive/ negative.

In this study reviews are classified as positive/positive, negative/negative, and mixed positive/negative or negative/positive; this is done in part to give weight to extreme views but also to expose the positions of the middle ground. The classification of *Against the Day* reviews in this study generally coincides with those found on *Metacritic* even though the methodology differs. A naive categorization would be favorable, neutral, unfavorable, but that would ignore the careful hedging that reviewers often engage in. No one wants to be remembered as the reviewer who panned what came to be a classic. Steven Moore's positive review in the *Washington Post* contains a good example of a qualifying statement: "Politically, this is blue-state fiction: It will not play well in Bush country." Although it is not the only review to use the not-everyone-is-going-to-like-it line, it is one of the few that predicts who will not like it.

This reduction of the reading experience to an ideological plane runs up against the fact that *The Wall Street Journal*, hardly a bastion of leftist thinking, printed a very positive review in which Alexander Theroux compared *Against the Day* to “the same kind of Hieronymous Bosch quality that we remember from *V.*, *The Crying of Lot 49*, and *Gravity’s Rainbow*.” *USA Today* provides an example of a review thoroughly mixed in tone, praising even as it criticizes. In it Bob Minzesheimer starts by calling *Against the Day* “funny, digressive, brilliant, exasperating” and finishes by saying that, “Pynchon is an acquired taste”, which can also be said of caviar and cheap wine. However, as stated before, this study is not interested in a scoring of reviews for and against, rather it aims to see what more can be learned from these book reviews.

One review that stood out from the others in its position-taking (or aesthetic judgement) was “Roller Coaster in the Dark” by Denis Scheck. First printed in *Der Tagesspiel* on Jan. 11, 2007, it involves a unique approach. In one of the first few paragraphs he gives a description of the novel which places it in the field of literary production by mentioning it alongside Joyce, Verne, and Asimov. In the next paragraph he reduces the event of the cultural product’s entrance into the social field by showing how some critics (Michiko Kakutani and Louis Menand) have negatively received the novel. Next, Scheck provides the interpretation that “the earlier a verdict ... the harsher ... it was.” As evidence of the pressure that might have affected critics, he points out that Penguin provided proofs “just a fortnight before the book officially came out.” This has been disputed by Pynchon scholar John Krafft⁴⁸ who claims, “it simply isn’t true that reviewers had only two weeks”, although what this assertion is based on is not stated. Clearly, *Publishers Weekly*, which printed the first review of *Against the Day* and thus broke the review embargo that was in effect, had access to an ARC (Advance Reader Copy) or galley proofs more than two weeks before the release date.⁴⁹ The same is true for *Time* which printed their early review on 12 November, almost two weeks before the release date. But the fact that these major players had early access to copies does not mean that everyone else did. The *Against the Day* wiki run by Tim Ware states that there were only 200 ARCs from Penguin and 77 from Jonathan Cape (the UK publisher), a fairly

⁴⁸ See *Thomas Pynchon and the (de)vices of (post)modernity* (Lublin 2012, 241).

⁴⁹ Tim Ware has informed me in personal correspondence that *Publisher’s Weekly* received their copy in very early October.

small number and not enough for all the possible reviewers.⁵⁰ Apparently, Denis Scheck was one of those that did not have extra early access. Moreover this is not exactly new with the release of Pynchon novels. In his “*Mason & Dixon on the Line: A Reception Study*”, Douglas Keesey writes, “Reviewers of *Mason & Dixon* were under peculiar pressure: how to deal with a novel of such scope and ambition within a brief space and early deadline?”⁵¹ (This pressure could only be compounded by the even wider scope of *Against the Day*.) So in this case it is more accurate to say that it is not strictly true that reviewers only had two weeks to review *Against the Day*, but some did have less lead time to produce a review and thus more pressure to do so as the release date was closer or already past. In fact, it should come as no surprise that those publications that printed an early review were from major urban centers (*New York Sun*, *L.A. Times*, or *Boston Globe*) or media groups (*Entertainment Weekly*, *Time*, or *Newsday*); they are more likely to have access to ARCs or proofs for review than a small publication, and they can incur the risk of breaking the embargo.

Admirable as Scheck’s review is for its attempt at a sort of phenomenological description, reduction, and interpretation, it has a flaw in its reduction step by focusing only on negative reviews. (This shows why a phenomenological reading is not enough, it must also be sociological.) Still, we are left with the question of whether earlier reviews tended to be negative. From the reviews used in this study it can only be said that this is not entirely true (see graph in Appendix I). Regardless of the accuracy of Scheck’s statement, it makes one wonder: did size and deadlines have anything to do with the negative reviews?

Instead of citing all the critical adjectives and phrases in the reviews of *Against the Day*, a summary will suffice. Most of the criticism focused on the novel’s size, its plot

⁵⁰ This number can be confirmed by checking the series number printed in the ARC. Time Ware has informed me that the Jonathan Cape UK ARCs for *Against the Day* were limited to 77; book collector Bob Nelson notes on his webpage that his Penguin Uncorrected proof of *AD* is one of 200.

⁵¹ Also, *The New York Times* reported in December 1989 that Little, Brown, publishers of Pynchon’s *Vineland*, only sent 200 copies to reviewers and critics, in contrast to the large first printing of 120,000 copies. With such a highly expected novel there would be great demand for copies to review and many would not be able to review the book until its release date. David Streitfeld noted, “No galleys were issued to reviewers or foreign publishers -- the first time anyone can remember this being done with a novel.” *The Washington Post* 6 December 1989. Salman Rushdie in his review of *Vineland* also complained about the minimal lead time for the review (*The New York Times* 14 Jan. 1990)

or narrative structure, or the characters. Reviewers almost inevitably commented on its size (“ungainly”, “too big”, “incontinent length”), some even mentioned its weight by way of criticism. Others complained about the over-abundance of characters, but John Clute in *Sci Fi Weekly* went further saying that the characters “are not in fact characters... They are *utterands*.”

Writing in the *L. A. Times* Christopher Sorrentino acknowledged these criticisms but avoided using them to attack Pynchon’s novel, and thereby his career. Sorrentino wrote, “The length and complexity of the book simply get the better of Pynchon ...” and “some of the plots generate more light and heat than others ... But these are quibbles.” Peter Körte’s review in the *Frankfurter Allgemeine Zeitung* seemed to pick up on this. Commenting on the novel’s plethora of digressions and subplots, he asks, “Aber was ist eigentlich so anders, im vergleich su V.?” (What’s actually so different from V.?) He goes on to ask if it had never bothered anyone before. Big books are certainly not unheard of in literature (e.g. *War and Peace*); the same is true of digression and non-linear narrative structure (e.g. *Tristram Shandy*). So what is the problem?

As mentioned before, there is a field of production of literary reviews and the agents in this field compete. It should then come as no surprise that most of the reviews (66 out of 98 studied here) were published between 19 November and 15 December, clustering around the publication release date; this is a result of the practical logic of the field. There is pressure to lead the pack. This pressure increased due to the time constraint imposed by Penguin, a fact that is noticeable in more than one review. Indeed, Ian Rankin wrote his review in the future tense because he had not read the novel, but at least the review was positive. The same cannot be said of John Crace who disparaged Pynchon’s work and then invokes his taste (“I just can’t get worked up about books that might have dozens of stories or none and hundreds of meanings or none”) as an excuse for not reading the novel at all. Some reviewers, in understandable haste, got the novel wrong. Jonathan Rosenbaum called it an “anti-capitalistic book” and Steven Moore thought it Marxist (both Karl and Groucho – the latter may be granted but not the former) in spirit; however, both of these reviewers overlooked the Weberian

element that is so important in Pynchon's work.⁵² So why did Penguin allow most reviewers so little time for such a big, complex book? The answer lies in the publishing industry.

Publishers (and their writers) want reviews in order to gain the potential benefits in the form of books sales (economic capital) or laudatory praise (symbolic capital); however, this also exposes them to the risk of negative reviews. How can they maximize benefits while reducing risk? One way is with a book review embargo which is an agreement not to publish reviews before a certain date, thus helping publishers control the book's entrance into the market. Although a relatively new practice⁵³, it has spread quickly to other review industries (video games, etc.) and has made news in relation to recent publications. Reviewers sometimes break the agreement and risk the consequences in order to be the first review out. On 14 November 2006 Richard Lea wrote in *The Guardian* book blog about *Against the Day* that "Time magazine has joined *Publisher's Weekly* in breaking the embargo on reviews." The pressure can make reviewers unhappy, as demonstrated by Rushdie's review of *Vineland* (*New York Times*, 1990): "But for his publisher to withhold reviewers' copies and give critics maybe a week to deal with what took him almost two decades, now that's truly weird, bad craziness, give it up." We see the publisher trying to gain economic capital in the form of book sales and the reviewer trying to gain symbolic capital in the form of prestige, but does that leave the writer in the middle? Not Thomas Pynchon, and that is due in part to his dominant position in a dominated region of the field of literary production.

Writers are often obliged to do book tours and interviews, which can help their exposure to the public through diverse media, increasing sales and augmenting name recognition, that most valuable form of capital. Pynchon rejects those strategies (no jacket photograph, no interviews, etc.) and thus complicates promotion of his novels, an issue addressed in "Promoting Pynchon" written by Jeffrey Ressler and published in *Time* a month before *Against the Day* was available for purchase. Despite the author's refusal to play the publicity game, his books are big literary events. One bookstore

⁵² See Steven Weisenberger, *A Gravity's Rainbow Companion* 2nd ed.; see also Ralph Schroeder, "From Puritanism to Paranoia: Trajectories of History in Weber and Pynchon."

⁵³ Marcela Valdes, "Embargoed," *Washington Post* 22 Oct. 2006: Book Notes. This very informative article offers an interesting view of this publishing industry practice.

manager quoted in the article said it (*Against the Day*) would sell itself, another said that, “a dedicated following makes up for him not doing *The Today Show*.” The existence of this following is further attested to by Ian Rankin’s comment in his review of *Against the Day* in which he writes: “The latest paperback of *Vineland* has gone into eighteen printings in six years, hinting at a readership beyond the groves of academe.” Given this apparent following, why should Pynchon and his publishers use embargoes on his books?

The answer is that it is worth it, the benefits outweigh the cost. This can be explained and clarified a bit by looking closer at the world of reviews and publishing, which can be done by examining a study by Alan Sorensen and Scott Rasmussen called “Is Any Publicity Good Publicity?”⁵⁴ In their abstract they state: “The estimates indicate that in the case of book reviews, any publicity is good publicity: even negative reviews lead to increases in sales... However, positive reviews have a larger impact on sales than negative reviews, suggesting that reviews also have a persuasive effect” (1). Their research, whose data came from *New York Times* reviews of hardcover fiction from 2001 to 2003, arrived at an interesting conclusion. “While the numbers aren’t large for small-scale books [...] for popular books by established authors the difference between a positive and negative review (or no review at all) can be quite substantial” (11). They conclude that the “results offer direct empirical evidence suggesting consumer’s opinions about a product are malleable” (12). This observation should be considered alongside another from Alan Sorensen in a 2006 study of Bestseller Lists in which he writes, “Bestseller status may serve as a signal of quality”, which can lead to increased sales. He concludes by saying, “Publishers choose their release dates strategically” (21). Given these observations it is clear that it is in a publisher and writer’s interest to try to control the entrance of the product into circulation, or as the popular phrase goes, ‘to control the narrative’. This is done not only to increase capital gain in the form of book sales but also to garner more symbolic capital in the form of praise, accolades and prizes. But not only does it assist in the accumulation of capital, it can also help the agent (if

⁵⁴ This scholarly paper, which can be found on Alan Sorensen’s Stanford webpage, offers an insight into the dynamics of the publishing-review relationship. Some of the findings from that paper appear in: Jonah Berger, Alan Sorensen and Scott Rasmussen, “Positive Effects of Negative Publicity: When Negative Reviews Increases Sales” *Marketing Science*, published online in *Articles in Advance* 10 Mar. 2010.

s/he is dominant enough to dictate the publishing contract terms) or publisher maintain autonomous control of the product. This compels one to look at Pynchon in a different light; he is not the indifferent recluse some would make him out to be. He is not a Pure Artist willing to starve for his art or unconcerned with critical reception. Pynchon is an agent who tries to maintain his autonomy while responding strategically and taking position in the space of possible positions in the field.

Pynchon's autonomy is in part maintained by his anonymity, he controls his image with absence. What famous writer is more anonymous? He is anonymous in the sense that he is faceless; he can't be identified walking down the street. This anonymity and the resulting lack of interviews or other information complicate our scholarly work, which has produced valuable information regarding Pynchon's biography as well as his novels. Fortunately, there are non-fiction texts that fill in the portrait of the agent as a producer of texts. The introduction to *Slow Learner*, Pynchon's articles and reviews, and some other writings demonstrate an agent aware of his position in a field and responding to the dynamics of that field.

An example can be found in the article by Scott McLemee "You hide, They Seek" (*Insider Higher Ed* 15 Nov. 2006). In it he writes about working as an archive assistant in the Library of Congress and that while sorting through some letters of Stanley Edgar Hyman, he found one from Pynchon dated December 1965. It appears that Bennington College, where Hyman worked, had offered Pynchon a teaching position. Pynchon wrote Hyman to explain that he could not accept the invitation due to the "three novels" he was working on. He explains that teaching would interfere, and yet he refers to his decision as "temporary insanity." He chooses the position of autonomous writer instead of university professor and writer, but he is also aware of what he is rejecting.

This insight is due to the discovery of a letter, which raises the question of how to use letters from a living author who obviously cherishes his privacy. Here, discretion should guide curiosity. It is with that rule in mind that letters obtained from the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas in Austin are used in this paper. The letters are from early 1962 to the spring of 1964 and contain a wealth of information. Despite this abundance of material awaiting study, no more than a few references are needed to support the argument of Pynchon as an autonomous agent acting strategically.

In a letter dating from May 1962, Pynchon explains that he cannot go to New York for several reasons: when he leaves Seattle “it will be for good,” he’s trying to save “escape money” so he cannot quit working; more importantly he is “trying to write a half-dozen stories at a time to get out on the *market*” (emphasis added) so he can quit his job at Boeing.⁵⁵ Pynchon’s practical logic navigates between the positions of starving poet or after-work writer; he is aware of the market and that there are rules to the game.

Aside from these examples of position taking, the letters reveal Pynchon as an agent in the field of literary production concerned about autonomous control of his product. In a letter from October 1962⁵⁶, Pynchon writes about editing changes in *V.*, which he was trying to have published. He shows annoyance with something about the book jacket and writes, “Next time (if there is a next time) I will (D.V.) design my own.”⁵⁷ This comment and others about editing show a literary producer unsure about some things in his writing, but certain that he is unhappy with the publisher JB Lippincott.

These references help dispel the image of Pynchon as a Pure Artist, and show how he has acted in the literary field. The agent’s actions as position-takings can also be found in other places. A good example is the letter that Pynchon wrote⁵⁸ in defense of the writer Ian McEwan and his book *Atonement*. Pynchon states that McEwan deserves gratitude, not scolding, for attempting to be accurate and using another person’s words. Pynchon is, in fact, arguing for the autonomy of the writer and by defending his fellow writer thus defends the whole group of producers of literature. This act of public writing, which Pynchon had done before for Rushdie, is not unlike Zola’s *J’accuse*; it is the act of the type of intellectual that Bourdieu describes at the end of *The Rules of Art*, an engaged intellectual intervening in the public sphere while maintaining autonomy. Seen this way Pynchon appears to be a part of what Bourdieu calls: “a ‘collective intellectual’ who might be capable of making a discourse of freedom heard, a discourse that recognizes no other limit than the constraints and controls which each artist, each writer

⁵⁵ This comes from the second letter (dated 28 May 1962) in the collection obtained from the Harry Ransom Center.

⁵⁶ From the third letter in the collection (1 Oct. 1962); it is almost entirely concerned with editing *V.* as well as the issue of publishing.

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁸ Letter written by Thomas Pynchon and printed in *The Daily Telegraph* 6 Dec. 2006.

and each scholar, armed with all the acquisitions of his or her predecessors, enjoy upon themselves and all others” (RA 340).

Thus far reviews of *AD* have been studied not to obtain a global evaluation of the novel (like *Metacritic*), but rather to expose the relations of author, publishing industry and the field of production of reviews and how Pynchon positions himself in the space of available positions. The reviews were not only studied in terms of their evaluation (aesthetic judgement) and source and date of publication, but also in relation to the history of reviews of Pynchon’s novels (e.g., the acclaim, prestige and awards gained by *V.* and *Gravity’s Rainbow* as well as the unfavorable critical reception of *Vineland*). In other words, historicization⁵⁹ is fundamental for understanding the practices and phenomena related to the critical reception of a book into circulation. Bourdieu makes this clear in *The Rules of Art* where he writes, “one must in effect operate a *double historicization*, both of tradition and of the ‘application’ of tradition ... To ignore this double determination is to be condemned to an anachronistic and ethnocentric ‘understanding’ which is likely to be fictive and which, in the best of cases, remains unaware of its own principles” (RA 309).

Still, one might ask: Other than the view (as presented above) of the author as an agent in the literary field, what does this Bourdieusian sociology of reading achieve? How can it improve or magnify scholars’ understanding of the circulation of *Against the Day* and the readings of it that are in turn circulated? The answer to this question can only be answered over the length of this dissertation; however, a brief response can be put forward here as a preliminary view to what must be developed further on. Bourdieu’s own words can explain best one of the central benefits of his method: “The notion of field allows us to bypass the opposition between internal and external analysis without losing any of the benefits and exigencies of these two approaches which are

⁵⁹ See “History Between Narrative and Knowledge” by Roger Chartier in *On the Edge of the Cliff: History, Language and Practice*. Chartier states the importance of combining “textual criticism, the history of the book, and cultural sociology ... [for] understanding how the particular, inventive reading of the individual reader fits into a number of determinations – the effects of meaning targeted by the texts through the devices of their writing, constraints imposed by the forms that transmit those texts to their readers (or listeners), and the competencies or reading conventions proper to each community of interpretation” (22).

traditionally perceived as irreconcilable” (RA 205). With this, according to Bourdieu, comes the dissolution of the supposed antinomy between history (external analysis) and structure (internal analysis) and thus also the possibility of hypothesizing about homologies between fields (e.g., the social field of the author and that of her/his novel) or the spaces of available positions and the distribution of those spaces in different fields. For example, with regard to *Against the Day* one might ask if there are structural homologies between the struggle among agents in the science or technological fields of the novel and the struggle of their counterparts in the social world of the author. In other words, given *Against the Day*’s inclusion of Tesla versus the unmentioned Edison (backed by General Electric), what other struggles, either within the novel or Pynchon’s own social field, might parallel this competitive relationship? Is the silencing of Webb’s TNT-voice reflected in the struggle of another field in the novel? Does the Chums of Chance’ struggle to maintain their autonomy and anonymity in any way parallel the author’s own struggle to maintain his autonomy and anonymity?

As can be seen this approach brings into focus what otherwise might be left unstudied as exemplified by certain reviews of *Against the Day*. Isolating a few thematic threads in Pynchon’s work (historicizing recurrent signifying elements) one might reasonably list anarchy, Weber, and the nexus of science/ technology, epistemology and power⁶⁰ (although this obviously excludes other significant elements). A number of reviewers commented on the now perennial Pynchon theme of anarchy, which is more obviously present in *Against the Day* than any other Pynchon novel. Some saw the element of *fin de siècle* anarchists as an allusion to the present world turmoil (e.g., ‘terrorism’) – a suspicion fueled by the accidental release of a blurb on Amazon’s website which contained the line: “No reference to the present day is intended or should be inferred.”⁶¹ More than a few reviewers noted or complained about the math and

⁶⁰ Bernard Duyfhuizen proposes his own list in his review of *Against the Day*, “The Exact Degree of Fictiousness”. He proposes the list not because he is a Pynchon scholar, but because he sees the need for historicization: “We need to recall Pynchon’s publishing history for any assessment of *Against the Day* because in this novel Pynchon is particularly aware of his earlier texts.” Duyfhuizen recognizes the thematic continuity and incorporates this into his approach to the novel.

⁶¹ The appearance and removal of a blurb for *Against the Day* from Amazon’s website created a stir that was followed most notably by the online magazine Slate (Troy Patterson “The Pynchon Post” July 2006). The final lines, “If it is not the world, it is what the world might be with a minor adjustment or two ... Let the reader decide, let the reader beware, “appear to be a risky invitation to read the novel as somehow reflecting the present.

science in the novel. But the Weberian thread in Pynchon's work was left unaddressed. Granted, the Weberian terms of preterite/elect, charisma/ rationalization, or disenchantment do not figure in *Against the Day* as they do in *Gravity's Rainbow*, still the thread is there.

In fact this thread spans the book.⁶² Early in the book Lew Basnight enters a state that "he later came to think of as grace" (42). This religious term occupies an important place in Max Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* as the Calvinists viewed it differently from the Catholics or Lutherans. Lew experiences a type of 'gratia illuminationis' in the spring just before the opening of the Columbia Exposition, which coincided with the World's Parliament of Religions that took place in Chicago in September. A few pages later (AD 50) Lew starts to develop a more sympathetic view of the Anarchists than the one his boss has. This conversion is reflected later in a different setting with another important character from the novel, Webb Traverse. Shortly after his introduction, the reader learns that one night in a saloon he survived "a roomful of flying lead," (86-87) an act of supernatural help: grace. After hearing about Webb's "miraculous escape"; Reverend Gaitlin says something that leaves Webb in "a state of heightened receptivity"; the following Sunday in church Webb experiences something "almost like being born again" (87), apparently part of his conversion to dynamite radicalism. These two events of grace are not simply used to develop character; they are moments of enchantment in an increasingly rationalized world that connect certain structuring structures that exist in the novel.

These moments of grace involving a type of secular socialist conversion occur in two very different social spaces, Chicago and Cripple Creek (Colorado); however, despite their differences, they both evidence competing relations in the field of power and bring the reader closer to the face of the dominated characters (immigrant miners, lumpenproletariat, etc.) that become the underdog protagonists of the novel. Each

⁶² Weber's *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism* was only a part of his greater study of the sociology of religion, the work from which he developed his more well-known terms like disenchantment, rationalization, charisma, etc. Given this the Weberian thread should not only be looked for in language associated with Christianity, rather the discourse of various systems of belief should be studied. Since the language of belief and faith (secular and otherwise) appear throughout the novel, it does not seem a stretch to consider this part of the Weberian element, even if it isn't 'marked' with typical Weberian terms.

location is marked with a genre and related narrative that initiates in that place: Chicago is where Lew Basnight and his detective thread begin, a genre inherently connected to the city; Colorado sets the scene for the western revenge narrative of the Traverse family, a genre as rustic as the pastoral. And yet the predominance of these narratives should not limit seeing *Against the Day* as a successor to twentieth century US novels that were critical of the plight of workers in the city and the country. The recurrence (with difference) of grace connects the urban industrial setting of stock yards and slaughter houses, echoing Upton Sinclair's *The Jungle*, to the rural/ agrarian setting of mines and ranchers, echoing Steinbeck's *Grapes of Wrath*. In Chicago, bombers are off-screen and anonymous, in Colorado the bombers are center-screen (the Kieselguhr Kid, a faceless name). However, grace is not limited to the first hundred pages; significantly it is the final word of the book. It is significant at the very least because Pynchon wrote in a letter:⁶³ "I am big on last sentences." Only a few reviewers took notice of the last sentence, like Denis Scheck; however, he only cited it to conclude the review, isolated from all context. If the element of anarchy and bombers in *Against the Day* alludes to the ideologically driven bombers of our own time, what do we make of the element of grace? Is Pynchon advancing the "anarchist miracle" of former novels or has the concept of grace come from elsewhere? Is there a trajectory from entropy to grace? These questions, which reviewers of *Against the Day* failed to ask, must be addressed to understand the trajectory of the author.

This critical review of the reviews of *Against the Day* has not endeavored to correct those reviews, nor to offer a 'purely objective' and totalizing evaluation of the novel; nor is it an attempt to give a complete overview of the reviews. Instead the work here is an effort to use reviews to find out more about the trajectory of the author and the various positions occupied in the field of cultural production and the wider social field. The approach, a Bourdieusian sociology of reading, has been applied here to reveal what reviewers were blind to: Grace. This term and other types of rhetoric belonging to various systems of belief are present in the novel as significant elements of the Weberian thread woven through Pynchon's work.

⁶³ From the sixth letter (2 June 1963) from the Harry Ransom collection at the University of Texas at Austin.

A Bourdieusian sociology of reading helps one unlearn the learned ignorance⁶⁴ of the scholastic view, exposing relations and homologies among diverse fields. By studying the history of the positions and dispositions of an agent, the habitus of that agent and the practices it generates become clearer. Perhaps Bourdieu would have agreed with Edwin Treacle of *Gravity's Rainbow* when he says, "There are sociologies...that we haven't even begun to look into" (GR 153). Seen in this way, one discerns an image of the author, not as a recluse but as an active agent 'cool, but caring', an author who writes in seclusion, gesturing obliquely through his writing at the world and the nightmare of history. However, there are clearly some who are not predisposed to liking Pynchon's writing and his gestures, a fact that is not problematic when speaking of the great mass of readers in the world, but what if the displeased reader is also a major critic? Is a critical voice well stocked with capital of its own enough to affect the position of a writer or his/her novel in the literary field? That is the question that is addressed in the next section.

⁶⁴ Bourdieu uses the term "anamnesis". See Pierre Bourdieu, *Pascalian Meditations*, particularly chapter 3 "The Historicity of Reason" 93 – 127, especially 115 "The Anamnesis of Origin".

Chapter 4

Pynchon's Critics and Readers

Part 1 - *Excursus: Pynchon's Wood-Be Nemesis*⁶⁵

If Richard Poirier is right that some people “take their cue” from others with greater cultural capital, then it is possible that some potential readers of *Against the Day* were negatively impressed by certain reviews written by reviewers whose effect is further reaching, as is the case with either Michiko Kakutani or James Wood, both of whom gave an entirely negative review of the novel. Wood’s review was lengthier and more reproachful in its treatment, and it may well be argued that as he possesses greater capital his judgement carries greater weight. To understand how the novel figures in Pynchon’s trajectory, as well as the position the novel has come to occupy in the literary field, the literary analyst should also consider the specific readings of these specialized readers to determine how their position-taking might affect the position of the novel.⁶⁶ The competing and conflicting readings of Pynchon fans and the ever-critical Mr. Wood create an agonistic site within the literary field that contributes to the contours of the field, creating new positions to be contested and taken, or rejected. It would be interesting to compare both Kakutani’s and Wood’s reviews to see how they differ or resemble each other, but since this it is not focus of the study only James Wood’s critical comments on Pynchon’s work are considered here.

The web of relations that connect the novel *Against the Day* to the critic James Wood are more tangled than one might think since, as will be seen, he was neither a novice reviewer nor a first time reader of Pynchon novels when he reviewed *Against the Day*. To make sense of Wood’s unrelenting criticism of Pynchon’s writing and his attempt to reposition it negatively in the literary field, we may bear in mind the words from Pierre Bourdieu when he states: “It has to be acknowledged, therefore, that it is

⁶⁵ This section was previously presented as a paper at the International Pynchon Conference in Athens Greece 2015.

⁶⁶ One might consider the case of William Gaddis’ *The Recognitions*; the negative critical reception it received caused it to be overlooked for a long time but it is now considered an important post-WWII novel presaging writers like Pynchon or DeLillo.

historical analysis which allows us to understand the conditions of the ‘understanding’, the symbolic appropriation, real or fictive, of a symbolic object which may be accompanied by that particular form of enjoyment which we call aesthetic” (RA 333). That thinking shall inform this critical investigation, which is quite simply how to square the rise and success of James Wood as *Uber-critic du jour* with his complete rejection of what many would call one of the most significant living literary voices. And given Wood’s position in the literary field, will his harsh judgements of Pynchon’s novels eventually diminish their stature and standing? How are Pynchon scholars to address Wood’s condemnation of Pynchon’s writing without falling into polemical exchanges regarding aesthetics?

Pynchon’s significance needs no expositing here, but I will point out how unrelenting Wood has been by comparing him to Michiko Kakutani, who has also been generally negative towards Pynchon’s work. However, even Kakutani was able to say something positive⁶⁷ about *Mason & Dixon*, as opposed to James Wood who clearly staked out his position by disparaging and deprecating the novel in his first review of a Pynchon work. In fact, Wood repackaged his review of *Mason & Dixon* in his book *The Broken Estate* (1999) as an essay on the “limitations of allegory”, thus reiterating his stance on the novel and Pynchon’s writing in general. Wood’s stance on Pynchon’s writing is apparently incontrovertible. But how did he get there and do his critical comments do harm to Pynchon’s standing or somehow revoke his writing’s consecrated status?

After graduating at Cambridge in the late 1980’s with a First, James Wood chose journalism over graduate school⁶⁸ and went to *The Guardian* where he eventually became chief literary critic by the mid 1990’s. He moved to *The New Republic* as Senior Editor in 1995 staying there until 2007 when he went to *The New Yorker*. In this series of positions we can see Wood making good use of his accumulated capital to advance in

⁶⁷ “It is a book that testifies to his remarkable powers of invention and his sheer power as a storyteller, a storyteller who this time demonstrates that he can write a novel that is as moving as it is cerebral, as poignant as it is daring.” Michiko Kakutani *New York Times* 29 April 1997.

⁶⁸ In this position-taking one discerns Wood’s habitus that predisposes him not to the greater cultural capital of a Cambridge Don, but to a position where he can work more immediately with books and pursue greater social capital. In the end more people have read Wood’s reviews than some Cambridge professor’s book on literature.

the literary field. He has also taught or lectured at various universities such as Harvard, a clear example of how cultural or social capital can be converted to economic capital. He's been compared to Edmund Wilson and praised widely for his critical reviews; however, he has also been criticized, and even targeted by *N+1* in an early issue (in fact adding to his stature). This is quite an achievement for a mere book reviewer with no postgraduate learning or degree.

Wood's professional path took him to *The New Republic* as the publication swung slightly right-ward under the editorship of Andrew Sullivan. Although Wood already had a reputation for a sharp pen forged at *The Guardian*, it was during his tenure at *The New Republic* that he wrote his cri du guerre piece "Human, All too Human" in which he coined the term "hysterical realism" targeting Zadie Smith, Pynchon and others. (Coining a term that becomes accepted and used and exchanged, adds to the capital of the inventor. It is also a demonstration of one's legitimate authority to give names to things, to categorize,⁶⁹ and to consecrate or not.) However, prior to the move Wood had composed a best books list in 1994 that included works by Pynchon – but more on this later. Three years after composing the list he negatively reviewed *Mason & Dixon*: Did his pen start to lean in a different aesthetic direction in part because of the move? Did a change in position prompt a change in perception?

Wood's rise has also coincided with what some have termed an *Aesthetic Turn* in a range of fields.⁷⁰ As if in response to the perceived "anything-goes" of 'postmodernism', James Wood takes an adamant stance which avers a distinction between good writing (serious and inward, like Samuel Richardson) and bad (silly and Fieldingesque). This arbitrary division is a helpful dichotomy for Wood's argument, but at what cost? By inventing this false dyad of the novel's literary genealogy, Wood reduces the heritage of the English novel to so-called English literature, obviating all other authors. This reduction is too reductive for authors like James Joyce who drew strongly in Continental authors and literature, and the same can be argued for its application to Thomas Pynchon's novels. Pynchon is certainly aware of writers and

⁶⁹ Bourdieu reminds us that category comes from the Greek meaning to publicly accuse or call out (*RA* 297).

⁷⁰ In the political field there is *The Aesthetic Turn in Political Thought* Ed. Nicolas Kompridis (Bloomsbury 2014), but also in history (see Alan Munslow) and in computer science (see Gerald Benoit).

literature outside of the British or American literary fields as evidenced by his review of Gabriel Garcia Marquez's *Love in the Time of Cholera* as well as his mention of Latin American writers in his personal correspondence. Woods repression of the facts demonstrates that his intention is not to locate Pynchon in the literary field but rather to classify him in a category produced by 'pure taste'. And yet his approach has its appeal for some. As an example, I offer this quote from Peter Carty: "James Wood is a useful throwback. His literary criticism recalls an era before academia and imported theory dominated, when men and women of letters held sway."⁷¹ The history of his various position takings has led to an accumulation of cultural capital that has allowed Wood access to academia without the corresponding requisite degrees (demonstrating the convertibility of one form of capital into another).

However, it is not easy getting to the top. Attaining a position like Wood's in the field of book reviews requires more than reading books and writing witty reviews, it requires a good feel for the game. No doubt Wood has that. He knows that writers need critics' reviews as much as the reviewer needs the writer; it is a somewhat symbiotic relationship that occurs under the aegis of some publication which stands to benefit in terms of economic or cultural capital. James Wood makes good use of his capital by carefully including comments that include Flaubert, Barthes, or Chekov; his readers praise his elevated style; the publications he has written for are glad to have his readers. With his change in status, Wood has also changed his position, moving on to positions of greater importance such as judging the Booker Prize in the UK. As Pascale Casanova writes, "Critics, like translators, thus contribute to the growth of the literary heritage of nations." Casanova also notes that critics "more than anyone in the world of letters, they are firmly convinced of the universality of the aesthetic categories in terms of which they evaluate individual works" (RL 23). It is clear that in some cases the critic or reviewer is essential to the writer's career. Still, it is not enough to back a writer that is then later praised; to be successful, and enforce one's authority, one must demonstrate the distinguishing taste of legitimate judgement, rejecting that which is done badly as well as lauding that which is done well. A critic must back the winners and disdain

⁷¹ Carty, Peter. Review of *The Fun Stuff* by James Wood. 27 January 2013 *The Independent*.

perceived losers in the competition for capital in the form of awards, praise, honors and sales.

Nonetheless, there can be only one poet laureate and thus also only one 'chief critic', and so one finds there is also competition for the critical throne of authority to consecrate cultural products and their producers. Wood's back-handed compliments to Harold Bloom are as much a recognition *of* as a challenge *to* Bloom's authority as grand critic for the Anglosphere of letters.⁷² And yet, Wood is not posturing; his writing is a result of his conviction, a belief that much of what has been called good writing is nothing of the sort. Here we may borrow and reword one of Wittgenstein's phrase: "He acts with *complete* certainty. But this certainty is his own."⁷³ The tenets of his belief are demonstrated, for example, in his introduction to W.S Sebald's *Austerlitz*, in which Wood writes of Sebald's "great powers of reticence and understatement", virtues that he would certainly oppose to Pynchon's writing. Sebald, by his own admission, has a "dislike for ostentatious avant-gardist style" and advocates a "documentary approach" by which literature will begin serious study. Of course this preference for seriousness can be seen in Wood; he is clearly bothered by how Pynchon treats London during the Blitz in *Gravity's Rainbow*. In the review of *Mason & Dixon* Wood sees too much similarity between Pynchon's pre-Revolution America and the London of *Gravity's Rainbow*, in which London appears "less a city of one noble British defense than the site of internecine paranoias." It is tempting to borrow from Bakhtin and say that Wood "fails to grasp the positive regenerating power of laughter,"⁷⁴ that he is the gloomy agelast of our own age (Bakhtin 212-213). Wood's preference for an earnest sort of gravitas comes across in other places. In his *Against the Day* review, Wood states of Richardson's writing that "There is a kind of seriousness about human activity", this is then contrasted with Fielding and his "manic factories of plot", from which Pynchon is claimed by Wood to descend, an assertion made not only in a review, but reiterated as an essay in a separate

⁷² This effort to dethrone Bloom is similar to T.S Eliot's revaluation of minor poets that displaced and replaced the Arnoldian view of literature. Although the critic and the poet/author occupy different positions in the field, there are homological structures and strategies that exist between them.

⁷³ Ludwig Wittgenstein *On Certainty* (1972) 25e.

⁷⁴ Mikhail Bakhtin in *Rabelais and His World* (page 45) writes of Heinrich Schneegans' treatment of Rabelais that, "He is the most consistent interpreter of the purely satirical grotesque. In his mind the latter is always negative [...] Schneegans fails completely to see the positive hyperbolism of the material bodily principle of the Middle Ages and of Rabelais."

publication.⁷⁵ As such Wood has staked out his position in the critical field and done fairly well for himself; not many book reviewers attain such status.

At this point it might be fair to inquire about the strength of Wood's case against Pynchon. Wood's complaint is clearly put in his review of *Mason & Dixon* and again later in his review of *AD*. In the world according to James Wood there are "two great currents in the novel": Richardson and Fielding (of course they are both English). Richardson is serious and "goes inward" whereas Fielding "is the great externalizer" who belongs to theater and properly vaudeville. Pynchon is aligned with Fielding as a writer focused more on plotting historical narrative and less with character development; the language that Wood deploys throughout the essay enforces the supposed frivolity that he perceives in this type of writing (e.g.: manic(2), vaudevillian(3), silly, farcical, larkily(2), rousting schoolboy silliness, larking about; some of these were repeated or reiterated). His criticism is clear, but it is also clearly an attempt to impose a new reading of Pynchon that would demote him to an inferior status; it claims that Pynchon's writing is not serious or worthy of serious consideration.

As an example of frivolity, Wood seizes on the songs that Pynchon has woven into his novels since his entry into the literary field. Wood complains: "the principle of Pynchon's comedy is the principle of the stage musical. Everyone gets to sing his or her song, however meaningless" (189). But is this lambasting of "silly songs" a studied criticism or simply an obvious target for the Puritanical predilections of a literary aesthete?

To answer this one might take a brief look how poetry or song, either mockingly or in earnest, has been incorporated into prose over the centuries as the novel form has developed. Rabelais made use of quotes from classical authors but he also drew heavily on bawdy language and low poetry. There is an abundance of song in Shakespeare and not all of a lofty nature. Jumping forward to the twentieth century one finds a great quantity of music in Joyce's oeuvre ranging from belle canto to more common tunes. In

⁷⁵ James Wood 1997 review of Pynchon's *Against the Day* was included in Wood's *The Broken Estate*, a collection of essays published in 1999. The review was called "Levity's Rainbow", but in Wood's book it is called "Thomas Pynchon and the Problem of Allegory"; a slight repositioning of his text but also a clear reaffirmation of his stance on Pynchon's writing.

fact, by the present period one finds that a text that incorporates or refers to certain works or agents in the musical field may demonstrate its position in the field and the cultural capital that the author possesses. Here one might consider Thomas Mann's *Doctor Faustus* which situates the novel and Mann in the Dominant position of consecrated author within the literary field by displaying a deep knowledge of classical music composition and its contemporary currents. Then one could compare this to Jack Kerouac's use of jazz in his novel's to see how that situates him in a sort of *avant-garde* position that lacks the consecration of the university or institutions but still garners symbolic capital. By placing this cultural production within the wider frame of the mid-twentieth century US social field one also sees the importance and prominence of musicals in the field of artistic production (cinema). One might well say that Pynchon's writerly habitus was formed with music, musicals, and musical revolution in the air. In fact, it has been noted⁷⁶ that when at Cornell University Pynchon wrote a musical in collaboration with a friend - it was to be a science-fiction inspired dystopian future with IBM ruling the world.⁷⁷ James Wood considers Pynchon's use of song as merely juvenile and vaudevillian. However, one may find other critics who see things differently. For example, Walter Benjamin, writing about Brecht, informs the reader that songs, "[...] have their chief functioning in interrupting the action" (90).⁷⁸ So then, is it best to say that Pynchon's songs are not to Wood's taste? Maybe he has always felt that songs of such a low ludic nature can never qualify as Literature, that goofy songs are signs of goofy writers, lacking in true gravitas.

Or perhaps things are not so simple. In the course of my research I found something confounding, thanks to Mark Sarvas at *The Elegant Variation* website. There I encountered a list that Wood had made back in 1994 for *The Guardian*, but that subsequently disappeared. It was a list of the **best** books since 1945, apparently written in response to Harold Bloom's *The Western Canon* which had just been published. (Here we may see an example of the young aspiring critic responding to a position taken by an

⁷⁶ See *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Pynchon*. In the chronology (x) it is noted that he wrote "Minstrel Island" with Kirkpatrick Sale in 1958 just after Pynchon had returned to Cornell from Naval duty when he also switched major from engineering to English. This was a year before he would publish his first short stories.

⁷⁷ See Rodney Gibbs. "A Portrait of the Luddite as a Young Man"

⁷⁸ Walter Benjamin "The Author as Producer" in *The Work of Art in the Age of its Technological Reproducibility*.

agent occupying the dominant position in the field (Harold Bloom), Wood can only concur or create an alternate list; he opts for the latter.) Both *V.* and *The Crying of Lot 49* were on Wood's list among others that might surprise some people (*Naked Lunch*, for example). It is interesting that Wood has never included this list in any of his books; this amounts to a position-taking as it attempts to assign the text to the blank pages of silenced history.

Since then, Wood's tastes have changed. Now he distinguishes the serious from the frivolous. In *How Fiction Works* Wood again makes his case against Pynchon with a jab in a footnote taken almost verbatim from his review of *Against the Day*: "There are pleasures to be had from these amiable, peopled canvases, and there are passages of great beauty, but, as in farce, the cost to final seriousness is considerable: everyone is ultimately protected from real menaces because no one really exists" (150). (Here we should note the contrast of farce with seriousness.) And yet it was in that book that the Uber-critic showed the clay feet of his own fallible aesthetic judgements. Thomas Jones reviewed *How Fiction Works*⁷⁹ and pointed out something that was also noticed by reviewer William Deresiewicz in *The Nation*:⁸⁰ Wood had made a tremendous error in a reading of Joyce's *Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* regarding the character of Mr. Casey and his "birthday present for Queen Victoria".⁸¹ This might have been in Wood's mind when he wrote a critical letter to *The London Review of Books* about Thomas Jones' fairly favorable review of *Inherent Vice*. However, it only made Wood look worse since Jones answered his questions with amused respect and convincing clarity. This literary exchange, which can only be understood by looking at all the positions taken, is the kind of conflicting interaction that shapes the literary field and may in turn affect how detrimental Wood's criticism of Pynchon's writing is.

⁷⁹ Thomas Jones. "A Pitiless Literary Hitman." *The Telegraph* 3 Feb. 2008

⁸⁰ William Deresiewicz "How Wood Works: The Riches and Limits of James Wood" *The Nation* 19 Nov. 2008. His article offers the more serious rebuke, writing: "We are immensely fortunate to have him—his talent, his erudition, his judgment—but if American criticism were to follow his lead, it would end up only in a desert."

⁸¹ Briefly, Wood claims the section about the Mr. Casey's cramped fingers "fails to answer the basic question: What was the present?" Thomas Jones points out that the cramped fingers were a result of hard, forced labor in service to the Crown – a gift. Wood misses the irony completely even though he notes that "making a present for Queen Victoria means that Mr. Casey, a radical, has been in prison" (71). He fails to understand the grotesque humor.

Maybe the exchange with Jones and his new surroundings in Harvard have caused Wood to reassess his previous views, after all a change in position can prompt a repositioning. Signs of this may be observed in Wood's appearance in 2012 at the Mahindra Humanities Center in Harvard talking about David Foster Wallace in conversation with D.T. Max, Wallace's biographer. At one point Wood said that his "blindnesses have been educated" regarding his formerly more critical views of Wallace's writing. The metaphor points to what Bourdieu calls the principle of division, the vision that divides, that discerns and distinguishes for the agent who knows how to see something. This is effectively a repositioning through rereading, but we should be aware of the importance of the relationship between the agents involved, or to quote John Guillory, "The real social process is the reproduction not of social values but of social relations. These relations consist of much more than a relation of text to reader" (56). So it is not simply the interaction of the reader with the text that determines the reading of the text, but the interaction of readers with other readers and agents that shape that experience. This then may serve as an example of conversion through conversation in which re-evaluation occurs. Perhaps it is in part due to this that Wood's most recent books have been quieter in regard to Pynchon. Maybe other 'blindnesses' are being educated.⁸²

Or maybe it is just that the world is making it harder for James Wood to disregard some writers' work and its readers.⁸³ As much as Wood may believe in "the incompatibility of the political paranoid vision with great fiction,"⁸⁴ he would have difficulty not seeing how paranoia has become a sign of the times. Plots and conspiracies exist today as ever, some with real world conspirators and others in forums and in the heads of internauts. However, when a program like "Conspiracy and Democracy," based at Cambridge University, is established it indicates an institutional acceptance of the cultural significance of conspiracies and paranoia. After all, is this not the rise of the Age

⁸² James Wood may benefit from reading Wouter de Nooy's study of the degree of orchestration in literary criticism, "A Literary Playground: Literary Criticism and Balance Theory" *Poetics* 26 1999, 385-404.

⁸³ William Deresiewicz criticized just this in his review of Wood's *How Fiction Works*: "Too much is sacrificed on the altar of this aesthetic theology – too much in fiction that is fine; too much, finally, that is true."

⁸⁴ Wood declares this in his essay on Don DeLillo's *Underworld* (197) but as this essay is placed right after the one on Pynchon it can be read as an indictment of both authors, especially since paranoia is so strongly associated with Pynchon's writing.

of Paranoia? From the Kennedy assassinations and MK Ultra to NSA data-collecting and drones of today and the robots of tomorrow the world looks more like something out of the head of Thomas Pynchon and PKD than some fine Flaubertian realism. Of course, was not Pynchon pointing to this in his Luddite essay when he wrote that, “[...] the next great challenge to watch out for will come - you heard it here first - when the curves of research and development in artificial intelligence, molecular biology and robotics all converge” (Pynchon 1984) Hasn’t he been somewhat ahead of the curve, looking further down the road than our all too human myopia normally allows us to do?

Throughout his work the quest (and accompanying paranoia) has been an essential part of Pynchon’s writing, albeit with his own twist, and the early seekers (Stencil, Oedipa, Slothrop) have given way to later genre type sleuths (Lew Basnight in *Against the Day* and later Doc in *Inherent Vice* and Maxine in *Bleeding Edge*). However, whereas the early novels that launched the young Pynchon now have nearly canonic status, the most recent novels have been deemed ‘Pynchon-lite’ by some (Michiko Kakutani in *The New York Times* or Theo Tait in *The Guardian*). Despite the mixed critical reception, the later novels may prove to be a good point of entrance for new readers, and without readers a writer loses pertinence. Certainly the novel *Inherent Vice*, despite its mixed reception, is proving to do well for the author, in no small part thanks to the movie adaptation done by Paul Thomas Anderson. Of those who come to Pynchon through *Inherent Vice*, some will go on to read other novels, working their way from quest to quest and coast to coast through various Pynchon narratives. Thus even the adaption of one of Pynchon novels may over time eventually affect the position of *Against the Day* in the literary field. These dynamics escape the notice of critics like James Wood because his literary belief binds and blinds him as religious belief does for others. Perhaps the best cure for this aesthetic theology is a dose of rational analysis of the available sentient data to show where Pynchon’s work stands in the literary field and whether it is much in circulation.

Part 2 - The Market's Measure

In an attempt to bring some measure of empirical analysis to the my literary study of Pynchon's *Against the Day*, I have over the course of the last two years tracked sales of Pynchon's books in order to look at how his book sales have been as the movie adaptation of *Inherent Vice* was rolled out. Two main thoughts stand behind this task. First, that there are two different life cycles for books, and second that a book's adaptation into a movie can increase book sales and thus help the author gain symbolic capital. The first idea comes from Bourdieu's argument that there are "two modes of ageing" (RA 146) based on the fact that there are two opposing poles in the market of cultural production that have corresponding life cycles. As Bourdieu writes, "Thus the opposition is total between bestsellers with no tomorrow and the classic, lasting bestsellers which owe to the education system their consecration, hence their extended and durable market" (147). In other words, the bestseller will not sell many copies a century after its publication whereas the consecrated cultural product will continue to sell copies many years after its publication. Bourdieu demonstrates this with data from the French literary field between the early 1950's and late 1960's; however, given that the French and US literary fields are very different from one another and that both have changed since Bourdieu wrote *The Rules of Art* one cannot assume that the dynamics of the two fields are the same – thus the need for the research. Analysis of the data may also demonstrate to what extent if any Pynchon's books have benefited from the movie adaptation of *Inherent Vice*.⁸⁵

But how does one go about doing this? Although Bourdieu is a clear source of inspiration for theory and method in this dissertation, it is almost impossible to imitate his use of data in his study of the French literary field because information is not gathered by the US government as is done in France. Moreover, it is practically impossible to obtain data on book sales from the publishers. So rather than refer to Bourdieu, I looked at John Thompson's work in *Merchants of Culture: The Publishing Business in the Twenty-First Century*, a magnificent study of how books get to shelves

⁸⁵ In *Merchants of Culture* (2010) John Thompson notes how what he calls the "movie effect" (281) can increase sales of the book and generate greater economic and symbolic benefits for the author by making the book more visible in the public sphere through conversation. As an example he looks at Ian McEwan's novel *Atonement* and how its sales were affected by the movie adaptation.

before getting to readers' hands. Thompson was able to make use of Nielsen Bookscan data which provide fairly accurate numbers on book sales; however, the cost for their service preclude the possibility of their use in this study.⁸⁶ Instead, I have made use of Amazon book ranking numbers, despite the lack of clarity behind that system, in part due to their availability and cost – Nielsen Bookscan costs more than Amazon, but the information is more transparent. There are clear drawbacks; for example, Amazon does not track used bookstore sales (then again neither does Nielsen) and it is not entirely clear how their ranking system works. Still, the Amazon measure is not fundamentally faulty - the higher a book's ranking number (expressed with a low numeric value so that closer to "1" is better), the more it is circulating in society compared to other books. However, I have not only tracked Pynchon's novels but also some either by authors sometimes grouped together with Pynchon or "mass market" producers of bestsellers that were published at the same time as Pynchon's own novels. I have also used *The New York Times Bestseller* list as a sort of benchmark although one must bear in mind that literature of the type Pynchon writes is not oriented to bestseller status and if it appears on the list it is quite a feat but one not meant to last as compared to the bestseller that hovers on the list for weeks. One is then able to see how Pynchon's *V.* compares to what was a bestseller back in 1963; likewise one can also see how Pynchon compares to his consecrated confrères, at least from the period prior to the release of the movie *Inherent Vice* and up to the near present. From data collected over the two years it appears that Pynchon does fairly well compared to either mass market fiction or other works that contend for canonical status. An example will serve to support this.

When Pynchon's novel *The Crying of Lot 49* (produced for the restricted market and bearing the hallmarks of a 'literary' novel) came out in 1966, one of the novels that had been on the *New York Times Best Seller List* for months was *Valley of the Dolls* (a mass market product with a simple realist approach) by Jacqueline Susann. Pynchon's novel did not make the best-seller list but it did receive the Richard and Hilda Rosenthal Foundation Award of the National Institute of Arts and Letters; so whereas one garnered symbolical capital in the form of an award, the other gained economic capital by selling

⁸⁶ Ideally, future research in this area will be able to make use of Nielsen Bookscan, despite whatever flaws or limitations it may have.

numerous copies. But that was in 1966. If one looks now it becomes clear that Pynchon's novel follows the long cycle of the market, it actually has a better average Amazon book ranking number. To this we should add that Pynchon's *Crying of Lot 49* is much more widely represented in university syllabi compared to other similar novels of the time. (See Appendix III on page 340) This fact is supported by Jack Stillinger when he writes: "For all their critical impact [...] *Peyton Place* and *Valley of the Dolls* have no current status in the history of American fiction. *The Oxford Companion to American Literature* and the standard literary histories ignore their existence" (145).

The amount of books that Pynchon sells indicates a fairly wide readership that clearly extends beyond writers, professors, and students.⁸⁷ Here one might consider the words of Armando Petrucci who writes:

It seems evident that precisely in the most culturally advanced parts of the world (the United States and Europe) a mode of mass reading that some have hastily dubbed 'postmodern' is gaining ground. This is an 'anarchical, egotistical, egocentric' mode of reading based on the one imperative, 'I read what I want.'" (360).

For now we must leave aside the very important question of why a person wants one thing and not another, a question inherently linked to how the habitus predisposes one toward certain tastes. We can, however, categorically state that Pynchon does not "create his readers,"⁸⁸ despite Wood's claim to the contrary; rather the books choose them as much as they choose the books. Readers become Pynchon readers due to their habitus and position in the field.

Wrapped tightly in the blanket of his belief, Wood does not see beyond the aesthetic virtues he values so much, as such he cannot understand that despite his claims that Pynchon's writing is not good fiction, there are people who enjoy it. His conviction creates his blindness. Bourdieu writes of belief that, "*the foundation of belief* (and of the delectation which, in the case of the literary fiction, it procures) resides in the *ilusio*, the adherence to the game as a game, the acceptance of the fundamental premise that the game, literary or scientific, is worth being played, being taken seriously" (RA 333). But perhaps his seriousness is too serious. Laura Miller once wrote,

⁸⁷ A survey of Pynchon readers could go some length in determining just who constitutes Pynchon's readership.

⁸⁸ *The Broken Estate*, 185.

“Wood thinks about literature religiously” adding, “He’s very, very serious,” and that “He’s not known for his sense of humor.” And Jeff Staiger has proposed that Wood sees weak character development as a “failure of seriousness.” He takes the game seriously and makes seriousness the grand virtue that writers of good fiction must demonstrate; if they are found lacking then he, self-appointed Nemesis of writers lacking gravitas, will take them to task. Playing his role so seriously, Wood cannot understand what Bourdieu explains thus:

The value of works of art in general – the basis of the value of each particular work – and the belief which underlies it, are generated in the incessant, innumerable struggles to establish the value of this or that particular work, i.e. not only in the competition between agents [...] whose interests (in the broadest sense) [...] are linked to different cultural goods [...] but also in the conflicts between agents occupying different positions in the production of products of the same type: painters and dealers, authors and publishers, writers and critics, etc. (*Field of Cultural Production*, 79)

James Wood has enjoyed an impressive trajectory, and his professional path has crossed with that of Pynchon’s own trajectory. However, the latter occupies a higher orbit which will not be affected by the weak gravity of Wood’s criticism. As we creep into our future, Pynchon’s work will continue to gain in stature; on the other hand Wood’s criticism will only occupy a page on the critical history of twentieth century *fin de siècle* writing and the fiction that followed it. Wood’s trajectory passes under the arc of Pynchon’s writing, less a Nemesis than a Pentheus.

In conclusion, this excursus has tried to expose some of the dynamics of the field that otherwise are not brought to light by strictly internal readings of the text. James Wood’s consistently negative criticism of Pynchon’s novels may have helped advance his own career, but they have certainly not done any real harm to Pynchon’s standing in the literary field. By looking at Amazon ranking numbers (and thus book sales) it has been shown that Pynchon has a fairly constant and appreciable number of books going into circulation, and that his readership is ample and therefore not limited to undergraduate students and ageing academics from English studies programs in the humanities. Ultimately, Wood has contributed positively to the literary field by pleasing or provoking readers, who may then respond in praise or complaint, and thus enlivening the world of letters; if he has gained an important measure of the available capital in the field it is only because there is a significant amount of capital to be had.

Part 3 - *Who Has a Penchant for Pynchon?*

Having looked rather closely at the readings of those specialized readers called reviewers and critics, it is important to bear in mind that even though they act as taste makers (advising the public on what is worth reading) these are not the only readers whose opinion may affect the place of an artistic product in a society, it is not only their views which are put forward to contend with other readings. However, the wider readership of an author is quite another matter.⁸⁹ In the future, scholars will presumably be able to make use of the plethora of comments that now exist in digital form on web sites such as Amazon, forums, list-serves and more and have a better idea of the popular reception of a novel. As such the individuals who buy and read Pynchon's novels deserve some brief study. But who reads Pynchon's novels and how does one go about finding that out? It might be quickly assumed that he is an "author's author," or someone who is read only by professors and their students. In fact, that is just what Adam Roberts asserts in *The History of Science Fiction* in which he writes of *Gravity's Rainbow*, "that it is still in print today is almost certainly because universities require their students to buy it" (297). A claim not supported by any reference to university class listings or syllabi.

This stands in rather stark contrast to opposite claims for Pynchon's wide appeal. For example, in 1980 David Cowart maintained that Pynchon had an "extraordinary relationship with the common reader" (5) and he goes on to list people that one might not suspect of having read Pynchon. And even though I can also attest to having met people who did not have a background in the Humanities but who had read Pynchon, that personal testimony in itself is not enough to characterize the demographics of the Pynchon readership.

Some years before Cowart made his claim, another Pynchon scholar, Richard Poirier, had posed the question: "Who *is* Pynchon's audience?" (44) His answer is worth study. Poirier categorizes the readership into various groups, starting with "a certain kind of educated young reader who was probably trained to read hard books during the early to mid-sixties," to which he adds a second group "of academics, older than the first group but [...] the same sequence of interest and development"; the third group is

⁸⁹ Publishing companies and marketing firms try to identify groups and aim books in the right direction, something that can be seen in the creation of the category "Teen Paranormal Romance".

composed of “quiet learned academic readers who enjoy puzzles,” and the fourth is made up of “various readers who come from these three groups, but are also in the book business”. The fifth group “are people who take their cue from these various groups and who are enthusiastic about a phenomenon without the capacity to understand it, intellectually turned on groupies who see in Pynchon’s obscurities [...] a sign of radical contempt.” Poirier then points out that what is excluded from his typology is “the central mass of educated readers” (45).

It is interesting that the last group, according to Poirier, is cued by the first three groups. Also, the first three that he mentions all have in common their education, in which they are “trained to read hard books”; this already positions them with a specific place in society. They are not the uneducated readers of pulp romance or mass market genre fiction, they clearly possess a set of competences that the day laborer does not. These more intellectual readers are set apart from the “central mass” whose reactions to Pynchon “can be found in what might be called the Anglo-Americans. This is a literary nation of educated readers who can always flee from the petty tyrannies of a new interest to the thrones of literary and cultural conservatism: to the likes of *Saturday Review/ World* and the journal of bully-boy arriviste gentility, *Commentary* magazine.” This group is “unwilling or unable to submit to the pressure of Pynchon’s work,” they are almost the opposite of the first three groups. So we see the world divided into those with the distinguishing taste that submits to the demanding but disinterested pleasure of reading hard books and those who lack the predisposition to such reading practices. This is not a criticism of Poirier’s grouping but rather a demonstration of what Bourdieu calls the principles of vision and division.⁹⁰

Still, we might reasonably ask ourselves where the Pynchon reading housewives that Cowart attests to fit into Poirier’s grouping. Aside from personal testimony and claims about readership, can it be said that Pynchon readers have somehow been accurately defined or described? One reviewer asked: “In an era when cultural producers complain of the young’s MTV-brains, short-attention spans that demand

⁹⁰ “The social world may be uttered and constructed in different ways according to different principles of vision and division – for example, economic divisions and ethnic divisions.” Pierre Bourdieu “Social Space and Symbolic Power.”

quick cuts, shallow intellects that can't absorb long books, will anyone under 25 buy *Against the Day* except as a snob item for an obsessive aunt?"⁹¹ Behind these scholarly assertions of objectively presented information are there subjective relations that cast a shadow of doubt over their validity? The best way to resolve the question is by asking readers about their background (education, upbringing, etc.); however, that is a rather difficult task. How does one go about contacting Pynchon readers? How is the survey conducted?

In the case of Thomas Pynchon that is quite a bit easier now than it was when Richard Poirier first inquired about the Pynchon audience, primarily thanks to the Internet and some individuals who years ago created a list serve for Pynchon fans and scholars to exchange, information, readings, questions and even barbs in heated debate.⁹² Here is a place to find Pynchon readers that were not necessarily "produced" by university training but came to his books all the same. The challenge then is to conduct a survey of as many of the subscribers as possible to get a picture of readership demographics. The idea of such a readership survey came to me some years ago as I was reading an essay from the *James Joyce Quarterly* called "Who 'Curls Up' with *Ulysses*? A study of Non-Conscripted Readers of Joyce" by Frances Devlin-Glass. Her work was prompted by Martin Amis' claim that Joyce is a writer's writer and "such intimacy is improbable" (363). Devlin-Glass was suspicious of claims by scholars that seemed "so possessive of Joyce" and attempted to determine how much the "works of Joyce are consumed outside the specialized world of literary academia" (364). The methodology and details of her survey are not very important for the interests of this dissertation as my own theoretical orientation shapes the survey of Pynchon readers.⁹³ Ideally, the survey will determine the socio-economic status of readers but more importantly an insight into their habitus, that system of dispositions that predisposes them to particular

⁹¹ Carlin Romano "Pynchon Weighs In: Jokey, Dense, 1,085 pages" *The Philadelphia Inquirer*, 29 Nov. 2006.

⁹² The Pynchon-L Waste website (www.waste.org), with its archives going back to the early 1990's, is a fundamental source for Pynchon scholars; this record of exchanges about Pynchon's work that provide insight into reader's thoughts offers a wealth of qualitative information on reader's reading experience and the experience they have communicating about it.

⁹³ It should be noted that her survey was conducted at a Bloomsday event celebrating the novel *Ulysses*, this does not allow for a very wide focus. In contrast, by using the internet I hope to reach more readers.

tastes, practices, and values. The questionnaire is partially modelled on the survey questions that Pierre Bourdieu used in *Distinction*.

Although execution and inclusion of that survey was originally planned for this dissertation, difficulty in preparing the survey and finding a platform for its execution as well as processing the data in a timely fashion proved unfeasible. Fortunately, the analysis of data from a survey such as the one intended for inclusion in this thesis is not essential for a study of the literary field and *Against the Day's* place in it, or Pynchon's trajectory. However, research for this dissertation has revealed scholars from other fields that are clearly readers of Pynchon's novels, such as the mathematicians Michael Harris and Jordan Ellenberg who are cited later in this dissertation. A preliminary and informal survey of readers subscribed to a major Pynchon chat forum (www.waste.org) indicates a variety of backgrounds for the Pynchon readership. One respondent stated that his bachelor's degree was in political science and that he had been introduced to *Gravity's Rainbow* "by a textbook salesman at a party."⁹⁴ Another wrote that she had a BA in history and in graduate school had focused on Public Administration; yet another respondent reported that he had a BA in journalism and history and was employed as an editor. Not all respondents were from the US or had backgrounds in literary studies; however, only a complete study of that readership can render more exact information.

In spite of not having processed data from the proposed survey, and thus no empirically backed arguments to put forward, a tentative conjecture can be proffered on Pynchon readership. First, if one accepts Bourdieu's concept of the structure of the literary field and its two poles and their respective logics and economies, then one can easily see that Pynchon now occupies a consecrated position located near the pole of autonomous production and that moreover his novels are made for a niche created in part by his own works. As such, readers of Pynchon's novels are almost certain to have a background (or habitus) that includes an acquisition of cultural capital, and therefore access to places and opportunities in which that capital is acquired, that allows them to be potential readers of such novels. (On the other hand it is rather easy to imagine someone when confronted with a Pynchon text to respond that it is not "their type" of

⁹⁴ Personal correspondence with Joseph Allonby (2 November 2012).

reading, or that “they don’t get it”, it “doesn’t speak to them”, and so on. As with so much of taste.) It is worth noting that many of the respondents to my preliminary questioning had some degree of university education. Pynchon’s readership has acquired those competences that allow them to be consumers of books and producers of readings, but it is the individual habitus of each reader that predisposes her/him to a predilection for Pynchon’s novels.

Chapter 5

Pynchon Plays the Field

Having looked at the critical reception of *Against the Day* and also Pynchon's readership, both of which play their part in placing the text in the social field and ascribing it some value, it still remains to study the positions of agents in the social space of the novel, their trajectories, and the distribution of capital and then study Pynchon's own position in social space as well as his trajectory to determine if any homologies can be said to exist between them. After all, ancillary fields of criticism and/or reviews have effects on cultural products (books) that are felt in the literary field but these are not sufficient in themselves to determine the position of a work in an author's trajectory. The intent here is not to render some hermeneutical reading of the text, but rather while trying to avoid either a strictly internal or external reading, which often fails to notice and study the relational nature of cultural production, the analysis strives to clarify how the social space the author occupies refracts over and onto the text to create structural homologies between agents, places, and spaces. This science of cultural works will not nullify the pleasure often associated with the aesthetic experience of reading, but if some harbor that concern Bourdieu's own words should allay any misgivings:

Thus, far from annihilating the creator by the reconstruction of the universe of social determinations that exert pressure on him, and reducing the work to the pure product of a milieu instead of seeing in it the sign that its author has known how to emancipate himself from it [...], sociological analysis allows us to describe and to understand the specific labour that the writer had to accomplish, both against these determinations and thanks to them, in order to produce himself as creator, that is, as the *subject* of his own creation. It even allows us to take account of the difference (ordinarily described in terms of *value*) between works that are the pure product of milieu and a market, and those that must produce their market and may even contribute to transforming their milieu, thanks to the work of emancipation of which they are the product and which is accomplished in part, through the objectification of that milieu. (RA 104)

As the analysis of *Against the Day* is carried out it will demonstrate some examples of these different types of products in the US literary field and how Pynchon's work has contributed to transforming the literary field as well as his cultural milieu, it also addresses to what extent Pynchon may be said have "produced himself as creator" and "as the *subject* of his own creation" (ibid).

Earlier the steps for a sociological literary analysis were noted in the introduction to this dissertation, but it might be useful to mention them⁹⁵ again. The first step is locating and analyzing the literary field within the field of power. Secondly, the various positions of institutions, individuals or groups within the literary field must be mapped. Next, the genesis of the agent's habitus is traced as is his/ her trajectory; to this John Speller proposes the additional step of "the analysis of literary texts in the 'space of works'" (46). The focus of the analysis is *Against the Day* but it necessarily involves looking at other agents and positions. So for example, one of the major narrative lines in the novel is a western revenge story drawing on the genre of the western. To understand this position-taking one must consider other position-takings such as Cormac McCarthy's use of the genre as well as the genre's importance in cinema and the wider culture (Marlboro Man, John Wayne, etc.). And since gun play figures more heavily in this Pynchon novel it must be asked how the novel stands against other novels full of action based on guns and weaponry. But before any questions can be posed or answers proffered, the literary field must be located in the field of power. As we do so let us bear in mind that, "To understand the experience that writers may have had of the new forms of domination they found themselves subjected to [...] we need to have some idea of the impact of the emergence of industrialists and businessmen of colossal fortunes" (RA 48). However, where Bourdieu cites Talabots or de Wendels we must think of Dow, Rockefeller, Pratt or Morgan, the last two of which had houses in Nassau County not far from where Pynchon grew up.

It is time to take a closer look at the author's world and the world around the author. In *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Pynchon*, Hanjo Beressem proposes that Pynchon "has always been, and still is, writing *A Portrait of America*," and of course this is true in the sense that many writers are or have been dedicated to writing their own 'Portrait of America'. But what do we see in the prose portrait of *Against the Day*? And from whence the artist's creative project? As we go forward I would like to keep in mind this quote from Raymond Williams:

In its most general sense, the writing of prose is a transaction between discoverable numbers of writers and readers, organized in certain changing social relations which include education, class

⁹⁵ These steps are drawn from John Speller's explication in *Bourdieu and Literature* (45 - 70) of Bourdieu's work in *The Rules of Art* (214 - 277).

habits, distribution and publishing costs... It is always so, in the relation between literature and society: that the society determines, much more than we realize and at deeper levels than we ordinarily admit, the writing of literature; but also that the society is not complete, not fully and immediately present, until the literature has been written...so that we can see the rest of our living through it as well as it through the rest of our living. (*Writing in Society*, 72)

So how did the literary landscape look in the late 1950's to an aspiring writer, raised on Long Island in Nassau Co. and not in the Bronx like DeLillo or Doctorow? First it must be said that the U.S literary field is not hermetic and has always been close to that great Anglo publishing center, London, nor is it entirely deaf to other literary fields.⁹⁶ Still, the U.S. literary field has its own specific groups of writers, publishers, and events that separate it from the British literary field and its development (consider the homologous relation between positions of the Beats and the Angry Young Men). The quest for autonomy in the literary field that Bourdieu describes in *The Rules of Art* was still being carried out in the U.S. as, in the words of Thomas Pynchon, "mainstream fiction, which with only a few exceptions had been paralyzed by the political climate".⁹⁷ Blacklists and Obscenity trials shaped the literary field as much as struggles between agents (e.g., Truman Capote's attack on Jack Kerouac) as they strive to take some position or forge a new one. In the introduction to *Slow Learner* (a collection of Pynchon's early short fiction) Pynchon refers to "a transition point" as the orthodox "modernist tradition" was faced with the heterodoxy of the Beats to which he responded by orbiting the two until he came to his own position.

By the mid twentieth century the US literary field had the basic structure of a modern literary field, divided into autonomous and heteronomous parts. On one hand the pole of commercial production was well established; for example, Dime novels (westerns), which were widely read by the newly literate working class,⁹⁸ would give way to genre writers like Zane Grey or Louis L'Amour whose writing was commercial and clearly oriented towards the pole of heteronomous production that favors the dominant

⁹⁶ Hemingway won the Nobel prize for literature in 1954 when Pynchon was in his first year of university, but Albert Camus won it four years later as Pynchon returned to Cornell to study English with Vladimir Nabokov on faculty; clearly, other national literary fields had ripples that affected agents in the US literary field.

⁹⁷ "Is It Ok to Be a Luddite?" Essay printed in *The New York Times* 28 October 1984.

⁹⁸ See *The Western* by David Lusted (2003 Routledge).

class.⁹⁹ On the other hand, the development of this new literary market place that catered to the bourgeois created the opportunity for a “symbolic revolution through which artists free themselves from bourgeois demand by refusing to recognize any master except their art [...] making the market disappear” (RA 81). We see the beginnings of the idea of ‘Art for art’s sake’ in Edgar Allen Poe¹⁰⁰ and it is carried on through other writers that rejected “bourgeois demand” (e.g., Walt Whitman or Emily Dickinson), but it would have to cross the Atlantic to bloom in France before fully developing in the US. Of course by the early twentieth century one can certainly speak of writers¹⁰¹ (both Pound and Eliot come to mind) that are closer to the pole of autonomous production, firmly engaged in struggles to obtain the cultural and symbolic capital that allows them to consecrate and legitimize.

The basic structure of a field of cultural production (e.g., literature) with a significant degree of autonomy is represented by the figure¹⁰² below; economic capital is more concentrated on the right side which is the heteronomous pole of commercial production aligned with the dominant sector of the field of power. Cultural producers oriented toward this pole are more likely to gain economic capital than cultural capital.¹⁰³ On the opposite side is the autonomous pole of non-commercial production whose producers are more likely to gain cultural capital. The vertical axis indicates the amount of capital so that in the literary field one finds the consecrated poet laureate in the upper left corner and the avant-garde writer in the lower left hand corner; the author of ‘best-sellers’ or genre fiction is generally located on the right hand side.

⁹⁹ Writing about the demise of the dime novel and the rise of the popular western, William Handley proclaims: “As a popular genre freighted with national and international significance, the Western’s history delimits, but also empowers, the terms of creative or ideological consensus or resistance for any writer or filmmaker who engages it,” (452).

¹⁰⁰ See *Art for Art’s Sake and Literary Life: How Politics and Markets Helped Shape the Ideology and Culture of Aestheticism 1790 – 1990* by Gene H. Bell-Villada.

¹⁰¹ Perhaps instead of looking at US authors that gravitate toward the pole of ‘pure art’ we might find artists in other fields that stand in a homologous position. Whistler comes to mind; he claimed, “Art should be independent of all claptrap – should stand alone [...] and appeal to the artistic sense of eye or ear, without confounding this with emotions entirely foreign to it,” a position likely influenced by his time in Paris.

¹⁰² This is an adaption of images found in Bourdieu’s work, specifically *The Rules of Art*.

¹⁰³ In the literary field, perhaps the writer who best exemplifies this position is the late Tom Clancy; he was Pynchon’s opposite in many ways.

General Structure of an Autonomous Cultural Field

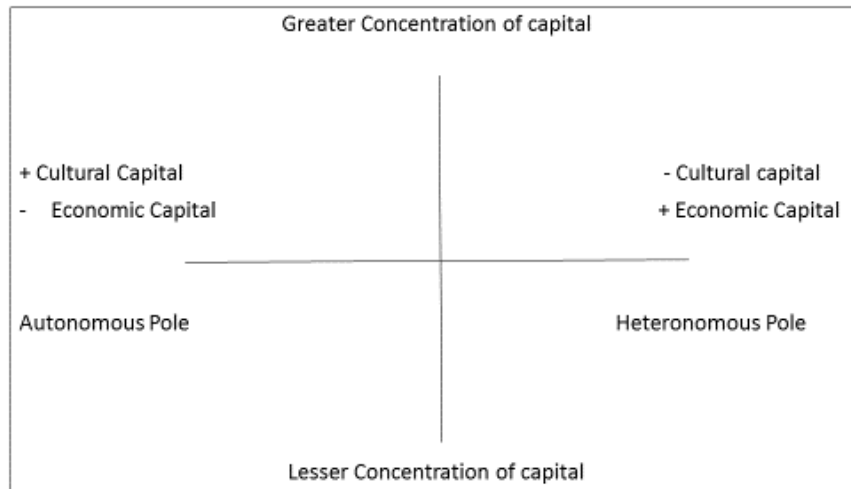


Figure 2 This generalized schema of an autonomous field of production with its dual axes is based on Bourdieu's model.

And although by the mid-twentieth century the US literary field had developed a fair amount of autonomy for those writers whose habitus drew them to that pole, it was not completely autonomous. Aside from the political pressure on screenwriters in Hollywood, there were social mores and values that constrained writers. A comparison of language used by Norman Mailer in *The Naked and the Dead* or later by Kerouac shows what a difference there was between publishing in 1948 or 1958, to say nothing of publishing in the early twenty-first century. Indeed, we can say that an author now may have the autonomy and cultural capital to publish a book that would have been unthinkable in the early 1960's.¹⁰⁴

The Field of Power and the US Literary Field

It must be remembered that the social field has fields within it, is composed of these multiple fields, one of which is the field of power. Unlike other fields that one can associate with a discipline or practice, the field of power is a more abstract concept¹⁰⁵ that cuts across and affects other fields. Bourdieu described it as “the space of positions

¹⁰⁴ In particular there are scenes in both *Gravity's Rainbow* as well as *Against the Day* that would likely have been edited out in earlier times. In fact, the 1974 Pulitzer Prize board vetoed *Gravity's Rainbow*, calling it “obscene.”

¹⁰⁵ For a good overview of the concept one might well read *Bourdieu's Theory of Social Fields*, especially the first chapter “Introduction to Pierre Bourdieu's Theory of Social Fields” (1-36).

of power” (“Social Space and Symbolic Power” 1989), but more completely as “the space of relations of force between agents or between institutions having in common the possession of the capital necessary to occupy the dominant positions in different fields (notably economic or cultural)” (RA 215). This field is also polarized; agents with greater economic or political capital are located closer to the heteronomous pole of the structurally dominant while those with greater cultural capital (and thus structurally subordinate) are closer to the autonomous pole. One finds wealthy financiers and bankers at the heteronomous pole and intellectuals, writers and artists at the autonomous pole, with the center occupied by those with nearly equal amounts of economic and cultural capital such as may be the case with professionals and some bureaucrats. Pierre Bourdieu argued in *The Rules of Art* that Gustav Flaubert’s *A Sentimental Education* exemplified this clearly (Speller 47). But can the same be said for Pynchon’s *Against the Day*?

Certainly one can find characters to put in equivalent positions and with equivalent types and quantities of capital. For example, Scarsdale Vibe (the malignant magnate protagonist) is unquestionably in a dominant position in the dominant quarter of the field located at the heteronomous pole. Vibe is a clear satirization of *fin de siècle* robber barons and his name relates to Pynchon’s own world. ‘Scarsdale’, as the Pynchon wiki informs us, is the name of a village in New York and a seat of wealth, the wiki does not note that it is just across the bay from where Pynchon grew up. Also, Vibe’s family manor is on Long Island, possibly in Glen Cove where many wealthy families had manors and estates. The physical structures and centers of economic capital and power would appear to be the same in *Against the Day* as in Pynchon’s own experience of the world (the names of the other Vibe children are also related to places of wealth). Vibe belongs to the dominant part of the field of power within social space; agents in the field of cultural production, which lies within the field of power, may occupy ‘dominated-dominant’ positions or positions that are doubly dominated. (Note, we first see the violent magnate in Chicago where he attains Professor Vanderjuice, but when Kit’s contract is made it is through Foley – Vibe doesn’t appear out west, he occupies his opulent place acting from afar. Only when submerged and looking at a mural, whose theme forebodes his downfall and to which he is blind because he cannot see beyond

its economic value (*AD 726*), only then does his vulnerability first appear.) Vibe acquires talent (Kit, etc.) in the way that modern corporations accrue intellectual capital in the form of young graduates. He has great economic wealth but little cultural capital; in fact Vibe goes to Europe, “buying up Renaissance art in what even for an American is indecent haste” (657) – his decency is questioned due to his greedy acquisition of symbolic cultural objects, which he buys in order to acquire objectified cultural capital, an attempt doomed to fail because he can only acquire them materially and not appropriate them symbolically which requires the very cultural capital that Vibe lacks.

The novel has such an abundance of characters it would not be difficult to find positions in the field of power for some of them. The artist Hunter Penhallow and his model Dally Rideout are, like the intellectuals of the novel (mathematicians, inventors, etc.) closer to the autonomous pole. More toward the center one finds characters like Lionel Swome, a bureaucratic “travel coördinator” that is drinking “Rheinpfalz from last autumn” as he waits in a hillside restaurant near Göttingen (629). This character has white wine whereas Vibe’s wife drinks “Sillery” in her Greenwich apartment (160) and the anarchist miner Veikko drinks “cactus beer” (83) with some Native Americans near a reservation; the things they drink and where and who they drink them with say a great deal about the characters’ positions in the field of power. As such, placing characters in the field is not difficult, but it does not help us to gauge the field of power and the literary field’s relation to it.

Despite what Pierre Bourdieu states about the field of power, as John Speller notes the French sociologist says little about “how to gauge the position of the literary field in the field of power” (Speller 48). How does one locate the position of the literary field within the field of power and then analyze it? Speller proposes two different ways to do so. The first analyzes the literary field based on “writers’ ability to resist or ignore external (especially religious, political, and commercial) demands” which is seen as a measure of the field’s autonomy which is connected to the value of the capital that the literary field possesses. However, Speller thinks this measure not very exact and adds a second one that works with more analyzable data. This second measure makes greater use of information regarding literacy rates, the number of books bought and sold in a society as well as the number of publishers, and bookstores but also “instances of

consecration (writers appearing on bank notes, stamps, monuments and street names, etc.)”, to which one should also add prizes. As Speller points out, weak or nonexistent examples of these would indicate a society with a small and feeble literary field lacking the symbolic capital to “contest temporal powers, by invoking their own norms and values (‘truth’, ‘justice’, ‘beauty’, the ‘ideal’ and so on), against those of the dominant (order, profit, power, etc.)” (48). The two measures are rather different but both provide a view of the literary field’s position in relation to the field of power, so in spite of the inexactitude of the first measure, both of Speller’s proposals will be drawn on in the following.

If one takes the long view of the US literary field¹⁰⁶ there is a discernible change in the position of the literary field relative to the field of power. In the early American colonies, the *ancien régime* of Europe in the form of Kings and churches held powerful sway over artistic production even in the far corners of empire. Although there are numerous examples of censorship of literary production, for the purposes of this dissertation it is interesting to note that in Pynchon’s own family there was an affair that the young author learned about and was marked by¹⁰⁷. Briefly, Thomas Pynchon’s ancestor William Pynchon was an important colonist and man of means, but he also wrote a book that criticized Puritan theology and soon became the first banned book in the New World. In the end, William Pynchon moved back to England rather than retract his arguments. It must have been a lesson for the young author in the 1960’s who was writing a satirical work of fiction that would criticize the war-industrial complex and the western culture of death that went along with it. Despite changes in the tools of censorship or their application by Pynchon’s time, the effects were still effective. “The instruments of ideological control are well known. The degree of control can be ranked on a scale, but it also depends on the extent to which these instruments are employed in practice, and on the ways in which they are used,” (443) as Gisèle Sapiro writes. She further adds that,

¹⁰⁶ In *The Rules of Art* Bourdieu writes, “one must analyse the position of the literary (etc.) field within the field of power, and its evolution in time” (214); to engage in a full analysis of the evolution of the US literary field is unrealizable given the parameters of this dissertation. Thus in this section the diachronic treatment of the US literary field’s change in position relative to the field of power can only be cursory.

¹⁰⁷ Pynchon draws on this relative and makes him an ancestor of the novel’s protagonist, Tyrone Slothrop. See Steven Wiesenberger *A Gravity’s Rainbow Companion* p.288.

Prevention, repression and economic means (such as the stamp-duty), are not the only means by which authoritarian regimes exert control on the cultural production. Apart from the system of direct gratification (temporal and symbolic) of the most devoted intellectuals (cf. Karabel, 1996), the major instruments of control are centralization of the means of production, unification of the profession, surveillance of professional institutions, and ideological supervision. (444-445 “The literary Field between the State and the Market”)

Pynchon, like many who had seen the effects of the Red Scare, knew how the “instruments of control” could be brought to bear on someone whose message was distasteful or unacceptable to agents in the dominant sector of society.

After the American Revolution there was greater freedom of the press. The number of newspapers shot from 200 in 1800 to around 3000 by 1860.¹⁰⁸ Circulation numbers also increased markedly with the number of copies as much as doubling from the early 1800’s to 1840.¹⁰⁹ This growth in press is due in part to growing middle and working class literacy rates as well as greater leisure time and political participation.¹¹⁰ Additionally, one must include technological advances that allowed faster and more efficient printing, one prime example being the Fourdrinier process.¹¹¹

And yet, despite the growth in press there were still constraints on writers. One outstanding example is the novel *Fanny Hill* (1748), which was not published in an unexpurgated version until the 1960’s. Additionally, a century after the American war for independence Mark Twain’s *Huckleberry Finn* was banned from a library and has faced continuous challenges for removal from libraries. The early twentieth century was not much better as works like Joyce’s *Ulysses* were kept from being published,¹¹² and later in the century authors like Henry Miller and Jack Kerouac had trouble getting their work published given the dominant mores in US society. However, growth in the literary field¹¹³ gave rise to new sites of struggle and conflict as writers took up new positions and publishers chose to back them and then defended the work legally, and thus the

¹⁰⁸ Frank Luther Mott, 216.

¹⁰⁹ Dan Schiller, 12.

¹¹⁰ Michael Schudson, 35-39, 43-50; and Schiller, 15-17.

¹¹¹ William Huntzicker, 32.

¹¹² Only when Random House decided in 1933 to test the initial ruling was *Ulysses* permitted to be published in the US.

¹¹³ Mattias Blom notes that “the years between 1940 and 1990 saw an unprecedented increase in the production of new books in the United States, with the 1960s as the period of most rapid expansion” (368). See “Tracing literary careers: four case studies from the 1940 cohort of fiction debut writers in the United States”.

terrain of the literary field changed (and continues to change) due to these new positions and changes in positions. By the end of the twentieth century writers in the US literary field would have enough autonomy to challenge and criticize politicians and corporations in a way that did not exist previously. When Pynchon entered the literary field in the late 1950's it did not stand in relation to the field of power as it does today.¹¹⁴ Clearly writers are now in a better position to use their cultural capital to legitimize or delegitimize some agent or institution than they were in the past.

As noted above, however, this measure of the literary field in the field of power is rather inexact. With that in mind we turn to Speller's second approach which involves looking at more assessable data and indicators.¹¹⁵ By looking at literacy rates, book publishing and reading habits one obtains a more solid and defined image of the literary field in relation to the field of power. Consulting federal data one immediately sees that the US has a very high literacy rate that has been achieved over the last century or more,¹¹⁶ but this is similar to other developed,¹¹⁶ or developing countries. It is not enough if the individuals in a populace are literate there must also be a strong publishing sector and consumption of books. By this measure the US stands out when compared with many other countries that have similar literacy and education levels. Although print culture started to thrive in the early American colonies and later after the revolution, it was only in the late 1800's that it became a proper industry as publishers sued over pirated material and the great publishing centers came into being and also, eventually, the first great publishing houses. For example, Harper Brothers was founded in New York by the early 1800's and both Putnam and Scribner were present in New York by the mid 1800's. These major publishers and others (and the eventual mergers that would unite some of them) made New York the publishing center of the US as it is today.¹¹⁷ Some of the biggest publishers at present are from the US, a clear sign of the strength of the literary field in relation to the field of power. To that must be added the results of recent research that shows the literary culture of the US to be quite strong.¹¹⁸ In fact,

¹¹⁴ The question remains if there is not some erosion of that autonomy as market constraints from the corporate world replace the state constraints of the past.

¹¹⁵ Speller draws on and refers to Priscilla Parkhurst Ferguson's *Literary France: The Making of Culture*.

¹¹⁶ See the first chapter of *120 Years of American Education: A Statistical Portrait*.

¹¹⁷ For a more detailed view of the growth of print culture in the US one should consult John Tebbel's *A History of Book Publishing in the United States* (2003), or *A History of the Book in America* (Volumes 1-4).

¹¹⁸ See *World Literacy: How Countries Rank and Why It Matters* by John Miller and Michael McKenna.

compared to societies in which religious mandates of violence can be ordered against writers, or where those that dominate can use their political power to crush the voice of criticism or opposition,¹¹⁹ it must be said that the US literary field stands in a strong position in relation to the field of power.

And yet despite the present strength of the field, one must bear in mind that it has not always been that way and a writer like Thomas Pynchon came into the literary field at a time that it was solidifying its position. When Pynchon went to Cornell in 1953 at the young age of fifteen, the House of Un-American Activities Committee (HUAC) was still a menace to the autonomy of writer's, a number of whom had been blacklisted. Even Arthur Miller was questioned by the HUAC in 1956, only to be cleared of contempt two years later when Pynchon was back from service in the Navy and had changed majors to study English instead of Engineering. To have a literary and cultural figure of that magnitude threatened by the state apparatus that HUAC had become could not have been missed by the young writer.¹²⁰ Indeed Pynchon has been witness to important shifts within the literary field. Today a writer in the US literary field can use his/her capital to legitimize or delegitimize a group or institution without fear of reprisals in a way that was not possible fifty years ago. Indeed it is easy to agree with Gisèle Sapiro when she writes, "Although there is no example corresponding to the idealized view of the market, the book market in the United States today is probably the closest to the model, with the intervention of the State being minimal, and the expensive production of worldwide best-sellers in standardized genres like thrillers" (2003, 450).

It is clear that today in the early twenty-first century a writer's attempt to produce a book is held in check by different forces than fifty years ago. To again borrow from Sapiro: "Literary activity has evolved from having ideological constraints to having mercantile constraints." (460). There is notably less State interference, but there is concern that the greater corporate culture that has installed itself in publishing through

¹¹⁹ One has only to recall the *fatwah* ordered against Salman Rushdie or the death of Nigerian writer Ken Saro-Wiwa or the deaths of Lorca or Neruda.

¹²⁰ The blockbuster *Spartacus* that came out in 1960 helped break the blacklist against Hollywood screenwriters. And yet a few years later Bob Dylan pulled his song "Talkin' John Birch Blues" from his second album under pressure from studio executives. Many years later Pynchon seemingly celebrates blacklisted actor John Garfield by repeated mention in the novel *Inherent Vice*.

various buy-outs and acquisitions¹²¹ will hamper the production of books geared toward the pole of restricted production that reap symbolic capital (Speller 94; Sapiro 460; Thompson 126-146). This concern appears in *Against the Day* albeit in a somewhat different form when the one of the Chums of Chance upon hearing rumors about Tesla says: "It sounds like capitalistic propaganda," said Darby. "Dr. Tesla has always had his enemies in New York. The place is a nightmare of backbiting, tort lawyers, and patent disputes." (794) Although this deals more with the field of intellectual (scientific) production, the exiting homologies between the intellectual and literary fields allows readers to see this as an example of how the field of power affects a given field. The added irony here is that this cultural capital (New York), which is also a publishing capital, is the capital of legal difficulties for those agents in the field of cultural production, it is more ironic when one notes that Pynchon resides there and is likely aware of the many legal cases that become news (embargoes on books, IT legal disputes, etc.). However, this is just a refracted image of the social world that Pynchon inhabits; his own experiences have been different.¹²²

Legal problems and mercantile constraints are less of an obstacle to Pynchon than they would be to a fledgling author because of his accumulated capital. On one hand Pynchon, unlike the starving avant-garde writer, is in a better economic situation to face the risk of legal difficulties, which his publisher would likely help with. Additionally, publishers are willing to take a financial short term loss (the sales fail to cover the advance to the author, for example) in order to have certain works in their backlist which can give them first symbolic capital and later economic benefits over time. Pynchon's long standing in the US literary field has allowed him not only to garner capital, which is in part shared by whoever publishes his books, but it has also allowed

¹²¹ See John B. Thompson's *Merchants of Culture* p103.

¹²² After Pynchon's publication of *The Crying of Lot 49* (1966), the author Romain Gary wrote to the editor of the *New York Times* claiming that Pynchon had taken a character name from his novel *The Ski Bum* (1965) to which Pynchon responded by also writing to the editor, by briefly ridiculing the charge in the public sphere he disarmed any possible legal challenge.

It is useful to note that Pynchon and his agent have prevented material (letters in possession of the Pierpont Morgan Library) from being made available to the public during the author's lifetime. He even persuaded CNN not to indicate him in footage they had of him.

him to see the literary field evolve from the “Golden Age” of US publishing¹²³ to a more corporate era in publishing.

The relation of the literary field to the field of power has changed notably from the 1800’s to the present, and with some of the most important developments in regard to the autonomy of the field occurring in the last fifty years. The growth of a free press and a literate populace allowed for the greater circulation of ideas and created positions for writers to fill from which they could narrate the experiences of the new country and its peoples. The type of constraints that writers face are no longer the same. Pynchon began his literary career when the State still exercised control over writers and authors didn’t really need an agent. Today the world is vastly different. Pynchon no longer needs to worry about the State and its attempts to control, suppress or subvert cultural production; the field of power is not the same as in the late 1950’s. Today suppression of an author’s work is liable to come from some entity that threatens to sue the publisher thus preventing the publication of the book. In *Gravity’s Rainbow*, Pynchon carefully pointed the finger of satire at the War-Industrial complex behind Viet Nam, castigating the architects of death without naming them aloud. He achieves something similar in *Against the Day* by satirizing the greed and mad dreams of power that are readily identifiable in the twentieth century but also in the present, perceived with a “minor adjustment or two.”

The US Literary Field: Pynchon’s Positions and Launch

Now that it is clearer how the field of power cuts across the literary field, it is time to say something more about the literary field as Thomas Pynchon entered it and as it was when Pynchon published *Against the Day*. First some general remarks about the field are necessary in order to determine what the field is and who is an agent in it. After this the essential step is plotting the positions of players in the literary field (Speller 50) and determining what positions were open to Thomas Pynchon as he entered the field. However, since the novel under study here was written well after Pynchon’s debut

¹²³ Al Silverman *The Time of their Lives: The Golden Age of Great American Publishers, Their Editors and Authors*.

in the literary field the, the contemporary literary field also requires inclusion in the analysis. This also brings to the heart of the methodological procedures that will ideally help understand the distribution of capital and positions within the literary field and thus the positions that Thomas Pynchon has taken. The question then becomes if and to what extent this is refracted through the text.

Before addressing the US literary field, it might be helpful to say something about the concept. First it must be said that a literary field can be said to exist in the way that a magnetic field does. The latter is a phenomenon widely studied in physics and the methods and instruments are well known - not so for literary fields. The concept of 'field' is, like other concepts Bourdieu used, still open to debate and study,¹²⁴ but without making greater claims for the concept's accuracy in modeling reality we can agree with Bourdieu's former student and colleague (and sometime critic) Michèle Lamont that Bourdieu is "good to think with" (228). Still, that leaves us with the question of how to determine who is in the field and what positions they occupy. However, before doing that a word about the literary field is in order.

As has been indicated before, the literary field comes about in response to greater economic and political liberalism that allow for the creation of new spaces for agents to occupy. The development of a literate working class as well as the bourgeoisie leads to a market for authors that cater to this pole of the general public, but this also leads to the development of a pole that opposes itself to that mode of production. So, "dominant positions at the autonomous pole are occupied by consecrated authors (Speller 52), which back in 1960 would not have included Pynchon but two decades later would. On the other hand "dominant positions at the opposite pole are occupied by authors who cater to the dominant faction of the general public" Speller 52), early examples might be Gilbert Patten or Harold Robbins, but late twentieth century would surely include Tom Clancy or John Grisham. These successful authors from the pole of commercial production are "doubly-discredited" (Speller 52); here the work of Danielle Steel comes to mind. At the autonomous pole but lacking in consecration are the avant-

¹²⁴ John Speller briefly discusses Anna Boschetti's criticism of Bourdieu "for naturalizing the concept of field" as well as Frédéric Vandenburghe's concern over weak ontological claims for the model and the reality it supposedly explains (*Bourdieu and Literature* 58).

garde writers as well as the poète maudit type, (Henry Miller or Charles Bukowski). The field, however, is not static; as agents move positions are abandoned or made available to then be contested by others. It is these struggles that by and large determine the contours of the field. (For an idea of how the US literary field might have looked as Pynchon entered it, see Appendix II)

Having described the “structural subordination” of the field due to its two opposing poles with their respective logics (also opposed), it is time to say something about who can be said to be in the literary field. This is not as easy as one might think. Gebhard Rusch claims:

[...] all people participating in literary action also more or less consciously - take part in the construction of literary reality: authors, publishers, book-sellers, readers, critics, teachers, literary scholars, and - last but not least - members of literary societies who concern themselves in a very special way with authors and their work. Through their activities (lectures, publications, conferences, etc.) they keep alive the knowledge about certain authors. (369)

Bourdieu would remind us that this is one of the first sites of struggle in the literary field, for the very authority to legitimate someone as an author (RA 224). Who decides if T.S. Eliot belongs to the US literary field, or if V.S. Naipaul is part of the British literary field? What is the deciding factor? Bourdieu tells us that, “To produce effects is already to exist in a field, even if these effects are mere reactions of resistance or exclusion,” (RA 226); but this raises questions.¹²⁵ What kind of effects and how are they to be measured? Clearly, writing a book (play, poem, etc.) and getting it published indicate some degree of presence in the field and therefore may produce effects, albeit perhaps less so with works from vanity press. However, a writer like Philip Roth who claims to have retired may still have an effect on the field by either supporting a writer or attacking some other position; even the deceased David Foster Wallace can be said to still have an effect on the field. This logic of the field is what Gebhard Rusch has in mind when he writes:

Writers nobody thinks or knows of are not only forgotten; they are also no longer real in the sense that they do not belong to anybody's reality. This is why - by chance - long forgotten authors can be discovered again and then 're-animated' for the contemporary public. (369)

¹²⁵ For example, John Speller cites Jeremy Lane as one scholar who finds this explanation problematic (BL 57-8).

So the dead may be present and the living effectively absent, but by what measure? And if book sales are one way to measure the effect produced by a cultural product in the case of a living author, what is one to do for the deceased but pertinent? One possible measure here would be the number of citations or instances of quotations by major figures.¹²⁶ Employing these measures would provide a clearer picture of the effects produced by various figures in the literary field.

At the very least one can say that an individual belongs to the literary field once they enter it, but would that include juvenile literary efforts? In the course of my research for this dissertation project I was very fortunate to come across the work of Bo Ekelund (and his colleagues) whose work runs somewhat parallel to my own. In “Comparing Literary Worlds: A Geometric Data Analysis of the Fictional Universes of Two Cohorts of US Writers” Ekelund and others “inquire into the social conditions of possibility for those possible worlds [novels], and to look at the whole space of fictional universes that a cohort of new writers generates”.¹²⁷ So whereas my work focuses more on Thomas Pynchon specifically, theirs looks at various cohorts of writers and analyses the space of literary possibles. Despite the differences in our research aims, we both are faced with the question of who to include in the literary field. Since their aim involves the study of cohorts, they chose to establish the cohort based on the “publication of the first novel or short story collection in the same year,” looking at cohorts for the years 1940 and 1955 (1970 was proposed but eventually not included in the study). As the authors note, this period witnessed significant change in the novel form with the emergence of mass-market paperback publishing,¹²⁸ but also in content as young new authors created narratives to portray their experiences; for example, African-American authors such as Richard Wright, Ralph Ellison or James Baldwin but also gay writers like

¹²⁶ For example, one might compare essays by Thomas Pynchon, John Barth or William Gass or even the late David Foster Wallace by looking not only at citations and quotations but also inclusions in anthologies or course syllabi.

¹²⁷ Quotes from this work come from an earlier version prior to being published in *Poetics* in 2005. Bo G. Ekelund, Mikael Börjesson, Mattias Bolkeus Blom and Anders Olsson: *Comparing Literary Worlds 1 An Analysis of the Spaces of Fictional Universes in the Work of Two US Prose Fiction Debut Cohorts, 1940 and 1955* (Kulturens fält, konferensen Kulturstudier i Sverige, Norrköping 13-15 juni 2005 www.skeptron.ilu.uu.se/broadly/sec/p-ekelund-borjesson-blom-olsson-050526-comparing-literary-worlds.pdf)

¹²⁸ See also John Thompson 36.

Gore Vidal and Williams Burroughs entered the field at this time.¹²⁹ Choosing a specific year to establish an author cohort on is practical and logical, but is that the best course to take for the particular case of Thomas Pynchon?

If I were to follow Ekelund et al in using the publication year of the first novel as the entry point for the author into the literary field, I would have to look to the year 1963 when Pynchon published his first novel *V*. However, the problem with that is that Pynchon's first novel started out as a writing assignment at Cornell for Baxter Hathaway in the late 1950's. In the Introduction to *Slow Learner*, a collection of his short stories, Pynchon explains that he was under pressure to hand something in, added to by the professor urging him to produce with the result that he drew heavily on his early reading experience with "spy fiction" (he mentions a few authors that were all in his "hometown library") and that he borrowed from a Baedeker guide to color his narrative; this became the short story "Under the Rose" which was originally published in *The Nobel Savage*, a magazine edited in part by Saul Bellow and clearly geared toward the pole of autonomous production. Moreover, by the time Pynchon had published "Under the Rose" he had already published several short stories in separate publications.¹³⁰ As such it hardly seems accurate to say that Pynchon entered the literary field in 1963 as he was already quite engaged in literary activity. In this specific case it makes more sense to put the point of entry into the field during the period of 1960-61.¹³¹ My concern is not to locate a historical origin on which to base some History of Authorial Genius, but rather

¹²⁹ It is worth noting that Vidal's *The City and the Pillar* (1948) was considered scandalous, and Burroughs' *Junkie* had to enter the literary field through the lowly door of Ace Books publishing which at that time was synonymous with low-brow literature e.g., science fiction, mysteries and westerns.

¹³⁰ Pynchon's first short story, "The Small Rain" was published in *The Cornell Writer* and his second "Mortality and Mercy in Venice" in *Epoch*, a magazine published at Cornell, both in 1959. The short story "Lowlands" appeared in *New World Writing* (#16 1960) which had just been taken over by J.B. Lippincott, the publisher that would go on to publish Pynchon's debut novel *V*. Another short story, "Entropy" appeared in the *Kenyon Review* (Spring volume 22 1960). By the time Pynchon's stories appeared in them both magazines had accrued quite a bit of symbolic capital by publishing poetry and prose by authors producing for the autonomous pole of literary production. In the mid to late 1950's it was far better to appear in one of these more prestigious literary magazines or quarterlies than something like *The American Mercury*.

¹³¹ In "Fast Learner" (*Texas Studies in Literature and Language* vol. 49, no. 1, Spring 2007) Luc Herman and John Krafft provide an excellent study of the textual genesis of the novel *V*., tracing the history from when the contract was signed in January 1960 to the changes that were clearly taking place well into 1962 about half a year before reaching the public in spring of 1963.

see what the literary field looked like when Pynchon entered and what positions were available to him.

So then let us say that Pynchon entered the US literary field in 1960, should I try study the 1960 cohort as Ekelund and his colleagues have done? This presents rather a different problem. Ekelund and his team identified 993 authors for the three cohorts, 243 in the 1940 cohort, 317 in the 1955 cohort and 433 in the 1970 cohort. One can see that the number rises as each year more people submit manuscripts to publishers, so presumably the 1960 cohort would have between 350 and 400 individuals. Aside from identifying these new agents entering the literary field I would have to obtain copies of their debut novels from that year and analyze them using the descriptive variables that Ekelund and his colleagues have used.¹³² Given the amount of work involved it is infeasible for my study to follow their methods so completely; so how does one go about describing the contours of the literary field and the social conditions that existed as Pynchon entered the field?

Fortunately, Pynchon's entry into the literary field is fairly close in time to the 1955 cohort studied by Ekelund and his colleagues, so it will serve for the purposes of this study. Although Pynchon entered the field in 1960, it is clear that he was already watching the game and considering joining in the mid 1950's. After all, in 1957 he changes major from Engineering to English, in 1958 he writes a musical with Cornell friend Kirkpatrick Sale, and 1959 he has a story printed in *The Cornell Writer* and another in the magazine *Epoch* (established by Baxter Hathaway at Cornell, an important literary connection for Pynchon) and moves to Greenwich Village: all the makings of a young writer accumulating capital and moving toward the literary center. So the "space of the literary debut" for the 1955 cohort would have left its own mark on the forming habitus of young Thomas Pynchon. While I am aware that the space of Pynchon's literary debut is different from that of the 1955 cohort, I suspect that comparing the 1940 cohort to the one from 1960 would reveal some of the same differences between the groups. For example, Ekelund et al note the following: "The third axis in the 1955 material also has

¹³² In private communication Professor Ekelund informed me that he and two other colleagues went to the US Library of Congress to scan the novels, which took them two weeks. Additional time was needed for the statistical work using MCA software; he pointed out that the time needed would depend on one's familiarity with MCA software and statistical analysis.

a pole which connects “Achievement” within the “Individual” or “Romantic Pair” frames with the multiple locations, but compared with the 1940 there is the addition of a European setting, a non-contemporary time frame,” both of which can be found in Pynchon’s debut novel *V*. When looking at social backgrounds of the 1955 cohort, Ekelund and colleagues wrote:

The pole opposed to New York City and an early debut is quite distinct: here we find birthplaces in the south and the Midwest, residence at debut also in those parts of the country: Protestant Christian and other Christian stances; these characteristics are linked with a late debut, and with a social background that includes fathers’ occupations in education or in farming. (13)

(It is interesting to note that this polar divide applies very well to US authors Thomas Pynchon and John Gardner; though Gardner was three years older than Pynchon, he would not publish his first novel until three years after Pynchon’s debut novel.) Perhaps as one final demonstration of the appropriateness of employing Ekelund and his colleagues’ study of the space of literary debut in this dissertation I can quote them on another great writer of encyclopedic fiction. The authors contend that the data maps rendered by MCA allow for a “renewed analysis” as the author’s debut novel can be seen to occupy a position that is a site of diverse tensions and pressures. As evidence of this they offer the following:

William Gaddis’s massive, modernist work *The Recognitions* is now found right in between the recognizable clusters, at a position of tension between different choices [...] Science fiction authors and authors of Westerns rub shoulders, wedged in between the straightforward crime and suspense authors on one side and historical novels on the other. (14)

It is easy to see Pynchon in a similar position. He was fond of and familiar with “spy fiction” as well as science fiction (both genres lacked prestige at that time and were generally treated as mass market products published in pulps and magazines or by publishers content to pursue the shorter cycle of literary production, reaping little or no cultural or symbolic capital), but he was clearly aware of their inferior status. Likewise he was familiar with the names of US authors associated with the production of ‘pure’ art (e.g. Hemingway, Fitzgerald, and T.S. Eliot to name a few) but understood that one cannot copy them. Pynchon’s habitus and the changing contours of the field lead to his occupying a series of positions and condition his authorial practice. This is what Judith Chambers misses in her study of Thomas Pynchon; she attempts to explain the

‘Emerging Voice’ that one finds in Pynchon’s early short stories she fails to consider where it emerges from. This becomes clear when she claims that Pynchon’s “The Secret Integration” “is finally not a political story but a philosophical one” an argument hard to maintain since given where and when it was published.¹³³

One more word about Pynchon’s literary debut. Although the 1955 cohort established by Ekelund et al is used here as a point of comparison for Pynchon’s entry in the literary field, it must be recognized that this cohort and those writers that entered the US literary field between 1955 and 1961 created a number of new positions to be contested and occupied. For example, the rise of the Beats allowed for later writers to align themselves with the Beats or as later-day Beats (e.g. Ken Kesey). On the other hand, Heller’s *Catch 22* (1961) caused a furor with its black humor and subversive critique of war, so that now writers could take a different tone instead of the macho attitudes found in Hemingway.¹³⁴ One must also consider the importance of Nabokov’s *Lolita* (1955) and the *risqué* avenue it opened for authors. Seen this way, the US literary field in 1961 offered a number of new positions that had not existed as such prior to 1955. As will be seen, Pynchon’s predispositions lead to the launch of his own specific trajectory through the literary field.

In lieu of a proper MCA produced data map of authors in Pynchon’s debut cohort, I follow on Bourdieu and ‘map’ authors to their positions to the literary field. But what authors should be included? Including the several hundred writers that likely joined the literary field in the same year is not feasible so I will try to include enough to provide a picture of the space of possibles as Pynchon entered the field.

¹³³ The short story was published in December of 1964 in *The Saturday Evening Post*, a fairly conservative magazine, after Pynchon had gained some fame for his debut novel. The story clearly deals with racism and that year saw the signing of the Civil Rights Act. The magazine had flagging sales so they needed something “new” but nothing as *risqué* as the Beats; Pynchon may have given the story to the SEP to reach a wider audience or as a jape, thrusting a critic of suburban America’s racism right where they would have to read it. To see it as void of politics involves a blinded reading.

¹³⁴ Thanks to David Seed’s “Pynchon, Joseph Heller, and V.” (*Pynchon Notes* 24-25, 1989) scholars know that in the early 1960’s Pynchon had read Heller’s novel (likely because their mutual agent Candida Donadio had given it to Pynchon) and was quite impressed by it. He calls it “close to the finest novel I’ve ever read” and asks, “Who is this guy,” demonstrating a mix of respect and recognition of another agent filling a new position.

Poles and Positions: Pynchon and Publishing

An agent's entry into the literary field is inherently tied to the publishing process and before going much further a caveat must be registered. It must be stated that the study of publishers here cannot follow on Bourdieu's work very closely since the US and French literary fields are rather different on this point. Whereas Bourdieu saw certain publishers as more inclined to publish 'pure' writing or mass market fare,¹³⁵ publishers in the US today are not so easily divided. A contemporary publisher will try to build up a good back list just as it tries to have some 'big names' to bring in liquidity, in other words looking to secure economic capital but also cultural capital. So Simon and Schuster may be happy to have Danielle Steel or Dan Brown for the short term, but it is names like Fitzgerald, Wolfe, or Hemingway that sell books decades after the writer's death.¹³⁶ That said, even if US publishers do not clearly align to specific positions in the field, we can see how they respond to two opposing economies and logics that operate at the different poles of the literary field. This structure was in place before Pynchon entered the field and all he could do was respond through the practices produced by his habitus.

Pynchon's first short stories placed him in a spot clearly defined against positions held by other writers. Despite his fondness for espionage, detective or science fiction genres of mass market literature, Pynchon does not pursue this path. Neither does he pursue the 'realist' position, nor remake himself as a Beat. This could be compared to Philip K. Dick, John Updike, Michael Crichton or Sue Grafton (all of whom belong to Pynchon's generation) who chose different positions that led to their own specific publishing options.

By receiving the help of Baxter Hathaway, which happened in part because Pynchon was writing 'serious' literature, Pynchon was able to publish in reputable magazines. In addition, to this first important position-taking, Pynchon's first agent was Candida Donadio, who was also handling Joseph Heller and sold his successful debut

¹³⁵ See *The Rules of Art*, especially "The Market for Symbolic Goods" in which Bourdieu situates various French publishers positions in the literary field, Gallimard as dominant, Minuit as the avant-garde and Le Seuil in the middle. This is clearly not applicable to publishers in the US today.

¹³⁶ Frank de Glas argues that "*oeuvres* are important for the economic continuity of a publishing house" (388) in his "Authors' oeuvres as the Backbone of Publisher's list: Studying the Literary Publishing House after Bourdieu".

Also, see in John Thompson's *Merchants of Culture* "The Virtues of the Backlist" 220-222.

novel *Catch 22*, so she was able to get Pynchon a book deal with J.B. Lippincott, a venerable US publishing house. After publication of Pynchon's debut novel and his second novel, *The Crying of Lot 49*, he switched publishers. However, this was not done for financial benefit (having gained status and fame an author may decide to change publisher or even their agent in an effort to get greater advances or heftier contracts¹³⁷), rather it had more to do with his discontent with J.P. Lippincott. This is made clear in a letter from the Harry Ransom Center collection at Austin University. In a letter dated October 1962 to Faith Sale, who was married to Pynchon's friend Kirkpatrick Sale and was working for J.B. Lippincott and also did some editing for Pynchon's debut novel, Pynchon expressed frustration about the book jacket for the novel and writes: "Next time (if there is a next time) I will (D.V.) design my own," so we see here a desire for greater autonomy and control of his literary project. In fact, in that letter he mentions a desire to find an "option breaker," which he mentions in another letter to Faith in March 1963. This has to do with contractual obligations, the publisher has an option on publishing the next book. Still, Pynchon's second novel, to which he famously referred to as a "short story with gland trouble" was in fact published by J.B. Lippincott. However, Pynchon's third novel, *Gravity's Rainbow*, which some would call his magnum opus, was published by Viking Press a much younger publisher than Lippincott. Was it for more money, now that he had received literary prizes for both his novels? Apparently not, or at least not primarily. Pynchon had been working with an editor named Corlies Smith who was then at J.B. Lippincott, but when Smith left for Viking Press Pynchon followed him.¹³⁸ So it becomes clear that Pynchon's first change of publisher had to do with discontent with Lippincott and a desire to continue working with an editor that seemed to understand what Pynchon was trying to do. Then there was a long pause after *Gravity's Rainbow* during which expectations rose along with rumors. The literary world received a small surprise when instead of another huge novel by the 'encyclopedic' author, it was given a collection of short stories (*Slow Learner* 1984) prefaced by a sizable

¹³⁷ John Thompson makes this point specifically about 'brand-name' authors (p218) in his *Merchants of Culture*.

¹³⁸ Gerard Howard writes: "On January 24, 1967, Pynchon signed an option agreement with Viking in the low five figures" he speculates that the book was not complete nor would be by the contract delivery date, but that "given Pynchon's blue-chip status and how badly Viking wanted him on its list, that had been sufficient." "Pynchon from A to V" *Bookforum* Summer 2005.

introduction written by the media averse author; but this book was published by Little, Brown and not Viking. This shift in position again has less to do with money than personal connections. Having made the acquaintance of a young lady (Melanie Jackson) who later became his agent, Pynchon left Candida Donadio. To establish her agency Jackson needed to sell a book and thus make her mark on the literary field. But this collection of short stories had an additional purpose. Pynchon's name had not been in the press much for a while and he needed to increase his visibility prior to publishing his fourth novel, *Vineland*, in 1990 which was also published by Little, Brown. But sometime between 1990 and 1997 he decided to change publisher and his much anticipated *Mason & Dixon* was published by Henry Holt, another longstanding and respectable US publisher. Pynchon would make one more final move. In 2006 *Against the Day* was published by Penguin, which has since published his latest novels.¹³⁹ Though Penguin may not have the lineage that other publishing houses have, it has gained cultural capital, for example, by deciding to publish an uncensored edition of *Lady Chatterley's Lover* in 1960 and also with its famous Penguin Classics. Aside from this capital that Pynchon can glean from Penguin by being in their back list (even as Penguin derives some measure of capital by having Pynchon in the backlist) there is the fact that Penguin, having become such a powerful publisher, is able to get behind Pynchon's novels in a way that smaller publishers might not be able to. As such it is a very understandable move for Pynchon to make.

Hopefully, the series of positions that Pynchon has taken in terms of publisher is clearer, and more importantly also the tensions and constraints that conditioned those choices. But is the choice of publisher the only way that a writer positions him/herself in the literary field? Clearly not, there are numerous ways to distinguish oneself. Perhaps one of the first is the literary form or practice that the author chooses (e.g. poetry, drama, prose, etc.), surely a significant choice that conditions later possibilities. To these must be added the taking of teaching posts (and, of course, where because it is not the same to teach creative fiction in Yale, Iowa, or Berkley), and the signing or writing of manifestos or other documents that state a position either in relation to the literary world or to the wider social world. Additionally, we may include the acceptance or

¹³⁹ *Inherent Vice* (2009) and *Bleeding Edge* (2013).

rejection of prizes, speaking engagements, and more, all of which affect the agent's position in the field. A brief look at some positions that Pynchon has taken (or rejected or failed to occupy) and a comparison of those with other writers provides more information about Pynchon's place in the literary field.

Bourdieu's idea that an agent's trajectory is based on the series of positions they have occupied as they traverse the field through time marked by various struggles, draws metaphorically on the physics of an object in flight. And just as the parabolic path that Pynchon made famous is composed on an infinite sequence of delta-*ts*, so an agent's path is composed of innumerable position-takings and isolating moments in that path only provide us with a limited view of that trajectory. Choosing a university is not the first position for a young author (we have only to consider Pynchon's anonymous juvenilia from his high school newspaper) but it is clearly an important one. In Pynchon's case he was to some extent chosen by the university (Cornell) by way of a scholarship. It is not surprising that since his father was an engineer, Pynchon started off in engineering. His decision to switch after returning from his Navy service is another. He could have continued in the military, but that would not have been very conducive to a literary career.

After graduating, Pynchon declined to accept a teaching position at Cornell¹⁴⁰ and instead spent some time in the New York area before going west to Seattle where some friends; it was through them that Pynchon got a job at Boeing as a staff writer. He could have continued at Boeing; many writers have had jobs that allow them to live while they write. In fact it is not surprising that many writers from Pynchon's cohort took first jobs as professors at universities or as editors or journalists. However, it is clear from one of Pynchon's letters that he is not happy working in the corporate world and wants to free himself from it.¹⁴¹ This is affirmed by Kirk Sale who has said Pynchon wanted to avoid the "grey-flannel-suit world" (Kachka 2013). He also kindly rejects an offer to teach at Bennington College¹⁴² in 1965 calling it "a moment of temporary

¹⁴⁰ See Boris Kachka's "On the Thomas Pynchon Trail" 25 August 2013 Vulture.com. While I agree with Albert Rolls criticism of Kachka's review as an overly biographical understanding of *Bleeding Edge*, I still find the information useful.

¹⁴¹ See letter of 28 May 1962 in the Harry Ransom Center at Austin University.

¹⁴² Scott McLemee "You Hide, They Seek" *Inside Higher Ed* 15 Nov. 2006.

insanity.” This double rejection of a day job in either the corporate world or academic institutions places Pynchon much more closely to the pole of ‘pure’ artistic production. It must also be noted here that Pynchon also failed in attempts to occupy positions. In 1959 he applied for a Ford Foundation Fellowship but was rejected.¹⁴³ In the mid 1960’s Pynchon applied to an undergraduate math program but was also rejected.¹⁴⁴ (Perhaps here Bourdieu would ask us to imagine what Pynchon’s trajectory might have looked like had he obtained these positions. Would too much math have spoiled the soup? Would failure or success with a libretto have brought about a different array of options and possibilities? Almost certainly.) Shortly after writing about his rejection (in a letter now held by the Harry Ransom Center), Pynchon states: “[...] it occurred to me that maybe writing was all I was good for,” so he dedicates himself doubly to the writer’s trade.

In addition to these positions regarding school and work, there are more subtle position takings that mark the trajectory of an agent. Since a writer lives by the pen (that’s to say the cultural and symbolic capital at his/her disposal and the ability to use it) it is especially weighty for them when they pick up the pen for some purpose other than the creation of their literary projects, to weigh in on some event as Zola did during the Dreyfus affair. Pynchon has not written much non-fiction, compared to some writers (William Gass comes to mind), but it is certainly important to consider. His first non-fiction article, “A Journey into the Mind of Watts,” appeared in the New York Times in June 1966, where at that time Pynchon’s friend Kirkpatrick Sale was working. The article was more concerned with social and political issues than anything so it is interesting to compare it to an essay by a writer from Pynchon’s cohort, John Barth. In 1967 Barth had “The Literature of Exhaustion” printed in *The Atlantic*; it was clearly focused on literature and has the ring of a manifesto about it, indeed it has been much cited over the years. The difference between the two pieces shows just how the two writers were positioning themselves in that ever more tumultuous period. Barth uses his capital to lead the discourse around literature and demonstrate his authority to declare what literature is legitimately worthy of the name. Pynchon makes no clear statement on the themes he

¹⁴³ Steven Weisenburger “Thomas Pynchon at Twenty-two: A Biographical Sketch.” *American Literature* Vol. 62, No. 4 (1990) 692-697.

¹⁴⁴ Letter from 27 March 1964 at Harry Ransom Center.

broaches (race relations in the US and police violence), in fact it is a bit more opaque in its tone. In retrospect, Pynchon's would seem to have stood the test of time much better since his words are very relevant today whereas Barth's essay seems a bit dated. Perhaps wisely Pynchon has not written many such pieces, they afford him additional capital but without turning him into an essayist. However, essays and articles are not only way for writers to mark public discourse.

In the mid 1960's as the Viet Nam conflict grew and along with it an anti-war movement, some started to use tax refusal as a form of protest. In 1964 Joan Baez refused to pay part of her taxes and others did the same. By 1968 there was a letter to be signed by writers and editors agreeing to refuse to pay their taxes over the Viet Nam conflict. The importance and significance of signing a letter like this cannot be overstated; writers had reason to fear the consequences. However, in the end more than five-hundred signed the documents which was then run in several papers, among them Thomas Pynchon.¹⁴⁵ It is more interesting to note who else signed it or did not. A number of Pynchon's friends from Cornell signed (among them his very good friends Kirk and Faith Sale and David Shetzline) but so did the science fiction writer P.K. Dick, who occupied a very different position in the literary field compared to Pynchon. Other signatories included James Baldwin, Kurt Vonnegut Jr., and the poet Robert Creeley. But many from Pynchon's cohort are not there. Some were not very opposed to the war; for example by 1968 Jack Kerouac or Saul Bellow were more likely to criticize "hippies" and communists than they were to denounce an unjust war. Perhaps others felt that given their weak position, silence was the better course. At any rate what can be seen from the above is what positions Pynchon occupied compared to other writers at the time.

By looking at the literary field as Pynchon entered it and as he began his trajectory through that field, I have tried to show how the context of Pynchon's decisions were conditioned by the contours of the field as much as by his own predispositions. However, in this dissertation it is Pynchon's 2006 novel *Against the Day* that is being studied and as such something about the state of the US literary field today must be included before moving on. Clearly the confines of this project do not allow for a fuller

¹⁴⁵ In the *Cambridge Companion to Thomas Pynchon* John Krafft notes that taking that position "landed Pynchon on the FBI index."

diachronic analysis of the US literary field, but as an artistic producer still engaged in the struggles of the field Pynchon must produce for the reading public of the present and so it is the present state of the field that must be looked at.

The first thing to notice is that in the early 1960's Pynchon entered the field as an innovative¹⁴⁶ challenger to those consecrated agents holding positions near the autonomous pole of literary production. Even though his first two novels received prizes, he was still a *risqué*, cutting edge writer far from having a canonic status. However, at present he is a consecrated author some of whose work has moved into the so-called canon. As Bourdieu writes:

The new entrants are bound to *continually banish to the past* – in the very process by which they achieve existence, that is, legitimate difference or even, for some shorter if longer period, exclusive legitimacy - those consecrated producers against whom they measure themselves and, consequently, their products and the taste of those who remain attached to them. (RA 157-158)

In other words, the shifting of the field is based on the movement of the agents and the outcome of their struggles.

And yet the very struggles in the field may be different in some cases. Issues such as race relations in the US or male dominance in society are still very much alive but they are not the same as they once were. Surely responding to an unpopular US war in the early 2000's is different than doing so in the 1960's. And of course new struggles arise with events in the social field. Authors find themselves forced to respond to new geopolitical realities and evolving social discourse. Quite importantly, these struggles are brought to the attention of writers much more quickly and directly than 50 years ago so that literary disputes and criticism do not depend on the delivery of a magazine or review but on the newer digital media that is nearly ubiquitous in developed countries.

Certainly the technological advances of the last few decades have made their mark on the literary field. People read in ways and places that they might not have before as is certainly clear by the success of electronic books. It has affected how authors write as they try to communicate via e-mail or mobile phone messages; even the written

¹⁴⁶ It is interesting that even though *The Noble Savage*, edited by Saul Bellow, published Pynchon's "Under the Rose," Bellow later declined to promote *The Crying of Lot 49* (See Mel Gussow's "Pynchon's Letters Nudge His Mask." *New York Times* 4 March 1998.) Was the competition threatening?

forms have changed as stories and poetry are refitted for digital platforms and/ or social media applications. At a more structural level, technology has affected publishing by speeding up the process and allowing publishers to control print runs more effectively. In part due to this the literary field has experienced a quickening of its pulse and the window for literary success is smaller now,¹⁴⁷ although that is not as much of a problem for an author like Pynchon around whose book releases there is a certain aura.

But technology has affected the literary field in other ways. In the late 1950's the literary world still had what was left of that inherited European phenomenon of the Salon.¹⁴⁸ In other words, certain individuals had houses or places that were gathering spots for the literati and others and these then became places that were able to consecrate agents or products to some degree; by being invited to a salon one gained capital. Of course now days the Salon inhabits places created by technology such as the TV or internet. Although TV is certainly not new compared to the internet, it has changed remarkably since the 1960's. In fact, it is TV that has made Oprah Winfrey one of the most powerful women in the US, and her book club is just one example of her sphere of influence. What John Thompson has called the "Oprah effect" can take a book (and its author) from virtual inexistence to much wider recognition. In fact one could say that Oprah has the largest, most powerful salon in history,¹⁴⁹ but that would not be accurate. That award goes to the Internet with its innumerable websites and pages. (One could go on at length about how advances in information technology and communication have put readers into contact with other readers but also with writers, as well as writers with other writers - not to mention "self-publishing".) It can expand a book reading beyond the physical confines of the place in which it happens; it can take a comment made in the moment and let the world know. It is a Salon of immense proportions with various rooms and gallery's: sharp tongues and sharp pens attack in this new public sphere. Due to this, nowadays writers are not only obliged to do book tours (except Pynchon) but must manage their digital profile, although this is clearly not a problem for a writer like Thomas Pynchon. Given the new face of communication technology (as compared to

¹⁴⁷ John Thompson *Merchants of Culture*, especially chapter 7 "Shrinking Windows".

¹⁴⁸ For a look at this social institution see Antoine Lilti's "The Kingdom of *Politesse*: Salons and the Republic of Letters in Eighteenth Century Paris".

¹⁴⁹ Jerome Klinkowitz calls it an "academic phenomenon" (337).

1960) a book's reception and the discourse that develops around it are radically different than when Pynchon entered the literary field.

Two other changes should be mentioned related to agents and strategies. First, even though the concept of a literary field often establishes its parameters on national identity, it has porous borders that allows agents from other fields to enter (consider the cases of Joseph Conrad or Samuel Beckett). In the 1960's few US writers were also involved in other literary fields. And yet today there are a number of writers living in the US that may compete for capital in the US literary field but also perhaps in some other sphere.¹⁵⁰ This is perhaps not so surprising as what some call "global literature" rises and authors from former colonies and other corners of the globe gravitate toward the global anglo-literary center that is New York, one is drawn to the cultural capital. This may bring new pressure to bear on some writers as they feel the need to respond to wider global themes; farther from this meeting point of US and global literature, writers are likely to have a different response. A second and somewhat less important change in the field is related to the idea of a new position that Marie Pierre Pouly calls a "literary best-seller." Though this sounds like a simple oxymoron it expresses the desire to "play both sides of the field" and thus reap both types of capital. Some might try to argue that Pynchon's last two novels might seem to fit this description as they lean more toward a clear singular genre type use. However, that would be to misunderstand the dynamics of the cultural field. Can one imagine an avant-garde film that is at the same time a blockbuster? Those consumers of books produced for the mass market express their habitus through their taste and patterns of consumption. The reader of a Nicholas Spark's novels wants a 'nice romance' and not something that challenges their schemas of perception.

Despite the changes mentioned above, the literary field maintains the basic structure of division of a fairly autonomous field with two opposite poles (the autonomous and heteronomous) and respective logics. It should be clear how the field confronts the habitus of a specific biological individual and from this interaction comes the various social practices and strategies that an agent eventually employs or eschews.

¹⁵⁰ Jhumpa Lahiri may stand as an example, but perhaps also Salman Rushdie.

The question then arises as to how the genesis of a habitus occurs, specifically in the cases of Thomas Pynchon, and how it leads to position taking and particular dispositions towards and demonstrations of taste in myriad situations. So in the next section we will look at the formation and development of Pynchon's habitus and how that contributes to his trajectory and, above all, to that mammoth and encyclopedic work set in the *fin de siècle* period that ranges over various genres to constitute a major position-taking, *Against the Day*.

Chapter 6

Habitus and Trajectory

To better understand Pynchon's position-takings we must move now from the external forces of the field that affect an agent's position-taking and practices to an investigation of the genesis of Pynchon's of habitus and his trajectory. It is worth recalling that Bourdieu called habitus "durable, transposable dispositions" (1990, 53) and elsewhere described it as, "the product of the work of inculcation and appropriation necessary in order for those products of collective history, the objective structures (e.g. of language, economy, etc.) to succeed in reproducing themselves more or less completely, in the form of durable dispositions" (1977, 85). However, they are not static or immutable but rather change with the shifting positions the agent occupies as s/he moves through the field. Habitus is shaped by the position into which an agent is born but also determines the positions s/he occupies, as such the habitus starts with the situation into which one is born. Bourdieu writes that:

[...] the habitus acquired in the family underlies the structuring of school experiences (in particular the reception and assimilation of the specifically pedagogic message), and the habitus transformed by schooling, itself diversified, in turn underlies the structuring of all subsequent experiences (e.g. the reception and assimilation of the messages of the culture industry or work experiences), and so on, from restructuring to restructuring. (1977, 87)

In this way habitus seems to accrue indistinguishable layers with what one may call the primary habitus lying underneath and behind later acquired dispositions.

It is in this third step in the investigation where we look at the genesis of Pynchon's habitus that Bourdieu's method draws on biographical practice, "with the difference that we should no longer simply be looking at an individual life or career, but also at the system of positions and relations between positions in which the events in an agent's life take place (movements between publishers, genres, groups, etc.)" (Speller 59). Habitus is more than mere biography, it is "embodied history, internalized as second nature and so forgotten as history - is the active presence of the whole past of which it is the product" (Bourdieu, *The Logic of Practice*, 56); both structured and structuring it develops out of a person's family, education, social status and more.

Indeed, Bourdieu was quite critical of traditional biography and its pitfalls, and believed that “Biographical analysis thus understood can lead us to the principles of the evolution of the work of art in the course of time” (RA 260). But what does this illusion consist of? Hélène Lipstadt claims that “biography smuggles” in this erroneous approach with phrases that imply a linear progression, “Teleology and intentionality are unwittingly taken for granted” (40). In order to avoid the perpetuation of this master narrative that lies behind the biographical illusion it is not enough to eschew certain phrases, one must stop thinking in terms of biographical events (goes to university, gets published, gets married, etc.) and focus more on the space and time in which this position-taking occurs (what choice of university compared to others writers’ choices, what publisher compared for the debut novel compared to other writers, etc.). Also, by looking at individual responses to objective structures (e.g. unemployment rates, possibilities for higher education, etc.¹⁵¹) one develops an idea of the agent’s habitus.

First, it must be said that biographical information on Thomas Pynchon is quite limited compared to other writers,¹⁵² mostly due to Pynchon’s own desire to keep his private life and information private. Given the dearth of information on Pynchon it is impossible to offer a very detailed study of the author’s habitus, and yet there is enough to give us some idea of how the genesis of his habitus differs from that of other writers in the literary field. However, over the years a number of people have turned up information on the elusive author; early efforts can be seen in work by Mathew Winston¹⁵³ and later from Charles Hollander¹⁵⁴ or Nancy Jo Sales.¹⁵⁵ But material may turn up in other places,¹⁵⁶ such as interviews with past acquaintances, giving scholars more to work with. This material should then be held up against the wider social space that Pynchon found himself in.

¹⁵¹ *Outline of a Theory of Practice* p. 86

¹⁵² In fact it has generated much speculation and rumors. I have drawn on standard sources and other reliable material.

¹⁵³ “The Quest for Pynchon” *Twentieth Century Literature* Vol.21, No. 3 (1975) 278-287.

¹⁵⁴ “Pynchon’s Politics: The Presence of an Absence.” *Pynchon Notes* 26-27, Spring - Fall 1990, 5-59.

¹⁵⁵ “Meet Your Neighbor, Thomas Pynchon” *New York Magazine* 11 November 1996.

¹⁵⁶ For example, Boris Kachka’s review of *Bleeding Edge* “On the Thomas Pynchon Trail” 25 Aug 2013. Vulture.com <http://www.vulture.com/2013/08/thomas-pynchon-bleeding-edge.html>. Vulture.com belongs to New York Magazine.

Since, according to Bourdieu, the habitus starts with the family circle and the position that the family occupies in society, it makes sense to look at this early part of Pynchon's life but by comparing it to that of other writers. So, for example, we may start with that most common point of origin, the birthplace and time, however we will not isolate it but treat it within the web of relations and positions in the wider social space. Pynchon was born in Nassau County on Long Island, in Glen Cove and lived in East Norwich where he went to school. This area, referred to as the Gold Coast, is inherently connected with wealthy families that had mansions there. Though this makes him a New Yorker, his early childhood experiences would have been quite different from those of writers born in the Bronx (e.g. E.L. Doctorow or Don DeLillo). For example, the number of Jewish families in the area of East Norwich and Oyster Bay, where Pynchon went to high school, was insufficient for a synagogue until the middle of the twentieth century.¹⁵⁷ To this day the ethnographic make-up of the East Norwich is predominantly white. Likewise job opportunities would have been more plentiful and better where Pynchon grew up, and as a civil engineer and later a local political figure, Pynchon's father's capital created a security that not all experienced. As a professional, Pynchon's father has a greater volume of capital than less skilled workers. Bourdieu maintains that having greater economic and cultural capital often leads to a "Propensity to orient oneself towards the most risky positions" (RA 261) so perhaps it should be no surprise to see such an 'experimental' style in his debut novel.

As mentioned above, Pynchon's father held political positions, first as superintendent of highways and later as town supervisor, and, although those may sound like minor positions, one must bear in mind the place and time. By combing through various websites as well as scholarly works one learns that Nassau County had a very right leaning demographic. In fact, Nassau County was for the Republican Party (heavily criticized in *Against the Day*) what Tammany Hall in New York had been for the Democratic Party.¹⁵⁸ To gain these positions Pynchon's father must have been a solid Republican; in fact, in the course of my research for this project I discovered that

¹⁵⁷ Oyster Bay Jewish Center website: <http://www.objc.us/history.shtml>

¹⁵⁸ This is made clear in a research done by Marjorie Freeman Harrison in her *Machine Politics Suburban Style: J. Russel Sprague and the Nassau County (N.Y.) Republican Party at Midcentury*. PhD Dissertation for Columbia University 2005.

Pynchon's father had been in attendance at a meeting with then Vice-president Richard Nixon,¹⁵⁹ which Pynchon must have learned about. He was then, to some extent, raised to be a Young Republican like Oedipa Mass.

Along with Pynchon's father's position (both occupationally and politically) one must also consider the contribution that Pynchon's mother made to the formation of the young author to-be. Despite Pynchon's protestant paternal heritage, his mother raised the children as Catholics.¹⁶⁰ Former Pynchon acquaintance Jules Siegel claimed in an interview with *Playboy* that Pynchon had introduced his mother to Siegel, saying that she was anti-Semitic (and pointing out that Siegel was Jewish) which she later corrected by saying she simply did not want her children surrounded by them. She was likely not a vicious anti-Semite but was perhaps influenced by views commonly held and vocally expressed in the US prior to World War II; proof of this lies in the speeches of Father Charles Coughlin who had a mass radio audience of millions and was only forced off the air in 1939. In fact anti-Semitism in the US was at a peak just at the mid-century point¹⁶¹ with well-known figures such as Henry Ford or Charles Lindbergh giving voice to anti-Semitic rhetoric. It is unknown whether Pynchon's mother listened to Coughlin's program or not but it would not be surprising if she had had some sympathy with anti-Semitic statements.¹⁶²

The image emerges of a fairly conservative household, but other practices mark the young man. Apparently, the family regularly attended church and was also "bookish" (Kachka 2013), so one can imagine the common practice of church on Sunday before school on Monday and the reading that occurred throughout the year. And what about that school where Pynchon's primary habitus was shaped with a new scholastic layer of dispositions? Thomas Pynchon attended Oyster Bay High School in the early 1950's when the Art Deco style building was only a couple of decades old. The doors above the

¹⁵⁹ This information can be found in PDF on the President Nixon Library website. The meeting occurred 28 Sept. 1960.

¹⁶⁰ In a *Playboy* interview, Pynchon's former Cornell acquaintance Jules Siegel claims that Pynchon went to Mass regularly. Although some have seen Siegel's comments as self-serving, this line has been oft quoted and few have cast doubt on its veracity. It is not clear of this is in reference to the young Pynchon who arrived at the age of sixteen, which would perhaps not be too surprising.

¹⁶¹ Leonard Dinnerstein writes that "The worst period of American antisemitism was sandwiched between the ends of World War I and World War II" (212).

¹⁶² This should in no way be seen as a judgement or criticism.

entrances are marked respectively with a “B” and a “G” to indicate separate entrances for boys and girls. We may pause here to consider how these structuring structures may be generative in terms of thought and action (Bourdieu, *Outline* 72). The separation of sexes (not unlike racial segregation) establishes difference, women are made into potential objects of desire and must be separated from young men who then will not see them as biological individuals so much as distant objects of fascination to be possessed. Perhaps this is what Pynchon refers to in the introduction to *Slow Learner* when criticizing his juvenile attitude towards women.¹⁶³ Writing about his treatment of women Pynchon proposes that perhaps he “was picking up on male attitudes that were in the air” (xix); in this reflexive moment Pynchon considers the shaping of his own habitus and the degree of male domination that was evinced in his early writing.

Of course the shape his habitus has taken is also a result of later position-takings. Due to Pynchon’s often remarked upon intelligence, at the age of sixteen he finished high school and went to Cornell on a scholarship entering as an Engineering physics major; he was chosen as much as he chose. At such a young age moving must have been as exciting as formative. One gets an idea of Cornell in the late 1950’s from the testimonies of people like Prof. Baxter Hathaway or former student David Wunsch. Wunsch, an engineering student at Cornell in the late 1950’s, recounts¹⁶⁴ that Cornell engineering was not for women – the sole female dropped out in her freshman year, an example of what was in the air and shaping young men and women. More interesting is his mention of young students. Wunsch entered at sixteen with about seventy others of his age, “mostly products of the New York City public schools, which would skip you a grade if they thought you could handle it.” He adds that, “For many of these youths, getting flushed out of electrical engineering, and in some cases transferring to less demanding universities or entering the military, must have been an embittering

¹⁶³ Mathieu Hilgers writes: “An agent’s freedom in the face of determination of self by self, of future history by past history, of what is by what has been, resides in the ability to objectivize his or her own condition. ... through the mediation of a reflexive effort, they identify and begin the work of gaining (relative) control over their own disposition” (739).

¹⁶⁴ This bit of minor history is located on the Engineering and Technology History Wiki, titled “First-Hand: An Electrical Engineering Education at Cornell, 1956 – 1961.” http://ethw.org/First-Hand:An_Electrical_Engineering_Education_at_Cornell,_1956_-_1961

experience.” This quote makes clear the stakes that were at play; failure meant aiming lower and a loss of prestige.

Pynchon was certainly one of those “bright kids” (albeit later an engineering apostate) a fact supported by Pynchon’s Navy friend Whitney Bolton. However, this intelligence needed formation. David Cowart has pointed out that Pynchon was already into jazz but that a girlfriend introduced “him to opera on her hi-fi” (63). One can only guess how important those interim service years were for Pynchon, in fact not long after being introduced to opera he would claim some expertise in his Ford Foundation application. Growing as a young person and music aficionado, Pynchon continued to absorb literature, filling his quiver with experience (literary and other) as medieval students filled their commonplace books with rhetorical phrases.

Still, it is not only the courses one attends or the groups one joins but the friendships that one makes that can be most important in secondary education; few would disparage the benefits of these relationships. In the case of Thomas Pynchon the people that he met and made friends with at Cornell are of inestimable importance in his trajectory. Some of those people have already been mentioned but it is worthwhile to list them here: Richard Fariña, Kirk Sale, David Seidler, Robert “Tod” Perry, David Schetzline and Mary Beal. Each played their own part in Pynchon’s trajectory. That Richard Fariña was an influence is clear not only from David Hajdu’s *Positively Fourth Street* but also from the fact that Pynchon dedicated *Gravity’s Rainbow* to his prematurely deceased young friend. David Seidler and his girlfriend convinced Pynchon to go to Seattle where he then got a job at Boeing with her help (Kachka 2013). Kirk Sale was editor at the New York Times magazine when Pynchon published his first non-fiction piece, and his wife Faith Sale helped Pynchon edit *V*. It should also not be overlooked that several of Pynchon’s friends were involved in protests at Cornell in the late 1950’s that ended in their being charged for participation in the ‘disturbances’.¹⁶⁵ This must have contributed to Pynchon’s personal growth and a slow questioning and eventual rejection of his parent’s value-system.¹⁶⁶ However, Pynchon’s university experience was

¹⁶⁵ See “Campus Confrontation, 1958” by Glenn Altschuler and Isaac Kramnick. http://cornellalumnimagazine.com/index.php?option=com_content&task=view&id=1956

¹⁶⁶ Mathieu Hilgers claims that “Agents can progressively emancipate themselves from their determinisms.” (“Habitue, Freedom and Reflexivity” p747 *Theory and Psychology*)

not continuous but broken up by a brief period of service in the Navy, and this surely contributed to his forming habitus.

The very young Thomas Pynchon entered Cornell in 1953, but in 1955 he began duty in the US Navy, returning to Cornell two years later. Exactly how this came about is not clear, whether Pynchon volunteered or was conscripted like many others in the mid 1950's.¹⁶⁷ What is certain is that it was as transformative an experience as going to Cornell. In Pynchon's own words: "Whatever else the peacetime service is good for, it can provide an excellent introduction to the structure of society at large," (*SL xv*).¹⁶⁸ First let us consider what a radical change in institutions this involves since they are almost entirely opposed worlds. Perhaps Pynchon was not badly prepared to play the game of university, but how would he fare in the less intellectual world of the military? One must also bear in mind that it was at this period that the US Armed Forces were being desegregated and as such Pynchon would have found himself encountering people from walks of life very different from his own. One sure sign of its importance is the recurring character (or incarnation of the character) Pig Bodine that appears in a number of Pynchon's works.¹⁶⁹ Of course being in the Navy meant more than meeting colorful characters and hearing stories, Pynchon acquired material in the form of various competences and interests during his service. Scholars have determined the boat that Pynchon was on and know that he was briefly stationed in Malta, a place that appears in his debut novel *V*. He also likely learned a bit about navigation and the necessary observations involved, something that figures to some degree in his later novel *Mason & Dixon* (Henry Holt 1997). And quite apart from all this, one must consider the extent to which military service functions as rite of passage into adulthood. Pynchon left Cornell at eighteen with what was left of boyishness and he returned a young man ready to embark on his own life journey.

Not unlike Hamlet, Pynchon comes back changed and set on a new course, indicated in part by changing his major. We might consider this for a minute. The bright

¹⁶⁷ The most famous cases were of Elvis and Willie Mays, but the writer Tom Robbins also enlisted, after receiving his draft notice, as did Philip Roth.

¹⁶⁸ He elaborates by explaining that those "wearing khaki and brass [...] can in fact be idiots. And that working class white hats [...] are much more apt to display [...] virtues associated, by the educated classes, with themselves" (*SL xv*).

¹⁶⁹ In the introduction to *Slow Learner* Pynchon writes of his fondness for the character (xx).

young man could pursue a lucrative career in some professional position, instead he turns his back on the dominant section of the field and embraces the dominated part of the field; it is a rejection of the world he came from, it is an act of betrayal. (For his parents with their place in society the idea of their son becoming some bearded writer socializing with beatniks and others must have been nothing short of scandalous.) It is an act of commitment. Despite the recognition of Pynchon's academic distinction,¹⁷⁰ he turned down a teaching position and went to New York to become a writer.

Just how the social and literary field looked to the young writer after leaving university and going to New York is hard to say. To get an idea we might consider this quote from Don DeLillo: "I think New York itself was an enormous influence. The paintings in the Museum of Modern Art, the music at the Jazz Gallery and Village Vanguard, the movies of Fellini and Godard and Howard Hanks."¹⁷¹ Despite the fact that Bourdieu has shown that living in the vicinity of museums with free entry is no guarantee of agents exercising that practice, the quote is still an indication of how geographic proximity to cultural centers is related to proximity of access to cultural capital; it is no surprise that a number of the so-called 'postmodern' writers that emerged in the 1960's came from cities, many on the East coast - the early center of publishing and learning in the US. So the quote is applicable to Pynchon to some degree, however on closer inspection we can see that although both Pynchon and DeLillo grew up in New York that is almost the extent of their commonalities in regard to formation of their respective habitus. The Bronx may not be a great distance from Nassau County in geographical terms, but the distance in social space is much greater and more difficult to transit. To see what positions the city held in store for Pynchon it is interesting to compare his own position-takings to those of others around him like his friend Richard Fariña.

"Their tastes in music appeared irreconcilable," (45) writes David Hajdu, who was fortunate enough to have Pynchon respond by fax to his questions about Pynchon's charismatic Cornell friend. Whereas Fariña "listened to pop radio" (46) and gravitated toward the evolving folk music scene, Pynchon was a consummate jazz fan: "Like others,

¹⁷⁰ Looking back through *The Cornell Daily Sun* one finds that Pynchon made the Dean's list in 1958, was made part of the Phi Beta Kappa society in April of 1959, and that he received the George Harmon Coxe award in American Literature for creative writing.

¹⁷¹ "A Talk with Don DeLillo" Robert Harris. *The New York Times* 12 Oct. 1982.

I spent a lot of time in jazz clubs, nursing the two-beer minimum,” (SL xvii). It might help to recall that it was at this mid-century mark that jazz gained a greater presence in the field of cultural production.¹⁷² As such it is worth noting how these positions place the two young authors in the field. Being a fan of bebop (avant-garde jazz with dizzying musical complexity) aligns Pynchon more firmly with the consecrated sector of the field of cultural production (not unlike Mann’s *Dr. Faustus*), on the other hand Fariña’s eventual entry into the folk music scene offered him a novel but less sophisticated and more popular portion of the field of cultural production to occupy.

These different positions regarding musical tastes come out in the novels to some extent. Pynchon’s use of jazz is fairly significant in *V.*, perhaps most obviously in his character McClintock Sphere. But more generally, music is for Pynchon a “major concern”¹⁷³ and his “fifty year career as a novelist involves a sustained engagement with a range of musical effects” (1).¹⁷⁴ In contrast Fariña’s novel does not demonstrate such use of his newly acquired musical habitus. This expression of taste, which Bourdieu would remind us is inherently involved with habitus, not only appeared in Pynchon’s consumption habits (going to concerts or buying or listening to albums) but also in his literary production. In contrast we find that Fariña positions himself very differently in terms of his literary production. Fariña’s novel, although picaresque, was based on his Cornell experiences – parties and then a student rebellion – and not as ‘experimental’ or creative as Pynchon’s. Again, this places Fariña in a rather different sector of the literary field compared to Pynchon. (In their study, Bo Ekelund and his colleagues used several variables, “sociotopes”, to analyze novels, one of which was for setting and another for temporal placement. If these are applied to the debut novels of Pynchon and his peers, and Eklund’s findings are kept in mind, we see some distinctive position-taking. Whereas Fariña uses a very contemporary time frame for his debut novel, Pynchon’s was more mixed with part of the story set in a non-contemporary frame. Also, Pynchon, like some of the writers in the 1955 cohort studied by Ekelund et al, “chose to set their books outside the US” (13), a more cosmopolitan chose of location than

¹⁷² Jeremy Yudkin writes: “[...] in the 1950’s jazz entered the mainstream of American intellectual life” (91).

¹⁷³ George Twigg “Sell Out With Me Tonight”: Popular Music, Commercialization and Commodification in *Vineland*, *The Crying of Lot 49*, and *V.*” *Orbit* Vol. 2, No. 2, 2014.

¹⁷⁴ John J. Hess “Music in Thomas Pynchon’s *Mason & Dixon*” *Orbit* Vol. 2, No.2, 2014.

Fariña's. Adding to this the fact that Pynchon has a fairly early debut and Fariña an almost late one, places them in two different parts of the field.)

Although New York offered Pynchon opportunities to develop his musical taste regarding jazz that distinguished him in society as well as in his writing, it was not the only place where his habitus was shaped in regard to music. In David Cowart's *Thomas Pynchon: The Art of Allusion*, a whole chapter is dedicated to music in Pynchon's work and it provides some insights regarding Pynchon's growth. In order to support his broader argument, Cowart makes use of testimony by one of Pynchon's former Navy acquaintances and a girlfriend that Pynchon had while stationed at the naval base in Norfolk, Virginia. One learns that the young woman and the somewhat younger Pynchon¹⁷⁵ both had a mutual passion for music and that as, "A jazz enthusiast, Pynchon took her to various Washington nightclubs for her education. She reciprocated by introducing him to opera on her hi-fi" (63). This provides a snapshot of the habitus in formation as one sees Pynchon's growing disposition toward the consumption of this consecrated cultural product, and also the taking up of a new position and later the declaration of his occupation of that position through his writing. As Cowart points out, not long after this newfound interest Pynchon makes the protagonist of "Mortality and Mercy in Vienna" an opera fan (64), Cowart provides more examples of Pynchon's use of opera in later works. I would add that by the time he finished *V*. Pynchon felt confident enough to have one of his characters mention the composer Edgard Varese along with other 'high-brow' icons of culture. This fondness for classical music was also noted by Pynchon's former Cornell friend Robert Perry who claims that Pynchon often listened to *The Rake's Progress* at Cornell.¹⁷⁶ These various sources make clear that Pynchon reached out to music (both jazz and classical compositions) as much as it reached out to him, and that this was important for his developing literary stance. Places like Cornell and New York or Norfolk and Washington D.C., but also certain relationships connected to those places, led to social encounters that were important in shaping Pynchon's habitus in early adulthood, music being but one example. There is, however, another

¹⁷⁵ The time period is given as "the summer of 1956" so Pynchon was just a bit over nineteen with one year served in the Navy and one left to finish.

¹⁷⁶ This information came from an interview with Mr. Perry that can be found on The Laws of Silence Blog. (lawsofsilence.blogspot.com.es/2013/12/cozy-loud-as-camel-in-rain-interview.)

place that almost certainly marked the young author but has not been discussed in the studies of Pynchon's work because up to now apparently no one was aware of this part of Pynchon's trajectory.

The Meyerhof Salon

By way of introduction to this section I must start by saying first that research on Pynchon would not be what it is if it were only left to academics and their shelves of primary and secondary sources. Indeed it is my experience that many non-academics contribute a great deal to work on Pynchon and that is where one may still find new avenues to investigate; as such it is no surprise to find that many Pynchon scholars keep an eye on the Pynchon list serve and other webpages that may offer new information. In fact that is how I learned about an interesting couple that Pynchon and his Cornell friends used to visit in New York.

It came to my attention that there was a blog called "Laws of Silence" that was investigating some photos related to Pynchon at Cornell and possibly including him, albeit in disguise. The diligent hosts of the blog finally were able to contact Robert "Tod" Perry, a former Cornell friend of Pynchon, and interview him about the photos and the disturbances at Cornell in 1958. In response to a question about the time that Pynchon and others spent in New York after graduating Cornell, Perry provides a telling answer. He first mentions a couple of "flophouses" where he and others lived, but then these bohemian accommodations are contrasted to a different residence. Perry recalled:

On the East side we had other amusements. And there was the fabulous table and hospitality of Hans + Gerda Meyerhof. They entertained a really amazing group of intellectuals from CCNY and Columbia and elsewhere--art historians, scholars, artists. Often we had dinner there, Dick, Kirk, Tom, Bob, Robin. Frau Meyerhof sometime shook her head and said it was like listening to a convention of the poetic plumbers. (from an interview posted on the Laws of Silence blog)

Having never come across any mention of the couple I became curious, more so because there were clearly a number of visits and it sounded like a sort of social salon entertaining agents from the field of cultural production. And yet finding out more would prove to be difficult but worthwhile.

Initial searches yielded very little, a photographer named Gerda Meyerhof but there was no way to know if it was the same person. I came across the same name again but in connection with the German-Jewish writer Martin Beradt. Further information from US census records gave a location in New York but there was still nothing to confirm whether or not the Gerda Meyerhof mentioned by Robert Perry was the same that I had digitally encountered. With no other options I contacted the hosts of the “Laws of Silence” blog to ask them if they could contact Mr. Perry and try to clarify the matter. The final result was that they very kindly put me in contact with Mr. Perry who then put me in contact with Nina Meyerhof, one of the children of the couple that had entertained Pynchon and his friends.

Before going much further it seems prudent to make a brief mention of that social phenomenon that is referred to as a ‘Salon’. According to Antoine Lilti, “Academic historians long showed little interest in Salons” (3) and only by the late 1970’s was their importance recognized so that “Today the salons have become an obligatory topic of study,” inspired in part by Bourdieu’s sociology which “sees in salons a place for the “birth of the writer,” in which the increasing autonomy of literary activity retains a dependence on the power structure of the elites” (4). In contrast to what some might think, the concept and activities associated with a salon should not be understood as focusing primarily on literature since they were first and foremost “a site for sociability [...] venues of entertainment for polite elites, deeply rooted in court society” (Lilti, *The Kingdom of Politesse*, 2). Some writers were accepted but salon visitors were not limited to poets. What’s more, although the Salon has an important part of its history in France, it did not only exist in France. Throughout Europe the practice extended with this new social space widening the public sphere, even giving rise to several famous Jewish salonnières.¹⁷⁷ Of course this phenomenon was not limited to Europe either; in the US there were also influential salons hosted by figures such as Perle Mesta, Mabel Dodge or Ruth Logan Roberts, who was important for the Harlem renaissance. However, regardless of location or host, “[...] the salons, which distinguish themselves more by whom they exclude than by whom they include, help to structure the literary field (as

¹⁷⁷ See Petra Wilhelmy-Dollinger’s “Berlin Salons: Late Eighteenth to Early Twentieth Century” or also her “Die jüdische Salontradition in Berlin. Vom späten 18. Jahrhundert bis zum Ersten Weltkrieg.”

journalists and publishers will do in other states of the field) around great fundamental oppositions” (RA 52-3). And yet despite the general structuring tendency of salons we must recognize the particular nature of each as it arises in its own social field. Although the situation of a Jewish salonnière in Germany may have certain homologies with that of an African-American woman’s salon, we must not deny the singular nature of each case.

Now, the question of whether the Meyerhof residence that Pynchon and his friends visited was in fact a salon, borders the debate of this institution’s historiography (dating the rise of these new spaces or determining when and if they have disappeared), questions that cannot be answered here nor need they be, exactly. Perhaps it is best to say that as the cultural practice, and the spaces created by it, traveled from Europe to the US it changed so that what one sees on one side of the Atlantic need not perfectly reflect the other side.¹⁷⁸ And although it may be true that these new sites for sociability and exchange begin to shift to more public spaces (e.g. The White Horse Tavern or San Remo Café in New York or City Light Books in San Francisco) or be displaced by advancing media technology, this was just on the verge of happening in the late 1950’s. So it easy to see the Meyerhof abode as something like a salon.

The history of the Meyerhof residence as a salon is somewhat less clear but neither is it my aim to elucidate it. In fact my aim is rather to determine how these visits shaped the habitus of the young author although the history behind the salon is also pertinent as it says something about the group that Pynchon and his friends found themselves conversing with. One of the things that led me to Gerda Meyerhof was mention of her in a book¹⁷⁹ about the German-Jewish author and jurist Martin Beradt who fled Germany in the late 1930’s and met Gerda Meyerhof in New York in the 1940’s. Thus at least a decade before Pynchon and his friends visited the Meyerhofs, the family had already received an émigré intellectual fleeing the increasing Nazi horror. Based on correspondence with one of Gerda’s daughters it appears that the Meyerhofs knew

¹⁷⁸ For a personal testimony of a Yiddish Salon in Passaic, New Jersey in the mid-20th century see Sandra Rubin video from the Yiddish Book Center.

She recounts that “it was like a Salon,” visitors recited poetry or talked about books; also she says” At the time I didn’t realize how much I was absorbing, but it was only later that it became very meaningful to me.” A sincere and accurate statement about one’s habitus.

¹⁷⁹ See Kirsten Steffen’s “*Haben sie mich gehasst?*”

others such as Hannah Arendt, so clearly their household played host to a number of people from the 1940's until the late 1950's, when Pynchon and his friends made their visits. It remains to answer what these visits were like, who was involved and when they happened.

According to Tod Perry his relationship with Gerda and Hans Meyerhof started in 1958. As Pynchon and others lived in New York until the early 1960's the visits must have occurred over this period. Although it is not exactly clear how the young Cornell graduates came into contact with the Meyerhofs, it was apparently due to Nina Meyerhof, one of Gerda's children.¹⁸⁰ These visits to the Meyerhof residence started after Pynchon had returned from the Navy but before graduating, and just as he was in the verge of entering the literary field – doubtlessly an important period. So who were Gerda and Hans Meyerhof and the other visitors to their salon, and what was it like?

Prior to coming to the US Gerda Meyerhof had worked as an assistant to the photographer Roman Vishniac and later helped Steffi Brandl (Gerda eventually had an important career in photography herself) although Mr. Perry did not know about her work at the time.¹⁸¹ Ms. Meyerhof adds that her “mother stayed home and was involved intellectually with others as well as sis (*sic*) her photography working for a short time for Steffi Brandt (*sic*) the other well-known photographer.” Tod Perry informed me that Hans “was the provider, and the generous contributor to just about an[y] (*sic*) conversation.” And that he “ran a glove company, Selecta, but he was in Banking in Germany before,” coming over to the US. Nina Meyerhof summarized her parents' politics thus: “They were humanitarians and thus to the left meaning not socialist but good democrats who cared much for the under dog.” This brief description of the Meyerhofs cannot not hope to do them justice but only to introduce them as agents whose trajectories intersected with that of Pynchon's. But who else might have been at the Meyerhof home other than those young men from Cornell?

¹⁸⁰ The following information about the Meyerhof residence and the time of Pynchon's visits was conveyed to me to me separately by Robert Perry and Nina Meyerhof through a series of emails in April 2016. Very kindly, they took time from their busy lives to respond to my queries. My gratitude is great as is my desire to respect all those involved, both the memory of those who have passed on and the privacy of the living.

¹⁸¹ Of course this does not rule out her having discussed photography with Pynchon and the others.

About other visitors Mr. Perry recalls, “They entertained a really amazing group of intellectuals from CCNY and Columbia and elsewhere--art historians, scholars, artists.”¹⁸² In personal correspondence with me he has specifically recalled a man named “Leo, who was a prof (*sic*) at CCNY, and also a very brilliant and regular fellow at the Meyerhofs.” The fact that Perry uses the term “regular” indicates that there had been enough visits for them to know who was a “regular,” a term used for someone who frequents an establishment. Of course the visits by Martin Beradt happened before Perry, Pynchon and the rest knew the Meyerhofs; they also were unlikely to have coincided with Hannah Arendt. Nina Meyerhof adds that a number of her or her sister’s friends also occasionally visited. With older intellectual émigrés and academics as well as precocious young people it must have been quite a lively dinner table for conversation. Was it so?

It is impossible to know what Thomas Pynchon thought then or remembers now but it must have been fairly similar to his friend’s experience. Mr. Perry provided a general description of the Meyerhof home thus: “The Meyerhof table, the household, was transformational for me personally, but otherwise was an educational continuation, an oasis from time spent in the demeaning employment that paid the rent. We were too young to know our privilege.” Perry’s language indicates the importance it had for him; it is worth noting that he sees it as “continuation” of their learning, that is to say the forming of the habitus that occurs with the scholastic experience. Perry describes the atmosphere of these dinner conversations as like “a WWE entertainment with anyone and everyone able to sit and listen or to jump in and have a say. That was what made it so grand. Nothing was hurtful, nothing was spared, ruffled feelings were tolerated, no view point was off the table.” In response to the question of whether there was much discussion of literature or art Nina Meyerhof responded: “ALWAYS..... art, politics and literature. My mom loved Goethe¹⁸³ and could quote by heart..then had salons on Plato...YES the house was filled with this and we took for granted.” When asked if she thought of it as a salon Ms. Meyerhof replied: “Yes young people gathered

¹⁸² See Laws of Silence blog 13 December 2013.

¹⁸³ According to Petra Wilhelmy-Dollinger (Professor of History at Ludwig Maximilians University in Munich) a demonstration of enthusiastic appreciation was a constant element in German salon events. See the Jewish Women’s Archive, <<http://jwa.org/encyclopedia/article/berlin-salons-late-eighteenth-to-early-twentieth-century>>.

there to discuss matters of the day like Tod but others who were my friends and or sister's friends..then their friends where the intellectual circle of Beradt but also Arendt and others.”

I do not wish to imply that the Meyerhof residence was a Salon in the manner of 18th and 19th century salons of Europe, that is to say with some affluent aristocrat or socialite at its center and calling cards presented at the door. However, there may be some similarities. We may for example note how Perry describes the somewhat agonistic nature of the exchanges regarding various issues. Also worth noting is Nina's mention of the sort of cultural capital at play and on display as Gerda recites Goethe or people discuss Plato. As a modern salon in the late 1950's the Meyerhof residence was much less visible than the other salon-like sites for sociability and the exchange and accumulation of capital that were coming to take the place of the traditional salon. But how did it compare?

First, what other sites existed at that time? By the late 1950's in the New York area some of the most emblematic locations for seekers of cultural capital were The White Horse Tavern or the San Remo café or the Hotel Chelsea, although one should add the coffee shops where hip young people could talk politics or read poetry or sing folk music. Of course one could relocate to the west coast and find places like City Light books in San Francisco, or go even further to Europe where the oldest centers of cultural capital are. Perhaps without traveling so far one could apply to the Iowa Writer's Workshop or other institutions with budding writing programs such as Black Mountain College. These amount to positions that one occupies given the positions available and to which the agent's predisposition inclines him or her. When asked if there was any overlap of Meyerhof visitors and frequenters of other places like the White Horse Tavern, or if they were separate worlds Perry responded: “We were frequenters of the White Horse and other holes, but no other contacts I know about.” To which he added “So in that sense we were the overlap. No other overlap tho (*sic*) that I know about. I'm sure not.” Pynchon and his friends drank at some of the same bohemian bars as Kerouac and the Beats, but they did not gravitate toward that group any more than they rejected them; the Beats were a presence in the literary field occupying positions that they had helped to create. Perry recalls:

I remember some years later "the whole sick crew" (surely at this time Kirk, me, Dick, Tom and I don't know who else) at a party sitting on the floor not 5 yards away from Allen Ginsberg and his sick crew and not a word went back and forth from the two groups. Ginsberg's group was getting lots of PR, but we thought, or at least I thought, we were writing something possibly great, and these guys were breaking glass but not making more than noise.¹⁸⁴

They might have occasionally occupied the same physical space but they did not occupy the same positions in the literary field. Visits to the Meyerhof home distance Pynchon and his friends from the bohemian romanticism of the Beats and align them more with a weightier European intellectual history and its concomitant questions regarding the then recent horrors of history and those that came before. After all, by this time the Meyerhofs would have been aware of the loss of family in the Shoah and it is hard to imagine Pynchon and his friends not knowing something about that and their flight from Europe.¹⁸⁵ Discussions over dinner at the Meyerhof's would have been quite different from drinking at The White Horse.

Being one of the regulars at the Meyerhof house must have played a significant role in the continuing development of Pynchon's habitus. Although Pynchon considered himself "an unpolitical 50's student," (*SL xv*) at some point the political world began to impinge upon his own. The protests at Cornell in 1958 may have played a part in waking Pynchon's political interest, but meeting the Meyerhofs, people who had clearly suffered the shifts in the European political terrain, must have been an introduction to greater concerns. After all, Gerda and Hans Meyerhof had fled Germany and fascism whereas the Jewish people that Pynchon had met at Cornell were hardly emigrant children escaping political nightmares. Could it be that this is where the judaistic element in Pynchon's writing comes from? And although the post-war period saw what Julian Levinson calls "a sea change in perceptions of Jews in American literary culture, largely displacing the paranoia of the Adams-Hemingway-Eliot group,"¹⁸⁶ it was still not common for a WASP writer like Pynchon to make one of his major protagonists in his first novel Jewish as he does in *V.* with the character Benny Profane. Furthermore, this

¹⁸⁴ See Laws of Silence blog 13 December 2013.

¹⁸⁵ It is worth adding that Elie Wiesel had his book *Night* published in 1960 and even though it had low initial sales it helped open the gates to writing about the Holocaust.

¹⁸⁶ Julian Levinson "Connoisseurs of angst: The Jewish Mystique and Postwar American Literary Culture".

Jewish element continues throughout his work¹⁸⁷ and in private correspondence.¹⁸⁸ Perhaps it is here that he began to be concerned about “a certain word” (AD 1071): fascism. This term quietly appears in Pynchon’s debut *V.*¹⁸⁹ but arcs over and into *Against the Day*.

Pynchon’s Political habitus

It is at best hazardous to discuss the politics of an author who does not communicate to the wider world, and yet the development of our political views are only more complex expressions of our tastes and values that have their genesis in our individual habitus and place in the social field. Perhaps it is appropriate to take Pynchon’s own words about another writer that he knew fairly well, Donald Barthelme: “Trying to describe Barthelme’s politics is as dodgy as trying to label his work, but Watergate sure did get him revved up.”¹⁹⁰ It would be hard to say that Pynchon is not a political writer and yet he is not overtly political, that is to say that in his first novels he did not clearly lean in one political direction. To better understand how Pynchon’s political habitus is expressed through his authorial practice in general and specifically in *Against the Day*, it will be helpful to take a brief look at some of the scholarship on the subject of Pynchon and politics.

First, it is worth noting that some earlier collections of critical essays about Pynchon’s work lacked almost any mention of politics.¹⁹¹ In fact, even in the various issues of *Pynchon Notes*, there is not an abundance of essays focusing on politics. An exception can be found in an article by Charles Hollander called “Pynchon’s Politics: The Presence of an Absence.” Hollander notes that Pynchon’s “politics are not exactly well-stated,” but he goes on to claim that Pynchon “reveals his personality and concerns

¹⁸⁷ Examples include Gershom in *Mason & Dixon*, the Grand Cohen and much more in *Against the Day* and the protagonist Maxine from *Bleeding Edge*.

¹⁸⁸ In a letter to Faith Sale dated October 1962, Pynchon responds to something in a previous letter to him saying, “I didn’t know that anti-semitism came in smidgens. Bad show.” So it would seem that at this early date he took exception to anti-semitism.

¹⁸⁹ See John Dugdale’s “V.: A Fierce Ambivalence” in *Thomas Pynchon* Ed. Harold Bloom

¹⁹⁰ Thomas Pynchon “Introduction” to *The Teachings of Don B.*

¹⁹¹ For example, neither Edward Mendelson’s *Pynchon* (Prentice Hall, 1978) nor Harold Bloom’s *Thomas Pynchon* (Chelsea House, 2003) had any essays with a discernible political focus.

through habitual use of favorite devices in the text of his oeuvre. These habits of mind may help decoders reveal his political beliefs" (6).¹⁹² Hollander's approach to the subject of Pynchon's politics starts with a look at Pynchon's family history and the misfortunes that have punctuated it. According to Hollander: "To know Pynchon is to know his family's history, his passion for history and historical method, and to see how political consciousness of a historical kind becomes central to Pynchon's aesthetic" (11). Hollander also points out that Pynchon's high school years (1950-53) coincided with the meteoric rise and fall of Senator Joseph McCarthy, writing: "This synchronicity affords some insight into Pynchon's legendary paranoia" (12). However, there is no reason to think that Pynchon thought anything at all about the HUAC and black lists when he was thirteen or even fifteen. Pynchon did not grow up in a left leaning house, and even if there was not avid support for McCarthy it is at least quite likely that there was no major criticism being voiced around the Pynchon children. Moreover, I see no reason to support a connection between Pynchon's use of paranoia and his going to school at that time. Still, despite this difference I do agree that there is a political element in Pynchon's writing that is perhaps most readily noted in his essay "Journey into the Mind of Watts," even if I do not see it as a sibylline warning.¹⁹³ It strikes me that Hollander's approach falls prey to what Bourdieu called the "biographical illusion." It sees Pynchon as 'always already' a great writer and imposes a teleological view of his career. However, as the question of how Pynchon deals with politics grows, others have taken rather different approaches, sometimes at greater length.

For example, Johanna Freer's recent *Thomas Pynchon and American Counterculture* (2014) sees Pynchon's politics as rooted in and shaped by the counterculture of the 1960's. This approach stands on the idea of the intellectual *milieu* giving rise to the authorial practice. Freer explains that "this temporal convergence had unusually strong repercussions on the creative practice and political convictions of Thomas Pynchon" (4). Her argument that Pynchon's political stance is primarily

¹⁹² This idea of "decoding" a text is addressed in Bourdieu's *The Rules of Art*. In a critical footnote on "pure reading" he writes: "I have shown elsewhere that the propensity to extend limitlessly the posture of *lector* [...] is the basis of systematic errors. The paradigm of these errors is what Bakhtin calls philologism, the lettered relation to the dead letter which leads to constituting language as a code allowing the decoding of a message implicitly considered as deprived of any other function than the one it holds for the expert - to be deciphered." (RA 393) It is applicable to Hollander's reading here.

¹⁹³ Hollander writes that, "Pynchon tried to warn the nation of the incendiary situation everywhere" (55).

countercultural would seem to imply that his works from *V.* on are oriented in that fashion. So then is there no growth or development in his politics from the early 1960's on? Her argument also seems to ignore Pynchon's criticism of practices associated with the counterculture. For example, in *V.* the character Rachel expresses disdain when Benny Profane tells her he has smoked marijuana. (Apparently, Pynchon did not initially like cannabis when he tried it, but later came to appreciate it.¹⁹⁴) And later in private correspondence¹⁹⁵ Pynchon wrote critically of a proposed 'Impeachment Rally' complaining that it should have been done in 1968. He also cynically jokes that "literary people" (he mentions Lynn Nesbit and Jimmy Breslin) will attend, implying that it is self-serving advertising instead of political engagement. With this in mind we might consider Pynchon to have a mixed relationship with what is commonly referred to as the counterculture. Placing too much emphasis on the time period fails to capture the practical response of the agent to the field given his or her predispositions, it ignores the struggles and strategies to obtain capital.

Rather differently from Freer's work, Samuel Thomas takes an approach influenced by the Frankfurt school and employs a dialectical method that "is an attempt to make legitimate political and historical connections" (17). He asserts that in his book he has "traced out a dialectic that encompasses demythologization, the liquidation of the individual, and the rise of a technocratic, military-industrial culture which culminates (via fascism) in contemporary consumer society" (153). Although *Against the Day* does not constitute a major part of his study, Thomas sees it as fitting in his dialectical structure, exhibiting "the same ethico-political commitment" (156) with the down trodden. This procedure allows Thomas to survey political issues in a number of Pynchon's works, however, it also sees Pynchon's treatment of political matters as somewhat static, nor does it do much to say where this political orientation came from.

In a different tack on Pynchon and politics, Jeff Baker envisions Pynchon as an heir to conflicting Emersonian ideas. This view:

locates Pynchon's politics within, first, a broader Emersonian conversation about the presumption of America's singular dispensation; and, second, an oppositional discourse

¹⁹⁴ Boris Kachka writes: "He tried pot once and hated it—for the time being."

¹⁹⁵ To David and Mary Seidler in 1974.

surrounding “Emersonian self-defense” [...] The stark political differences between these two Emersonian selves, [...] stand at the heart of Pynchon’s politics. (136)

This approach depends more on intellectual history than a history of family calamity or disgrace; it places a fundamental dilemma as the source of Pynchon’s political orientation, and although this allows Baker to address politics in most of Pynchon’s work it is also posits a fairly static image of Pynchon’s politics. (Baker, following Cornel West, sees the reading of Emerson as very influential for activists in the 1960’s.) Another way that Baker differs from Hollander is that Baker sees Pynchon’s “oblique” political allusions as part of a shared “cultural aversion to the polemical” (137) rather than some desire to ‘hide’ information and make readers hunt for it. Baker provides examples of this generative dilemma and how it works in some of Pynchon’s novels. However, when writing about *Against the Day* Baker recognized that there appeared to be a change on Pynchon’s part regarding political resistance (141). This prompts the question as to whether Pynchon’s politics have changed or whether they are the same as in the 1960’s.

Jeff Baker was not the only one to see something different in Pynchon’s largest novel. According to Kathryn Hume,¹⁹⁶ Pynchon’s “political sympathies are leftist and pro-labor” but she thinks that “they remain backgrounded” in former novels although she does recognize that, “*Vineland’s* values are more obvious in that it decries totalitarianism and encourages us to think well of labor.” However, for Hume Pynchon’s *Against the Day* constitutes “a new departure” in that it “appears to support political violence” (168). Further on she states that this “appears to reflect intensified personal convictions or increased desperation over the direction America is taking.” Hume makes clear that she is discomfited by what she calls “this anarchist and Catholic Pynchon.” Of course this view requires the construction of a new image of this imaginary author. Instead of the quasi-nihilistic author of post-modern fictions that escape fixed meaning, Hume suggests the detection of a new element of anarcho-Catholicism in *Against the Day*. In discussing the abundance of Christian and Catholic images she concludes, “Cumulatively, though, such terms suggest a Christian view [...] a Catholic inflected view” (185). This is certainly true in that Pynchon was raised a Catholic and it has marked his writing not unlike it did to Joyce’s. But are we to believe that this “vision” is then being,

¹⁹⁶ Kathryn Hume "The Religious and Political Vision of *Against the Day*".

as it were, preached to the readers? If so then the message only appears here because in Pynchon's later books there is no abundance of Christian imagery and anarchy is hardly mentioned. The argument depends on accepting the evolution of the author based on religious recuperation and political radicalization. However, it must be said that throughout this book full of dynamite, anarchists, and explosions there is also a persistent deontological discussion about doing violence to others. This more cautious view of Pynchon's use of the term "anarchy" can be seen in Graham Benton's "Daydreams and Dynamite: Anarchist Strategies of Resistance and Paths for Transformation in *Against the Day*". In it he notes: "Yet while Pynchon frequently invokes a concept of anarchism as a powerful mechanism for social engineering [...] he is also wary of fully endorsing an anarchist position" (191). Full endorsements of anarchy are not likely to come from a writer published by major firms or that lives in Manhattan or has sent a child to a private school. So what is one to make of all the bomb throwing anarchists in *Against the Day*? Have Pynchon's politics radicalized into some brand of anarcho-Catholicism, or has counterculture idealism soured into violent curmudgeonhood?

It is not possible here to resolve the nature of Pynchon's use of the term "anarchy," but we can say something about the development of his habitus and the effects on his political stance and authorial practice. Habitus changes with each change in position in the field even if the primary habitus remains in place to a great extent (that is to say that one can stop practicing a religion but that cannot undo having been raised in that religion, so in that sense one is still Catholic or Jewish even while proclaiming atheism) and it is habitus that drives that position taking. This Bourdieusian view means that a change in position is also a change in valence.

Pynchon's position at Cornell moved him away from his parent's values, a process furthered by service in the Navy. Studying at Cornell removed him geographically from his home environment but also in terms of social distance, placing him in a new world. In the first two years (1953-55) at Cornell studying engineering perhaps the young Pynchon and many other students felt like Susan Sontag when she recalls that, "The idea of being disrespectful to a teacher, or talking back, was unthinkable" (165). This is a stark expression of how the field of power imposed itself

upon the scholastic habitus, reducing students to the status of infant (unable to speak) that they themselves imposed. Or as Pierre Bourdieu writes in *Language and Symbolic Power*: “For symbolic power is that invisible power which can be exercised only with the complicity of those who do not want to know that they are subject to it or even that they themselves exercise it” (164). Of course this type of power is exercised even more clearly in military life, as Pynchon would see in the Navy. It is then only when he goes back to Cornell that we can say that Pynchon is first exposed to public acts of disobedience that constituted a challenge to the institution’s authority to declare what relationships are legitimate and licit. It is easy to imagine that his parents would likely have stood on the side of the dominant forces and been in favor of the university’s policy of *in loco parentis*.

It is around this time that Pynchon and his crew start visiting the Meyerhofs who, to quote Nina again from her personal correspondence, “were humanitarians and thus to the left meaning not socialist but good democrats who cared much for the under dog.” By the time Pynchon made the acquaintance of the Meyerhofs he already suspected that those adults in “khaki and brass” might be “idiots” and had seen that paternalistic authority sometimes can and must be challenged. In his early twenties, and working on his debut novel, Pynchon needed figures other than his parents, friends or professors and the Meyerhofs could have provided that. At the Meyerhof table his predispositions were further shaped so that as the tumultuous 1960’s came to a boil he was attuned to the various events and their political consequences whether that regarded civil rights and racism in the US or the growing war in Viet Nam. By 1966 he makes his position public first with his essay “Journey into the Mind of Watts” and then later in 1968 by signing the Writers and Editors War Tax Protest letter,¹⁹⁷ and finally in 1973 his novel *Gravity’s Rainbow* constitutes another position-taking albeit with a rather oblique manner of critique. It is not venturing too much to say that taking a position at the Meyerhof table was as formative for Pynchon in the relations it created and the experiences it offered as either Cornell or the Navy. Around their table the seeds were

¹⁹⁷ It is worth recalling what was at stake. Some signatories were wary. Norman Mailor, who signed the letter, wrote Arthur Miller in attempt to persuade Miller to sign, but he recognized what he saw as a risk involving the Internal Revenue Service. Miller agreed in spirit but thought the idea flawed and did not sign. See Christopher Bigsby’s *Arthur Miller 1962 – 2005*. Hachette UK, 2011.

planted for the intelligent use of the symbolic means to resist the abuses of the dominant faction of the social field.

Of course as important as the Meyerhof salon was for Pynchon and his friends, it was certainly not the end of the development of their predispositions. Later events and choices would leave each one to choose within the preconditioned contexts of their respective choices; agents can have surprising trajectories, for example Jerry Rubin became a stockbroker. In the 1960's some were predisposed to take up a position that amounted to acts of resistance, in the decades after some of those continued to make attempts to resist.

For the novelist that pursues this course it means that the writing act may constitute a position-taking in regard to the imposition of political power and resistance to it. However, individuals and movements engaged in acts of political resistance often find themselves split on the question of violence, whether to maintain a pacifist approach or to pursue direct/ militant action that may target physical structures and/or people. The author then must decide how to respond to this, how to represent the conflict and the parties involved. It is worth noting that early Pynchon protagonists are not violent (e.g., Slothrop, despite being in a war, kills no one), and in *Vineland* Weed Atman espouses something that sounds a lot like Gene Sharp's pragmatic non-violent struggle.¹⁹⁸ However, given the arguments for violent action in *Against the Day*, one must ask if Pynchon is the "hippy" type some would take him for. Putting that question aside, we may more importantly ask to what extent a novel can really be considered an act of resistance. After all, even Pynchon himself has cast some doubt on the liberating force of literature. In the introduction to *Slow Learner*, while discussing the apocalyptic anxiety of a new postwar atomic world Pynchon quips that responses range from madness to ignoring it and that "Somewhere on this spectrum of impotence is writing fiction about it" (*SL* xxix). But is this true and does he believe it? In the sense that authors cannot write atomic weapons out of existence it is true that they are helpless. They are also not very likely to change the course of immediate geopolitical events. But does this

¹⁹⁸ When someone asks Weed Atman about using violence against the 'Man' he responds: "It's wrong because if you pick up a rifle, the Man picks up a machine gun" (*VL* 229), in other words it authorizes the dominant power to use the tools of war on the agents of resistance.

mean that they are “impotent,” truly powerless? Regardless of what Pynchon thinks, not all would agree. John Speller writes that, “Another of the ways in which writers and artists could contribute to the symbolic struggle was by using the ‘symbolic weapons’ of comedy, parody, satire, and pastiche, to unsettle our usual confidence and belief in figures of authority” (*Bourdieu and Literature*, 140). And more intuitively, would regimes detain and kill writers and artists, abolish them or try to erase their names if they did not feel threatened by the symbolic power behind the acts that amount to an expenditure of cultural capital in order to undermine the invoked authority of the dominant faction of society? Clearly not. And although Bourdieu would caution us against the mistaken belief in literary practice as an essentially subversive act, it is still possible for social struggles to arise out of symbolic ones (Speller 141). Whether or not Pynchon is an anarchist or promoting violent struggle, it is clear that he has consistently put the paranoia provoking matrix of politics-money-power at the center of all his novels whereas a number of his colleagues have not positioned themselves in this way.

If I have dedicated a good number of pages to explaining the genesis of Thomas Pynchon’s habitus, it is not only because it is necessary in order to avoid being reductive or simplistic but because it will also facilitate the understanding of Pynchon’s trajectory. The two terms are connected through the positions occupied (consciously or not) by the agent, given that the habitus predisposes one to taking certain positions and it is this series of positions that then constitutes the trajectory of an agent or group. In the case of an author each text (poem, play, novel, etc.) amounts to a position taken in the literary field. Bourdieu writes that, “the practices of writers and artists, starting with their works, are the product of the meeting of two histories, the history of the production of the position occupied and the history of the production of the dispositions of its occupants” (*RA* 256). Thomas Pynchon occupies the place of novelist, but of a specific sort which I will describe as a writer of experimentalist historical fiction noted for its encyclopedic and maximalist nature – a rather specific niche within the restricted field of literary production. A study of Pynchon’s authorial practice involves some understanding of the history of this position, which requires a good deal of work. However, the greater difficulty is the second history, that of the occupants’ dispositions; even looking at a handful of writers occupying a position similar to Pynchon’s would be

quite difficult. This has also been noted by Bo Ekelund. In his essay “Space, Time, and John Gardner”, Ekelund notes that,

For the study of a single author’s trajectory, however, Bourdieu’s method presents various problems. [...] it is certainly plausible to assume that the relations between the literary field and the fields of education and power are decisive for each trajectory, and with this assumption one is obliged to map out thousands of positions and trajectories. Counting only prose writers of the sixties and seventies with a degree of academic recognition, the figure is over fourteen hundred. (218)

In the following section I establish Pynchon’s trajectory in part by looking at the positions he has occupied or avoided as well as drawing on Ekelund’s work on the trajectory of authors.

Thomas Pynchon’s Trajectory

Having already mentioned a number of positions that Pynchon has occupied, this part of my study revisits some material and covers new points before returning to Ekelund’s contribution to the methodology used to study an author’s trajectory. But how does one go about tracing this path through social space without misapplying Bourdieu’s theory? After all, his approach is meant to avoid a linear trajectory with its teleological underpinnings, the standard ‘great man’ or ‘genius’ biography. Bourdieu criticized this as being like trying to understand a trajectory in the metro without understanding the wider structure and the objective relations between the various stations.¹⁹⁹ So instead of presenting biographical events as so many progressive steps toward inevitable greatness (e.g. “the promise that he showed as a child was confirmed in his first...”), positions will be viewed alongside and against other positions, moves in comparison to other moves – a necessarily limited procedure. This part looks at a number of Pynchon’s positions and moves and divides them into subsections that describe the phases of Pynchon’s trajectory through the social field, which I refer to using terms from rocket take off sequences. After presenting Pynchon’s trajectory from this point of view I move on to Ekelund’s work in this area.

¹⁹⁹ “L’illusion biographique.” In: Actes de la recherche en sciences sociales. Vol. 62-63, June 1986, 69-72.

Where and when do the series of positions that an agent occupies begin? An attempt to define the point of origin of the social origin of social beings could easily deviate into a discussion of the discursive structures that swirl around one prior to birth as well as after, and yet this somewhat Foucauldian view of the formation of the Subject would leave out the objective relations between various positions and moves that agents are confronted with. To be born in Glen Cove's North Country Community Hospital, as was Pynchon, was to be born amongst members of the dominant faction of society; it is clearly not the same as being born in the Bronx (like Doctorow or DeLillo) or further away from the centers of cultural capital as was Ken Kesey (born in Colorado). To this one must add the moves a family might make. Pynchon's family moved a short physical distance from Glen Cove to East Norwich²⁰⁰ but the social distance is greater, amounting to a move toward a lesser position; and yet Pynchon was still close to a major cultural center (New York). This could be compared to moves by other writers such as Cormac McCarthy, who moved from the east coast to rural Tennessee when he was young, or Philip K. Dick, who moved at a young age first from Chicago to San Francisco and then to the east coast before going back to California. These moves may distance agents from cultural centers or bring them nearer, either retarding or accelerating the accumulation of capital and competencies. After all, the positions occupied and the moves made from one position or place to another are what create an agent's base or platform from which an agent's trajectory may develop.

Launch Platform

So what can be seen in the early positions that Pynchon occupies? First we know that his early reading choices included espionage and detective fiction (*SL* introduction), but apparently not westerns and presumably not romance - an expression of taste. However, this taste does not come through in his earliest known juvenilia which some Pynchon scholars have already studied.²⁰¹ In Pynchon's final year at Oyster Bay High

²⁰⁰ See David Cowart's *Thomas Pynchon and the Dark Passages of History*, 2.

²⁰¹ Michael Hartnett's "A High School Record for Disturbing the Peace."

Also, Hollander, Charles. "Pynchon's Juvenilia and Against the Day: The Child is Döppelgänger To the Father." And, Luc Herman's "Early Pynchon" in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Pynchon*.

School, the young man wrote a number of pieces for the high school paper, *The Purple and Gold*. Charles Hollander writes:

The first four columns were written as letters to the Hamster's fictive pal, Sam. This epistolary technique allows the writer to distance himself from the actual people he might be writing of. By camouflaging names, and moving the place and time-frame around, the writer can create the illusion of not writing about the here and now. (46)

Luc Herman corroborates this last when he writes, "Pynchon himself give the game away by suddenly describing "the Boys," a group of rowdy Hamster kids, as attending Oyster Bay" (20). It is striking that instead of modeling his writing on his reading preferences of the time and imitating 'real writers,' Pynchon eschews 'serious' writing in favor of levitas and linguistic japes at the expense of authority figures. This can be contrasted with E. L. Doctorow's early high school writing experience with his story "The Beetle" that was "in the spirit of Kafka,"²⁰² here the position that he takes is quite different from that of Pynchon. It is also worth noting that Pynchon wrote his pieces under a pseudonym, deflecting attention away from himself and keeping out of view while putting his words in full sight. At the very adolescent age of fifteen Pynchon had positioned himself as a social agent and producer of literary texts, endeavors that shape one's habitus even as one marks out new positions. In fact, we may note here that Pynchon's first four pieces for his high school paper were letters but in one of his later pieces he parodies the Arthurian legend, effectively taking up a new position by deploying a different literary technique. Despite whatever importance these early position-takings may have for understanding Pynchon's trajectory, they are limited in number because Pynchon had no more made himself into writer than he was off to Cornell on a scholarship after graduating early and as class salutatorian. Thus Pynchon left East Norwich and went to Ithaca, with a firm base he was ready to set out into the wider world.

Initiating Launch

It is hard to imagine a more auspicious beginning to one's journey on the road to higher education. Unfortunately, there is very little material relating to Pynchon's first

²⁰² From "American Conversation E.L. Doctorow" (Interviewed by Allen Weinstein on 25 Sept. 2008) in the US National Archives.

two years at Cornell while he was enrolled in engineering; many of the comments from friends or professors concern the second half of Pynchon's time at Cornell. We do know from one of his letters²⁰³ that he failed calculus, presumably taken while in engineering, which may have had something to do with making him consider a change of direction in his studies. Whatever the case, after two years of military service Pynchon returned to Cornell and made his grand pivot to the humanities, where he eventually not only enrolled in a writing course but was also on the Senior Board of *The Cornell Writer* in which he published his first story "The Small Rain." Two of Pynchon's friends, Richard Fariña and Kirk Sale, also worked on the paper as did a girl with whom Pynchon had a fairly serious relationship that she terminated (Kachka). Did Pynchon follow his friends to the little press? As mentioned before these friendships were clearly of great importance then and later. About Cornell's writing program Pynchon's friend Tod Perry has said, "Everyone around us was writing something ambitious or lyrical and interesting." It should not be forgotten that this was the time of the rise of creative writing programs and Cornell had attracted great instructors but also great writers like Vladimir Nabokov. A fine place for an aspiring young writer, but how does one stand out? Having turned his back on engineering (but not maths or science) Pynchon was faced with the question of how to make his first mark or in other words what type of mark to make.

Pynchon's early stories, mentioned briefly above, provide some interesting examples of position-takings. His first short story, "The Small Rain" has a Jewish protagonist and it occurs in the south far from Pynchon's home. This type of frame corroborates Ekelund's findings in respect to his study of the 1955 cohort of debut authors. Ekelund et al locate a cluster of authors in the upper left hand quadrant that joins "birthplace in New York and residence in New York at the time of the debut, low age at debut, Jewish cultural background, and a working-class background as the most distinctive qualities" (13). One major difference with this cluster compared to a similar cluster in the 1940 cohort is that this later group of debuting authors has a lower degree of "literary local patriotism" (13), they are more likely to set the location of their narratives outside of their birthplace. Perhaps this can be explained in part by Pynchon's

²⁰³ From the Harry Ransom Center at the University of Texas in Austin. Letter dated 27 Mar. 1964.

own confession (*SL* xii) that he got the “details” of the story from someone in the Navy and he recycled it. Later stories do have more urban settings which is in line with Ekelund’s assertion that, “the cluster of biographies associated with New York City and high a level of economic capital is linked to settings in the Northeast and a metropolis,” (12) something one finds more complexly developed in *V.* as the narrative is split between New York and places far from US soil.

These various positions that Pynchon occupies stand out because they were eventually published and as such figure in Pynchon’s publishing history. But what of the failed attempts at position taking? Shouldn’t we also consider these potential paths that his trajectory did not take? Another New York writer, Philip Roth, speculates thus:

I got my master’s degree in August of 1955. I was twenty-two. Then I went into the army. If I had not gone into the army, I might have proceeded right on for my Ph.D. It’s strange for me to imagine what my life would have been like had I succeeded in doing that. But by the time I got out of the army, I’d become impatient with schools – or rather, with schooling. I came to New York to look for a job (125).

This was a ‘game’ that Bourdieu played even with himself: how does the agent’s habitus perform if placed in a different field with a different logic? So one may ask what would have happened if Pynchon had been luckier with his Ford Foundation proposal. This early attempt to take a position firmly in the heart of the pole of ‘pure’ artistic production, and thus glean some measure of capital from association with the world of opera, had a bold idea - to mix the ‘high’ culture (consecrated artistic production rich in cultural capital) with the ‘low’ culture of sci-fi (in the fifties it did not garner much money and little or no cultural capital). This unorthodox mix of high and low was not new, and not new to Pynchon. Bakhtin has shown how high church liturgy was mixed with low corporal humor on festival days and that this happened in literature in works by Rabelais or Cervantes, for example. But Pynchon would have been familiar with a more common example in the form of the animated short films by Warner Brothers involving Bugs Bunny, Porky the Pig and others; these often drew on ‘high’ cultural works (opera, art, or literature) to make low jokes. A mindset clearly akin to Pynchon’s as demonstrated in his juvenilia.

We see then that relations often lead to the occupation of some position, but likewise a new position may initiate a relationship with others that also affects an

agent's social trajectory. Pynchon had classes with a number of rather famous professors who had their own cultural and symbolic capital to draw on. On one hand Pynchon had class with Professor M.H. Abrams, a major force behind *The Norton Anthology of English Literature*, but he also studied under professors/ writers such as James McConkey, Baxter Hathaway and Herbert Gold. According to Charles Hollander, Pynchon knew, "Herbert Gold, who offered Pynchon and Fariña access to a New York literary connection, James Silberman at *Dial* magazine" (13). This is corroborated by David Hajdu's research in *Positively Fourth Street* in which he indicates that it was James Silberman who put Pynchon into contact with the young literary agent Candida Donadio (270). This all unfolds in 1959 and when Pynchon gets his story "Lowlands" published in *New World Writing* it is with Donadio as his agent.²⁰⁴ One might say then that Pynchon enjoyed a certain amount of literary sponsorship. About this Mattias Blom writes:

In relation to educational background and its importance for the launching of a literary career, we can consider the role that 'sponsorship' plays in this process. Conventionally, one would regard the post-debut sponsorship crucial in determining long-term literary success or failure, but [...] we hypothesize that pre-debut academic sponsorship can help launch a literary career but that it might not help sustain it. There seem to be other factors, such as proximity to the center of publishing (i.e. New York city), type of academic sponsorship, position of sponsor etc., that play important roles in the making or breaking of a literary career. (373)

Clearly, Pynchon had 'sponsors' who enjoyed significant positions in the literary field and had appreciable amounts of capital from which and with which they could consecrate cultural producers and products as legitimate. Given the web of relations and the cultural capital that Pynchon had attained he was in very good position to start his literary career.

Take Off

It would not be unfair to say that no sooner had Pynchon appeared than he 'disappeared.' However, it should be stated first that Pynchon had already proved to be "camera shy" by not appearing in the Cornell yearbook, a dislike he discusses in a letter (Hajdu 178); so perhaps it is better to say that he was ducking the camera before he was famous. Of course when he avoided some journalists from *Time* magazine in Mexico

²⁰⁴ This is clear from Al Silverman's *The Time of Their Lives*, see page 157.

after the success of *V.*, the myth began. Or, as Pynchon scholar Edward Mendelson put it: "At the beginning, he never declared his anonymity, it just grew" (63).²⁰⁵ This expression of his predisposition against being photographed became a position regarding his interaction with the media. That position coincided with the growing predominance in the relatively new field of 'literary theory' of a mode of formalism that was different from the New Critics in that it infused a heavy dose of semiotics into its approach. This formalist mode of literary study came in part to be associated with Roland Barthes'²⁰⁶ essay "The Death of the Author," published in English in the journal *Aspen* in 1967. The apparent 'disappearance' of Thomas Pynchon was more than congenial to this new mode of reading; as Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck write, "Pynchon has proved to be a perfect fit for the Death of the Author thesis advanced by Roland Barthes [...] This coincidence between author image and cultural context contributed to the success of this image," (11)²⁰⁷ an image created more by media and academia than the author himself. Despite having since been criticized,²⁰⁸ the 'Death of the Author' mixed very well with Pynchon's rejection of media and the fame machine that was by the sixties putting authors on TV. For many Pynchon was a playful example of a Signifier seemingly separate from its fugitive Signified: the very icon of a postmodern author. And although this would not convert him into a best-selling author, it certainly helped establish his position in the literary field. But that all came later, with time. So when did Pynchon's career take off? After he did.

When Pynchon's agent Candida Donadio offered Pynchon's unwritten debut novel to Corlies Smith at JB Lippincott in 1960 she admitted that it was not written and she did not know what it was about. When Smith asked her why Lippincott should pay the advance she responded that it was so Pynchon could go to Seattle (Silverman 157); this was when his friend David Seidler's girlfriend offered to get him a job at Boeing

²⁰⁵ Quoted in Nancy Jo Sales' "Meet Your Neighbor, Thomas Pynchon." *New York Magazine* Books 11 Nov. 1996.

²⁰⁶ While scrutinizing the Picard-Barthes Affair in his *Homo Academicus* (Stanford, 1988) Pierre Bourdieu offers his criticism of Barthes.

²⁰⁷ Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck "The Implied Author: A Secular Excommunication" *Style* 2011.

²⁰⁸ Bo Ekelund writes that, "The selective tradition that restricts itself to a brief manifesto by Roland Barthes and/or a short postscript on the author by Michel Foucault leaves us without a critical purchase on the role played by the RTD [rhetoric of terminality and decline] *sic* in the US literary field" (6) in "The 'Age of Criticism': Debating the Decline of Literature in the US 1940-2000.

where he would eventually work as a technical writer. To move from New York to Seattle was a major move as it would take him away from the heart of the publishing world and a major US culture capital, on the other hand it would give him steady income and offer less distractions. Letters in the Harry Ransom Center collection make it clear that he was not fond of Seattle.²⁰⁹ Research by Luc Herman and John Krafft give them good reason to claim “that most of the important editorial work on the novel had been done by the time Smith left Lippincott” (3) in the fall of 1962. If Pynchon liked New York as much as he disliked Seattle why didn’t he go back to the east coast while his book was going to press? Why did he go to Mexico? Certainly not just because he had been in the Spanish club in high school, although that would dispose him towards it to some degree. A clue can be found in the same letter in which he mentions “escape money”; after that phrase he adds parenthetically “(escape to where God knows but I wish it was Italy).” But why? It is telling that this is all in response to Kirk Sale’s interest and work with or in Africa. In a letter written a year later (29 June 1963), Pynchon again mentions traveling somewhere, this time to Africa, writing: “About Africa, yes, I think it would be valuable for me too. [...] I do believe in going out and gathering information, which is after all what books, fiction or non, are based on.” Did Pynchon feel like he needed to deepen the pool of cultural capital that he was drawing on for his fiction? It is clear from his letters that his time in Mexico, during which he read a good deal of both Jorge Luis Borges and Julio Cortázar, going as far as translating the latter’s “Axolotl,” which has not been published, that he benefitted from the experience immensely. It helped distinguish him from other hip young writers that had served in the military and studied literature and writing. It was in Mexico that the journalists from *Time* did not find him but instead a legend was founded. So it is not incorrect to say that Pynchon took off before his literary reputation did. He had to go to Mexico to be not discovered *in absentia*.

Into the Literasphere

Pynchon’s use of the Joycean virtue of silence in regard to the media simplified his life in that he did not have to take positions or choose his words in relation to the

²⁰⁹ Letter dated 28 May 1962, Pynchon writes of Seattle: “This city is a nightmare.” It is in the same letter that he mentions “escape money.”

unfolding events of the sixties when questioned by journalists.²¹⁰ However, he was faced with the question of how to continue his literary career, what next step to take. As Joanna Scott puts it:

Whether they considered literary modernism a failed experiment, characterized by H.G. Wells as a “monstrous egoism of artistry,” or a grand success that expresses, in Virginia Woolf’s estimate, “the quick of the mind,” novelists beginning their careers in the 1950’s and 60’s necessarily had to position themselves in response to the dramatic shape-shifting that had just occurred in their genre (ix).

Given the success of his novel *V.*, Pynchon could have continued with quasi-espionage fiction or pursued a more standard historical fiction. Up until the sixties the paradigm of literary production of narrative was solidly realist. From Dreiser’s *Sister Carrie* or works by Hemingway or Steinbeck up to the Beats, literature focused on quotidian events. The ripples of the so-called Latin American Literary Boom were just starting to hit the US cultural shores in the early 1960’s. In fact John Barth would eventually mention Borges in his 1967 essay “The Literature of Exhaustion” and Michel Foucault makes reference to Borges only a bit earlier in *The Order of Things* (1966). In this sense Pynchon caught the wave early.

Of course there were other currents reaching the US in the form of Beckett’s writing and the French *nouveau roman*, though it is not clear how aware Pynchon was of these other writers. At any rate realism of some sort was the default position. However, in Pynchon’s second novel, to which in a letter (23 Nov. 1962) to friends he had referred to as “the optionbreaker,” he takes a decided turn for the less quotidian. Did this less ‘realist’ mode of narrative offer him a new position as well as an acceptable way to break contract with Lippincott? After all it was his second novel so he could not just create a disastrously flawed work solely in order to force a divorce with his then publisher. His authorial practice continued in this direction with what some would call his opus magnum, *Gravity’s Rainbow*, a novel replete with scenes that are far from realist. From a certain point of view these were risky moves that in retrospect have paid

²¹⁰ Malcolm X was publicly censured by his church after his comments to journalists about the Kennedy assassination, a fact mentioned in his autobiography published after his death. Malcolm’s appearance in *Gravity’s Rainbow* indicates Pynchon’s awareness of Malcolm’s story.

off, helping Pynchon to accumulate a great amount of capital which can be measured to some extent by the awards he received in approximately one decade.

But of course the series of positions that compose a trajectory include more than writing books, an author can take a position in other ways. Receiving awards and /or prizes grants authors an amount of prestige and thus symbolic capital. It should be noted that Pynchon's *V.* won the William Faulkner Award for best first novel and was nominated for the National Book Award, both of which probably helped spur *Time* to look for the "mysterious" young author. *The Crying of Lot 49*, his second novel, won the Richard and Hinda Rosenthal award in 1966, helping to build his reputation even further. To put it in perspective, Pynchon got a \$500 advance for *V.* and a decade later Pynchon received ten times that much "up front" (Silverman 161) for his next novel. His third novel, *Gravity's Rainbow*, was awarded the National Book Award and should have received the Pulitzer but the committee's vote was overridden and no award was presented in 1974. A year later Pynchon was offered the Howells Medal but declined it. What we see here are a number of possible positions that one can take regarding awards and to understand how each position affects the trajectory it is worth looking at a little more closely.²¹¹

Awards and prizes are not new but the last century has seen a great proliferation of these icons of social recognition; this complex and until recently understudied field is handled admirably by James F. English in his book *The Economy of Prestige*. He notes that when Sartre refused the Nobel Prize it was because receiving it would produce "a substantial net diminishment of his symbolic wealth" (220); he adds that in the mid-sixties "it was still possible to occupy a position on the cultural field from which such a sincere and implacable refusal made symbolic sense." English asserts that Thomas Bernhard's use of the 'strategy of condescension' in the 1970's already seemed "dated and curmudgeonly" (221) and that from that point on it loses its capacity to "reinforce one's artistic legitimacy" (221). Ultimately, the refusal of an award does more to

²¹¹ In *Thomas Pynchon: The Art of Allusion* (1980) David Cowart briefly mentions the awards that contribute to Pynchon's "growing stature" (6), but does little more than speculate that Pynchon must have enjoyed the "Pulitzer Prize fiasco of 1973" more than the "attempted award of the Howells Medal", reasoning that "an artist is in trouble if, obliged traditionally to shock the bourgeois, he suddenly finds the bourgeois lining up to do him honor" (7). For Bourdieu this fascinating dynamic is central to the literary field and thus what must be analysed.

augment the profile of that award than to bring it under scrutiny. However, English sees “a transitional moment” in the way that Pynchon accepted the award. Without going into too much detail, Pynchon did not appear to receive the prize but sent the eccentric comic Professor Irwin Corey, whom many thought was Pynchon. The speech was rambling and slightly incoherent to the audience; a stunt of this nature would have to have been approved by not only Pynchon but his publisher, Viking. This tactic avoids the binary of acceptance or refusal, or as James English calls it, “an ambiguity between these two extremes”; and one that paid off. According to English “The event increased Pynchon’s specific visibility as an “invisible” recluse writer” and it “also increased the sales of his (academically acclaimed but commercially resistant) novel” (223). A year later he rejected the Howells Medal in no uncertain terms with a letter. On the other hand more than a decade later Pynchon would accept a MacArthur Foundation Fellowship. So here we see that his trajectory is not linear by any means. However, of all these various opportunities to position himself in regard to awards the one that stands out is his prank for the NBA; “Pynchon clearly made the award ceremony a kind of parodic version of itself, a false or pretended exchange, a simulation of a consecration, an event which, however well it succeeded in accomplishing its purposes, could not quite be taken seriously” (English, 224). Perhaps this is why Pynchon has received a handful of awards or honorary titles and an author like John Updike has thirty-nine (English, 345).²¹² The various occasions of receiving an award have allowed Pynchon to position himself in a way that confirms his singular position within the literary field.

Despite the importance of awards and the capital they may confer upon an author, there is another way for a writer to position him/herself and that is through the writing of essays. We have already seen that Pynchon’s 1965 essay “Journey into the Mind of Watts” was significant in how it positioned him in the literary field but his later essays should also be mentioned. A long quiet period followed before Pynchon produced another non-fiction work for the wider public.²¹³ On the 28th of October 1984

²¹² English includes in his list: Philip Roth with 31 awards, 26 for Peter Carey, 23 for Toni Morrison, and 21 for Salman Rushdie.

²¹³ The decade of silence was first broken by Pynchon in 1983 when he wrote an introduction for the reissue of his deceased friend Richard Fariña’s book *Been Down So Long It Looks Like Up to Me*; at the time his first-person speech was so rare that no one had reason to think that Pynchon would continue in this vein, after all he hadn’t written a word or even been quoted for about ten years. Over the next decade

(just in time for Halloween) Pynchon's "Is it OK to Be a Luddite?" was published in the *New York Times Book Review*; it came just six months after the publication *Slow Learner*, his collection of short stories. The essay makes evident Pynchon's concerns about and suspicions of technology's then changing and developing role in society. In the midst of the 1980's as the 'information age' burst into view with the arrival of the PC, Pynchon took a cautionary position. About a decade later, and three years after the publication of *Vineland*, Pynchon joined other writers to create a series of essays on the Seven Deadly Sins for the *New York Times Book Review*. Pynchon, logically enough, wrote about Sloth; the essay was called "Closer my Couch to Thee." His essay, which was first in the series, got pride of place for a reason. Having the elusive Thomas Pynchon writing about Sloth would pull readers in, making it more likely for them to follow the other essays.²¹⁴ Four years later Pynchon would publish his much awaited novel *Mason & Dixon*. These essays and the other non-fiction texts he wrote at this time gave him greater visibility before and after publication of his fiction works. Given this successful strategy why hasn't Pynchon produced more in the way of essays?

Some of Pynchon's peers have made names for themselves in part by writing essays, for example William Gass. Others have also written essays that have been widely circulated with the author benefitting from that circulation (for example, John Barth's "The Literature of Exhaustion"). Pynchon's case is different in that he has neither produced very many essays nor have they enjoyed wide dissemination; also he does not engage in aesthetics but prefers to write commentaries on social issues without making it political or social commentary read from a soapbox. This allows him to position himself differently from his peers; he is neither seen as an essayist of the academic stripe nor as some prescriptive pedant sounding off on issues of the day.

After the National Book Award incident, Pynchon "went to ground" according to David Shetzline (Kachka) and he was even more invisible than ever. Rumors swirled about his existence or whereabouts; he was said to be writing a book. For more than a decade there was no news from Thomas Pynchon, more than enough time for one's

he would produce half a dozen non-fiction texts offering biographical, aesthetic and/ or political insights or comments.

²¹⁴ These essays were then collected and published as *Deadly Sins* (Morrow, 1993)

name to fade a bit from the public memory. Apparently, at this time Pynchon became disillusioned with literary stardom, writing to friends in 1974 that he hasn't "been able to write anything to anybody for a couple of years" and he goes on to claim that he "can't understand any of this literary stuff," (from letters in the Harry Ransom center collection). With no obligation to teach or write essays or articles to maintain himself, Pynchon had time to think. What next?

Spinning up in the loneliness of his literary orbit, disillusioned by the trappings of fame, Pynchon was on the point of another turn which has already been alluded to but here must be expanded upon because it deals with a series of important changes in position, all in a relatively short period of time. To do so I must turn back to his short stories.

By the end of the seventies, at the height of Pynchon's decade of silence, these examples of early Pynchon fiction were out of print and in demand. Given the situation, a small publisher in the UK called Aloes Books decided to try to publish some of these early works starting in the mid-seventies.²¹⁵ They started with "Mortality and Mercy in Venice," for which they had received permission, in 1976 and went through three printings. Next they published "Low-lands" in three printings, noting in the book that they had received permission from Candida Donadio. This was communicated in a letter to Aloes Books circa 1977 that informed them that the cost for permission to print would be \$75. The three printings came to almost 5,000 copies. After that Aloes Books decided to print Pynchon's "The Secret Integration" and contacted Donadio but received no response so they went ahead with the publishing. Next they published "The Small Rain." In total Aloes Books published more than fifteen thousand copies, sales of which Thomas Pynchon saw hardly a dime. Aloes was contacted in September 1983 by Pynchon's new agent Melanie Jackson who informed Aloes of Pynchon's displeasure about the 'pirated' edition. A solution was reached, and in 1984 Thomas Pynchon's first book in a decade, *Slow Learner*, was published with an Introduction by the absent author himself, appearing a little less absent. What had happened?

²¹⁵ I came by this information thanks to an article by Florina Kostulias Jenkins called "An Enquiry into the Nature: Aloes Books and the Pynchon "Piracies" - See more at: <http://www.aba.org.uk/Book-Collecting-Details.aspx?bcid=51#sthash.Xiz8PU6c.dpuf>.

In January of 1982 Pynchon fired Candida as his agent. She had been negligent in her duties and missed a good publishing opportunity. The young Ms. Jackson that was working for Donadio was able to rectify the situation but only by striking out on her own and taking Pynchon with her. It was a good time to bring Pynchon back. By the end of the decade Pynchon would have his first novel in almost two decades published and also have married and settled down into domestic bliss, far from the peripatetic existence of flight and escape that had been his before. In just two years he changed agent, civil status and publisher, and was about to be back and as front and center as Pynchon gets. In 1990 with the publication of *Vineland* readers spoke of a 'new' Pynchon whose writing had more family than in previous novels.²¹⁶ He had started his own family and ended the estrangement that stood between himself and his parents (Kachka).²¹⁷ The 1990's saw the return of Pynchon and the new millennium eventually saw a Pynchon novel adapted into a movie.

In John Thompson's *Merchants of Culture*, he makes it clear how important it can be for a novel to be made into a movie. To demonstrate the force of the 'movie effect' Thompson focuses on Ian McEwan's *Atonement* and the boost it received from the movie adaptation, concluding that, "Although not as large and long-lasting as the uplift typically produced by an Oprah pick, the movie effect is impressive nonetheless" (281). One must look beyond the economic capital generated by the sales and look at the symbolic capital that it generates for the author that everyone "must read," to understand how this affects the author's trajectory through the literary field. Pynchon is a rather tardy beneficiary of this exchange compared to members of his cohort like Philip Roth, Cormac McCarthy or others. Of course it should be noted that Pynchon's novels have up until recently not been the type that lend themselves easily to adaptation to cinema. In contrast we may look at Philip Roth whose 1958 short story "Expect the Vandals," set in WWII on a Pacific Island, fit the times and was easily adapted to cinema in 1960. (He has since then had a number of novels adapted to cinema.) The same could

²¹⁶ One doesn't really see much of the parents of Pynchon's early protagonists.

²¹⁷ Boris Kachka quotes Pynchon's former girlfriend Mary Ann Tharaldsen as saying about Pynchon and his parents that "he was disconnected from them" (3).

be said of E.L. Doctorow's 1960 debut novel "Welcome to Hard Times," a western (a central genre of the period) that was adapted to film in 1967.

Another author from Pynchon's generation that has also had great success with cinema adaptations of his novels is Cormac McCarthy. However, McCarthy runs the risk of too much success too quickly,²¹⁸ affecting his position as a producer for the restricted market of cultural goods. A movie adaptation of a book is more of a risk (for the author as well as the producer, director and the rest) when it is a "hard book" (e.g. *Ulysses*, *Gravity's Rainbow*, etc.). In order to generate greater capital for the author the movie production should have an "all-star" cast as well as director and sound. *Inherent Vice* may not have the encyclopedic range and length of other novels but it does have the aura of Pynchon and it lends itself fairly well to adaptation. Thus it is understandable that Pynchon's first novel to be adapted is one that is considered by many to be 'easy reading' or 'Pynchon-light'. Regardless of how one rates the novel or the movie, the decision by Pynchon to let Paul Thomas Anderson (a highly regarded director) make the adaptation was astute as it put him more solidly in the public eye than many would have imagined possible two decades ago. Excitement reached a new pitch when it was learned that Pynchon had lent his voice to a promotional trailer for the book.

Pynchon Reaches Out

Who would have thought that the absent author, the invisible author, would actually speak out someday? Some had already detected a change. Back in the mid-nineties the late Pynchon scholar Steven Tomaske said about Pynchon that, "He doesn't seem as concerned with being a recluse recently."²¹⁹ What can be said about this new change in position, one that is all the more radical given how much of a stake Pynchon had in that former position of silence? Well, as mentioned earlier his long silence was definitively broken in 1984 with the introduction he wrote for *Slow Learner*, giving

²¹⁸ The fact that the succession of McCarthy novels adaptations has been rapid and the time between novel production and movie production has decreased, (and in the case of *The Counselor*, for which he wrote the screenplay, zero) makes McCarthy look more like a producer of texts for the mass market of cultural goods.

²¹⁹ Quoted in "Meet Your Neighbor, Thomas Pynchon" by Nancy Jo Sales. *New York Magazine* 11 November 1996.

scholars “a vital source of information” (Herman 21) but this was followed up with essays and other writings²²⁰ culminating in his introduction to a special edition of *1984* (Plume 2003) to celebrate George Orwell’s Centenary. This last is very fitting for Pynchon, of course, but more than that it assures the publisher that it will generate more interest than if the introduction were written by someone else. However, Pynchon also benefits by having his name put beside Orwell’s. Additionally, he uses the opportunity to position himself and, as David Kipen²²¹ writes, “articulates an unsentimental humanism relevant to developing events.” Pynchon also takes a position in the sub-field of literary history by responding to the charges of Orwell’s supposed anti-Semitism, which he finds not well substantiated. Pynchon takes a more significant position when he offers this reading of *1984*: “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,” (xiv). The word fascism appears (in various forms) almost a dozen times in the text; his concern is not exactly ambiguous. This very public statement with its political concern continued the trend of Pynchon’s reaching out through the media of printed text. But he did not stop there.

In 2004 the most unknown famous author of encyclopedic novels in the US appeared (with a bag on his head) on *The Simpsons*, one of the most well-known US TV series; in fact he was in two separate episodes that year, even lending his voice to the program and creating a stir.²²² (There is no small amount of irony in that the first episode that Pynchon appears in also has a cameo by Tom Clancy, both of whom praise Marge’s book in that episode; it is likely that most viewers had heard of Tom Clancy, the mass market author, and not Thomas Pynchon, the ‘great’ author. This mixing of cultural producers or products from opposing parts of the cultural field is typical of *The Simpsons*.) This step onto TV certainly surprised people. However, it is hard to say if it created as much of a buzz among his readership as the next occasion when he called out from behind the veil of silence. In 2006 as *Against the Day* was set to arrive in stores,

²²⁰ For a fuller listing see the chronology in *The Cambridge Companion to Thomas Pynchon*.

²²¹ David Kipen, “Pynchon Brings Added Currency to ‘Nineteen Eighty-Four’” *Chronicle Book Critic*, Saturday, May 3, 2003, SF Gate. His title exposes the exchange of symbolic capital in the pairing of the two authors.

²²² A quick look at the Pynchon List serve in January of 2004 reveals how a group read of *Vineland* was interrupted by Pynchon’s appearance on the series and started a somewhat lengthy thread.

there appeared on Amazon a description for the book, with Pynchon credited for the blurb. The subsequent disappearance of the description furthered speculation about the authenticity of the text, whether it was an accident or a marketing ploy. It was later confirmed to be by Pynchon and was used with some changes on the book's jacket. Having a text by Pynchon 'leaked' out on the internet was something new, but his next step was even more titillating for fans. For the book *Inherent Vice* his voice was used on a video for the book's promotion; later it was rumored that he subtly and imperceptibly 'appears' in the film. Granted, these last examples of a less-silent Pynchon have less political thrust than his introduction to *1984*, but they do show a willingness to make use of changes in technology and media to abet Pynchon in his tentative but more frequent enunciations made in the modern public sphere.

With the series of positions that Pynchon has come to occupy or abandon since the mid-eighties, and thus affecting his trajectory, some scholars have voiced their doubts about the direction of his writing. Kathryn Hume provides an example of this concern in her essay "Pynchon's Alternate Realities from *V.* to *Inherent Vice*" in which she explains what she sees as "a substantive departure from" his earlier work, which causes her to ask, "Has Pynchon simply grown up? Or grown old?" (1) What I have tried to show by laying out a series of positions that Pynchon has taken or moves that he has made in response to the available positions in the field, is that change in one's position affects change in habitus and thus practice. After all parenthood changes people biologically and socially. Why should scholars expect the same "multiple worlds of reality" (Hume 1) present in Pynchon's previous narratives to be woven into his latest works? Is this a sign of creative impoverishment or is there another way to look at Pynchon's later novels? By looking at his trajectory in the literary field and wider social field we might come to another conclusion.

Ekelund's Approach to Trajectory Study

However, lest we become too fond of the series of positions cited above as some totalizing view of Pynchon's trajectory, it is good to remember that there are innumerable moments and events that compose this series and I have selected a few.

Other moments - in class, at parties, after movies, either choosing clubs or music or food and drink - they are positions we occupy and demonstrations of our habitus. One could add to the number of Pynchon's position-takings that I have referred to above and that would provide a more detailed picture, but it still leans towards "biographical 'career study'..." (Ekelund 218) without additional support. Fortunately, there is a precedent to follow in work done by Bo Ekelund to whom I have already referred. His work is especially applicable because he has applied Bourdieu's ideas to the study of the US author John Gardner (b. 1933) who was a contemporary of Pynchon and a member of his generational cohort. Ekelund observes that, "It is easy enough situate the writer's position-takings, in the form of publications, in a chronology, a succession of neutral dates. The question we then must ask ourselves is: How do we get from a chronology to the *real time of the field*?" (224) Ekelund's approach is based on the idea "that the field concept, this spatial paradigm, can yield temporal structures with which individual trajectories can be analyzed" (218). For him this involves analysis at three different levels: first at the level of the crisis; second, the individual field; and third focusing on the habitus.

Following Bourdieu, Ekelund sees "events that effect synchronization" (221) of the 'objective time' of chronologies and orders of time specific to a particular field, and it is at these points of struggle in the field or tension between fields that lead to crisis. These critical moments are opportunities for agents to execute or reformulate their strategies and take positions thus creating generations, groups, or movements. Ekelund asserts that "The crucial unit for the project of constructing the individual trajectory as an object of study, then, is the break, the successful claim to represent something new" (225). He goes on to note two major breaks between 1945 and 1990: the first in 1960 and the second in 1975, creating three generations. Ekelund places Pynchon firmly in the second post war generation of writers alongside Barth, Barthelme and others,²²³ but points out that John Gardner started much later than Pynchon and also had to wait longer for his big break-through novel. Given that "Gardner was a latecomer and thus subordinated to" predecessors like Pynchon, he could claim allegiance to this group or

²²³ In the essay Ekelund associates these writers with Robert Scholes 1967 *The Fabulators*.

“defect from the camp in favor of a new position-taking” (227); Gardner’s *On Moral Fiction* makes it clear he chose the latter.

Having looked at how crisis in the field leads to a break to which the agent responds, we must now turn our attention briefly to the “individual field, whose relative autonomy frames a struggle over the time of the field that in turn produces the phenomenon of literary generations” (Ekelund 219). In the introduction to *Slow Learner* Pynchon gives his readers a clear idea of how he saw the literary field prior to entering it. He frames the struggle as between two groups. In discussing social and class division Pynchon transitions to the subject of literature and writes, “The conflict in those days was, like most everything else, muted. In its literary version it shaped up as traditional vs Beat fiction” (xvi). Though Pynchon does not provide specific examples of ‘traditional’, the very fact that he leaves it open makes it fairly broad, (from Richardson to Hemingway, for example). Moreover, when Pynchon indicated some sources of influence he put Kerouac and Bellow alongside “emerging voices like those of Herbert Gold or Philip Roth” (xv) giving them the appearance of being a generation of writers. And although Roth belongs to Pynchon’s birth cohort (he is four years older), he could be said to belong to an older generation of writers. Bourdieu writes:

The ageing of authors, works or schools is something quite different from a mechanical sliding into the past. It is engendered in the fight between those who have already left their mark and are trying to endure, and those who cannot make their own marks in their turn without consigning to the past those who have an interest in stopping time, in eternalizing the present state (RA 157)

Pynchon’s words push Kerouac and Roth into a past that predates Pynchon’s writing as he reflects on the positions he perceived to be available in the literary field. However, it is this vision of the history of the field which is generated by Pynchon’s own embodied history, his habitus, maintaining the past in the present and generating practices of categorization.

Given the space above already dedicated to the genesis and formation of Pynchon’s habitus, I will not spend much time on it here; however, I will show how Ekelund uses this central Bourdieusian concept for the study of an author’s trajectory. For Professor Ekelund the chief reason for employing Bourdieu’s theory can be summarized thus:

Instead of the static pairs of text and society or life and times, Bourdieu's model focuses [on] *sic* a moving point in social space and time, which is concretized by being endowed with a *habitus* – a class-specific and individual repository of internalized structures and schemes of practice, carrying within it a socially specific past as well as projecting and orienting itself towards its possible futures – a point that can be traced because it produces a discourse that speaks equally about its own trajectory, about the formal impositions of the field it traverses, and about a complex social totality articulated in relatively autonomous fields, including those contradictions that Jameson sees as the fundamental object of textual analysis. (234)

At this third level of analysis of the author's trajectory, Ekelund sees Gardner as an example of an author whose "habitus and position are imperfectly matched" (231) and that Gardner's "home culture persists throughout Gardner's trajectory, even when it is censored by the demands of the field" (232). One would have to say that the case is rather different for Pynchon due to the fact that his early position as an uproarious writer in high school fit well with the subversive ironies directed at authority and society in the later postwar period. The initial difference in habitus between John Gardner and Thomas Pynchon expresses itself more fully in the different positions they occupied or rejected and thus ultimately their individual trajectories.

As mentioned before, trying to trace all of the successive positions taken by an agent is laborious and not necessarily feasible, and Bourdieu was aware of this which is why he observed that, "numberless individual histories can be replaced by *families of intragenerational trajectories*" and further on he adds "one may distinguish inside the field of cultural production among several major classes of *intergenerational trajectories*" (RA 259). In the first set there are two basic family types: one which is "limited to one sector of the field" and a second one which "implies a change of sector" (Speller 62). Pynchon belongs to the first group as his displacements have occurred within the same sector of the field²²⁴ from his early works to his most recent novels. Now, the question of where Pynchon fits in the trajectories of the intergenerational schema remains to be answered, and here one finds more categories Bourdieu distinguished generally between 'ascending' trajectories that could be either 'direct' or 'crossed,' and 'transversal' trajectories that are "horizontal but, in a sense, declining" (RA 259). Given the descriptions of the various categories, Pynchon's intergenerational

²²⁴ For an example of an author from the second family type, one might consider J.K. Rowling who has tried to shift from production in one sector (children's literature) to another (detective fiction) by a "conversion of one kind of specific capital into another" (RA 259).

trajectory is direct, like “those of writers coming out of the working class or salaried sections of the middle classes” (RA 259). Studying this trajectory in the scope of objective time, it is clear that various historical series entwine and encompass it. Whereas Bo Ekelund sees Gardner’s work within an “encompassing time frame, in which the independent small-hold farmer, Jefferson’s ideal American, is replaced by ‘agribusiness’” (235), we see something quite different for Pynchon. His trajectory occurs with its own “encompassing time frame” but this is composed of the histories of bureaucrats and politicians furthering the insidious creep of technology, accompanied by a slide from a democratic society that has a market based economy into a market society that claims to be democratic, a potential slide into fascism.

If scholars are intent on understanding how authors respond in writing to the world around them, it is important to gain an understanding of the genesis of the author’s habitus and of the generative role of the habitus in the practical logic that lies behind the authorial practice. In the above I have tried to depict the early formation of Pynchon’s habitus and the occupation (or not) of certain positions that have in turn altered or reoriented his dispositions. To this end I have presented and added new information to the study of Pynchon’s work by drawing on correspondence with people that were close to Pynchon as he entered the literary field. This should help explain how the polymathic son of an engineer and Republican politician became a writer and left his potential place in the dominant part of the field to take a position in the dominated sector of the field. An examination of the series of positions that Pynchon has occupied liberates scholars from the biographical illusion of a linear trajectory; as Bourdieu writes: “Biographical analysis thus understood can lead us to the principles of the evolution of the work of art in the course of time” (RA 260). If scholars only focus on the Pynchon family history of tribulations and misfortune, it is all too easy to see the Young Pynchon set out on the road to subversive rebellion and writing his ‘coded’ narratives at the tender age of fifteen. Of course, adolescence is the time for rebellion and who is to say that the young author to be did not have a thirst for justice? Scholar Michael Hartnett has written of the young Pynchon that, “[He] seems to be groping toward some alternative to the ultra-conservative environment” of his upbringing; perhaps this is the origin of what Samuel Thomas calls Pynchon’s “fugitive politics” (91-92). But where

would this have led without the scholarship? Would Pynchon have been forced to attend a less prestigious university without access to the fine professors that he had, and thus also the relationships that brought him contacts in publishing? Surely this was as important for his trajectory as Vibe's patronage was for Kit's.

This series of positions I have sketched, though apparently biographical, is meant to elucidate what John Speller calls "the system of positions and relations between positions in which the events in an agent's life take place (movements between publishers, genres, groups, etc.)" (59). These position-takings, practical responses to the field, are generated by the agent's habitus, initially formed in the family circle but further developed as the social environment grows. Young Pynchon's calling arched from high school juvenilia through Navy and on to college writing courses, giving rise to what Bourdieu calls a '*projet créatur*'. However, there still remains one step to be performed. We have looked at the field of power as it intersects with the literary field, we have looked at the structure of the literary field when Pynchon entered it and later, we have just analyzed the genesis and formation of Pynchon's habitus and trajectory, therefore, now it only remains to analyze the 'space of works.'

Chapter 7

Analysis of the Space of Works

But what is it that necessitates this step? What is the 'space of works'? Both questions are fair given that investigations of the field and Pynchon's habitus are rather understandable, and yet this concept is not so easily grasped. Before proceeding an explanation of this stage and clarification of this space is helpful. According to John Speller, the 'space of works' "sees works as *referring* to one another (by way of refusal, negation, parody, emulation, etc.)" (BL 64), in other words a type of intertextuality. From this view a text, of whatever sort, is a position-taking in response to the relations between agents and/ or specific positions in the field. As mentioned previously, this approach aims to avoid the unnecessary dualism of internal readings (a formalist focus on the text) or external ones (focused on context). Instead, Speller sees a healthy circularity in which the micro-textual and macro-social inform one another. However, there can be no discussion of a space of works without looking first at the space of possibles that interposes itself between the space of positions and the space of position-takings.

John Speller correctly points out that the significance of this stage in the analysis is that it aims to expose the logic that underpins the creation and construction of an author's literary work (BL 64). Bourdieu writes: "It is only by taking into account the specific logic of the field as a space of positions and position-takings, actual and potential (the space of possibles or the problematic), that one may adequately understand the form that these external forms may take in the course of their translation according to this logic" (RA 232). To this he adds, "The correspondence between this or that position and this or that position-taking is not established directly, but only through the mediation of two systems of differences" and it is by looking at these that we come to see the author's point of view. For Bourdieu,

The science of the work of art thus takes as its very own object the *relationship between two structures*, the structure of objective relations between position in the field of production (and among the producers who occupy them), and the structure of objective relations among the position-takings in the space of works. (RA 233)

The relationship between the two spaces is not mechanical; rather the space of possibles rises out of the oppositional relationship of the space of positions and the space of position-takings. Bourdieu compares the space of possibles to the scholastic *ars obligatoria*, "... it acts like a grammar in defining the space of what is possible or conceivable within the limits of a certain field, constituting each of the 'choices' taken," but he adds that the space of possibles "is also an *ars inveniendi* which allows the diversity of acceptable solutions within the limits" (RA 236). So, the space of possibles delimits and constrains but also permits and enables.

In order to reveal how the space of possibles functions as a "discloser of dispositions" Bourdieu asks readers to imagine what agents "might have been if they had found in another state of the field a different opportunity to deploy their dispositions. Indeed, Bourdieu played this game with himself, speculating thus: "I think if I hadn't become a sociologist, I would have become very anti-intellectual. I was horrified by that world."²²⁵ He encourages scholars to apply this exercise to agents in the field as well. Since the dispositions of habitus are durable and transferable, one can imagine what other positions an agent might have occupied. Perhaps John Barth would have continued studying music to become a composer or musician or his fiction might have focused much more on music. Perhaps Pynchon could have continued writing for Boeing or would never even have gone west. According to material in David Hajdu's *Positively 4th Street*, Pynchon considered joining his friend Richard Fariña in the advertising business saying, "Advertising sounded like fun, but in the back always there was that nagging doubt" (47). What would Pynchon the adman have been like? Would working in advertising have cut off his writing career or simply diverted his path away from the rocket looking overhead? If alternate positions are taken in alternate fields, then the system of durable dispositions produces a different practice.

Going forward here we will bear in mind that the space of possibles is "an oriented space, pregnant with position-takings identifiable as objective potentialities, things 'to be done', 'movements' to launch, reviews to create, adversaries to combat, established position-takings to be 'overtaken' and so for the" (RA 235). It is from this

²²⁵ Emily Eakin "The Intellectual Class Struggle" *New York Times* 6 Jan. 2001

space of possibles that that the space of works develops, works both potential and/ or imagined as well as those that were not finished or those that were. In order to see the space of possibles that Pynchon faced we must first look at the space of positions and after that the space of position-takings, revisiting some points previously mentioned but without trying to be exhausting in the account.

Space of Positions

The positions that a writer can occupy are nearly innumerable and as Bourdieu writes, “can only be apprehended through the properties of their occupants” (RA 231), and these positions are not necessarily consciously taken. They range from those numerous elements in a text that an author generates (protagonist type, temporal setting, genre, etc.) to positions outside of the text which can be banal (e.g. dress, abode, acceptance or refusal of positions or awards) or more important positions such as the support or criticism of some social or political issue (e.g. war). These positions have an homologous correspondence with *position-takings*; moreover, the space of position-takings may at times be governed by the space of positions. For example, the late Tom Clancy, whose novels were oriented by the heteronomous pole of the literary field (thus making him, in some ways, Pynchon’s polar opposite), was unlikely to take a pacifist stand. The space of positions will be more or less different for each agent in the field. Let us look now at Pynchon’s.

Having discussed Pynchon’s habitus above there is no need to revisit details of his family history or his youth, instead here I recapitulate a number of positions Pynchon has taken or rejected in order to delimit this theoretical space. First, it must be said that given the position that Pynchon was born into, he came into the social field with a fair amount of capital; he was well prepared for a perfectly successful middle-class life. Graduating early and being salutatorian could have lead quite easily and logically to being something other than an author. Yet it seems that writing for the school paper and being the Voice of the Hamster left a mark that came calling to him, so much so that when his naval service was finished he returned to school and made a serious change in position within the academic field but also in direction. This turn can be seen as an act

of betrayal not because his father was an engineer but because it involves a rejection of membership to the dominant sector of the social field (those professional classes that act as society's architects of buildings, roads, and laws). His decision not to continue in the Navy is not surprising; however, his rejection of teaching positions is a bit surprising and also significant given the number of his cohort peers who have taken some post along the path of their literary career. Despite mild interest in the possibility of work in advertising, Pynchon rejects that position and is left with few options, leaving him with a "hand-to-mouth existence" (Winston 284). He accepts his friend's offer and goes to Seattle and works at Boeing long enough to confirm his dislike of the corporate world. When he finally quit his job at Boeing and went to Mexico, Pynchon's geophysical displacement matched his displacement within the social field and specifically the literary field.

And yet this outlier position was also affected by positions Pynchon failed to occupy, from which he was rejected. About the time that Pynchon was finishing Cornell he experienced a couple of rejections that delimited the space of positions afforded to him. A girl with whom he had a serious relationship broke off with Pynchon, something which bothered him enough to mention two years later in a letter (28 May 1962) to the Sales. At about the same time his Ford Foundation proposal failed to gain him a grant. A few years later (27 Mar. 1964) he would also write to friends about being turned down from enrolling in a university math program. In recounting his rejection from the math program, Pynchon mentions that the Kennedy assassination came at stressful time for him and that he was thinking of abandoning writing when he received the rejection notice. Then, Pynchon writes in a letter to friends that, "It occurred to me that maybe writing was all I was good for;" clearly his perception of the positions available to him affected his course of action. Of course the space of positions changes along with changes in the wider social field regarding politics and technology, for example, but also more specifically in the literary field as shifts occur (e.g. the rise and fall of 'postmodernism' or minimalism, etc.). So, the space of positions fluctuates over time with positions coming into existence or disappearing, and as this occurs the agent in the field takes a position or positions in line with his/her dispositions (*FCP* 62), forming what Bourdieu calls the space of position-takings.

Space of Position-takings

All the positions that an agent might occupy are clearly beyond enumeration so it is convenient that Bourdieu also posits the more focused 'space of literary or artistic position-takings' in *The Field of Cultural Production*. There he writes:

The *space of literary or artistic position-takings*, i.e. the structured set of the manifestations of the social agents involved in the field – literary or artistic work, of course, but also political acts or pronouncements, manifestos or polemics, etc. – is inseparable from the *space of literary or artistic positions* defined by possession of a determinate quantity of specific capital (recognition) and, at the same time, by occupation of a determinate position in the structure of the distribution of this specific capital. (30)

Understood thus we may focus our scope on the texts, primarily public, that Pynchon has produced, starting with his adolescent "Voice of the Hamster" and up to his most recent works. One can easily perceive the series of position-takings by which he enters the literary world of writing and publishing, but it is worth looking closer. One notices that his first short story "The Small Rain" has a Jewish protagonist as would his later debut novel *V.*, a somewhat surprising position to take. Also in his debut the scene of action in New York is not surprising, but scenes in Africa or elsewhere are less common for a debut author. It is not only at the outset of his career that Pynchon has taken what amount to subversive outlier positions; one need only consider *Mason & Dixon* (1997) with its incorporation of Vaucanson's mechanical duck and a cannabis smoking George Washington to see how Pynchon's choice of content continues to constitute position-takings on issues. One could go on in this vein noting the various choices of location for scenes or protagonist types; for example, it is clearly important in *Against the Day* that the Traverse family are working class protagonists and the antagonist is a proto-fascist tycoon. However, any strict focus on his fiction would ignore the other texts that Pynchon has produced such as essays and what not. For instance, "A Journey into the Mind of Watts" counts as what Bourdieu calls "acts of prophetic denunciation [...] so intrinsic to the personage of the intellectual that anyone who aspires to a position (especially a dominant one) in the intellectual field has to perform such exemplary acts" (*FCP* 63). Additionally, when Pynchon wrote an open letter in support of Ian McEwan's *Atonement* it was a clear example of position-taking as was an earlier statement in support of Salman Rushdie. His introduction to *1984* exemplifies another position-taking, in part signaled by his clear reference to what he sees as a real threat from ever

present fascism. However, these are but particular cases of position-takings and we must consider broader reaching ones.

To say that one wants to write is like saying one wants to teach, it shows interest but not exact focus. In creative writing classes students are told to “find their voice” or “think of who they are writing to, who their audience is”; they are asked to focus, self-categorize, to assume a position. For Pynchon it was clear that he wanted to write for the restricted market of cultural goods, evidenced by his early motto, “Make it literary” (*SL* xii) and his allusion to T.S. Eliot, for example, in his first short story. He wanted to occupy a position in the literary field but in line with his habitus. It may help to consider that an area around the pole of ‘pure’ literary production had developed in the US literary field by the mid-sixties. US authors such as the Beats had their position(s) but so did the so-called “Fabulators”;²²⁶ however, one should not ignore the effect of European authors (ranging from Kafka, Mann, Joyce and Beckett to members of the *nouveau roman*) represented to some degree by Nabokov, nor the Latin American writers like Borges. What position could Pynchon take?

Bourdieu claims that, “The propensity to orient oneself towards the most risky positions, and especially the capacity to hold on to them in the absence of any economic profit in the short term, seems to depend in large part on the possession of significant economic and symbolic capital” (*RA* 261), to which he later adds, “it is the people richest in economic capital, cultural capital, and social capital who are the first to head for new positions” (262). Perhaps that is what we see with Pynchon; he does not conform to being a second generation Beat (Kesey) any more than he tries to recast himself as an ersatz Thomas Wolfe or some other icon. The fundamental position-taking that defines Pynchon as an author is that he occupies a position that would seem to be equidistant to those positions mentioned above. Pynchon is beat, but he is not a Beat; one can chart the jazz and dope that arches from *V.* up to *Inherent Vice*, and yet he is no Burroughs or Kerouac. Pynchon is a science guy but he is not Sci-fi; he makes liberal use of science and math but he is no P.K. Dick. Pynchon’s novels have action but they are not action novels à la Carré or Graham Greene. (On this last point it is worth noting that

²²⁶ Robert Scholes *The Fabulators* (Oxford UP, 1967).

Charles Rzepka asserts that *The Crying of Lot 49* “incorporates elements of both traditional California *noir*, in its paranoid visions of conspiracy lurking beneath the quotidian glare of modern life, and classical detection of the Gothic variety” (465). This shows how Pynchon’s position-taking even responded to genre fiction’s presence in the literary field.) Also, Pynchon’s encyclopedic style draws on the so-called ‘book of ideas’ but without being too erudite or intellectual (e.g. the occasionally cumbersome erudition in Umberto Eco’s books). The fact that Pynchon’s debut novel (his initial position-taking in the literary field) was risky can be seen in a remark by George Stevens, editor in chief at Lippincott when they published *V*. He told Pynchon’s editor, Corlies Smith: “I think this guy will be selling used Chevrolets within a year” (Silverman 157). Statements in some of Pynchon’s letters make it clear how uncertain even he was about his position in the literary field.

Despite whatever relationship Pynchon may have had (or not) with other authors like Donald Barthelme or John Barth, he certainly has not produced much in terms of aesthetic declarations and has never shown any sign of seeing himself as part of a group, other than that of writers, nor an intention to be such.²²⁷ Some writers at this time clearly felt an affinity with other writers, whether that is Heller talking about being “part of a near-movement in fiction” or Robert Coover and his feeling of belonging to a “literary generation” – and yet there is no manifesto or claim to membership in a group, certainly not on Pynchon’s behalf. Gerda Meyerhof may have called Pynchon and his friends the “poetic plumbers” just as Robert Scholes used his term the ‘Fabulators’ to refer to a group of writers, but those terms no more made a movement than it convinced Pynchon that he belonged to one. Pynchon has issued no aesthetic code to follow (as so many have before), nor has he professed membership to any group; where does that leave him? The space of position-takings that are specific to Thomas Pynchon oscillate around his central position-taking which may be best described as one of “high tension”: a beat, encyclopedic, Sci-fi, spy-guy. It is this space of position-takings and the apposite space of positions that allow the flourishing of the space of possibles from which the author’s work comes forth. Prior to looking at the space of possibles I want to

²²⁷ Not only has Pynchon apparently eschewed the word ‘postmodern’ from his vocabulary, he even missed the ‘Postmodernist’s Dinner’ according to Louis Menand’s “Saved from Drowning” in *The New Yorker* 23 Feb. 2009.

examine some of the far reaching consequences of position-taking in regard to some of the concepts that Pynchon has worked with over the course of his career.

Given the space of positions available to a writer, s/he must decide what material to cover, what terrain to excavate; this may be done with scenes and characters as much as ideas and concepts. James Joyce takes a position in writing about Ireland and uses the word “paralysis,” a word that has come to be associated with Joyce’s early work at least. Kerouac takes the “Beat.” And Pynchon? If scholars were asked what words they most associate with Pynchon’s writing many would choose “paranoia” and/ or “entropy.” Though other writers have used these terms, Pynchon has made them his. A discussion of entropy (and/ or paranoia) in the work of Pynchon falls outside the scope of this thesis but a brief appraisal is possible and worthwhile. So, in what way is the concept of entropy a position-taking for Thomas Pynchon?

The fact that one of Pynchon’s early short stories is called “Entropy” would be enough to make it subject of mild interest, but the fact that the concept continued to appear in his work has made it into an area of significant study. (As Pynchon’s work came to prominence in the literary field, so did semiotics and information theory in the intellectual field, intertwining and growing together in the halls of humanities faculties and in the pages of books and journals.) A summary of critical work on Pynchon and entropy would be lengthy. My aim here is not to analyze how Pynchon has used the term in his work or how scholars have tried to make sense of it. Rather my intention here is to see how Pynchon’s incorporation of the term in his work forms a position-taking. To this end, we must look at his appropriation of the term through Norbert Wiener.

In the introduction to *Slow Learner*, Pynchon confirmed what some suspected, that he had read Norbert Wiener’s *Human Use of Human Beings*;²²⁸ he also admitted that “people think I know more about the subject of entropy than I really do” (*SL* xxii). Although not the first to make use of this term in literature, it has come to occupy an important place in the study of Pynchon’s work. A recent effort to bring some clarity to

²²⁸ The popularity of Wiener’s book is attested to by a statement from the famous publisher Jason Epstein who wrote that “It was from Wiener in the 1950’s that I first heard of the second law of thermodynamics” (147). *Book Business: Publishing Past, Present and Future* (Norton 2001).

the discussion of entropy in Pynchon's work can be found in David Letzler's essay "Crossed-Up Disciplinarity: What Norbert Wiener, Thomas Pynchon, and William Gaddis Got Wrong about Entropy and Literature," which serves me as a starting point. Although I agree with Letzler that some scholars have been rather loose in their use of the term, I differ with him on his reading of Wiener's book²²⁹ and how it offered Pynchon a position to occupy. Letzler claims that Wiener posited,

an entire cultural-allegorical interpretation of the Second Law of Thermodynamics [...] as a Manichaeian societal struggle between Progress's efforts to create more organized societal communications and ineluctable Entropy's attempt to degrade them toward most-probable states of motionless homogeneity. (24)

However, the metaphoric relation between entropy and Manichaeism that Wiener postulates is more nuanced. Early in his book Wiener asks if this principle of disorganization is "Manichaeian or Augustinian" (34), with the first described as "opposed to order" and the second as "the very absence," noting that the difference between these two ways of understanding was quite important. "The distinction between the passive resistance of nature and the active resistance of an opponent suggests a distinction between the research scientist and the warrior or game player" (36). The scientist should see entropy as Augustinian because "This attitude is necessary for his effectiveness as a scientist, but tends to make him the dupe of unprincipled people in war and politics" (36). Wiener reiterates at the end of the book that "Manicheanism is a bad atmosphere for science" (192). It is clear that Wiener thinks others might well understand entropy as Manichaeian, as a malevolent force that deceives and orchestrates against order and progress. So instead of seeing Pynchon's use of entropy as synonymous with decay, or as a prompt to apply information theory to literature and the reading experience, a Bourdieusian view that takes account of the acquisition and accumulation as well as the expenditure and circulation of capital (symbolic or cultural) sees it otherwise. The Manichaeian take on entropy brings to mind

²²⁹ Rather than a case of what Pynchon "got wrong about Entropy", this move reveals itself as a productive misreading (as argued by Harold Bloom) in which one can find similarities with Joyce's use of Giambattista Vico's *New Science*. Donald Verene quotes Joyce as saying, "my imagination grows when I read Vico" in *Knowledge of Things Human and Divine: Vico's New Science and Finnegans Wake*. It is Pynchon's imaginative understanding of Wiener's book that is most important to understand, not the accuracy of his use of the term. See also Rosa Maria Bosinelli's "'I use his cycles as a trellis': Joyce's Treatment of Vico in *Finnegans Wake*" in *Vico and Joyce* Ed. Donald Verene (State University of New York Press 1987) 123-131.

that other Pynchonian term, paranoia; on this view entropic forces and processes are viewed as having some nefarious and hidden origin. This then gives Pynchon the epic battle of good and bad but played out through the eyes of the paranoid. Over the length of Pynchon's career the term 'entropy' has fallen by the wayside, but the idea of a cultural Manichaeism towards disorder/ incompleteness (not, in theory, by scientists who must take an Augustinian view of disorder in nature, but by bureaucrats and politicians and others) is one that continues from its stirrings in *V.* and *The Crying of Lot 49* to its formalization of the Us/ They system of *Gravity's Rainbow* and beyond. *Against the Day* has the stamp of Manichaeism from its epigraph to the end.

These shadowy forces behind entropy then control more than molecular reactions, they reach the social world and its global events. According to Pynchon himself his reading (in the late fifties) contributed to "a peculiar shadowy vision of the history preceding the two world wars" (SL xxviii). He adds, "My reading at the time also included many Victorians, allowing World War I in my imagination to assume the shape of that attractive nuisance so dear to adolescent minds, the apocalyptic showdown" (SL xxix). This big showdown is visible in *V.* and it hangs over our heads in *Gravity's Rainbow*, but its ominous presence is no less noticeable in *Against the Day*. Paranoia is a constant in Pynchon's work, even if some find it diminished in later works (Hume 2013). It is also one of the coordinates (along with entropy) that defined the position he comes to occupy in the literary field.

And although entropy and paranoia may have been the starting coordinates for his launch, entropy's fading presence has left paranoia to stand out more starkly. Like entropy, the term paranoia has a long history with Pynchon, and almost for the same reason considering that Pynchon's rise through the sixties occurred alongside the modern birth of paranoia when the term gained a common usage. By the mid-sixties when one said you were "paranoid" it did not have a Freudian denotation. This usage is almost completely shorn of its Freudian moorings; rather the meaning is informed by the secondary effects of some substance use and/ or the fear of arrest by 'Narcs' and undercover police or federal agents. Paranoia now starts to resemble its etymological roots related to mind and thus knowing; paranoia is a knowing that lies to the side of

official truth.²³⁰ In a similar vein, Elias Canetti writes in *Crowds and Power* that, “The paranoiac is the exact image of the ruler. The only difference is their position in the world.... One might even think the paranoiac the more impressive of the two because he is sufficient unto himself and cannot be shaken by failure” (462). Some indication of this new position that Pynchon comes to occupy, after creating it, is made evident by Emily Apter when she writes that Pynchon’s “invention of a literature of conspiracy steeped in the ethos of CIA operatives, McCarthyism, cybernetics, and hallucinogenic drugs takes paranoia beyond Cold War spy fiction and into the realm of a new literarity” (367). Apter points out that paranoia did not disappear with the sixties, but “has returned with a vengeance as the *ordre du jour* in the aftermath of 9/11” (369), an event that is refracted through *Against the Day* (Benton 206). As can be seen Pynchon’s ‘misreading’ of Wiener’s book coincided with the rise of the Cold War and the Atomic Age and its concomitant atomic bomb fear, allowing for the creation of a new space in the literary field. The position of ‘author of the paranoid’ has aged well and carried over to the present successfully.

A brief example of how paranoia works in *Against the Day* might help. As stated before, “paralysis” is for Joyce what “paranoia” is for Pynchon, it is central to the creative project in both cases. In *Against the Day* there is an abundance of paranoia and conspiracies, and in one particular case the reader is treated to an interesting juxtaposition of two conspiratorial narratives. In London the Detective Lew Basnight meets his former work colleague from Chicago, Max Khäutsch, during the intermission of a musical based on Jack the Ripper. Max introduces Lew to Professor-Doktor Joachim Werfner who is the *doppelgänger* of Professor Renfrew. In conversation Khäutsch connects the Whitechapel killings with the Mayerling incident²³¹ and it takes on the hallmarks of contemporary conspiratorial talk as Werfner points out that “Jack was not a firearms person” (681) adding that there are “by now thousands, of narratives, all equally valid – what can this mean?” When a character responds by blurting out: “Multiple worlds,” Professor Werfner agrees, saying “Precisely!” This conversation is cut

²³⁰ In “Negotiating the Paranoia Narrative” Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck state that conspiracy theories and paranoia plots often “take the form of a narrative quest for hidden truths.”

²³¹ The Mayerling Incident ended with the murder-suicide of Prince Rudolph of Austria, leaving dynastic succession to Archduke Franz Ferdinand; one of the almost infinite series of events that led to World War I.

short by the beginning of the second act; however, they agree to meet at a hotel afterward.

It is in this second meeting with Werfner that Lew listens to the Professor address the possibility of growing conflict in the Balkans now that the more aggressive Franz Ferdinand is heir presumptive to the Austro-Hungarian throne and not the liberal Rudolph who died in the Mayerling Incident. Werfner summarizes his position in the field of power: "My market value tends to fluctuate. At the moment it is up, because of the Anglo-Russian Entente." Germany is concerned about the new geo-political reality. "Lew listens guardedly to this impersonation of a *gemütlicher alte junge*." Pynchon's rendering of the phrase "good old boy"²³² and the fact that Lew listens in a guarded manner to this impersonation imply that Werfner is not all he seems to be, not so simple or harmless. The reader learns that Lew has heard that "lives by the railroad were said to hang in his every pause for breath" (683). The Professor is depicted as a technocrat who can sign life away with the symbolic violence of a signature, like the one (Adolf Eichmann) that consigned so many to death under the Third Reich. There is in all this that which seems to conspire towards an apocalyptic end.

The first example of conspiracy is that which is so well known these days when a news event is quickly turned into a conspiracy by online social media users; no evidence can quit them of their belief, in fact it re-affirms it. The second example is of a different type of conspiracy, not the act of conscious conspirators plotting some nefarious goal, but agents with the same spirit who act in sympathetic synchronicity toward some end; not the violent conspiring of thugs, but the communal indifference or quiet acquiescence that leads to the ghettos and camps. Paranoia swirls around both wrapping them in layers of half-truth and misinformation, making the real threat almost indiscernible from the imaginary one, something that happens in *Against the Day* just as in our own world.

²³² The term "good ol' boy" can be positive or negative. It is important that this is an "impersonation," he affects being an honorable man of good standing, but is not. Members of the Klu Klux Klan think of themselves as "good ol' boys" but when an Afro-American calls George Bush a "good ol' boy" it is not a complement. Here we have an example of the banality of evil.

There is one more aspect of the space of position-takings that confronts Pynchon, the paranoid author of the preterite, which I wish to examine. Entropy and paranoia may make for interesting writing material but they lack motivating force, on the other hand anger moves the pen like almost nothing. William Gass has said: “I suspect that in order for me to produce my best work I have to be angry” (*Paris Review* “The Art of Fiction” No. 65 Summer 1977) and for William Gaddis it was also a motivator. Pynchon does not *prima facie* appear to be an angry author, but his satire takes aim at that which is ripe for criticism. *Gravity’s Rainbow* in part serves as an indictment of the war-industrial complex of the time and US society. However, this is not the only place it appears. In Pynchon’s introduction to *1984* he speculates that Orwell might have feared losing his “political anger” and that “His anger [...] was precious to him.” Pynchon ends the introduction by referring to a photograph of a smiling Orwell with his adopted son and muses that it “is as if he has discovered something that might be worth even more than anger” (xxv). This balance of political anger and parental love can be seen later in *Against the Day*.

About half way through the book Kit is reunited with his brother Reef and they participate in a séance in which the deceased Webb ‘talks’ through Reef. In the scene, Webb recognizes his shortcomings as a father and laments, “But I sold my anger too cheap, didn’t understand how precious it was, how I was wasting it [...] yelling at the wrong people” (AD 672). Shortly after this scene Kit thinks of avenging his father, it is “All there was to hold on to. All he had.” (AD 675) Webb’s anger at the mine bosses and capitalists as matched by Kit’s anger at his father’s unjust murder. Pynchon is not one of the angry young men, but his anger is real. How does a writer avoid being bitter and angry, being consumed by the fire? Pynchon imagines that for Orwell it was his child’s smile “proceeding out of an unhesitating faith that the world, at the end of the day, is good and that human decency, [...] a faith so honourable that we can almost imagine Orwell, and perhaps even ourselves, for a moment anyway, swearing to do whatever must be done to keep It from ever being betrayed” (xxvi). It is not surprising to find that in *Against the Day* anger is very present and powerful, but it is relationships (both family and otherwise) that offer Kit and others salvation. The space of position-takings also includes how one writes anger into his/her work, and in the case of Thomas

Pynchon one sees the anger but finds that it does not harden into bitter despair or cantankerous curmudgeonhood, rather it is tempered by something worth more than even an author's precious anger: a sort of agape that is life affirming. But if, as Bourdieu writes, "Every position-taking is defined in relation to the *space of possibles* which is objectively realized as a *problematic* in the form of the actual of potential position-takings corresponding to the different positions," (FCP 30) what is that for Thomas Pynchon? What problematic emerges with his space of possibles?

The Space of Possibles

Having outlined the space of positions and the space of position-takings that face Thomas Pynchon we are ready to look at the space of possibles that develops out of the interaction of these sets of relations. For Bourdieu "the heritage accumulated by collective work presents itself to each agent as a space of possibles, that is, as an ensemble of probable *constraints* which are the condition and the counterpart of a set of *possible uses*," and this yields "problems to resolve, stylistic or thematic possibilities to exploit, contradictions to overcome, even revolutionary ruptures to effect" (RA 235). However, before any such actions can be effected they must be perceived as potential, they must previously exist conceptually for the agent. John Speller points out that here one finds "potential courses of action and works which were never in fact realized" (BL 65). Bourdieu was aware of the difficulty²³³ in reconstructing the space of possibles (FCP 31), and yet despite that there is material and information which can be made use of. It is hard to say what schemas of perception Pynchon employs, what oppositions, which constitute the field's structure, he may have interiorized. His world is not structured by Left Bank and Right Bank, but neither New York nor the broader US is devoid of oppositions. One may consider Greenwich Village poetry and Broadway Musicals, or East Coast and West Coast Beats or later in music the opposition of folk and rock. He did not have Hugo and Dumas to look back to, but he did have Hemingway and Fitzgerald.

²³³ "It is difficult to conceive of the vast amount of information which is linked to membership of a field and which all contemporaries immediately invest in their reading of works" *The Field of Cultural Production* 31.

Pynchon's world is delimited very differently from Flaubert's or even Hemingway's. As Bourdieu notes:

The space of possibles impresses itself on all those who have interiorized the logic and necessity of the field as a sort of *historical transcendental*, a system of (social) categories of perception and appreciation, of social conditions of possibility and legitimacy which, like the concepts of genres, schools, manners and forms, define and delimit the universe of the thinkable and the unthinkable, that is to say, both the finite universe of potentialities capable of being thought and realized at a given moment – freedom – and the system of constraints inside which is determined what is to be done and to be thought – necessity. (RA 236)

One can get an idea of Pynchon's perceptual schema (and a certain awareness on his part of how literary position-takings change along with changes of position in the social field) by looking at his introduction for *1984*. There he contrasts Orwell's disdain for harsh violence in pulp detective fiction prior to the war with the brutal beating at the end of *1984* and asks what has changed. Pynchon's answer is that Orwell's war experience made him think of violence in literature differently; that which in the pre-war was brutal literary trash in the post-war period is "part of the vernacular of political education." But Pynchon adds, "Yet Orwell cannot, like the average pulp writer, enjoy the luxury of unreflectively insulting the flesh and spirit of any character." Here we have an example of that vision which divides and categorizes. Pynchon puts unreflective writers of pulp (let us note that this term places this group at the heteronomous pole of literary production for a mass market) at the opposite pole from writers that do reflect on the symbolic violence in the language. As these statements are fairly recent, they can be taken as a small demonstration of the 'thinkable and unthinkable' (or the space of possibles) that Pynchon faces.

However, there also exist some examples or intimations regarding Pynchon's potentialities, or his untraveled paths. One of the first things we should look at is his unfinished "Minstrel Island" (1958), a musical²³⁴ that Pynchon collaborated on with his Cornell friend Kirk Sale. Pynchon and Sale's musical is a dystopian satire "in which IBM dominates the world" (Herman 2012, 20); they use a genre form that is generally oriented toward the pole of heteronomous artistic production and bend in it in the other direction. Thanks to Tod Perry we know that "There was always a whole lot of writing

²³⁴ It is worth noting that the musical, both on Broadway and in Hollywood, was a very successful genre form at the time, reaping high economic benefits but less cultural capital.

going on, and Tom liked nothing better than writing three penny opera type librettos” (from an interview on the Laws of Silence blog) Where does this potentiality lead to if it was never finished or published? Pynchon does not dedicate himself to writing musicals or drama, but he does not abandon this potential course (Luddite concerns, science fiction overtones, and silly songs) altogether. No, instead it becomes one of Pynchon’s stylistic trademarks: characters break into (often absurd) song as if it were a musical, not a scene in a novel. As Luc Herman notes, “the musical illustrates Pynchon’s concerns about the impact of technology and also anticipates his use of songs in narrative” (Herman 2012, 20). As one possibility is foreclosed, the cultural competences acquired are applied in other directions according to the dispositions of the agent.

To find more examples one must look to less verifiable material. On one hand a potential course for Pynchon can be found in his supposed translation²³⁵ of Julio Cortázar’s “Axolotl.” Many authors have also translated poems or stories, and thus added to their own store of capital; but Pynchon does not pursue this path of translator. And yet, foreign languages will play a growing part in his writing (even as that writing gains a mild resemblance to the writers of the Latin American literary boom) something one can see first in *The Crying of Lot 49* and much later in *Against the Day*.

The next example brings us to another unfinished work, this time a novel. In 1978 Bill Roeder²³⁶ wrote that Pynchon was working on two novels and that one was a science-fiction piece (about a claims adjuster) drawing on Pynchon’s fondness for Japanese monster movies. Although never completed we can see the trace of this untraveled path in *Vineland*, in which a character named Takeshi (a claims adjuster) stands in a giant footprint. Years later, metropolitan destruction by some terrible force occurs more significantly in *Against the Day*. These potentialities that were not realized partially compose the space of possibles from which Pynchon’s works originate.

²³⁵ Boris Kachka mentions this in his article “On the Thomas Pynchon Trail” but the translation has not been published so the evidence is hearsay. Still, it is quite plausible given Pynchon’s level of Spanish and the fact that apparently he was living in Mexico at the time and interested in Cortázar.

²³⁶ Bill Roeder “After the Rainbow”. David Seed claims that the information was provided by Pynchon’s agent.

The Space of Works

It might help to recall that the space of works involves a sort of intertextuality in which the work by one author may refer to works by other authors (in a number of ways) or even to his/her own works. John Speller observes that Bourdieu “locates the impetus behind the evolution of the ‘space of works’ squarely in the dynamic relations and struggle between writers in the field” (BL 66). In the beginning Pynchon faced the same struggle of all debut authors at the time, how to distinguish himself from Bellow, Hemingway, Kerouac and the rest. And yet still today he must struggle to remain relevant (and read) against all the new young contenders (e.g. Richard Powers or David Foster Wallace) that have come into the field, sometimes from other national literary fields by way of translation (e.g. Salman Rushdie or Haruki Murakami). Speller states that,

The analyst’s task is then to explain why particular authors have adopted particular strategies, which propelled them on various trajectories. [...] Works can then be understood as the expression, translated or ‘mediated’ into a literary form, of the author’s social position and history, and by implication as an objectification of the social structure. (BL 67)

In sum, this analysis requires a study of the intertextuality of the space of works and then an explanation of the strategies employed.

First, the discussion of Pynchon’s intertextual references is a vast area given the breadth of his reading. By his own account one of his early writing rules was “make it literary” (SL xii), made evident in his mention of T.S. Eliot in one of his first short stories; since then he has engaged in more elusive allusions, creating a game for readers to find the ‘hidden’ referent. In fact scholars have done a great deal of work in tracking down and trying to make sense of Pynchon’s references to other literary works or historical events. Some direct references in his earlier work include Wittgenstein or quotes from Rilke; other bits (like the Kenosha Kid in *Gravity’s Rainbow*) do not reveal themselves as easily. However, his novels are not simply crafty literary allusions, they are also responses to other novels and books appearing in the literary field at or around that time - whether that was espionage with a cold war backdrop or Malcom X’s autobiography. With that in mind, it must be said that by the time Pynchon was finishing *Against the Day* the web of relations was quite different. For example, Cormac McCarthy’s use of the western genre has changed the field so that Pynchon’s

employment of the western is not defined against the mass market genre western of the past. Additionally, a fiction author's choice of whether to write about terrorism and how also affects how Pynchon's book with bomb throwing anarchists is designed and defined. (This creates a problem for the author to resolve in the book.) And if one proceeds to talk about how *Against the Day* alludes to other Pynchon works one would need some time.²³⁷ For example, the thematic use of math, which has always been a part of Pynchon's work, proliferates in *Against the Day*, extending his playful use of math even as it checks any would-be contenders for the position of literary math novelist. Moreover the intertextual links with Pynchon's other novels extend to the individual word level as exemplified by Pynchon using a pun on the word delirium in *Against the Day* that he first used in *The Crying of Lot 49*. The task of intertextual analysis is made more difficult by the fact that *Against the Day* makes use of several genre types (e.g., western, proletariat, espionage, etc.). Thus it is that the Lew Basnight narrative may evoke a number of writers (although given the character's name, one should not look only to Chandler and Spillane but also to Ross Macdonald's character Lew Archer²³⁸), and the element of anarchist bombers may bring to mind Conrad's *The Secret Agent* or any of the novels written in response to the attacks on the US in September 2001. As can be seen there are various and numerous strategic responses, generated by the author's practical logic, to the intertextual web that is the space of works at the outset of the 21st century. It should also be clear that any attempt at an exhaustive description of the space of works would involve lengthy study ranging over literary, cultural, linguist and thematic interlinking.

Having only just addressed the intertextual web of texts around *Against the Day*, it is time to say something about the strategies that Pynchon has employed in response to the space of works that confronts him. Before doing so it should be noted that according to John Speller "such strategies (alongside manifestos, choices of publisher, etc.) are literary works themselves, which also contain many 'position-takings' relating

²³⁷ Simply a study of characters would take time; they range from the central (the Traverses) to the more minor and connect to other novels. On another level one could also note how a clear concern about nefarious corporate powers also carries over from earlier novels to *Against the Day*.

²³⁸ Charles Rzepka writes that "Nearly all of Archer's cases involve crimes that arise from the misdeeds of a previous generation and threaten to pollute the lives of the next" (7). This is similar to Lew Basnight, except it his own misdeeds for which he seeks redemption.

to form and subject-matter” (67); this naturally includes the prosopographical variables (studied by Ekelund et al) as well as other content. A full study of the strategies that Pynchon employs would be too time-consuming²³⁹ so I shall do so in an abbreviated manner on two basic levels, his general strategy that can be seen over his career and those strategies specific to the novel *Against the Day*.

Although that novel is the primary concern of this dissertation, any attempt at understanding Pynchon’s strategies as an author must also consider early works. In fact this is where we find him first making use of certain strategies that he himself recognized upon reflective study. Looking back on his short story “Entropy” Pynchon wrote “I thought I was sophisticating the Beat spirit with second-hand science” (SL xxiv); this strategy allows him to be ‘hip’ as well as scholarly. This strategy repeats in *V.* with Benny Profane and his friends as Beats and the rest of the book bristling with study. This combination of hipster and polymath has continued through his books; protagonists in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, *Vineland*, *Mason & Dixon*, *Against the Day* and *Inherent Vice* may not all be hipsters or hippies but they are all far from conservative conformists. This is a bit more difficult to achieve in *Against the Day* due to its temporal setting, but Pynchon does incorporate two things that people would likely associate with the Beats or hippies and hipsters: jazz and drugs. The former, first written as “jass” (370), is enjoyed by both Reef Traverse and later the Chums of Chance. The second, chemically assisted changes in perception, is experienced by a number of people in the book, though primarily by Frank Traverse, who eats peyote, and Lew Basnight who consumes “cyclomite,” a “reality modifying explosive” (233). It is worth adding that in the same place that Reef first hears jazz he also smokes hemp, creating an image of anachronistic Beat cool. Of course fitting drug use into his narratives would border on puerile if it were the mere inclusion of substance abuse, however that is not the case. In *Against the Day* the use of psychotropic drugs is rendered as innocuous and often connected with visionary states or recreational consumption; but in *Inherent Vice* the perils of heroin addiction

²³⁹ It would of course study the strategic use of names (a practice already well established in Pynchon studies), but that would be quite an endeavor given the number of characters. It would also have to note Pynchon’s unique use of history that draws from many, sources creating a strange ensemble. For example, in *Mason & Dixon* Pynchon drew on the journal of Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon but also brought in a not altogether anachronistic Feng Shui master as well as Vaucanson’s duck – an unusual and entertaining historical mix indeed. However, names and use of history are but two of Pynchon’s many strategies.

are included too, so on balance one can say that not all substances are treated equally in Pynchon's work indicating a careful position on the topic. However, this strategy cannot stand on jazz and dope alone, the bookish scholar must have his part. Just how that is done leads to the next strategy.

Since being a science-fiction writer per se was not what Pynchon wanted, he had to find a way to fit his "second-hand science" (competences acquired with his scholastic experience and later) into his narratives without the appearance of writing science-fiction. He does so by taking something that is related to science or math and instead of treating it fantastically (i.e. as science-fiction) he wraps it in *fabula* after the style of Latin American writers like Borges, Cortázar or Marquez.²⁴⁰ I will only mention a few examples that occur in or arch through his career. First, in his debut novel *V.*, the titular figure, in part a female character, gradually becomes a sort of automaton as she acquires prosthetics.²⁴¹ In addition there is another figure that David Seed notes when he mentions the "job Profane gets as a night-guard with a company which uses automata to simulate car accidents" (78), this is SHROUD, which talks to Benny.

The use of the term and concept "automaton" works for Pynchon as a sort of robot in disguise, which he ingeniously exploits again in *Mason & Dixon* with the mechanical duck and to some extent with the golem²⁴² that is also present in the novel. Pynchon does not use robots or androids as his frame of narration is usually in the past. He uses some technical element that might appear to belong to some fantastical future of science-fiction but in fact is part of a quizzical past. However, the robot as automaton is not the only icon that Pynchon appropriates from science-fiction; he may not write about spaceships and aliens, but he does write about something similar. Most obviously the rocket in *Gravity's Rainbow* fulfills this strategic function but later in *Against the Day* the same is achieved with the Chums of Chance and their slightly anachronistic airship.

²⁴⁰ Ana Mariá Mutis refers to work by Donald L. Shaw when she writes that "una de las características fundamentales de la literatura del boom fue su escepticismo frente a la realidad, que la llevó a rechazar el realismo tradicional y en cambio optó por mostrar una nueva realidad más influida por la ambigüedad, el misterio y la fantasía que por los hechos cotidianos" (816-817).

²⁴¹ The character Sidney Stencil thinks of her as an "automaton" (444) and contemplates her "[...] obsession with bodily incorporating little bits of inert matter" (V. 528).

²⁴² Minsoo Kang cites the movie *The Golem* as an example of cultural expression of automaton stories in his book *Sublime Dreams of Living Machines*. See pages 272-274.

In the same novel there are even time-travel machines and the “First International Conference on Time-Travel” (407), but rendered as puckish satire.

The choice of this material allows Pynchon to draw on all the specific vocabulary and language of the sciences and mathematics and deploy it in his text metaphorically or structurally, often bringing them into contact with more esoteric belief systems as Pynchon does in *Mason & Dixon* in which astronomy and astrology interact. An interaction of a different sort occurs when Pynchon borrows the monsters of science-fiction and strange creatures from elsewhere. One may find examples in *Gravity’s Rainbow* with its monster octopus Grigori or later in *Against the Day* in which an “incendiary Figure” (150) devastates New York City. But there is also a Werebeaver (in *Mason & Dixon*) and zombies (*Inherent Vice*). Finally, in *Against the Day* there are the Trespassers whose provenance is unknown. This subject matter allows Pynchon to come close to writing science-fiction without doing so. As an ancillary strategy Pynchon employs terms and concepts from thermodynamics (entropy), mathematics (calculus’ DeltaT or Riemann’s zeta function) and chemistry (calcite) science fiction, or as Inger Dalsgaard puts it, “Different novels invoke various fields”.²⁴³ These terms may be more or less important in the novels but they either appeal to readers’ backgrounds or oblige them to remedy their ignorance with research, after all this is an author that famously asked why is it should be easy for the reader. In fact, the long running activity on the Pynchon list serve as well as the newly created wikis indicate the degree that readers work together to clarify references and or symbols.²⁴⁴ This makes for a different reading experience that draws a reading community together to create a fan base that one normally encounters forming around the best-seller authors that are often very prolific since readers ‘can’t get enough.’

Moving on from these general strategies that one finds in Pynchon’s work, it is time to turn to specific ones found in *Against the Day*. As mentioned above the textual strategies an author employs may range from naming, choice of ethnic background and birthplace to education, occupation or political leaning. It also includes literary

²⁴³ Inger Dalsgaard “Science and Technology.” (157).

²⁴⁴ A wonderful example exists with the seal that appears on the front of *Against the Day* and had readers were bewildered and curious. Someone from the reading community obtained a translation of the text on the seal and confirmed its Tibetan origin.

considerations like point of view, use of techniques (stream of consciousness, free indirect speech, rhetorical figures, etc.), and content involved. In a novel the size of *Against the Day* this presents the literary analyst with an overwhelming number of factors to consider. To narrow the scope, I focus on several different strategies that propel Pynchon further along his trajectory (*BL 67*) as well as respond to the positions and strategies of others in the field. For example, a non-fiction book called *The Devil in the White City* (2003) recounts the crimes of a serial killer at the Columbia Exposition in 1893 in Chicago. This came out three years before Pynchon's novel, and he likely heard about it (after all it was published by Crown which belongs to Random which belongs to Penguin, Pynchon's publisher) and took it into account. A more important book for Pynchon to consider would be E.L. Doctorow's *Ragtime* (1975), which although published well before Pynchon's novel, belongs to the same field and competes for the same capital, unlike the non-fiction book mentioned above. He might also have been responding to the so-called steampunk literature exemplified by books like *The Difference Engine*.²⁴⁵ The question then is: what strategies distinguish Pynchon's work in *Against the Day*? In this study three main strategic elements are analyzed with a fourth as a subset of the third one: first, doubling (as with calcite but also bilocation); second, the use of multiple genres; and third, the very large spatial-temporal canvas that Pynchon uses for his novel. Related to the choice of temporal and geographic setting is the strategic choice of content and theme in connection to which three points are considered: on one hand how Pynchon uses it to explore the crises of intellectual and political fields of the time, and also juxtapose the *fin de siècle* period of the book and our own, and on the other the 'absence' of WWI in the narrative. Although the following analysis cannot and indeed does not aspire to a totalizing and final word on these topics, it does strive to explain why these particular strategies were adopted.

Double Refraction, Doubling and Binaries

As mentioned earlier, the first edition of *Against the Day* has a cover that depicts the title as it would appear as seen through Iceland spar. This crystal is even used for the

²⁴⁵ *The Difference Engine* by William Gibson and Bruce Sterling (Gollancz 1990).

title of the second part of the novel. Why does Pynchon emphasize it so much by doubling the title and continuing this 'doubling' throughout the book?²⁴⁶ It might be noted that in former books he has had characters that seem to have doubles or twins such as Enzian and Tchitcherine in *Gravity's Rainbow*, (although David Cowart does not mention them in his own reference to Pynchon's doubling²⁴⁷) but never to such an extent.²⁴⁸ What is the function of this strategy?

Douglas Keeseey asserts that "Pynchon's use of the double may be self-consciously literary ("*Doppelgänger*," "*semblable*"), but the device enables him to present both a fully realized world and a nuanced critique" (5). William Millard makes a similar point about the use of doubles in *Mason & Dixon*, enumerating couples and pointing out the gothic and romantic roots of the doppelgänger device in literature.²⁴⁹ Somewhat differently, David Ryan writes that, "On a more architectonic level, this sense of polar opposites identifies one of Pynchon's techniques for generating the structure of his stories: introducing opposing (binary) concepts and then circulating various metaphors inside their center" (449).

Despite whatever metaphoric value it has in the novel, it first and foremost structures the novel by creating two main narrative lines from the start. (Here I draw on the language of physics and propose that as the double refraction of light through calcite produces an ordinary and an extraordinary ray so does the novel cast through the spar-like cover produce an 'ordinary' narrative line and an extraordinary one.) This allows Pynchon to work back and forth between a more 'realist' narrative and what is an inherently more fantastic one. The story lines alternate, bringing characters back around like comets on their elliptical trajectories. These major paths and the more minor ones in the novel occasionally intersect or bifurcate as happens with Reef, Yashmeen and

²⁴⁶ When the reader meets Scarsdale Vibe in the first part of the book, s/he learns that Vibe has a bodyguard named Foley Walker who serves as his double and served his place in the Civil War (even receiving a bullet that is elliptically returned to Vibe at the end of the book). This itself is a refracted view of history since the wealthy were often able to avoid fighting, as Andrew Carnegie did. Although Pynchon may not have known about Carnegie, he would have known about the practice.

²⁴⁷ David Cowart (2011, 125).

²⁴⁸ Other scholars have also noticed this, for example Justin St. Clair who notes the "incessantly twinning, copying, replicating, doubling, and redoubling" as well as how the cover "emphasizes the novel's obsession with doubling" (69). However, his view is rather different from mine.

²⁴⁹ See pages 100-101 in William Millard's "Delineations of Madness and Science: *Mason & Dixon*, Pynchonian Space and the Snovian Disjunction."

Cyprian, for example. Another effect of this initial doubling of narrative lines is a doubling of numerous other elements in the novel. At the very beginning of the second part of the novel (“Iceland Spar”) The Chums of Chance run into their counterpart, a Russian airship called *Bol'shaia Igra*, which is translated in the text as “The Great Game.” This not only introduces their double but also brings in the theme of espionage that builds through the book; moreover, this theme of “the Great Game” connects the book back to *V.*, which had already been alluded to when one of the Chums mentions the “Khartoum business.”

Along with double refraction and doubled characters one might not be surprised to find bilocation. Although it does not happen often in the novel, some characters disappear only to reappear somewhere else, or travel to another place. This may remind some of ‘teleportation’ but notice it is not driven by technology and thus avoids the appearance of science-fiction. In fact, Pynchon’s treatment of bilocation puts the rationalizing force of science (as math and science try to explain nature’s ‘wonders’) up against the enchanted world of non-scientific belief systems as he has often done. It is certainly no coincidence that Pynchon weaves bilocation in along with mathematical discussions of multiple dimensions and also shamanistic voyages. These undermine or challenge common understandings of space-time, blurring science and religion along the edges of the unknown. Perhaps this is why some like Christopher Coffman see “Frank’s encounter with an alternate space [... as] related to question of redemption” (109).

The understanding that scholars such as Coffman and others have regarding the role of doubling in *Against the Day* tends to be subsumed to their greater overall interpretative aims. My concern is to ask why Pynchon adopts this strategy.²⁵⁰ I have already mentioned some of the ways in which doubling functions in the novel but it remains to describe one final reason for the strategic choice of this doubling which destabilizes concepts of space and time. The doubling that begins the novel carries through on the dual narrative lines of the Chums and the Traverses. At the end of the novel the two narratives exit the book in different directions as with light passing through spar. The less fabulous one leaves the Reef and Frank Traverse and family in

²⁵⁰ While I agree with scholars like Amy Elias that “The novel is replete with metaphors of duality” (31), I do not see this as a feature of its picaresque style but as a strategic move for structure.

California where readers familiar with Pynchon know that the family reappears in *Vineland* (1990). The Chums' narrative ends with a domesticating flourish that takes them into "grace." But members of both groups find partners and pursue domestic bliss, on terra firma or elsewhere in almost traditional fashion. However, excluded from this picture are Kit and Dally, who are apparently emotionally and, eventually, physically distanced from each other with Dally in Paris and Kit in L'viv. In what basically amounts to *deus ex machina* device, Kit is transported across space and time to Paris where he will reunite with her. The doubling that Pynchon suffuses the novel with is structurally strategic in how it lets him develop story lines and end the novel, setting him apart from other novelists with his special sense of an ending.

Pynchon's Use of Multiple Genres

It would be difficult for readers of *Against the Day* not to notice the great amount of doubling that occurs in the novel, but it would also be hard not to notice the wide range of genres that Pynchon makes use of. Before going further I should mention that Pynchon's previous novels have also drawn on and made use of various genres or literary forms. The novel *V.* draws on espionage fiction, *The Crying of Lot 49* includes a Jacobean revenge play, in *Gravity's Rainbow* the polyphonic array of genre influences grows to comics, movies, and more; this trend continues with *Mason & Dixon* which also avails itself of a number of genres. However, it is in *Against the Day* that Pynchon most obviously exploits multiple genres. Again, the job of the analyst is to explain why this hyper-cross-genre strategy was chosen.

Prior to putting forth any claims proper to this thesis it should be noted that other scholars have taken this aspect of the novel as their own object of study. Long time Pynchon scholar Brian McHale refers to Pynchon's use of genre in *Against the Day* as "genre-poaching" (18). This is based on his idea that "Pynchon appropriates the conventions and materials of genres that flourished at the historical moments during which the events of the story occur. His genre-poaching is synchronized with the unfolding chronology of his storyworld" (19-20). McHale bases this claim on a rather impressive list of genres that he notes in the novel which include the inarguable

dominant ones and “a whole range of other popular genres” which he lists. To this he adds “other subgenres of imperial romance, including African adventure and polar adventure” (18). His argument would seem to hold forth based on the types enumerated in his list. However, there are two major events that do not fit his schema very well. First, what McHale refers to as a “polar adventure” certainly is that, but it is worth noting that many other scholars treat this episode as deriving from monster cinema, which has appeared earlier in Pynchon’s work. After all this episode is not merely a race to one of the poles, but one which brought back “a Figure with super natural powers” (151). The destruction this “polar adventure” causes is less an “imperial romance” than a modern nightmare. And to this must be added an event that occurs much later in the book but is equally important: the Tunguska Event. As this catastrophic event occurred far from humankind, it is wrapped in mystery and thus a perfect historical moment for Pynchon to use, however, this does not fit in with any of McHale’s listed genre types. It could be argued that this moment in the novel is closer to the modern-day disaster genre. If so then McHale’s argument begins to weaken.

So then how does one account for the proliferation of genre in *Against the Day*? On one hand it is simply an extension of what others have identified in Pynchon’s previous work as a type of Menippean satire,²⁵¹ which abounds in genres and styles and juxtaposes them. But more importantly the plethora of genres should be seen as a strategic response to the space of works as Pynchon sees it. It differentiates him from his peers and competitors not only by demonstrating a use of multiple story-lines, but of multiple genres intermingled in the same time frame. Of greater import is the fact that the use of multiple genres connects *Against the Day* forward and backward to other novels and makes a greater whole of Pynchon’s works; this works retrospectively as the Traverses are connected by kinship back to the family in *Vineland*, but also forward thematically to the detective protagonists of his later novels *Inherent Vice* and *Bleeding Edge*. It also allows Pynchon to pursue story lines with some characters in a way that he might not want to do with others (e.g. doing with Cyprian what he couldn’t do with Kit). Finally, by using the western genre for one of his main narrative lines, Pynchon makes a

²⁵¹ See, for example, Theodore D. Kharpertian’s *A Hand to Turn the Time: The Menippean Satires of Thomas Pynchon* (Indiana UP, 1990).

'new move' that not only admits traditional family drama but also allows him to segue into a proletariat novel. This multifunctional strategy of multiple genres distinguishes Pynchon from others who have used the period (*fin de siècle*) or era (Edwardian) for narrative temporal setting and more generally from others in the field.

Chronotopes in Against the Day

Another aspect of *Against the Day* that eventually impresses itself upon the reader is the massive spatio-temporal canvas that Pynchon uses for his gargantuan novel. Most of the narrative action that occurs in Pynchon's novels takes place on either the East or West coast of the US, with occasional changes of scene to more distant places although generally through analepsis. For example, *The Crying of Lot 49* primarily takes place in California with brief forays to other times and places. In fact, within Pynchon studies scholars refer to Pynchon's 'California novels'.²⁵² The big exception to this previously had been *Gravity's Rainbow* which being set in WWII Europe has less action unfold in the US. However, *Against the Day* would seem to break this pattern as much as it completes it because even though it starts in the Midwest and goes further west to Colorado, the action passes through New York and on to the wider world before bringing most of the Traverse family back to the US west coast.

Despite the importance of the spaces that characters occupy and the journeys they make, to focus too much on them at the exclusion of the temporal element of the chronotopes would be a mistake. In a novel of so many different narratives it is not surprising to find a number of various histories as backdrop for the various narratives. Aviation history is mixed along with the fall of the Hapsburg Empire, the rise of fascism, labor history, as well as the history of mathematics, and that is still not the end of it. The overall time span of the novel is decidedly marked by crisis, foremost politically but also

²⁵² See, for example, John Miller's "Present Subjunctive: Pynchon's California Novels" or chapter four, "Pynchon and the Sixties: The California Novels" in David Cowart's *Thomas Pynchon and The Dark Passages of History*.

in mathematics and European thought in general.²⁵³ Or as one character in *Against the Day* says, “The political crisis in Europe maps into the crisis in mathematics” (594). These various histories cross with narrative lines and genres to create a kaleidoscopic array of chronotopes. If one wanted to use only one of Bakhtin’s chronotope²⁵⁴ types, the fit would not be perfect. One may be tempted to propose the chronotope of the road, since so much travelling is done, or perhaps the Rabelasian chronotope and its characteristic ‘series’ seems more applicable. However, for structural and thematic purposes the chronotope of the threshold with its crises and liminal events may fit best overall. Fortunately, there is no need to choose since Bakhtin states that “Chronotopes are mutually inclusive, they co-exist, they may be interwoven with, replace or oppose one another, contradict one another or find themselves in ever more complex interrelationships” (252), this is, in fact, a very good way of describing space and time in *Against the Day*. But why construct the book in such a fashion?

To some extent the strategic choice of such a large spatio-temporal setting complements the previously mentioned strategy that strives to unite Pynchon’s various novels into a greater whole. Moreover, and perhaps more importantly in terms of a response to the space of works, this move allows Pynchon’s novel to reach toward the global, to become as global as the world has become. It is worth bearing in mind that the attacks in 2001 on the US effected changes in the social field as well as the field of cultural production. Agents in the artistic field (literary, cinematic, etc.) have either responded or not, some by being more insular and others by looking out at the world.²⁵⁵ It is important to note that less than half way through *Against the Day*, the place of action switches from the US to Europe and beyond; in fact, the action goes to geopolitical hotspots like the Balkans or further east to Baku or Lake Baikal. This move takes reader, reviewers, professors and students beyond the comfortable national

²⁵³ Here one could point to the Dreyfuss Affair or Nietzsche’s declaration of the death of God as signs of the turmoil afoot during the *fin de siècle* period. J.W. Burrow examines this period astutely in his *The Crisis of Reason: European Thought, 1848-1914*.

²⁵⁴ My references here are to Mikhail Bakhtin’s development of the term in *The Dialogical Imagination*.

²⁵⁵ Responses included jingoistic songs like Toby Keith’s popular “Courtesy of the Red, White and Blue (The Angry American),” written and released less than a year after the attacks. A very different example can be found in Kathryn Bigelow’s “Zero Dark Thirty” (2012) which was controversial for its portrayal of torture. More pertinent to the literary field, there is Don DeLillo’s *Falling Man* (2007) which constitutes the author’s artistic reaction to the space of works in the contemporary literary field.

shores of their imagination and by doing so, Pynchon effectively raises the bar when it comes to setting in encyclopedic historical fiction.

The Strategic Choice of Content: Thematic and Problematic

The major strategies of doubling, multiple genre use, and chronotopic framing in *Against the Day* are the most striking upon reading the novel, but there are other, perhaps less obvious, strategic moves regarding the choice of content and context as thematic and problematic that Pynchon has taken and that should be explained. There are three areas to look at here which are: the inclusion (or exclusion) of the various struggles in diverse fields, the juxtaposition of the novel's *fin de siècle* temporal setting and our own, and the treatment of WWI at the end of the novel. Although not readily apparent, these individual moves work in a common direction. The first strategic move regards the decision of what content to include and how to contextualize it, this then establishes thematic elements and problematic situations. In the case of *Against the Day*, Pynchon focuses on the tumult surrounding labor disputes, but also debates and crises in political and intellectual arenas. This content is set in the context of a threshold moment which allows Pynchon to develop themes and explore problems that arise from them. On one hand this leads to a family drama when Kit is offered a scholarship by Vibe and his father urges him to reject it. On the other hand it can lead to bigger social questions regarding the use of violence for political struggles. And here we find anarchist miners with dynamite. Anarchy has always been somewhat strategic for Pynchon, setting him apart from those who looked left to the USSR for ideas; his characters do not speak of "class war" but of "anarchist miracles." In *Against the Day* anarchy takes a more central role, for the first time the protagonist are anarcho-syndalists. Using time period that he does allows Pynchon to include "bomb-throwers" and thus broach the subject of terrorism. The problem that Pynchon makes for himself is also a problem for the reader. If one sympathizes with the "bomb throwers" in the novel then s/he is put on the defensive regarding modern acts of terror. However, if one criticizes the violent activity of Webb and others, then one is forced to read against the grain of the book. The strategic choice of content and context is not only limited to developing themes and dramatic situations.

Pynchon's choice of the *fin de siècle* period is strategic in that it invites a juxtaposition of novel's temporal setting and our own despite the exhortation from the original book blurb that "No reference to the present day is intended or should be inferred." This line was on the Amazon page initially, but was not on the book jacket flap; a strategic removal? Perhaps. Knowing that Pynchon has a good deal of control over book cover design, some might take the absence of the line as tacit permission to read the novel with the present at least in mind. Of course the novel's imagined *fin de siècle* period does not exactly mirror our present, rather it is a doubly refracted image of what our present could be "with a minor adjustment or two." The question some may ask then is, do we head towards Grace or Apocalypse?

For the very title, *Against the Day*, rings with great menace; this phrase appears in the bible several times and always with heavy portent. The phrase appears in several reiterations in Pynchon's novel, and as it does so the ominous foreboding of something dire hanging overhead or looming in the distance grows. Those who know the basics of history realize that a world war is in the offing, to which Pynchon occasionally alludes. The time period builds up to the date of the beginning of World War I and it is passed over and observed only obliquely, wrapped in a kind of silence – prompting scholars to ask 'Why'? Several reasons suggest themselves, first perhaps being length; a book of this length could not go into WWI. Less pragmatically, but perhaps more important stylistically, it leaves this period as a mark of trauma. "When absence is narrativized, it is perhaps necessarily identified with loss" (49) writes Dominick La Capra *Writing History, Writing Trauma*. This argument is made in a different fashion by Tore Andersen. He notes that the painter in the novel, Hunter Penhallow, makes paintings in which "the central subject is absent, but where the remaining elements of the paintings all point to the missing centerpiece and in concert define its outline" (19). He adds that the novel is similar to *Gravity's Rainbow* in that the traumatic event to which the novel builds is passed over in silence, although Andersen includes in a footnote that these traumatic events haunt the text indirectly, "refracted through descriptions" of other events. (This is not so different from how works by Gabriel Garcia Marquez deal with the Columbian civil war or how Mikhail Bulgakov wrote with Stalin in the background.) The war Pynchon passes over in silence was quite real, the potential war of our own time is quietly

postulated. Silence is a strategy, so Joyce might suggest, but it might also be the only thing one can do.²⁵⁶

The above analysis of the space of possibles and the space of works is the final step in the sociological literary analysis which tries “to reconstruct the problematic [...] as it faced a particular author, and to try to understand, as if from ‘the author’s point of view, why the author responded in the way (s)he did, given the manifold pressures and constraints (s)he was under” (Speller *BL* 45). This series of positions that I have tried to sketch, though apparently biographical, is meant to elucidate what John Speller calls “the system of positions and relations between positions in which the events in an agent’s life take place (movements between publishers, genres, groups, etc.)” (*BL* 59). These position-takings are practical responses generated by the agent’s habitus, initially formed in the family circle but further developed as the social environment grows. In general, I have pointed out that Pynchon’s position in the literary field is firmly placed at the restricted pole of literary production, and that his position-takings lie at the interstices between other literary positions (Beat, Sci-fi, etc.). His writing strategies have helped him chart a course that allows him to draw on his reading of mass market fiction (science-fiction, detective, or espionage) as well as his scientific learning and other acquired cultural capital. Specifically, I have shown how various strategies function in *Against the Day* as responses to the space of works that Pynchon faces, solidifying his position in the literary field. Ingar Dalsgaard writes that, “Though the presence of both science and technology in his fiction is often considerable, Thomas Pynchon is rarely classified as a science fiction writer” (156).²⁵⁷ This is certainly true. However, although her essay is very complete regarding science and technology in Thomas Pynchon’s work she fails to address how the deployment of these concepts function as strategies in response to the web of texts that intertwine and interact in the space of works that confront Pynchon in the US literary field. Also, by positioning himself as a scientific writer of historical fiction, Pynchon is more likely to have readers that identify as readers of science fiction, but without alienating potential readers that draw back from that genre.

²⁵⁶ “Wovon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schweigen.” (Whereof one cannot speak, therefore one must be silent.) Ludwig Wittgenstein *Tratatus Logico-Philosophicus* (189). This is fitting to mention because Wittgenstein was in WWI and Pynchon refers to the *Tractatus* in *V*.

²⁵⁷ Inger Dalsgaard “Readers and Trespassers: Time Travel, Orthogonal Time, and Alternative Figurations of Time in *Against the Day*”.

More importantly, by avoiding the label of science-fiction writer he avoids being restricted to the subfield of sci-fi literary production which reaps less in terms of symbolic capital.

Chapter 8

Pynchon's Point of View as an Author

Now that the rather lengthy analysis is finished we are in a better position to understand our understanding of the author's point of view, the creative project, and ultimately *Against the Day's* place in that project as well as Pynchon's trajectory. It is to the first of these that I now turn briefly for it is this authorial outlook that makes the creative project comprehensible. I should hasten to add that establishing the author's point of view is not another form of the so-called intentional fallacy nor much less a claim to understand his opinion on specific issues. Rather this outlook is derived from an analysis of the homology that exists between the spaces, positions and the system of oppositions that exist in the literary field. So for example, a position-taking in the social field regarding cultural consumption is an expression of taste that has its homological expression in other fields. Thus when one learns that Pynchon was not a fan of Dave Brubeck (Coward, *Art*, 114) it is not surprising to encounter scholarly speculation about "a sick joke at Dave Brubeck's expense" (125) in the short story "Entropy."²⁵⁸ This stance on music resurfaces in *Inherent Vice* in which Frank Zappa is cool and Herb Alpert is not. This then extends to visual media with TV series like *Adam-12* being satirized and movies with the black listed actor John Garfield treated in an admirable manner. Although he was born into a bourgeois family, Pynchon writes against that social group by rejecting false bourgeois morality and by exposing the dark secrets that the dominant sector of society would like to hide from itself. This would be a difficult position for any writer, but Pynchon compounds this for himself by his refusal to participate in the media fame-machine; he is a celebrated writer refusing celebrity and his science filled writing embraces science fiction without being it. "By historicizing him we can understand how he tore himself away from the strict historicity of less heroic fates" (Bourdieu *FCP* 205), for there were clearly other fates: engineer, staff writer at Boeing, professor, etc. Each of these would have had a different accompanying point of view. And yet he became an author, so it is that point of view that interests us.

²⁵⁸ David Seed "Order in Thomas Pynchon's 'Entropy.'"

John Speller observes that the analysis that Bourdieu carries out on Flaubert and his *L'Education sentimentale* is perhaps an overly facile target to use as an example, in part because of the “voluminous correspondence” (70) left by Flaubert but also due to Flaubert’s very accurate depiction of the French social world at that time. That is certainly not the case with Pynchon as there is neither an abundance of correspondence nor a faithful depiction of the ‘real’ social world that Pynchon inhabits. Still, from what available material there is one can analyze the various texts and information and draw the author’s point of view from the observable objectified structures and their homologies. In the case of Thomas Pynchon enough has been seen to begin an outline of his point of view as an author. However, as others have also cast their scholarly gaze in this direction, we will proceed by considering another account of Pynchon’s point of view before moving on.

In Boris Kachka’s review of *Bleeding Edge*, he used the deployment of biographical information to put forth a reading of the novel. Independent scholar Albert Rolls disagreed with Kachka’s limited comparison of Pynchon to the heroine’s husband and wrote an essay in response.²⁵⁹ Rolls states that,

Pynchon’s self-presentation through *Bleeding Edge*’s characters, if we accept that Horst and Maxine share identifying characteristics with their creator, illustrates a double-sidedness to his understanding of his own character, as if Pynchon saw himself, as does Fausto of *V.*’s “Generation of ’37”—the year of Pynchon’s birth and the apocalyptic temperature of the story “Entropy”—as “a dual man, aimed two ways at once: toward peace and simplicity on the one hand, towards an exhausted intellectual searching on the other” (*V.* 309). From the very beginning of his career, such duality has been a feature of Pynchon’s use of authorial stand-ins. The main characters of *V.*’s two plotlines may be read as such. (1)

Rolls’ idea of Pynchon’s double-sidedness is interesting for a couple of reasons. On one hand it captures the reflexivity that occurs in Pynchon’s work, and on the other hand it shows the division that exists within the author as he is torn between the orthodox inculcation of his youth and the heterodox and unorthodox dispositions he has acquired along his social trajectory. This double-sidedness and division can then be extended to his position in the literary field and seen in how he oscillates between conflicting positions open to him. Perhaps that becomes most clear in his last two novels where he

²⁵⁹ Rolls, A., (2016). “‘A Dual Man [and Oeuvre], Aimed Two Ways at Once’: The Two Directions of Pynchon’s Life and Thought.”

uses the detective genre, albeit a la Pynchon; the use of such an iconic mass market genre²⁶⁰ for a cultural product intended for the restricted field of production is a move that speaks to Pynchon's double-sidedness. Quite simply, Pynchon's point of view is not a simple one.

The phrase "point of view," as ordinary language, connotes the idea of opinion or perspective. The question, "What's his point of view?" may be responded to in a number of ways. The common phrase, "He has an X point of view (e.g. as a father, American, manager, etc.)" sounds simple but it implies perspective, a complex web of interests, and a position. To say that Pynchon's point of view is that of a father, New Yorker, male, etc., is pointless since even a composite of all of these, though it would not be entirely wrong, would not be quite accurate. Bourdieu reminds us that, "To construct the author's viewpoint in this sense is, if you will, *to be put in his place*, but through an approach which is totally different from the sort of projective identification 'creative' criticism strives for" (RA 88). The author's point of view is not succinctly stated nor easily categorized but only begins to appear. In a 1963 letter to the Sales (29 June) Pynchon refers to "the only kind of novel that is worth a shit, i.e., the traditional realist kind. Which is what, someday, I would like to be able to write" and yet he complains that he cannot. Ten years later he would be famous for not writing that kind of novel. In another letter some months earlier (9 Mar.) Pynchon wrote "What I hate is inside, not outside: a kind of deathwish I never knew I had and which I've had to get used to," expressing something of the reflexive turmoil he was experiencing. One can see how struggles in the social and literary fields are internalized by Pynchon, creating a point of view that would seem to issue forth from a position fraught with tension, a view that comes through in his writing. It must be noted that Pynchon's point of view must have changed to some degree because the field has changed and so has his position. Pynchon left bachelorhood behind when he married, and with that came new experiences, feelings and concerns. How could that not change something? He was once a contender for consecration and now he is a consecrated author, the history of his positions is present in the expression of his habitus in his authorial practice. And yet it is fair to ask,

²⁶⁰ As Bourdieu writes, "The hierarchy of genres, and within them the relative legitimacy of styles and authors, is a fundamental dimension of the space of possibles" (RA 89), it is what is open to Pynchon.

‘What is this gaze pointed at? What does this point of view see?’ The fledgling author in his twenties looks out over the literary field as does the successful middle-aged author or the aged and venerable writer, but do they see the same thing or even in the same way? From out of the space of possibles what potential paths open (and close) as he goes forward? What projects are pondered and abandoned? What does Pynchon see as his mission as a writer?

The Creative Project

The above use of the word “mission” should not be understood in the sense of zealotry or some pre-ordained or pre-existent plan, but closer to the Weberian use of the concept *beruf* which is best rendered as calling or vocation. It is this sense that stands behind Bourdieu’s “creative project” (*projet créateur*). Perhaps not all of the above questions can be fully answered in a study of Pynchon’s creative project, but it will provide a clearer understanding of Pynchon’s “practical response to the pressures, tensions, and forces in a field which is itself in constant flux, seen from a particular position on the cusp of a trajectory, embodied as the durable dispositions of habitus” (BL 63). However, while looking at this creative project one should not make the error of constructing a “charismatic representation of the writer as ‘creator’” (RA 190), what Bourdieu has elsewhere called the “Uncreated Creator.” It is common enough in the tradition of literary criticism to make out some author shining through the text, but it is just this that Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck caution against when they write that in negotiating the reading experience “there is neither an absolute starting point, nor a God-like creator” (12).²⁶¹ Just this type of infallible creator is imagined by Judith Chambers when she writes, “When Pynchon presents facts incorrectly, he does not do so out of ignorance but because it suits his purposes” (13). However, while it is true that Pynchon makes use of anachronisms, his errors are not always purposeful; letters written around the time of the publication of *V.* make it clear how annoyed Pynchon was about errors he had made. Bourdieu would surely remind us that creative

²⁶¹ Luc Herman and Bart Vervaeck “The Implied Author: A Secular Excommunication”.

production comes about when an agent's habitus produces practices in a specific field when faced with the space of possibles that pertains to that field (RA 128).

Another cause for caution when studying the creative project is the risk of repeating the romantic trope of the 'inspirational flash,' the moment of illumination when the future path reveals itself clearly. It is something of this sort that Bourdieu criticizes in what he considers to be the 'founding myth' of Sartre's *projet originel*, it suffers a retrospective illusion to create a teleological explanation (RA 187). This would be easy enough with Pynchon, as I show, given what little has seeped out to scholars about his novelistic plans. However, the creative project does not come about in this way; instead "it is in and through the whole system of relations which the creator maintains with the entire complex of agents composing the intellectual field at any given moment of time – that the progressive objectivization of the creative intention is achieved" (Bourdieu 1968, 170). In other words, critics objectivize the creative project and this has a specific role in the process of forming the 'public meaning' of an author's work because the author must situate herself in this discourse by responding to criticism (or not) and recognizing membership of a group or accepting or rejecting labels. For this reason, "the public meaning of the work [...] is necessarily collective" (Bourdieu "Creative Project" 173) which involves the very author. However, in advance of an analysis of the encounter of the author with his/her objectivized work and how that may lead to altered future responses in the field, we must first take a wider view to survey the social field in which the dreamy reader becomes the dreaming author.

One must turn back to a time before Pynchon had positioned himself as *actor*, before the 'Voice of the Hamster' and Cornell, when he was at the door of adolescence and secondary education – in 1950, when Thomas Pynchon was thirteen years old. It would be easy here to digress. For example, it could be pointed out that even though Pynchon had grown up to the east of Glen Cove, and thus in the shadow of the icons of wealth that existed there, he was also seeing the rise of New America in the form of the mass-produced suburb of Levittown²⁶² just south of his own community. But this urge must be stifled. It is more worthwhile to find something that occurred as a macro-

²⁶² Levittown would become a symbol of post-WWII American economic growth and the rise of suburbs accompanied by anomie and 'modern living.'

sociological event but that Pynchon was able to experience up close. Although it may seem a bit incongruous, in this case the end is a good place to start, specifically with the words of an author. However, not just any words from any author but William Faulkner's Nobel acceptance speech. The speech took place in December 1950 and fittingly enough it looked back as well as forward, and yet the speech may have surprised some people given that the content addressed the concerns of the atomic age, something that perhaps many would not have suspected Faulkner of contemplating very much. Part of what he said was, "Our tragedy today is a general and universal physical fear so long sustained by now that we can even bear it. There are no longer problems of the spirit. There is only the question: When will I be blown up?" We know that he goes on to "refuse to accept this," but it stands as a challenge because he talks of the writer's "duty." To be fair it is not known whether the young Pynchon even knew about the speech or not, however, it does prove exactly how great the new and growing nuclear concern was. According to Steven Weisenbuger, "Fears of a nuclear holocaust achieved their hysterical peak during his stint in Boeing missile support," (2012, 45). This was quite clearly the world Pynchon was growing up in. Though hard to verify, it is very likely that Thomas Pynchon experienced atomic bomb drills and perhaps saw public safety films²⁶³ on the topic, experiences that have lasting effects on the formation of habitus. Upon reflection Pynchon recognized this, doing so while writing about literary sources and influences for his first short story, "Under the Rose," that would turn into his debut novel *V*. "I had grown up reading a lot of spy fiction, novels of intrigue," (*SL* xxvii) some examples of which he lists. He then adds, "My reading at the time also included many Victorians, allowing World War I in my imagination to assume the shape of that attractive nuisance so dear to adolescent minds, the apocalyptic showdown" (*SL* xxix). Those comments echo earlier statements in which he reflects on the effect on his outlook after reading about 'universal heat-death' through Henry Adams and Norbert Wiener, and assumed, "A pose I found congenial in those days – fairly common, I hope,

²⁶³ The US Office of Civil Defense began a campaign to prepare citizens for an atomic bomb attack, included in this effort was a short animated film "Duck and Cover" (1952) to be shown at schools. There was also a massive air raid alert drill emptying the streets of New York on 13 Dec. 1952, which a fifteen year-old Pynchon almost certainly would have heard about.

among pre-adults – was that of somber glee at any idea of mass destruction or decline” (xxiii).

Writing an introduction to his early works, Pynchon is forced to reflect on the field, its positions and the forces that acted upon him. In both of these sections he comes quite close to Frank Kermode’s reflections on the period that, “no one could ignore the imminence of events that could without too much exaggeration be characterized as apocalyptic” (181).²⁶⁴ Although Kermode was almost twenty years Pynchon’s senior, they share similar recollections that center on the word “apocalyptic.” That tone does come through in both *V.* and *The Crying of Lot 49*, albeit not one of atomic oblivion but rather a less distinct though still quite dire foreboding. The apocalyptic tone is much starker in *Gravity’s Rainbow* in which the end has the rocket hanging over our heads like a modern sword of Damocles; surely, many would agree that there is a menacing tone in *Against the Day* as well. It continues to appear in his work even after he reflects on his youthful/ juvenile “pose.” Is this because he came of age with the Bomb and has lived ever after with the Rocket hovering overhead? Or perhaps because, as Kermode writes, “The apocalyptic types – empire, decadence and renovation, progress and catastrophe – are fed by history and underlie our ways of making sense of the world from where we stand, in the midst” (29). He also points out that eschatological concerns, though “long-lived,” are subject to change. So one should not assume that the young man that Pynchon looks back on weaves apocalyptic themes into his texts in the same way as the older author Pynchon would become.

There is then something that sustains Pynchon’s motivation, and it is clearly not economic gain or wide-spread fame. If William Gass writes “to get even” and Gaddis was fueled by indignation, what is behind the energy that sustains the production of a text like *Against the Day*? Has Pynchon harbored some ‘precious anger’ as he claims Orwell did? Perhaps then he has also “discovered something that might be worth even more than anger,” something after literary fame and the disillusion that may entail it, that it is “an unnatural violation of scientific reality *not* to be together” (AD 924), the need for community if only “collectively dreamed”. This points to something present in *Against*

²⁶⁴ Frank Kermode “Epilogue” *The Sense of an Ending* (Oxford 2000).

the Day though not as a reflection of the world in some realist mode, but rather a refraction, “what the world might be” as seen through the Spar-like quality of the novel. Apocalyptic concerns and anger at the masters of war are perhaps necessary, but not sufficient. So what else is needed for this seed to sprout?

It helps to have the right conditions, but first it must arrive to an appropriate spot. Young Pynchon’s calling arched from high school juvenilia through Navy to college writing courses giving rise to what Bourdieu calls a ‘*projet créatur*.’ Speller explains this as a “practical response to the pressures, tensions, and forces in a field which is itself in constant flux, seen from a particular position on the cusp of a trajectory, embodied as the durable dispositions of habitus. The writer’s ‘*projet créatur*’ is capable of quite radical changes and reversals” (BL 63). One gets an intimation of this project when Pynchon writes that he thought he was “sophisticating the Beat spirit with second-hand science” (SL) and also in private letters in which he mentions several books that he is then endeavored upon. The result is a young writer willing to write a libretto based on a dystopian science-fiction, playfully banging the high and low brows together, or in Steven Weisenburger’s words: “offsetting the gravity of a literature of ideas by the levity available in popular genres” (1990, 696) – a successful strategy that Pynchon continues to draw on. He weaves science into his writing, but his writing is not science-fiction. This idea of using science-fiction without writing it can be seen in other places like Nabokov’s short story “Lance.” First Published in the *New Yorker* in 1952 and then in a *Nabokov’s Dozen* in 1958 while Pynchon was still at Cornell along with Nabokov, it provides a narrative precedent for Pynchon’s proximity to science fiction. Even if not a model or influence, it at least shows how a “big writer” was toying with its use in literature. Automata instead of robots, rockets and airships in place of spaceships, monsters rather than aliens; this is the young author of two cultures. Adam Roberts, who claims *Gravity’s Rainbow* as a sci-fi novel, sees this approach as “an alternative to the avant-garde extremism of stylistic and formal experimentation associated with the *nouveau roman*,” and a “cross-fertilization of ‘fiction’ with modes of discourse other than traditional humanist idioms” (297). He also assumes that *Gravity’s Rainbow* is still in print due to its place in university curriculum, failing to consider sales figures or online sources that point to readers beyond academia – though neither of Roberts’ claims holds up very

well. He fails to consider the dynamics at play in the literary field. Looking at the positions available and considering Pynchon's habitus one sees how he had to navigate between undesirable and/or unavailable positions to settle on one that was congenial to his dispositions. The project takes shape.

When his debut novel appeared in 1963, it is clear from the letters in the Harry Ransom Center at Austin that Pynchon had asked people to send him reviews; it is also clear that he is critical of his book and at one point even considers abandoning fiction. According to Mel Gussow, "In April 1964, Mr. Pynchon tells Ms. Donadio he is facing a creative crisis, with four novels in process" but if he can finish them "it will be the literary event of the millennium." He wrote something very similar to friends just a month before, so he clearly had a plan that included several different literary projects. Let us note here that this occurred around the time when Pynchon was reading Borges and Cortázar; he even translated the latter's story "Axolotl." The ending of that short story marks the endings of Pynchon's later big novels in which the reader gazes into the narrative aquarium but by the end of the novel finds herself gazing out of the narrative stream. Just as the reader of *Gravity's Rainbow* finishes the book sitting in the theatre described on the last page, so does the reader of *Against the Day* sail off with the Chums of Chance on the airship that s/he boarded at some point without knowing it. The books mentioned likely referred to *The Crying of Lot 49* and also *Gravity's Rainbow*, leaving two more books. What were they? As Pynchon mentioned *Mason & Dixon* as far back as the seventies it is a good possibility that that was one of them. And the other? The book that never appeared (about a claims adjustor) is possibly the other one, though it is not certain. It was certainly not *Vineland* since the events depicted in that book were beyond Pynchon's knowledge in the sixties. Tore Andersen speculates in this direction and goes as far as to say that one of them could have been *Against the Day*. Ultimately he thinks it logical "to consider them parts of a coherent novelistic project conceived by Pynchon back in the early 1960s," but this is where we differ because even though I agree there was an early 'plan,' I see this moment as the point at which we can see the embryonic concept of the author coming into contact with the diverse forces and struggles that shape the literary field, thus giving rise to the creative project. Praised by critics and yet denied a Pulitzer for his "obscene" writing, Pynchon went 'to ground' for

a long quiet decade, which would normally be detrimental to an agent in the field of cultural production who must produce to stay current. It is during this time that he becomes disillusioned with literary fame. When Pynchon resumes his practice within the literary field, that is to say the publishing of books or writing of articles, he has had more than ten years to contemplate and engage with the objectivization of his work. Let us recall that,

The relationship the creator has with his work is always mediated by the relationship he has with the public meaning of his works. This meaning is concretely recalled to him with regard to all the relationships he has with all the other members of the intellectual world. It is the product of the infinitely complex interactions between intellectual acts seen as judgements which are both determined and determining of the truth and value of works and of authors. (Bourdieu "Intellectual Field and Creative Project" 173)

Pynchon informed some friends in a letter (9 Mar.) that Joseph Heller had told him that *V.* was "too deep for him," a reaction that he clearly hoped would not be general. Later, Saul Bellow's refusal to trumpet Pynchon's second novel, *The Crying of Lot 49*, would also have stuck with Pynchon. Of course over the years other authors gave voice either in private or print to their thoughts about Pynchon's work. Some like John Gardner were more vocal and others like John Updike criticized him more quietly; but in the literary world word gets around. The creative project forms thus with the writer looking back and forming in retrospect a view of his mission. That one still finds a note of the apocalyptic in *Against the Day* is not a sign of repetition, rather of the evolving and ever-forming creative project.

If no plan survives contact with the enemy, then no artistic vision goes unaffected by its entry to and interaction with a field. Whatever ideas Pynchon had about a literary future went through some changes, and any plans or projects he had altered accordingly. "What is called 'creation' is the encounter between a social constituted *habitus* and a particular position that is already instituted or *possible* in the division of the labour of cultural production" (Bourdieu "Creators" 141). Letters show he followed reviews, obliging him to engage as a lector with the critic's objectivized reading of his own novel.²⁶⁵ After a decade playing the literary game, he clearly must have been aware

²⁶⁵ "Even the author most indifferent to the lure of success and the least disposed to make concessions to the demands of the public is surely obliged to take account of the social truth of his work as it is reported back to him by the public, the critics or analysts, and to redefine his creative project in relation to this truth" (Bourdieu "Creators" 168).

of the status he had gained as well as the categories applied to his work. It is in this to-and-fro that scholars find the creative project. What Pynchon calls “Our common nightmare The Bomb” (*SL* xxix) was in his early work by his own account and it clearly hung in the air throughout the eighties, but in our contemporary world the siren blast of air raids are forgotten and out of use. Our apocalyptic concerns are much more diverse now, as are Pynchon’s, because the threat of M.A.D. (Mutually Assured Destruction) is not isolated to the hands of two superpowers, it has proliferated. But so have the sources of threat with epidemics and terrorist attacks extending worry spaces hitherto unthreatened. Our common nightmare is plural and global, and perhaps that is one of the most interesting things to observe in *Against the Day*, that apocalypse is global, not just an attack on the US.

Against the Day: A Global Novel?

Against the Day is a novel that starts in the US but eventually “covers the globe from the west coast of America to inner Asia” (Duyfhuizen *Cambridge*, 71), overflowing into other countries and onto other continents and into their conflicts; it may start as an ‘American’ novel, however that is not what one sees when looking back over the scenes in the Balkans, Siberia, or Mexico. It is with some trepidation that I broach this topic, for it could be seen as intentionally polemical to propose that this massive novel by one of the great American authors is to some degree more a great global novel than some version of the great American novel. After all, literary fields are normally seen as subfields of the greater social field and thus part of the nation-state/ country in which that society is located, thus Bourdieu’s study of Flaubert and the French literary field. Nevertheless, in order to study the place of *Against the Day* in Thomas Pynchon’s trajectory through the literary field, scholars should not ignore how products from a national literary field are shaped by or received in wider global contexts. Some scholars have already provided a precedent by trying to apply Bourdieu’s sociology of literature beyond the national borders which are seen as somewhat porous in terms of the circulation of cultural goods and practices. The editors of *The Global Literary Field* write, “As this field grows in size and becomes more complex, the task of making sense of it through academic research becomes more difficult, requiring scholars to move beyond

familiar oppositions between the foreign and the domestic, the universal and the parochial.”²⁶⁶ In *Against the Day* it is easy to find instances of these binaries; for example, Reef and Frank Traverse’s parochial speech define them as parts of a small community whereas their activity in mining and labor disputes indicate their involvement in the universal struggle for organized labor. The greater degree of porosity and circulation, though uneven, between literary fields necessitates considering to what degree, if at all, *Against the Day* can be considered a global novel.

With our ever more globalized outlook it is not surprising that we have come to talk of global literature. The field of artistic production had already produced ‘world music’ so it would not be long in recuperating Goethe’s *weltliteratur*; scholarly works and books on this topic have proliferated in the last two decades. A discussion of this type is not incompatible²⁶⁷ with Bourdieu’s concepts and theory as a number of scholars following in his footsteps have shown, creating what John Speller calls, “a major extension of Bourdieu’s theory to the transnational level of ‘world literary space’” (BL 71). One of the people involved in that extension is Anna Boschetti who believes, “we can reconcile a rigorous analysis – by definition limited and circumscribed – with a worldwide perspective” (13). Yet others, though less oriented by Bourdieu, take a more focused approach on this topic. For example, Jernej Habjan is interested in, “the relation between processes of globalization and literary genres” and believes that, “by studying such lasting formations as genres that we can hope to defamiliarize conventional self-positionings” (1), an approach that seems made to include study of *Against the Day* with its abundance of genre and its global scale. And finally, Pascale Casanova’s *The World Republic of Letters* plants a much broader argument in her book by extending Bourdieu’s work on a global scale. As can be seen from these examples Bourdieu’s work is being taken into this developing academic discourse. But what about Thomas Pynchon, can this very American novelist be studied in this light?

In response to the question of whether or not Pynchon can be studied within the rubric of global literature as Casanova claims for James Joyce and others, some respond by questioning the premise behind the claim that Pynchon is a producer of ‘purely’

²⁶⁶ *The Global Literary Field* Edited by Anna Guttman, Michel Hockx and George Paizis, xx.

²⁶⁷ Just this point is made by Marco Santoro in “Putting Bourdieu in the Global Field” *Sociologica* 2008

American novels. Michael Harris challenges the inclusion of Pynchon in the criticism that US authors “write almost exclusively about America [...] ignorant of the world beyond their countries borders,” a claim even voiced by Swedish Academy member Horace Engdahl when he criticized the US for its isolation and insularity. Harris argues that Pynchon is not guilty of this charge because his writing is not strictly about the US, but rather demonstrates “an overriding preoccupation with the European colonial era in” its former ‘Third World’ holdings (199). Though Harris is more interested in Pynchon’s use of postcolonial history and issues, part of his argument claims that “Pynchon’s novels to date appear to follow a pattern related to recent global history” (199). However, Harris is not the only one to see a global leaning in Pynchon’s work. For example, James Gourley quotes Don DeLillo who writes in a letter that *Gravity’s Rainbow* “gave writing an unapologetic range – even a sort of cosmic range” (6) to US writing. Another Pynchon scholar who sees the possibility of reading some of Pynchon’s novels in a global context, is Tore Andersen. He “argues that Thomas Pynchon’s three novels *Gravity’s Rainbow*, *Mason & Dixon* and *Against the Day* can profitably be read together as an ambitiously conceived world-historical trilogy which tells the story of the gestation and emergence of our contemporary global reality” (1). Andersen finds earlier attempts to categorize Pynchon’s novels or classify them into groups problematic in one way or another. His idea of a ‘trilogy’ (not in its normal sense) is proposed as a way to address “the remarkable unity of their vision” (8) shared by *Gravity’s Rainbow*, *Mason & Dixon* and *Against the Day*, novels that Andersen considers to be “world-historical or global.” He contrasts his own position to long-standing Pynchon scholar David Cowart who divides “Pynchon’s trajectory into three different phases,” a division that revolves around Pynchon’s use of material related to German history, culture and ideology. Andersen thinks that Cowart’s division may obscure what the three novels have in common, a concern I also share but I will add that it puts too much focus on the choice of content without looking at the reason for the choice of content. No one would doubt the importance of material related to German history in Pynchon’s novels, but one must ask why that position is taken. As mentioned in the previous section my understanding of what Bourdieu calls the creative project differs from Andersen’s idea that these three novels constitute “three installments in one major novelistic project, or perhaps as three

parts of a triptych;” for the purposes of my thesis, it is Andersen’s view on reading Pynchon through global contexts or as “world-historical” novels that is most interesting.

But are the choices really limited to reading *Against the Day* as a global novel or as US fiction? I would like to look at two more ways of reading the novel before moving on. On one hand perhaps one could consider the extent to which the novel fits Franco Moretti’s paradigm of the “modern epic.”²⁶⁸ As a characteristic of it, he notes that a “disavowal of violence is a constant of modern epic form” (25), something that can be easily perceived in Pynchon’s novels since the protagonists generally avoid physical conflict. Although Moretti’s *Modern Epic* does not mention any of Pynchon’s books, one might ask how suitable of an example *Against the Day* would be for Moretti. Given that his other examples include Goethe’s *Faustus*, Joyce’s *Ulysses* and Garcia Marquez’s *One Hundred Years of Solitude*, Pynchon does not seem like a bad fit. His place seems all the more congruous when one reads Moretti’s hypothesis about magical realism in the occident which he sees as “the desire of contemporary societies for ‘meaning’, imagination, *re-enchantment*” (249). This is familiar ground for Pynchon scholars who see what Moretti calls “Weberian coldness” as the impediment to a re-enchanted world. Looked at this way one might well read *Against the Day* as one of Moretti’s “modern epics.” However, in substantial contrast to this renovated idea of the epic, one might view the novel as an example of what Caren Irr calls the “geopolitical novel.” Even though Pynchon is hardly mentioned in her book *Toward the Geopolitical Novel: U.S. Fiction in the Twenty-first Century* (2014), his novel *Against the Day* would seem to be workable for her idea. Irr states that “authors of geopolitical fiction tend to support pro-global ideas in combination with liberal individualism or moderate collectivism in political action” (22); although “pro-global ideals” per se may not be explicitly stated, some scholars have found environmental concerns in Pynchon’s work that could be read as a ‘pro-global’ concern. And as for political action and collectivism, one might look to Pynchon’s use of anarcho-syndicalism in *Against the Day* as an example. However, since Irr finds William Vollman’s “globe-trotting narratives” to be “compelling but ultimately too unique to sit comfortably in a genre” (11) perhaps that would impede *Against the Day*’s inclusion in the set of geopolitical novels she offers. Of course in a novel that

²⁶⁸ Franco Moretti *Modern Epic: The World System from Goethe to García Marquez*. Verso, 1996.

exhibits multiple genre use it is perhaps not feasible or accurate to place it in only one category despite the usefulness of reading it through that lens.

In spite of the place that genre study has come to occupy in current academia, the above is not meant as a full treatment of genre in *Against the Day*, something that would involve a lengthier endeavor. Rather, the purpose is to look at how Pynchon's evolving creative project allows for the inclusion of content and themes that extend Pynchon's previous literary efforts even while responding to the changing world around. After all, this is the author who borrowed the following from Wittgenstein: "Die Welt ist alles, was der Fall ist."²⁶⁹ *Against the Day* readily lends itself to the above globalized readings which although different from each other are all rather broad in contextual scope, and each brings to light some facet of the novel that otherwise might be left out of focus. Whether one experiences *Against the Day* as an example of US fiction, global literature, a modern epic or geopolitical novel is important for the reading produced by the individual reader or for the student of literature, but in this study it is not as important or at least not in the same way. In fact, I suspect Bourdieu would remind us that the conflicting views, debates, and struggles that arise in an attempt to define and categorize a work are evidence of the contests that exist in the academic field, based on the individual scholar's dispositions and his/her response to the positions available in the academic field at the time. It is important to consider the positions that are open to an author and how s/he responds given her/his habitus. In response to a world with global corporations, economies and communications how does Pynchon continue to express his interest and concerns related to faraway places²⁷⁰ while maintaining a close connection to US cultures and histories? Pynchon's practical response as an author is a novel of immense proportions, for it is by such economy of scale that he is able to further his creative project and re-affirm his position as legitimate author of maximalist and encyclopedic historical fiction. An author's most significant position-taking is the production of a literary work. To write a novel is not the same as an essay; the sum of Pynchon's essays and other texts does not add up to a novel like *Gravity's Rainbow*. In

²⁶⁹ The quote is of the first proposition of Wittgenstein's *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* and it appears in *V*. In English it reads: "The world is everything that is the case."

²⁷⁰ We might note that this interest appears early in his letters to the Sales in which he expresses interest in going to Africa and then later in *V*. and more so from then on.

1997 Pynchon's *Mason & Dixon* came out, a novel some twenty years in the making, and then he was quiet again. Even when the events of 11 September 2001 brought disaster to his city, he maintained his veil of silence. That is until 2006, when *Against the Day* reached stores; coming five years after the attacks and in the middle of a 'war on terror,' the novel was bound to be read in light of recent events. Now it is time to take a closer look at the product of Pynchon's authorial response.

Chapter 9

Arcing Through and Overarching Against the Day

Like arcs of electricity between two electrodes, narratives and themes arc between the covers of the book as well as the time frame of the book itself. The narrative trajectory of the novel arches over the *fin de siècle* period as the author's trajectory arches from the so called "American Century" to the present one which would appear to be much more global, at least thus far. In a wider sense *Against the Day* creates an arc through the whole of Pynchon's *oeuvre* by going back to a time frame (the *fin de siècle* period of the late 1800's) that was central to his first novel *V*. In a closer focus on the theme of anarchy, which comes to the fore in *The Crying of Lot 49*, the reader is brought back to the historical roots of anarchy and many other themes familiar to readers of Pynchon's novels. Charles Hollander claims critics "recognized strong similarity" between *Against the Day* and earlier novels and then levelled the charge of repetition, which prompted Hollander to ask: "Why did he [Pynchon] write a massive book that goes over so much the same ground, and uses much the same bag of tropes to express his favorite themes?" (52) The question is a fair one, but the answer hardly does it justice. Hollander thinks that what motivates and orients Pynchon's writing is an attempt at "hinting toward the 'hidden history' of the USA for those willing to do the scholarship by tracking down the clues he offers" (53). To my mind this has a few problems. First, it implies that there is one correct reading and second, following from that, that certain critics are the only ones who can unlock these encrypted warnings – the scholar goes back to being a cleric, an initiate in the mysteries. The third problem I find with this is that it makes the mistake of treating Pynchon as an uncreated creator, a genius pre-ordained; it cuts off the work from the literary and social fields in which it is produced and circulates. Against this tendency Richard Shusterman cautions thus, "For even the most immediate experiences of aesthetic surface seem conditioned by habits and categories of perception and by dispositions of feeling that involve cultural mediation and social training. We misunderstand aesthetic immediacy when we see it as entirely unmediated" (2). By employing Bourdieu's concepts and methods, a different understanding of the novel emerges, but to do so I first had to show how Pynchon's

creative project was constituted and grew along with his trajectory through the literary field. Although many may think of *Gravity's Rainbow* as Pynchon's opus magnum, it is not his central novel. As I show in the following, *Against the Day* occupies a special position in Pynchon's trajectory, it unifies his novels by looking back to his previous work as well as opening the way for future novels, it arcs from *V.* to *Bleeding Edge*. It remains to show how Pynchon objectifies the social structure and generative structure (RA 48) of which *Against the Day* is a product.

Bourdieu's invitation to apply his ideas to other social fields prompted me to do so with the US social field, but it was his work in *The Rules of Art* that made me wonder how I could accept his challenge in regard to the US literary field. His use of Flaubert and *Sentimental Education* to study the French literary field prompted me to ask what US author could be studied in a similar fashion. It might help to recall that

For Bourdieu, the 'homology' between Frédéric's fictional world and Flaubert's social worlds is situated at the level of their *structure*. This structure is, however, only visible in the novel (as it is in our everyday reality) by its effects [...] Taking note of who attends the various soirées, receptions, and reunions, and using the many details. (BL 104)

I argue the same is true of Pynchon's *Against the Day* although not as steadfastly as Bourdieu's homology between Flaubert's world and Frédéric's, that is to say that Flaubert's Paris is more like Frédéric's than Pynchon's New York is like the one in *Against the Day*. If there is a homology between Pynchon's world and the fictional world in *Against the Day* it will be perceived by taking note of the various agents' appearances and connections to other characters and places in the novel, events and movements that demonstrate their position in the social field and the exchanges of capital at their disposal. Expressions of taste, displays of wealth and symbolic power and number of other details provided by Pynchon offer clues to characters social positions that can be represented in a sociogramme. Against concerns of an overly biographically oriented study I put forward quotes by two authors. First, in the late seventies Pynchon wrote to his former agent noting that "As for spilling my life story, I try to do that all the time" (Gussow). About six years later Pynchon would publicly state:

Somewhere I had come up with the notion that one's personal life had nothing to do with fiction, when the truth, as everyone knows, is nearly the opposite. Moreover, contrary evidence was all around me, though I chose to ignore it, for in fact the fiction both published and unpublished that moved and pleased me then as now was precisely that which had been made luminous,

undeniably authentic by having been found and taken up, always at a cost, from deeper, more shared levels of the life we all really live. (SL xxxii)

To these quotes we can add another about the place of biography in literary production; Arthur Miller said, “The plays are my autobiography. I can’t write plays that don’t sum up where I am. I’m in all of them. I don’t know how else to go about writing.”²⁷¹ The declarations make it clear that the author’s experience as a biological individual in a specific society cannot be isolated from his/her work.²⁷² So to carry this analysis forward and bring it to completion I must do two things. First, in order to demonstrate that a structural homology exists between the fictional social space in the novel and Thomas Pynchon’s social space, a character comparable to Frédéric is needed, and then movements and trajectories can be traced and held over against the social space that Pynchon inhabits. To the extent that these crossings, encounters, and movements demonstrate a structure, it is not necessarily an entirely consciously produced one. Additionally, to indicate the special place that I claim *Against the Day* has in Pynchon’s trajectory I have to show how it is structurally central to his creative project. To this end, the structures looked at here are ellipses and arcs, elements of conic sections that have appeared in Pynchon’s previous work. In the end we shall see how much Flaubert’s formula has in common with Pynchon’s.

While it may be true that there are no formulas in the human sciences as there are in mathematics or chemistry that does not mean that the term must be altogether absent from their discourse. What Bourdieu has in mind when he uses the term “generative formula” is not all that different from the formulas of the so-called ‘hard sciences’ which are applicable across a range of cases; he sees iterations of functions and variables in the movements and actions of characters. For Bourdieu a structural homology maintains between diverse fields, spaces or systems of positions in response to which habitus generates practices.

Thus, through the character of Frédéric and the description of his positioning in the social space, Flaubert delivers the generative formula which is the basis of his own novelistic creation: the double refusal of opposed positions in different social spaces and of the corresponding taking of

²⁷¹ From Christopher Bigsby’s *Arthur Miller: 1962-2005*, (1).

²⁷² Although I am sympathetic to Albert Rolls’ criticism of Boris Kachka’s use of biography in his review of *Bleeding Edge*, it is for different reasons. I agree with Rolls that the “Pynchon stand-in” that Kachka proposes is not the best option, but that does not mean that some refracted version of the author cannot be found in the text.

positions which is at the foundation of an objectifying distance with respect to the social world.
(RA 29)

Now, even though not everyone would agree with Bourdieu's analysis of Flaubert's *Sentimental Education*, very few scholars would object to seeing Frédéric as a sort of stand in for Flaubert. In order to argue that something similar to Bourdieu's claim above can be said for Pynchon's *Against the Day*, it is first necessary to decide what character would stand in relation to Pynchon the way that Frédéric does to Flaubert. Prior to doing so it is worth bearing in mind the Arthur Miller quote above; a number of characters may have bits of the author built into them, although not in an autobiographical manner, and yet one of these may stand closer to the author. However, it is not enough to simply propose a candidate for a character as *ersatz* Pynchon, one must analyze the positions occupied or abandoned and moves made to determine if there is a homological relation between that character's trajectory and Pynchon's.

The Author's World and the World around the Author

To propose that the social space of *Against the Day* is a refracted version of Pynchon's social world is not an entirely unique idea. Christy Burns argues for something similar when she proposes "that in *Mason & Dixon* Pynchon's temporal or *historical* coordinates are the mappable difference, measurable via his synchronization of the 1760s charted alongside the 1990s" (2). However, not only literary scholars expressed this perception; in his review of the novel Anthony Macris saw Pynchon "making parallels with our own brave new world," but this was also echoed in other reviews.²⁷³ Of course it is one thing to 'see similarities' and another to measure how the various spaces and fields compare to one another. Let us for now say only that the distribution of capital and the composition of capital at agents' disposal is not very unlike the social world Pynchon inhabits. For example, a young man from a working-class family in a small mining community in Colorado at the turn of the century has less chance of going to an Ivy League school than someone from the same demographic at present, but both of

²⁷³ Among the publications that printed reviews that touched on this refracted verisimilitude are *Time*, *The Guardian*, *Austin Chronicle*, and the *San Francisco Chronicle*; I have refrained from quoting each instance for the sake of brevity.

them have less chance than their cohort peers living in an urban area on the East Coast. In both worlds the physical distance from cultural capitals converts into social distance from opportunities to access or attain capital; unsurprisingly, a number of characters move towards urban centers where they enter into competition for capital (both economic and cultural or social).

“The reign of money is asserted everywhere, and the fortunes of the newly dominant class, either industrialists making unprecedented profits from technical transformations and state subsidies, or occasionally small speculators, are flaunted in the luxurious mansions,” (RA 48-9). This description could be applied to the social world in *Against the Day* which saw the creation of fantastic mansions that Pynchon would grow up in the shadow of. However, it could just as easily be said of Pynchon’s social world in which the reign of money continues its creep, creating a culture of conspicuous consumption and millionaire politicians. All the above leads one to conclude that what David Cowart has called Pynchon’s ‘Art of Allusion’ is in full force in *Against the Day*. Events and problems in the novel clearly draw on real historical referents (the struggle of organized labor, robber-barons, geopolitical strife lurching toward the possibility of war, etc.), but also seem to point to events and traumas of the contemporary world. It is from this point of view that Paolo Simonetti argues that the novel “obliquely alludes to contemporary discourses about the causes and effects of (and responsibilities for) the 2001 attacks” (27). Given such views of the novel’s refracted image of Pynchon’s social world, it is not surprising for some like Tiina Käkelä-Puumala to call *Against the Day* “a historical novel [...] also a very contemporary novel” (147). While I agree with her that the novel looks toward our contemporary era, I disagree with her view that “In *Against the Day*, economy is not a field of human activity but the field in which human life is defined, for it permeates social relations and thinking” (147). This view that claims ‘money makes the world go round’ excludes the consideration of any other form of capital other than the economic and thus imposes the idea of humans as ‘homo economicus’ and thus fails to consider the way in which power and authority are exerted in the novel as much as in Pynchon’s social world. It remains to be seen to what degree there are homological relations between the systems of relations in the novel and in the social world that Pynchon inhabits.

One more word on the world of *Against the Day*. It has been previously noted that there is a family resemblance between *Mason & Dixon* and *Against the Day*, and yet there is a crucial difference. The narrative basis of the former is built on the journal of Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon, two white men that are minor figures in that type of history based on 'Great Men'. This must be compared to one of the main historical sources for the latter novel. According to former German Secretary of Culture Michael Naumann, he helped Pynchon with some research regarding the real historical figure of mathematician Sofia Kovalevskaya, who would seem to have been the basis for the character Yashmeen to some extent. Although this narrative structure is not as central as the one for *Mason & Dixon*, it is certainly important in the novel as the center of action switches to Europe and mathematically themed content takes the stage. But more significantly it is a very different figure to build upon. As Raymond Williams writes,

'Creation' of characters is then in effect a kind of tagging: name, sex, occupation, physical type. In many important plays and novels, within certain modes, the tagging is still evident, at least for 'minor' characters, according to social conventions of distribution of significance [...] Over a wide range of intentions, the real literary process is *active reproduction*. (209, his italics)

Thus it is that Pynchon reproduces his world even while at the same time he reproduces theirs.

Kit is to Pynchon as Frédéric is to Flaubert?

On first glance the numerous characters in the book might seem to make it difficult to find one that stands in relation to Pynchon as Frédéric does to Flaubert; however, after winnowing out the secondary characters that populate Pynchon's narratives, one comes back to the central narratives of the Traverse family and the Chums of Chance. Still, in a novel with almost two hundred characters, it is difficult to keep track of positions, movements and social trajectories, so it seemed particularly serendipitous when I read the following from Bernard Duyfhuizen: "Of all the characters in *Against the Day*, Kit travels the farthest"²⁷⁴ (*The Cambridge Companion* 74). He adds that Kit embodies the adventurer/ traveler type (Kit is short for Christopher, patron saint

²⁷⁴ The same is true of Pynchon who has almost certainly travelled more than his siblings in physical space and definitely further in social space.

of travelers), but since his line of argumentation goes in another direction Duyfhuizen does not continue to look at positions Kit has accepted or rejected. Had he done so, he might have concluded that Kit also travels the most in social space with a trajectory that is more positive than anyone else in his family or the novel. After all, where does the reader encounter the young Kit? One no more than meets this young math prodigy and the reader sees him join Tesla and then receive an offer to study at Yale, paid for by Scarsdale Vibe in return for future work and inventions. We know that Pynchon also received a grant that allowed him to study at an expensive university, taking him rather far from home for a sixteen year old.²⁷⁵ We do not know what his departure was like but we do know how he describes Kit's departure to Yale. After Kit argues with his father, which leaves Webb thinking regretfully of his own estranged father, the scene switches from Webb's interior discourse to the train station (the new web of power that connects back to Vibe and his Juggernaut). Kit is accompanied only by his mother, the men's obvious absence a sign of their reproach. Kit's acceptance of the Vibe offer means a change of location but also of field and practice (from mining to math at Yale), whereas his brothers are closer to Webb – Reef takes up Webb's work and Frank is suspected of being the Kielsing Kid.²⁷⁶ The scene is very poignant, in fact it is one of the most intimate scenes between the siblings and their mother (Kit is the only one to get such a sendoff). Kit's journey will take him far from home before reuniting with family again. Pynchon also felt the pull to leave home: "I mistakenly thought of Long Island then as a giant and featureless sandbar, without history, someplace to get away from and not to feel very connected to" (*SL* xxi). They would both travel far and wide before getting back to some place to settle, for both "might no longer say "home"" (*AD* 732).

Clearly, Kit is born into very different family (miners) than Thomas Pynchon (petite bourgeoisie) so there are some basic differences in what positions they are born into. Moreover, whereas Kit is the youngest of his siblings Thomas is the oldest, a very important difference in position that can affect trajectory. And despite these differences

²⁷⁵ From East Norwich to Cornell University in Ithaca is about 255 miles, a trip that takes one over the border of Pennsylvania and over the Mason and Dixon line; in 1953 Pynchon would have depended on trains or buses to get to New York or Long Island.

²⁷⁶ Though some might see in Frank's multiple disguises and border-crossing flights an echo of Pynchon's own peripatetic wanderings, it is Kit's trajectory which most resembles Pynchon's. This does not establish a biographical equivalence but rather demonstrates how the sequence of positions are homological to a significant degree.

there are a number of similarities that give one pause. For example, both Kit and Pynchon change their area of study at university, an act of rebellion or betrayal.²⁷⁷ Also, towards the end of the novel Kit's "vectorist skills" (1068) get him a job much as Pynchon engineering and writing skills helped get him a job at Boeing. But perhaps more significant than these structural similarities in their trajectories is the fact that when Kit meets the character Dally for the second time it begins a romance upon which the novel turns structurally and geographically, a love story that eventually brings the novel to a close. That Pynchon's own love story happened in the middle of his life and was a pivotal point for him seems more than coincidence.

A Homology of Double Refusal

More than anything it is Kit's refusal that most aligns him with Pynchon. That Thomas Pynchon has refused or rejected certain positions or possibilities should be clear, so it is not surprising that other scholars have made note of this. Tony Tanner has observed in Pynchon's writing a double refusal of the literary heritage of romanticism on one side and revolution on the other: "... neither of the two suggested ways of being in – or against – society worked or can work: the delusions of romanticism are matched by the delusions of apocalyptic revolutionary politics" (31). But there are others positions to accept or reject outside the literary field. How else does one discuss Pynchon's change from engineering to English or his desire to escape from the corporate world? Certainly his refusal of opposing literary heritages is comparable to Flaubert's (RA 79), but there is more. We would do better to consider what Bourdieu sees as a "double rupture."

The occupants of this contradictory position are destined to oppose, according to two different relationships, different established positions and hence to try to reconcile the irreconcilable, that is the two opposed principles governing their double rejection. [...] If they reject the bourgeois life to which they were destined, meaning both career and family, it is not to trade one slavery for another [...] nor to place themselves in the service of a cause, no matter how noble or generous. (RA 77)

²⁷⁷ For Jeffrey Severs betrayal "creates an entire poetics for Pynchon" that is most easily seen in *Vineland* (Pynchon Notes 56-57, 2009, 212-228). However, I think he would agree that the theme of betrayal clearly extends to *Against the Day* as well.

Pynchon's refusal is double in that it refuses a homological set of positions in separate fields; as much as he was bound to disappoint his parents by rejecting his family's social place and values, he is also "fated to disappoint all those who expect literature to demonstrate something" (RA 103). Pynchon was no more likely to speak at the Chicago Democratic Convention than he was to write an 'anti-war' piece.

Kit also responds to space of position-takings with a double refusal. By accepting the offer of a free university education from Vibe, Kit rejects the miner's life and thereby his father; however, later when he becomes aware of Vibe's responsibility for his father's death (331), Kit can only contemplate escape and vendetta. As Kit leaves, Scarsdale tells him to "Become the next Edison," and then we read the following:

The man sat there smirking, secure in unquestioned might, unable to imagine how all he believed protecting him had just turned to glass – if not smashed to bits quite yet, then shaped for now into a lens that promised close and merciless scrutiny, or maybe someday, when held at the appropriate distance, death by focused light. And he should have said Tesla, not Edison. (AD 331)

Kit corrects the name because Edison (and thereby General Electric), though hardly mentioned in the novel, are the unspoken agents of the Elect that prey upon the Preterite like Tesla; in Pynchon's work it is the Preterite underdogs who are to be sympathized with. Kit eventually enters the intellectual subfield of the production of mathematical knowledge in which he occupies a dominated position in the field by siding with the quaternions against the vectorists. So although Kit's position in the social and intellectual field is different from either that of Frédéric Moreau or of Thomas Pynchon, the double rupture experienced and the contradictory positions occupied by these agents stand in homological relation.

If in these various spaces and positions one begins to perceive the outline of the chiasmic structure that Bourdieu sees in *Sentimental Education*, with Frédéric's opposing structural twin in the figure of Arnoux, then what character in *Against the Day* stands as Kit's double or twin? Fleetwood Vibe is surely the answer, in part because he is the Vibe sibling that most importantly figures in the book but also because he stands in a structurally opposed position to Kit. Kit exceeds his father's expectations by being offered a Yale education, which Webb opposes due to Vibe's sponsorship, "You're either my boy or theirs, can't be both" (105). This conflict leads to a falling out, a lesser of which one can rather easily imagine happening when Pynchon switched his major from

engineering to English, a sort of betrayal to his father.²⁷⁸ This rift appears in an inverted fashion between Scarsdale Vibe and his son Fleetwood who fails to live up to his father's expectations. Scarsdale has a low opinion of his offspring's potential so he tries to groom Kit to take over, something that comes up between Kit and one of Fleetwood's siblings (*AD* 328). In the end, Kit stands to Fleetwood as the Traverse family in general stands in contra position to the wealthy Vibe family, made clear by the almost completely opposite positions that they hold in the social world.²⁷⁹

When the reader first meets Fleetwood, he is sent on an expedition "at the behest of his father" (130), it is this expedition that brings something back that delivers ruin upon New York. After this traumatic event, which is narrated through Fleetwood's journal, the reader meets Fleetwood again and learns that he wants to "do nothing but explore" (159) and later it is revealed in an analeptic leap that Fleetwood "wanted to be like" other explorers "who were fated to die young," he wants to shake off what he is. After he felt "that every bit of American predisposition" was gone he heads to the Transvaal but shortly after crossing the border his thinking shifts and it occurs to him that he is there to "make his own personal fortune" (168). He kills a native in questionable circumstances and the experience comes back to haunt him in dreams, leaving him "bedazzled at having been shown the secret backlands of wealth, and how sooner or later it depended on some act of murder, seldom limited to once" (170). He is set at odds with his fate by his 'accident'; it is tempting to say of Fleetwood what Bourdieu writes of Arnoux (Frédéric's 'twin'), that he "is doomed to ruin by his indeterminateness and his ambition to reconcile contraries" (*RA* 21). When these 'twins' meet for the last time, Fleetwood is full of despair, "[...] what life could he expect as one more murderer with his money in Rand shares, destined for golf courses, restaurants with horrible food and worse music, the aging faces of his kind?" (*AD* 791). They sit together, but are miles apart with very different trajectories.

²⁷⁸ According to information gathered by Boris Kachka, there was a rift between Pynchon and his parents though it is not clear what the cause was. Presumably, it was not just Thomas Pynchon's desire to be a writer; there were likely some ideological differences that led to a period of estrangement.

²⁷⁹ In fact, it is rather remarkable how much the Traverse and Vibe families mirror one another; Scarsdale and Webb both have three sons, and in each family there is a girl with a fairly diminished role in the novel, with the difference being that in the Traverse family it is a daughter and in the Vibe clan she is a cousin, Dittany.

One sees how Fleetwood's "contraries" cause him conflict early in the novel. Back from the Arctic (Vormance) Expedition, which has unleashed something horrible on the whole of the twentieth century, he is the "Explorer's Club" surrounded by others of a similar social status but a different habitus. These faceless members of the club use racial epithets and try to goad Fleetwood into some colonial story-telling (the kind of story they might get in theatre from Fleetwood's uncle, R. Wilshire Vibe) which he cuts short without indulging in details (148). It is here during a discussion at lunch of "civilized evil in far-off lands" (145) that Fleetwood wonders aloud what would happen if "another form of life" made people cannibalize others, "Not literally" but with "each of us knowing that at some point it will be our own turn" (AD 147). A listener responds that Fleetwood must be referring to "Capitalism and the Trusts" to which Fleetwood answers by claiming to see "little difference" and asks: "How else could we have come to it?" To this someone responds with a variant of social Darwinism that sees man evolve to "Some *compound organism*, the American Corporation" (148) with personhood²⁸⁰ granted by the Supreme Court. What this amounts to is a sort of Corporatism (Mussolini's other term for fascism) from which Fleetwood does not appear to get much comfort. The dog-eat-dog world that Fleetwood contemplates is not explained away by a corporatist philosophy tinged by social Darwinism that reduces the social world to a market society. For Fleetwood Vibe the situation of *omnia contra omnis* that forces people to cannibalize each other comes from an "incursion from elsewhere" (148). He can no more agree with what he hears than respond with revolutionary rhetoric; he is haunted although in a manner different from that which Kit will experience.

Let us briefly consider the differences. Kit defies his father and rejects a miner's life by going to Yale, toward the centers of capital and their institutions which award agents with cultural capital; Kit goes to acquire a more specifically defined scholastic habitus. His is an extraordinary change as he moves from a position that is economically and culturally dominated to one that is dominated but lies within the dominant field of power. (See figure above on page 38.) Kit increases his volume of capital although its composition is primarily cultural capital acquired in the scholastic process. And yet he

²⁸⁰ At the time that *Against the Day* was being finished and going to print, a very important judicial case was developing ('Citizens United v. FEC') that would eventually rule to give corporations freedom of speech and thus something akin to personhood and the pertaining individual rights.

cannot avoid feeling that he is an outsider; his actions betray him. When a Vibe scion at Yale observes reproachfully that Kit has joined no clubs he adds, “[...] you might as well be a Jew, you know” (318). Whatever charm or refuge it seemed to offer Kit wore away “as Kit came to understand how little the place was about studying,” he begins to see “toxic layers beneath” and concludes he must leave. He realizes how little he belongs to the social world the other students come from:

Kit thought, I will never look like this fellow, talk like that, be wanted in that way. At first it produced a terrible feeling of exclusion, a piercing conviction that because of where and to whom he had been born, some world of privilege would forever be denied him. (AD 319)

Here one sees a powerful description of the symbolic violence that exists in the relations between agents, positions and institutions. One sees how the agent participates in the double negation, Kit denies to himself what had previously been denied. Upon learning of his father’s death he convinces Scarsdale Vibe to let him study in Göttingen and his trajectory takes Kit further from the mines of Colorado. It is on the whole a positive trajectory. Can the same be said of Fleetwood Vibe? Not at all. Whereas Kit goes towards cultural centers to acquire the scholastic competences necessary to play the game of mathematics, Fleetwood goes to Africa to void himself of his social and class dispositions. Fleetwood Vibe is not the heir who faithfully follows the father’s footsteps and enlarges the family fortune, indeed his geographic removes to far corners of the earth correspond to his ostensible rejection of his father’s position and place.²⁸¹ Thus, by the end of the novel Fleetwood Vibe does not greatly augment his volume of capital, despite his “Rand shares,” and its composition is only slightly more cultural; he is no famous explorer – it is never mentioned if his journals are published – and he is loath to tell stories at the “Explorers Club” (147). Fleetwood’s trajectory moves toward the pole of cultural capital but it is not positive. The social trajectories of Kit and Fleetwood do not cross as exactly as their geographic paths do.

²⁸¹ A more successful reproduction of values can be found in Webb Traverse’s grandchild, Jesse Traverse, whose left leaning lineage continues in *Vineland*; Jesse writes a one line school composition that identifies the symbolic and physical violence that suppress the organization of labor and deny people their rights (the irony is that it passes due to a sympathetic teacher, an irony which exposes the potential symbolic violence in schools). In contrast Scarsdale seeks an ersatz heir since his offspring (whom he calls disparagingly calls “cucumbers”) are not ‘cut from the same cloth’ as he is, they lack their progenitor’s vicious capitalist streak.

And yet we must bear in mind that Kit's double refusal of a miner's life or being Vibe's corporate heir elect is a refracted image of Pynchon's double refusal. Kit's betrayal of his father is an inversion of Pynchon's rejection of his parents' status and place in society and later corporate life at Boeing. Along with this we may compare their moves and trajectories. Kit goes from the 'wild west' to the civilized northeast, heart of the dominant center where production of law, letters and learning are concentrated. He travels to Yale in Connecticut and later on to Göttingen in Germany; far from home and deeper into the mathematical field. Pynchon's initial trajectory is almost the exact inverse. He accepts the offer to study at Cornell (instead of choosing someplace closer to his parent's home on Long Island), but when he changes major and begins to pursue the literary path his social trajectory changes. After graduating he remains in New York living with friends (it is worth noting that he did not move back to his parent's house) until he goes west to Seattle and later to Mexico. Pynchon has left a potential future with a dominant position in the dominant part of society, which gains more economic capital than cultural capital, to pursue a dominant position within a dominated field. He moves away from the centers of power. Despite the fact that Pynchon goes in a different direction than Kit geographically, there is some similarity to their social trajectories as they both strive to occupy positions in the field of cultural production (in one case the literary field and in the other the intellectual subfield of mathematics). To put this in perspective we might benefit ourselves of a couple of maps to compare their paths and social trajectories (see figures on next page).

Map of Kit and Pynchon's Initial Geographic Paths



Figure 3 The red line shows Kit's path from Colorado to Yale and then to Europe and further. Pynchon's path goes crosses going the other way as leaves Long Island for Cornell and then later Seattle before going to Mexico and living in a number of places.

Kit and Pynchon's Social Trajectories

(Based on Bourdieu's biaxial schema of social space. Kit's trajectory is in red, Pynchon's in blue and Fleetwood's in green.)

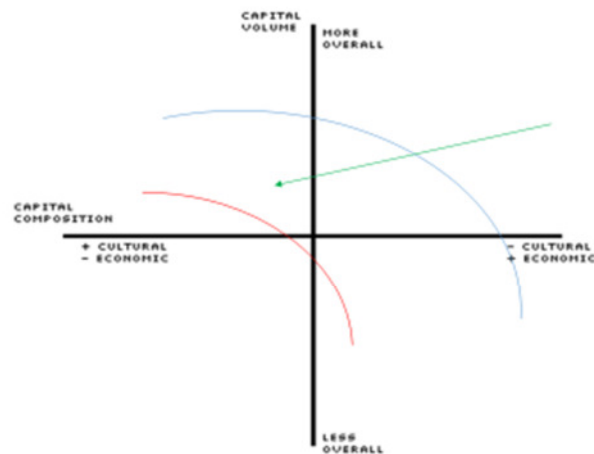


Figure 4 The above figure shows Kit's positive trajectory (in red) from son of a miner to Yale student and beyond. Pynchon's trajectory (in blue) from would-be engineer to major author is also positive. In contrast, Fleetwood Vibe (in green) has a slightly negative trajectory.

Rejection of their parent's social position is something that Kit and Pynchon have in common, but the positions they reject are quite different. The double refusal of a corporate master is, on one hand, mutual; however, they demonstrate rejection in differing areas by standing in marked opposition or contra-position to some position or

positions in their respective fields. Kit as a quaternionist stands against vectorists, just as Pynchon's position is in part defined by his negative relationship to other novel forms. Although Tanner sees Pynchon rejecting romanticism and revolution, his twofold refusal could be seen as rejecting the options of Beat or traditional writing on one hand or more broadly the bourgeois or social novel (Bourdieu "Creators"). Ultimately, Thomas Pynchon has a fairly neutral position in the literary field due to his double rejection; Kit will try to maintain neutrality as World War I develops at the end of the novel. Based on the homological strategies that Kit and Pynchon apply to different fields it is more than reasonable to see Kit as standing in relation to Pynchon as Frédéric does to Flaubert. Thus the following from Pierre Bourdieu seems applicable to Pynchon to some degree:

In the chiasmatic structure that is obsessively repeated throughout his work, and under the most diverse forms – doubled characters, intersecting trajectories, etc. – and in the very structure of the relationships he draws between Frédéric and the benchmark characters in *Sentimental Education*, Flaubert objectifies the structure of the relationship that unites him, as a writer, to the universe of positions constitutive of the field of power or, what amounts to the same thing, to the universe of positions homologous with preceding ones in the literary field. (RA 104)

Finally, it is the double refusal that one sees in both Kit and Pynchon's responses to the space of positions available to each of them that reveals a character couple which function like generative schemas of novelistic discourse in *Against the Day*.

This could all have the appearance of being some elaborate literary exercise on the part of the author, somewhat like John Barth's *Letters*, if it were not for the fact that Kit's story has what Faulkner called "problems of the heart." For Faulkner believed that what was fundamental to write about were "the old verities and truths of the heart, the old universal truths lacking which any story is ephemeral and doomed - love and honor and pity and pride and compassion and sacrifice."²⁸² Kit's story has elements, such as betrayal, love, fear and revenge that would fit well enough in a Faulkner novel and subtly power the novel and move it forward. But it is worth taking a step back to see how.

As Kit's refusal is Pynchon's, so is his parental rift. The conflict that Kit has with his father, Webb, leads to a form of betrayal that is recognized in the text in free indirect speech: "He had betrayed his father, that wouldn't change," (674). (Pynchon's case can

²⁸² From William Faulkner's Nobel acceptance speech.

be loosely compared to Kit's based on Boris Kachka's claim that after a period of estrangement from his parents, Pynchon renewed contact in the 1990s, significantly after starting his own family.) Later, when Kit thinks Vibe forces might wish him harm, he decides to leave and gets on a steamer going to Europe. On this same boat is a young lady named Dally whom Kit has previously met and thus begins the central romance of the novel which employs the trope of classic love tales that unites potential lovers and then separates them only to unite them as enamored and part them again before allowing their final union and love. Indeed, just as youthful ardor begins to ignite they are separated, starting one of the strangest sections of the book. Kit is taken below deck and the ship begins to bifurcate and follow two different routes. Kit's ship, which becomes a military vessel, goes to Ostend and Dally's goes to Venice. After they get to Europe, sections of the novel alternate by focusing on Kit, the Chums of Chance, Dally, Lew and Kit again for over one-hundred pages; this long series of sections shifts the focus away from the US and over to Europe and allows for the introduction of two new narratives connected with Yashmeen the mathematician and Cyprian the gay spy. This provides the scene for Kit's second betrayal, an act of academic treachery as he switches from 'pure' mathematics and starts "to frequent the Applied Mechanics Institute" (603); this is in fact a double betrayal because Vibe had paid for Kit to study mathematics that would somehow benefit Vibe in the future. In consequence, Kit soon finds his credit at the bank has been cut off. Of course one should note that Pynchon also changed study programs in an act that 'betrayed' the grant he was awarded. Thus it is that Kit's change in position is an inversion of Pynchon's own change in position; whereas Kit moved from the 'pure' pole of intellectual production towards the more heterogeneous pole that serves the dominant sector in society, Pynchon moved from the heterogeneous pole to the autonomous pole and a dominant position in a dominated field. The direction they move in is not the only difference though, Kit's position-taking will lead him to his love-interest much faster than in Pynchon's case. In this way betrayal and flight in *Against the Day* make way for the appearance of love as Kit's change in position leads to romance, but before that can come about he must go further and contemplate revenge.

Fearing Vibes agents, Kit leaves Göttingen accompanied by Yashmeen. It is worth noting that the reader learns more about Kit's emotions regarding his departures as

compared to those of his siblings. As Kit contemplates the need to leave he thinks of Göttingen as, “[...] a town he had never loved all at once become a place, now he was obliged, it seemed, to leave it, whose most quotidian detail shone with a clarity almost painful, already a place of exile’s memory and no returning” (619). Moreover, he is the only one to express a sentiment of homesickness as later in the novel he asks himself: “How had this happened? What used to be home was five thousand miles away now” (674). The use of the past is important as it indicates that the place is no longer home. Could this have been how Pynchon felt about Cornell or one of the places he lived in along the years? Did he relate to Thomas Wolfe’s *You Can’t Go Home Again*? Perhaps so, but after a decade of wandering one may start to look for a place to call home, to settle down. However, settling down is not on Kit’s mind as he leaves Germany.

Kit and Yashmeen travel through Frankfurt and on to “the Swiss side of Lago Maggiore” (664) where Kit meets up with his eldest brother. Reef, who back in the US had “drifted around sanatoriums posing as a rich-kid lung case from back east [...] Though he never did get the accent right” (645),²⁸³ is “Tunnelin for the railroads” and occasionally some “card play in the hydropathics maybe” (AD 665). Reef is back in the company of the aristocratic Ruperta Chirpington-Groin. At first Kit does not recognize Reef: “Kit would have taken him for a tourist from someplace out in Deep Europe, except for the voice, and the old amiable lopsidedness to his face.” At first glance Reef looks like a European but his voice gives him away. Reef for his part is surprised to find Kit in a Swiss sanatorium: “How come you’re not back in the U.S., hobnobbing with that summerset at Newport, playin polo, whatever” (665). This teasing rebuke displays Reef’s image of where Kit had arrived to (from Colorado mines to East Coast polo entertainment). Kit then apprises his brother of his trials and difficulties. It is their respective changes in position that most surprise the brothers about each other.

This reunion of brothers leads to Reef’s eventual romantic union with Yashmeen. But more importantly, when Reef learns that Scarsdale Vibe is in Europe, he proposes that he and Kit avenge their father’s death. While dining Kit informs Yashmeen about the situation, he describes Reef as “the reckless one” and Frank as “the

²⁸³ Bourdieu refers to accent as ‘linguistic hexis’; although Reef can dress the part by acquiring the outward symbols of the dominant class, he cannot ‘talk the talk;’ he is betrayed by his speech.

reasonable one" (667) which prompts Yashmeen to suggest in answer to her own question about Kit that he is "the religious one" (668). In fact, it is Kit who proposes a séance to consult with their father, to which the skeptical Reef responds in disbelief. And yet despite his disbelief, Reef gets involved, even becoming the medium. In the séance, Webb Traverse's spirit speaks (through Reef) saying: "[...] But I sold my anger too cheap, didn't understand how precious it was," (672) language that reflects Pynchon's wording in the introduction to *1984*. Although it is not the message that Kit and Reef want (like Hamlet they want a clear identification and demand for justice from the paternal spirit), it has a powerful effect on Kit. At some point after the séance Kit has a dream in which Webb offers him some fatherly advice about the need for solitude. It is after this dream that Kit realizes how much he wanted "to be the one son Webb could believe in" (674) and concludes that he had betrayed his family and more by accepting the offer. He can no more hide in mathematics than be a 'holy wanderer' like the ones described by Yashmeen. "It might have been [...] but he knew the closest he'd ever got to a religion was Vectors [...] in which Kit once thought he had glimpsed transcendence [...] a way to escape the world governed by real numbers" (AD 675). Forced to reflect on positions that he had previously maintained, Kit realizes that he had "come to believe that Göttingen would be another step onward in some journey into a purer condition, conveniently forgetting that it was on the Vibe ticket," (675) that position is closed off to him. Religion was not an option and math was no escape. His thoughts come to Scarsdale Vibe who "had been allowed to go on with his dishonorable work too long without a payback." For Kit this is, "All there was to hold on to. All he had" (675). That is to say: "His anger [...] was precious to him" (xix). The episode is a refraction of some of Pynchon's own experiences with religion, mathematics, and wandering as well as his own history with his parents. With revenge in mind Kit parts from Yashmeen and goes with Reef to Venice. It is interesting that the reader does not see Kit for another fifty pages or so and this interlude picks up the secondary narratives of Lew (detective) and Cyprian (spy). Moreover, when the reader returns to the Traverse narrative it begins not with Kit, but with Scarsdale.

Unlike some of Pynchon's other novels, *Against the Day* has a well-defined antagonist in the figure of *laissez-faire* capitalist magnate Scarsdale Vibe. For example,

in *Gravity's Rainbow* the character Blicero is “a brand new military type, part salesman, part scientist,” an SS technocrat and later in *Vineland* the antagonist Brock Vond is a quasi-fascistic government operative; only in *Against the Day* is the antagonist so closely associated with the field of power. (This is made clear by the fact that he names his children after places associated with wealth: Fleetwood is an affluent community in New York, Cragmont in California is also affluent, and Colfax is connected to Colfax Avenue in Colorado that was once called the ‘Golden Road.’ Additionally, the names Scarsdale and Wilshire are also names of wealthy places that Pynchon would know, above all the first since it lies right across the bay from where Pynchon grew up.) Scarsdale Vibe, a robber baron, is central to the nefarious networks of power that convert the symbolic violence of orders into the physical violence of bullets that claim the life of Webb Traverse early in the novel and later miners and others in the Ludlow massacre. Vibe’s disposition for facile violence and the apparent impunity that he enjoys are demonstrated from the beginning when he shoots an “elderly woman” (31) in the leg; his body guard and body double, Foley, goes along with his employer and seems to share his hatred of labor organizers and anarchists. However, after crossing over the Atlantic to buy European art, Foley finds that Vibe’s “exercises in personal tyranny [...] picked up a notch [...] and it was beginning to irritate him some” (725-6).

That this irritation might lead to something more is foreshadowed during a trip to a lagoon to see a submerged mural called *The Sack of Rome*. The scene depicted on the mural shows “[...] not just Rome, it was the World, and the World’s end. [...] Merchants were strung by one foot upside down from the masts of their ships, [...] Peasants could be seen urinating on their superiors” (726). Vibe views this from under water in a diving suit. The reader is told that although “Scarsdale was no aesthete,” he could see its worth as a masterpiece. The whole scene points out that Vibe has the money to buy art but not the eye to appreciate it, “the Cassily Adam rendition of Little Big Horn was fine enough art for him” (726). (The image referred to was acquired by and is used by Anheuser-Busch; a cheap mass produced image for a rather tasteless product.) Vibe misses the symbolic value and focuses only on how much profit could be made from it; he is thus blind to it as a historical document that shows crowds coming to power to exact revenge on the dominant part of the social field. It is while Vibe is

below that Foley's hands "approach the nozzles" but return to their pockets in a hesitant back and forth. Scarsdale Vibe's blindness to other's suffering may spread, making him blind to other emotions or changes in position.

Venice becomes a focal point with lines and trajectories passing through and over it. Kit and Reef are there to assassinate Vibe, but early one morning Kit again meets Dally, who has been staying with an aristocrat, Principessa Spongiatosta, whom she was introduced to by the painter Hunter Penhallow. And Reef has also found Ruperta. But it is Dally who wants to help the Traverse brothers with their plan. However, they do not get a chance to execute it because someone else tries to kill Vibe but is quickly cut down by "body guards in black" (742). Vibe gleefully commands his thugs to mutilate the corpse while Foley "stood by and did not comment." As he leaves Vibe turns and looks at Kit with a "triumphant smirk" (743). The failed attempt convinces Kit that his options are very limited. "It was probably also the undeniable moment, if one had to be singled out, of Kit's exclusion from what had been spoken of at Yale as a "future" - from any routes to success or even bourgeois comfort that were Scarsdale Vibe's to control" (745). Here one sees how the field of power cuts across the space of possibles in the field affecting practices and position-takings. Reef reproaches Kit for lack of will and leaves on a train, Kit takes a steamer to Trieste en route to Inner Asia, leaving Dally behind again with her heart and his ever more entwined. Cities in Europe, like Venice, serve as the point at which trajectories and paths cross and cross again; it stands between North America across the Atlantic and the distant lands on the other side of the Bosphorus.

Movement in Against the Day

Given the number of characters in the novel and the various journeys of varying lengths it is not surprising that more than one academic has turned his/her critical eye to the significance of all this movement and positions that are contested or defended for occupation. Amy Elias sees *Against the Day* as "thematically obsessed with the symbolism of travel and the politics of space" (29); and although the importance of these "peripatetic global wanderings" is clear, her approach does not take the indispensable

step of analyzing these spaces, places, distances and journeys over and against the author's social world. For example, when the painter Hunter Penhallow, accompanied by Dally, sees Ruperta with Reef in Venice and proposes to Ruperta that they meet later at Caffè Florian in the Piazza San Marco – “a place Hunter had ordinarily little patience with,” Dally observes – it informs one about the classifications of space as much as the classifier. Hunter, the artist, would not normally go there, but he assumes that it will appeal to Ruperta who as tourist goes to the places that ‘real’ Venetians avoid. By treating the aged establishment this way Pynchon classifies the agents and the place; it is the place for Ruperta, who will gladly pay for the over-priced experience in order to say she has been there, but not for Hunter. As a New Yorker, Pynchon is familiar with this phenomenon - the poor artists of Greenwich Village rarely frequent the ‘tourist trap’ places because they know where to eat better for less. Pynchon's own peripatetic wanderings and locations should also be taken into account when one considers these crisscrossing paths.

Some academics have taken greater note of the places that characters meet, “The characters' different missions and agendas bring them to remote corners of the globe, where they constantly run into each other in the most unlikely places” (Andersen “Mapping” 14), an indisputable observation. One example occurs when Frank Traverse, the only brother who does not cross the Atlantic and the only one who spends much time in Mexico (as Pynchon did), goes to Chiapas where he meets a former colleague of Kit's from Göttingen. A rather minor character, Günther Von Quassel is a “wealthy coffee scion.” He does not inherit his father's plantation as much as it inherits him. He is forced to “bid farewell to the life he might have had,” he must now pursue the “world-line” (635), leaving the field of intellectual production (the production of mathematical theories or concepts) for the field of production consumable material goods. This change in position means that he must no longer compete for the cultural and symbolic capital that one may acquire in the field of mathematics, but rather now must pursue the brute economic capital that his family plantations in Mexico can yield through colonialism and exploitation. He and Kit are both pushed out of the intellectual field but their different trajectories take them in opposite directions. One a different level, Günther's mini narrative, which arches from Göttingen to Chiapas, structurally connects the sections.

At the end of the section in which Kit decides to leave Göttingen, Günther informs Kit and Yashmeen that he must go to work at his father's coffee plantation. The next section turns the focus back to Frank Traverse who goes to Chiapas where he meets Günther. When that section finishes, Reef takes center stage until he is reunited with Kit.

Ideally, to the examples above would be added the other occasions in the novel of when and where people meet, whether it is in North America, Europe or Inner Asia. What would a map of character positions and paths in *Against the Day* look like? (see Appendix I) Numerous paths converging and diverging. It would note a young Dally travelling west from Chicago to Colorado with her father Merle, only later to return east on her own passing back through Chicago and on to New York before crossing the Atlantic to Venice, where she meets Hunter Penhallow who introduces her to Principessa Spongiatosta, and eventually on to London and Paris. It would include Reef meeting Ruperta at hot springs or a former mining coworker up in some Albanian mountains. It would indicate the presence and action of pairs that work together (Rocco and Pino) or in opposition (Werfner and Renfrew) or stand in proximity such as Ruperta and Ca Spongiatosta. The map would show a number of paths and points of intersection because among the host of characters some are making a 'grand tour' of Europe, others go to the temples of math or other mysteries (Yashmeen visits the grave of famous mathematician Bernhard Riemann) or they flee trouble or look for work. Central characters often encounter minor characters that briefly appear only to go, possibly reappearing in the future like comets with unknown orbits. Among these various movements in physical space, one would also discern in the social space of the novel the chiasitic structure that exists in the social field. At the heart of this stands Kit, and with every crossing of their paths, his feelings for Dally grow. (Kit aligns himself with the Quaternionists and thus occupies a dominated position in the dominated field of mathematics as the Vectorists became the dominant force. In Ostend he and others drink "no-name wine" (535), unrecognized and lacking in capital not unlike the Quaternionists. Since the field of intellectual production (of mathematics) is dominated by the field of power, partially evidenced by how Vibe 'buys' talent, Kit and his colleagues are doubly dominated. Pynchon's own initial position is also one of a dominated position within a dominated field.)

“To reconstruct this social space,” writes Bourdieu “I simply noted methodically just who attends the different meetings or gatherings or dinners” (FCP 148). A simple enough proposal for a book like *Sentimental Education*, but rather more complicated for *Against the Day*. Still, his idea is clear, it allows him to create a type of sociogramme based on the opposing poles that structure the field and agent’s position. Bourdieu notes that, “The receptions organized by Rosanette, the *demi-mondaine*, bring people from these two worlds together. Her world, the *demi-monde*, bring people from these two worlds together” (148). Something of the sort may be found in *Against the Day* in the characters of Ruperta and Principessa Spongiatosta. It is certainly true that the people either Reef or Dally grew up around would not normally have the opportunity to meet and live with an aristocrat. Before studying those two, it may help to compare these European aristocrats to Scarsdale’s wife Edwarda Beef.

The reader meets her early on and sees her no more, but her brief presence is telling. The fact that she is “Edwarda Beef of Indianapolis” (160) implies the lineage of a mid-west *nouveau riche* family. Edwarda moves from the Long Island mansion to Greenwich Village, a move in physical space that matches the movement in social space away from the concentration of high economic capital and lower cultural capital and towards that part of social space that has less economic capital but greater cultural capital: the field of cultural production. Edwarda can, with the help of her brother-in-law R. Wilshire Vibe, move into a new position from Long Island socialite to Greenwich Village artist; however, she still bears the symbols of her wealth by drinking Sillery Champagne in her “town house [...] designed inside by Elsie de Wolfe” (161). Still, she is limited to a lower position in the artistic field since she lacks the consecration of some legitimizing authority; she performs in R.W. Vibe’s “horrible ‘musical dramas’” (161). The praise she receives, “spellbindingly incomparable,” is cliché and thus a satirical treatment of her “success” as well as the critic’s evaluation. Although the portrayal of Edwarda is one of excess, she is no Lucrezia Borgia or *demi-mondaine*, and is not really comparable to the positions held by Ruperta or Ca’ Spongiatosta. Edwarda is an “asset” to her husband Scarsdale and their matrimony is described as “leading almost entirely unsynchronized lives, inhabiting each his and her own defective city” (162).

To be accurate neither Ruperta nor Ca' Spongiatosta are exactly *demi-mondaines*, in fact there is a touch of the aristocratic libertine about them, but the point is that they stand midway in the field of power between that pole of art and politics and its opposite, the pole of business and politics as represented by Scarsdale Vibe. And yet despite occupying similar positions in the field, there is a final difference that separates Ruperta from Principessa Spongiatosta in the novel. In her final appearance in the novel, Ruperta hopes to work some mischief on Hunter and accepts his invitation to see Vaughn Williams conduct his "Fantastia" in Gloucester Cathedral. The event causes her "to undergo a certain adjustment" (896). Ruperta reportedly experiences levitation briefly, bringing her to tears, and then returns to her seat "never again to pursue her old career of determined pest." She tells Hunter, who is aware only that something has happened to her, though it is not clear what, that he must not forgive her: "I can never claim forgiveness from anyone. Somehow, I alone, for every single wrong act in my life, must find a right one to balance it" (896). Through this out-of-body experience Ruperta enters ecstasy and comes to embrace the quasi-religious idea that runs through the novel which mixes karmic balance with penance to achieve the attainment of grace. In fact, her experience mirrors that of other characters like Webb or Lew who experience some kind of "grace." Her ascent to grace becomes an assent to grace and her altered trajectory takes her beyond the gaze of the reader. She is not dead or lost or even off scene, it would be better to say that she is beyond the narrative horizon of events.

In conclusion, by looking at the positions and movements of the characters studied above I have tried to show how the social space in *Against the Day* exhibits homological relations between fields arising from a chiasmic structure, one that is not unlike the structure of the social field in which Thomas Pynchon moves. The agents' trajectories may be quite different and the fields they are in unrelated, but the agents may still occupy parallel positions or engage in similar strategies. Günther's attempt to become a mathematician may be almost as audacious as Kit's although they start from different points, and still Kit's trajectory is more like Dally's. The presence of this structure is not necessarily intentionally or consciously produced any more than one consciously starts reading from one side of the page or another. But the presence of this chiasmic structure that the author includes unknowingly should not preclude the

scholarly investigation of a text to discern other elements that exist as part of the creative project or as a position-taking.

Chapter 10

Of Cones and Conics: Structuring Structures in Pynchon's Novels

Apart from the binaries and crisscrossing paths in *Against the Day* that reveal a chiasmic structure, other structuring structures may also be found in the novel. In the following it is argued that Pynchon has continued with a structuring element in his writing that connects back to his earlier novels, an element that draws on the geometry of cones and conic sections. After looking at how these structures have been used in previous novels, the analysis moves on to argue that *Against the Day* continues this practice, and it is proposed that the very novel itself occupies a specific and fundamental position within Pynchon's trajectory and creative project, acting as a chronotopical keystone in Pynchon's *oeuvre*.

The conscious use of structures and concepts to structure narratives and texts is part of the literary heritage that Pynchon inherited. Already in the early twentieth century James Joyce provided an example with his *Ulysses*, but much more recent for Pynchon was Julio Cortázar's *Rayuela*²⁸⁴ and later works by writers such as Georges Perec. So it was not entirely unprecedented when Pynchon employed a structuring structure for his debut novel *V.* which has two main story lines that meet at the end. (In a letter dated 1 Oct. 1962 to Faith Sale, who helped with editing, Pynchon writes, "I wouldn't want the initial V thing to get to be too much of a formula," implying that there is some degree of formula in the symbol.) Perhaps this would have been of no great account, but when *Gravity's Rainbow* appeared and many critics and academics²⁸⁵ began to discuss the parabolic arc of the rainbow and the rocket's trajectory²⁸⁶ it all took on the aura of something more significant (especially given that the US was deeply mired

²⁸⁴ Julio Cortázar's novel *Rayuela* was published in Spanish in 1963 and in English in 1966, winning a National Book Award in 1967 for the translation by Gregory Rabassa. Since Pynchon was fond of Cortázar's work, it is almost certain that he knew about this singular novel.

²⁸⁵ See for example Tony Tanner's "V. and V-2".

²⁸⁶ In a letter from June 1963, Pynchon responds to a friend's comment about transportation, writing: "I dig your theory about how the means of transportation is the clue to every age. The rocket seems to be for this one all right, in a way so symmetrical it's almost suspicious: as evil (carrier for nuclear warhead) and/ or as good (carrier for whatever positive quantity in men makes them want to go someplace that won't even support life)." This image is used almost verbatim in *Gravity's Rainbow*, almost ten years later.

in the bloodbath of the Viet Nam conflict). But to what extent does the application of this use of structure reach? After all, *The Crying of Lot 49* does not appear to share any structure related to conic section. This is where one must recall that Pynchon's initial creative project took shape as he tried to break his deal with Lippincott and as the sixties came to a boil. Seen this way, not all of his novels should share this genetic trait – only those that were initially part of the project such as *Gravity's Rainbow* or *Mason & Dixon*. Granted, the structuring figure of the “V” in *V.* is not solely related to a conic structure even if it looks like one in profile; the sign is wildly polysemic. However, the parabolic arc that stretches from cover to cover and hangs over the reader's head in *Gravity's Rainbow* is harder to ignore when the text makes so much of the rise and fall through the narrative – few would argue that the parabola, one of the conic sections, is not structurally significant for the novel and the reading experience. And if this is so, if the conic section of the parabola is important for *Gravity's Rainbow*, then what does one say about Pynchon's later work's? Again, it must be noted that *Vineland* is a later conceived work and need not fit the scheme, but what of *Mason & Dixon*? Although it is not a conic section, the line that runs through that novel is as fundamental to the geometry of cones as any other element. And as will be shortly explained, *Against the Day* also exhibits a structure aside from the chiasmic one that exists within the social field. However, less it be suspected that the use of such structures as parabolas, etc. is nothing more than a literary device to demonstrate his authorial prowess, one must note that the structures allow Pynchon to work toward his unorthodox endings and achieve his “axolotl effect.” The reader begins the book and hears the screaming over the heads of the characters, but by the end s/he is sitting amongst them, or the reader hears the order to “single up all lines” but by the end is on-board. But to what end does it take us?

The central place of these structures in Pynchon's creative project becomes clear with his third novel. In both *V.* and *The Crying of Lot 49*, the ending hangs the reader upon an indeterminate hook of terrible uncertainty that provides no resolution, but there the protagonist is at the end, waiting to know. That changes with the end of *Gravity's Rainbow* in which the protagonist Tyrone Slothrop fragments, dissipates and fades away – a vastly different ending. It is a most confounding ending that sends readers back to find out when the hero ‘disappeared’ instead of riding off into the

sunset. These structures allow Pynchon to avoid traditional endings such as the *deus ex machina* that sweeps the antagonist away in *Vineland*, creating a happy ending – a first for Pynchon. However, when *Mason & Dixon* came out it was clear that Pynchon was back to his entangled endings spun out of the interwoven narrative frames, echoing Oedipa’s sensation upon looking at Remedios Varo’s “Bordando el Manto Terrestre.” And so it is again in *Against the Day*, in which the end is not, as Frank Kermode writes, “the old ending that panders to temporal expectations,” (22) quite the opposite. The Chums mundane drift into domestic peace is set against Kit’s more fantastic finish so that “straightforward prediction becomes an obscure figure” (Kermode 30). The reader is at a loss to understand what has happened and attempts to reconstruct the series of events, to which the following quote from Bourdieu seems to apply most fittingly:

But perhaps that is precisely what the author wants to make readers do: take on the effort of identification and reconstruction that is indispensable for ‘finding their way’ and in doing so discover how much they lose when they find their way too easily, as in novels organized according to current conventions (especially as regards the temporal structure of the narrative), that is, respecting the truth of the ordinary experience of time, and the experience of the ordinary reading of the telling of that experience. (RA 327)

An echo of this exists in something once said by Pynchon. In response to a friend’s complaint that *V.* was too difficult Pynchon quipped: “Why should things be easy to understand?”²⁸⁷ So this obliges the reader to engage in a reflexive reading and reflective rereading of this somewhat baffling novel.

Ellipses and Elliptical Structures in Against the Day

In the previous section we saw how Pynchon has consciously made use of structuring devices in some of his novels, specifically by drawing on conic sections and cones. To follow on that, this section explains what structure structures *Against the Day* and how so. The major claim here is that as *Gravity’s Rainbow* has a parabolic structure to it, so *Against the Day* is dominated by the ellipse. This structure is certainly discernable because other scholars have also noted it. In a fairly negative review of *Against the Day*, Anthony Macris calls the novel “highly elliptical,” what he does not realize is that there are various elliptical paths, some of which take the reader back to

²⁸⁷ Pynchon to Jules Siegel regarding “V”, from a *Playboy* interview, 1977.

(or on towards) other novels. This may not be as strange as it sounds. The narrative refers to previous (supposedly published) stories about the Chums of Chance that lie outside the text of *Against the Day*, putting the reader in the position of ‘possibly’ having been with the Chums before; the reader becomes the witness to the Chums comet-like return. For example, when the reader starts the first line of the novel, s/he finds the Chums of Chance poised to take flight. Lines are singled up, that is to say redundant lines are loosened (briefly forming catenary curves that provide the reader with the first hyperbolic arc in the novel) as they lift off and start across the sky towards Chicago. The reader is later informed that this is another story of the Chums and s/he is reminded of past adventures and thus given to have a sense of having read them before. This is not their first time (in print), but none have been like this; their elliptical returns have brought the Chums of Chance around in the past, but now this time the reader joins them on their narrative flight, while also occasionally following adventures on the ground. At the same time readers of Pynchon’s earlier work will notice characters, themes and events coming back around in slightly different reiterations. For example, the reader finds the Traverse family transposed from *Vineland* but occupying a place that stands in contra-position to their narrative opposite, the Vibes. (It should be pointed out that an ellipse has two focal points so that for each binary pair in the novel one can describe an elliptical path with the characters, either together or alternating, swinging in and out of narrative range on their orbits.) The elliptical returns of themes and narratives are driven by the various pairs in *Against the Day*. However, the elliptical paths of the characters only loosely structure the novel, this elliptical element does not divide the book into even sections with a constant alternation of narrative lines and characters; their appearance is not periodical.

The ellipse also appears in the book in more specific and concrete ways. One of the best examples occurs as the love triangle of Reef, Yashmeen and Cyprian comes to an end. As the trio near the French border with Catalonia, Cyprian feels “that something was coming to an end” (AD 890) and a short time later they learn that Yashmeen is pregnant. The section closes and when the reader next encounters the trio they are returning to the French Riviera at which point they discover the “Anarchist spa of Yz-les-Bains” (AD 930) and it is here that Cyprian runs into a former schoolmate and colleague

in espionage. In the town there is “an elliptical plaza” with various groups scattered about, and “Grouped near one of the foci of the ellipse, a choir was practicing a sort of counter-Te Deum, more *desperamus* than *laudamus*, bringing news of coming dark and cold” (AD 931). Among this group is Cyprian’s friend Ratty McHugh²⁸⁸ who has left espionage to become an anarchist. Their paths elliptically intersect on an ellipse; however, the Edenic interlude must end and the trio moves on, eventually getting to Bulgaria where Yashmeen has her child. The conversion of Cyprian’s friend presages his own conversion to the “Brides of the Night” (AD 961), after stumbling upon the Manichean order (of Pynchon’s invention) somewhere in the Balkan Range. This signals the end of Cyprian’s trajectory, but Reef and Yashmeen will travel on before their journey takes them back in an elliptical return to the US and labor disputes there.

A brief word more about Cyprian’s decision to stay at the convent and his new vocation. The end of his storyline brings the reader back to the Manichean theme introduced with the Thelonious Monk epigraph and alluded to throughout the novel. The fact that Cyprian finds his “calling” in the Balkans in a Bogomil convent connects the text back to the Orphic element that scholars have found in *Gravity’s Rainbow*.²⁸⁹ It also provides a comfortable resolution to the trio of Yashmeen-Reef-Cyprian; the very non-traditional relationship reduces to a standard heterosexual couple. (In fact most ‘swinging’ characters in *Against the Day* settle down: Ruperta is enlightened, Cyprian converts, and Lake Traverse is left alone; even the Chums eventually find partners and establish hetero relationships.) When Cyprian tells Reef and Yashmeen that he is staying at the convent, he speculates “that God doesn’t always require us to run about. It may be that sometimes there is a –would you say ‘convergence’ to a kind of stillness, not merely in space but in Time as well?” (958). What Cyprian seeks sounds like the “stillness” that Kit had been striving for while he tended bar in Pera (911) before being forced to flee again and thus encounter Dally. Both characters appear to be tired of being on the run all the time; could this be a sentiment formally shared by a younger,

²⁸⁸ Additionally, though less importantly, the term “ellipse of uncertainty” (936) appears in a discussion that Reef has about what seems to be a line of land mines possibly armed with gas, though they do not know where.

²⁸⁹ See, for example, Christopher Coffman’s “Bogomilism, Orphism, Shamanism: The Spiritual and Spatial Grounds of Pynchon’s Ecological Ethic” in *Pynchon’s Against the Day: A Corrupted Pilgrim’s Guide*.

perambulating author?²⁹⁰ As the novel progresses towards its conclusion characters find partners or places to settle down, for “it is an unnatural violation of scientific reality *not* to be together” says the anthropologist Wren Provenance in the novel.

If one begins to imagine all the different pairs in the novel forming elliptical paths within the diverse narratives, one may come to think of intersecting ellipses producing an image like those in Venn diagrams or the nuclear icon used to represent molecules. (See figure below)

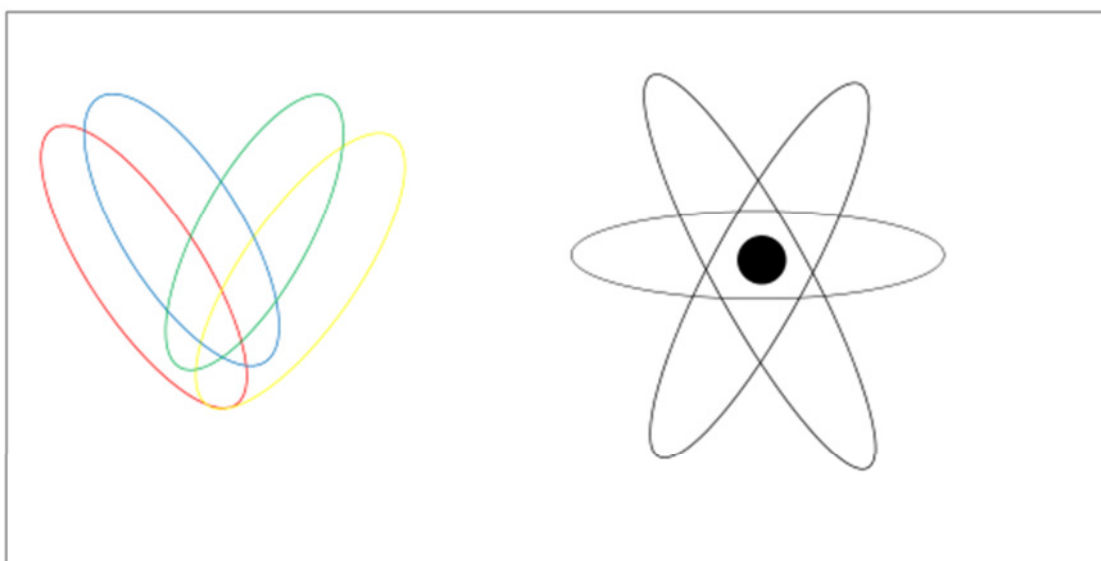


Figure 5 Venn diagrams and the molecular symbol are two dimensional ways of visualizing overlapping ellipses.

The problem with thinking of the ellipses’ interaction this way is that it frames it in two dimensions when the social space they move through corresponds to the three dimensions of physical space. As such it makes more sense to consider an ellipsoid as the structure that allows all the recurring paths to interact. (See Appendix III on page 342 for a view of conic sections and an ellipsoid.) To support this proposal we must first look back to Pynchon’s project and recall that he uses rockets instead of spaceships and, moreover, that the rocket that appears early in *Gravity’s Rainbow* becomes an overarching symbol that structures the text. Accepting that, one sees that in *Against the Day* it is the airship that stands in for the spaceship, but instead of a parabolic arc what

²⁹⁰ The young Pynchon often wrote in his letters that he “like seeing young people getting together.”

does one perceive? In the very first pages as the Chums of Chance arrive to Chicago the reader finds one of the crew “scrambling up the ratlines and shrouds of the giant ellipsoidal envelope from which the gondola depended” (AD 6). On this view, the airship and its ellipsoidal shape are to *Against the Day* what the rocket and its parabolic arc are to *Gravity’s Rainbow*. But that is not its only appearance in the novel. When Kit is briefly detained in a mental asylum by a paranoid anti-Semitic doctor (something which harkens back to a doctor of the same stripe in *The Crying of Lot 49*), he and the other inmates, who are used as forced labor to build the landing field, are treated to some excitement as a dirigible arrives. One of the inmates claims that “It will come to deliver us from this place [...] for the Dirigible’s secret Name is the Riemann Ellipsoid” (AD 626). The next day he is saved by Yashmeen and over coffee she will start him on his path to look for Shambhala. Although Kit does not board the dirigible, its connection to Riemann and thus Yashmeen clearly mark this transitional moment when he will leave Göttingen and proceed on his trajectory.

However, there are others that also see a mathematical structure in *Against the Day*, but of a somewhat different nature. In his book *Mathematics without Apologies: Portrait of a Problematic Vocation* (Princeton 2015), Michael Harris includes a very short chapter that examines *Against the Day*. There he proposes that Pynchon has a “quadratic narrative style” and offers the hypothesis that “Pynchon’s major novels are structured by *conic sections*, at a rate of roughly one per book,” (128) a position that resembles the one put forward in this dissertation. My view differs from his in that I see a less rigid application of conic geometry in Pynchon’s work, for example I do not think that it figures as importantly in *Vineland* given my understanding of the genesis of Pynchon’s creative project. I will not rehearse his entire schema here but only note that Harris suggests that the paradigmatic structure in *Mason & Dixon* is the ellipse, and that for *Against the Day* the “narrative style is hyperbolic” (134).²⁹¹ This warrants a closer look.

²⁹¹ In order to support his budding thesis Harris “had no choice but to read *M&D*, bitterly regretting that I had not done so ten years sooner and, of course, unlike the book’s eponymous heroes, finding exactly what I was seeking,” (132). The facile discovery of the confirmation of his pre-conception casts some doubt on this claim.

Harris speculates that if the novel has a hyperbolic narrative structure “one would expect *Against the Day* to have two nonoverlapping narrative arcs” (134). In answer to his own musings he writes: “So it is significant that the Chums of Chance and the main characters of the Traverse family never meet. [...]The two arcs do come very close in three successive chapters set in the Low Countries – in Oostende, to be precise, exactly in the middle of the book” (134). Jordan Ellenberg, a fellow mathematician, thinks this sounds reasonable and adds that Pynchon surely “knows very well what the conic sections are.” However, it is not quite as simple as that. There are several earthbound characters who do have contact with the Chums or even board the airship. Harris recognizes “a host of secondary characters who bounce or vibrate from one narrative strand to the other” (135) but this does not do justice to Lew’s narrative which is not as minor as Harris portrays it to be. Characters like Professor Vanderjuice or Lew may be less central to the novel than Kit or Scarsdale but their interaction with the Chums of Chance creates the point at which the world of the airship boys meets the ‘real’ world. It is in these chiasmic exchanges that the extraordinary crosses with the ordinary allowing the fabulous and fantastic to enter the quotidian. Seen this way Vanderjuice, who is an intimate friend of the Chums, has a real function associated with his own minor narrative. Harris blinds himself to this and thus fails to notice that at the end of the book when Kit is in L’viv Poland and meets Professor Vanderjuice again the Chums own path crosses with Kit’s. Vanderjuice tells Kit about how the Chums once saved him and then tells Kit, “The boys are about, [...] I usually get a feeling when they are. Maybe you’ll meet them. Hitch a ride.” (1079). And then: “One day Professor Vanderjuice vanished. Some claimed to have seen him taken into the sky.”(1080) There is no need to ‘read into’ the section; the Chums have been in L’viv and taken Vanderjuice away – clearly their paths have crossed. I might add to this that Reef Traverse is also aided, albeit indirectly, by the Chums. This would seem to challenge Harris’ hypothesis.

The Long Return

Part of my claim is that the elliptical nature of *Against the Day* allows that novel to connect to other Pynchon novels as well as connecting those novels together. It is not always a screaming that comes across the sky, it may be a silent shape that no one has

noticed like a comet that has crept into view. As indicated previously, Pynchon has in past novels allowed characters to elliptically return to the reader's attention, but in *Against the Day* he broke new ground. It might be difficult for Pynchon to surprise his veteran readers who have already read about mechanical ducks or a switch in a man's arm, so when a character in *Against the Day* turns into a doughnut it is not that out of the ordinary; Pynchon's readers have come to expect things like that. It is rather different when La Jarratiere appears at the end of *Against the Day*, brought into the narrative as her orbit intersects Dally's in Paris. Characters may reappear from one novel to the next (as do, for example, both Pig Bodine and Kurt Mondaugen), but they are not resurrected from a death in previous novels as is La Jarratiere.

A bit of background is needed here. At the end of Pynchon's debut novel, *V*, there is a scene that draws on the unrest that accompanied Stravinsky's 1913 debut of *The Rite of Spring*. In it a young dancer that has been made into the fetish of the character V, performs a stunt which impales her from between the legs. In the year 1963 it must have been quite shocking. A letter from Pynchon to his friend Faith Sale shows some concern about the scene. He writes: "The ballet finale and rioting in the audience is wild because that's how it happened at the premiere of *Le Sacre du Printemps*, which this is stolen from. The spear in the crotch bothers me too though probably not (hyeugh, hyeugh) for the same reasons exactly" (letter to Kirk and Faith Sale dated 1 Oct. 1962). Presumably, Pynchon's female friend was struck by the violence of the image in a way that the somewhat immature young Pynchon was not, and yet he apparently agrees that there is something bothersome about the scene. Still, that was where and how Mélanie l'Heuremaudit, La Jarratiere, was dealt with at the end of the novel and that is where she has been for readers and critics, until she reappeared in *Against the Day*. It occurs at the end of the novel as all the narrative lines are being singled up and Dally is in Paris. In an apparently off-hand scene Dally salutes a girl called 'Jarri' and when some passing Americans ask if she is the same famous dancer and inquire about her supposed death, she responds: "Grand Guignol. They came to see blood. We used the ... raspberry syrup. [...] They needed a *succès de scandale*, and I didn't mind. A young beauty destroyed before her time, something the eternally-adolescent mind could tickle itself with," after

which her and Dally sing “*que les hommes sont bêtes!*” (1066). Thus readers learn that she never died; they had been tricked.

But despite that very surprising return from beyond time and the grave, most reviewers said little or nothing about it and very few academics have addressed the somewhat confounding reappearance. It is no surprise that two of the few to do so are Pynchon scholars. First, Jeffrey Severs suggests that Pynchon’s treatment of women in *Against the Day* is a “corrective to his earlier work” (234) and proposes that “an image emerges of Pynchon trying to harmonize his early and late career, implicitly arguing that both portrayals have been attacks on a rapacious male culture” (235). This view of a reflexive Pynchon writing reflexively coincides with my own argument that Pynchon’s novel objectivizes the field and positions he has held in it. (In the *Slow Learner* introduction Pynchon made it clear that he was aware of his “imperfectly developed attitudes about sex” and that in his youth he might have been “picking up on male attitudes that were in the air”, indicating a reflective awareness of an element of male domination in his habitus.) Rather differently, Bernhard Duyfhuizen takes note of the young dancer’s appearance and asks: “...must we revise our reading of the scene in *V.* to say “stage death?” (7) That provocative question points to another possibility: could a future Pynchon novel appear that elliptically recuperates another character from a previous novel? Although the second question is more hypothetical than the first, both look to how la Jarratierre’s appearance destabilizes the reader’s certainty about readings of events in previous novels. To my knowledge no one has engaged with these questions regarding Pynchon’s novels. However, Duyfhuizen does proffer an explanation for her appearance (one that is similar to Severs’ own) writing: “As he did in *Slow Learner*, Pynchon may be commenting on his own “adolescent male mind” at the time he wrote *V.*, and maybe on his own thinking at the time that his novel needed a “succès de scandale.” He notes the parallel language of *Against the Day* and the introduction that pre-dates it by more than twenty years, but more importantly Duyfhuizen takes into account Pynchon’s earlier, reflexive non-fiction writing and sees that incorporated into the text. But most importantly, from a Bourdieusian perspective, is how Duyfhuizen considers the author’s reflexive awareness of the pressures and tensions in the field at the time that Pynchon was producing his debut novel.

Thus, introducing La Jarratierre at the end of *Against the Day* brings the reader back to *V.* both in terms of its narrative time frame as well as its thematic concerns as a wrong from the authorial balance sheet is stricken and the novels are sewn more tightly together. The episode makes clear that ‘men are beasts’ (both Clive and Kit behave badly towards Dally); in fact when Dally leaves Kit and goes to Paris he is like a beast alone and wandering, lost to himself “inside a regime of starvation and hallucinating and mental absence.” This leads to an additional possibility that La Jarratierre’s appearance, crossing over from the novelistic chronotope of another text, prepares the reader for another surprising violation of conventions a few pages later. This happens in the last part of the novel, which is also the shortest, called Rue du Départ. It opens in Paris with Dally thinking back to her time with Kit in Turin where they were married in 1915 (AD 1067). At that time World War I is still going on and Kit eventually gets involved, which Dally disapproves of. Her suspicions are proved correct when Kit’s friend, an Italian pilot named Renzo that seems drawn from Gabriele D’Annunzio, exhibits proto-fascistic characteristics. When Dally reproaches Kit for participating in the aerial bombing, he can only say “Austrians,” to which Dally responds: “Your brothers-in-arms” (AD 1074). He asks her to help him; but despite her attempts she eventually leaves Kit and goes to Paris. (Before turning back to Dally, Pynchon makes use of the interlude to send Reef back to the US where he is united with Frank and the rest of the family.) Back in Paris with Dally, the reader finds her talking with “an old of acquaintance of Kit’s” (1077) who is incredulous when he thinks he sees Kit. It is then confirmed that “Kit had returned to Paris unexpectedly, after some time in Lwów,” how he returned is related in the analepsis that follows. The reader learns that after the war he drifted north to Poland to learn more about some mathematicians there; it is here that he encounters Professor Vanderjuice who shortly leaves. Sometimes while Kit practices bi-tonal singing that he learned in Tuva, “he believed that if he got this just right it would transport him to “where he wanted to be”” (1080). Kit is now alone so he starts to travel aimlessly on trains in a manner that sounds reminiscent of Benny Profane’s “yo-yoing” in *V.* Wandering in solitude he is often caught “inside a regime of starvation and hallucinatory and mental absence,” (1080). Kit, the furthest traveling Traverse and namesake of Saint Christopher, is lost in every sense. So what saves him from this unfocused existence? “And now and then, in brief periods of lucid return, he found himself thinking about

nothing but Dally,” (1080) it is not his mother or siblings that draw his thoughts, but Dally with whom he had married.

In the dance of approach and retreat that Kit and Dally have been engaged in throughout the novel, they have progressed to union and separation; and if it were a conventional romance one would expect the lover to board a series of trains, etc. to reunite with his beloved. Pynchon is bound to disappoint such cliché expectations. Haunted by thoughts of Dally, Kit begins to notice something:

After some weeks of this, he began to be visited by a sort of framed shadow suspended in the empty air, a transparent doorway, [...] At last one day, still hesitant, he decided to approach it – might then, in fright, have lost his balance, and seized all at once as if by gravity, he toppled into the curiously orthogonal opening, exclaiming “What’s this,” as to the astonishment of onlookers he was turned to shimmering transparency, dwindling into a sort of graceful cone and swept through its point into what appeared to be a tiny or perhaps only distant window of bright plasma. (AD 1080)

Kit experiences this event differently than the witnesses; for him the luminosity grows and envelopes him, leaving him “in a quiet hotel room in Paris” (1080), occupied by a man who introduces himself as Lord Overlunch. When Kit tries to explain that he had been in L’viv, the man corrects him and tells Kit that he had been in Shambhala. He continues and informs Kit that while inspecting his stamps he saw “something different about this ten-dhiran design, [...] But of course I found the change immediately, the one face that was missing, your own, I know it well by now” (1081). A confused Kit tries to differ but is cut off as Lord Overlunch says, “Well, well. A twin, perhaps.” When Kit presses on the manner of his arrival, Overlunch limits himself to saying, “It’s the way people reappear these days” (1081). Realizing that he is late, Lord Overlunch invites Kit to meet “Miss Rideout” (Dally). Their awaiting reunion will be final. From his alienated and pointless peregrination Kit is transported back to Paris and Dally, where community saves man from his more beastly leanings. The need for communion in the form of a relationship and/ or family is as strong as or stronger than in *Vineland* or *Mason & Dixon*. David Cowart, like many other academics, notes *Vineland’s* “new interest in the idea of family” (109) but he does not offer much of an explanation as for this trend. The importance of family arches over from other novels, but in *Against the Day*, which weaves all his works together into a greater whole, it has a formidable presence.

In a wide elliptical arc La Jarratierre returns from oblivion, not unlike Kit Traverse returns from spiritual perdition and geographic wandering. However, they are not the only ones to return by some comet-like orbit that brings them back around. Lesser characters are also pulled by their narrative back in front of the readers. Lew Basnight provides such a case. The reader encounters this secondary figure in Chicago and shortly later in Colorado after he goes west; however, Lew then later goes east crossing the Atlantic to work in London for a bit. His trajectory is finished by turning back to the west and going to Los Angeles, home of *noir* detective genre and later Pynchon protagonist Doc Sportello from *Inherent Vice*.



Figure 6 Lew's elliptical trajectory from Chicago to Colorado and then to Europe before returning to the West coast of the US.

Lew's narrative, then, is elliptical in the physical space of the novel but also within Pynchon's oeuvre. I have added this last example to indicate that the narrative return of characters and themes is not limited to two characters, although clearly Kit's is more befuddling and La Jarratierre's more surprising.

So to summarize, the cone may serve as a multifunctional structuring device for Pynchon's big novels. *V.* describes the cone, *Gravity's Rainbow* has the parabolic arc, *Mason & Dixon* exhibits a line, and finally *Against the Day* has an elliptical structure that takes the reader back around to past books, themes, and characters – in transtextual orbits. The foci may be doubled characters like Renfrew/Werfner or Edison and Tesla

that compete in specific fields, or characters from separate narratives: Lew the detective stands over and against Cyprian the spy (this strange pair has both characters working toward some secular, or non-dogmatic and unorthodox absolution or redemption), and the Chums are in contraposition to the Visitors. These various narratives in their elliptical relations overlap with the greater focal pair of the Traverses and the Vibes and although the two main story lines (the Traverses, a working class family, and the Chums of Chance) do not exactly mirror one another, they do run a bit parallel. If the latter lets fancy run free, then it is the former that keeps the reader's feet a bit more on the ground and allows for the social map of *Against the Day* to be held up against Pynchon's social world. The peripatetic narratives that compose the novel start in the mid-west and soon reach out to the East and finally west coasts of the US. This effectively unites the settings of Pynchon's earlier novels that take the US East and west coasts as focal points, in no small part based on his own life experience.

Arcs in Against the Day

In the previous section I argued for the significance of the ellipse as a structuring device in the novel, and despite that importance, it strikes me that there is another structure that is relevant but reaches beyond the breadth of the novel. Nor am I the only one to take note of this. In a mostly positive review Christopher Sorrentino writes:

Whatever the problems with sheer mechanical execution, Pynchon here offers his most successful and cogent articulation of the concerns that have haunted his work from the start. Throughout his career, he has described an arc that portrays the bloody origins and dubious consequences of modernity, reaching back to the 18th century with "Mason & Dixon," taking on the 1940s in "Gravity's Rainbow," the 1950s and 1960s in "V" and "The Crying of Lot 49" and the 1970s and 1980s in "Vineland." With "Against the Day," he comes full circle.

Sorrentino's use of the term "arc" is very similar to my own thinking as is his overarching category of concerns, the "dubious consequences of modernity." I would add that the arcs that trace the Pynchonian firmament are not only composed of the philosophical and geopolitical concerns of intellectual history, but include those elements of genre that cling to his narratives. Is there not an arc of detective fiction that spans from Oedipa (*The Crying of Lot 49*) to Maxine (*Bleeding Edge*)? And what about music such as jazz that connects McClintic Sphere (*V.*) with "Dope" Breedlove from *Against the Day*?

The act of bringing a character, event or theme back into another novel is a position-taking action that can be done in a number of ways and involves some risk. The risk comes from directly recycling a character into a similar format as is commonly done in serial fiction by authors who produce for the mass market; if a consecrated author does this too often s/he may be accused of 'going commercial' in an attempt to increase sales at the sacrifice of aesthetic purity then s/he is branded a 'sell-out'. (This risk indicates the two opposing economies of the cultural field that Bourdieu identified and the logics that accompany them.) Pynchon never reuses characters in a central position and reappearances are generally subtle; on the other hand, his perennial themes are clearly identifiable. All of these arcs are of varying lengths and magnitude. One should consider that the various arches of architecture, which support all manner of edifices, are derived from arcs that one observes in geometry, to these we can add those arcs that describe phenomena in nature. The diversity of these arcs are reflected in the way that characters, themes and events traverse the narrative length of a Pynchon novel or even reach further, connecting to other Pynchon novels. Let us direct our attention to *Against the Day*. As stated earlier, the Chums of Chance begin the novel and end it so we may think of their fabulous narrative as arching over the whole novel and encapsulating it, but there are other minor narratives that start later and finish sooner. For example, the reader meets Cyprian almost half-way through the novel and he exits more than a hundred pages before the novel finishes, in this way his narrative appears subsumed by the wider reading narratives. However, as stated earlier these arcs are not confined to an individual novel but can extend beyond its pages.

The First Arc, the Last Arc, the Apocalyptic Arc

It is not in an effort to make my point by 'driving it home' that I put forward another case that exemplifies how arcs in Pynchon's novels structure and connect them, but rather to address a concern that thematically arcs from the "adolescent mind" behind the writings of a young Pynchon to the mature works of the aging author become father. The young man that Faulkner could have been addressing in 1951 grew up and wrote reflectively on the atomic fear then that, "was bad enough in '59 and is much worse now, as the level of danger has continued to grow" (SL xxix). Despite having

written that three decades ago he is not likely to think the world a much safer place. In *Against the Day* Pynchon creates a brooding climate of doom as the novel progresses toward World War I, but he gives apocalyptic fears an object to focus on with the mysterious “Q-weapon” which works using doubly refracted light, an operation that depends on very advanced mathematics. Throughout the book battle works and weapons are being developed, the latter thanks to advances in mathematics and its application to technology. The reader is back to the dual image of the rocket that can bring salvation or doom. The novel itself is doubly refracted and as such then offers two endings that offer two very different paths. The first path is that of the Chums who are last seen as “They fly toward grace” (1085), and very much not earth bound, in fact free of the problems below; theirs is the extraordinary path. On the other hand the Traverse clan continue their struggle as workers, but the depression is coming and after that World War II; theirs is the ordinary path which will take them to a very earthly inferno in a few decades. This grace that the reader encounters early in the novel with Webb and later Lew Basnight is the final word in the novel that can be seen to arc through the novel, offering the reader a different dream of the future. However, it is not a Calvinist or Catholic concept of Grace though it may appear tinged with Buddhism; it is a secular saving grace. It is held out to the reader as a possibility, a way to break out of the thought that a dire future is certain, the fatalist thinking of self-fulfilling prophecies that trap us in our nightmares. *Against the Day* accurately portrays the fatalistic attitudes that led up to World War I. As Tore Andersen writes:

The war is rather considered to be an inevitable event, an abyss at the end of a rapidly sloping historical terrain, and therefore the war does in the end become inevitable. By drifting passively along with the flow of history and considering the not yet materialized war to be a *fait accompli*, the characters submit to a false determinism and thus contribute to the reduction of a historical field of possibilities into a foregone conclusion. (“Mapping” 18)

Considering the way that something similar happened with the US war in Iraq, it is understandable that this concern still lingers in the author’s mind. We are offered the extraordinary path of grace or the banal path which leads to the banality of evil. Ingar Dalsgaard maintains that Pynchon uses “technological creation myths [... and] turns them into cautionary myths,” (1998, 98) and even though he wrote that about *Gravity’s Rainbow* it is equally applicable to *Against the Day*. Clearly, there is an apocalyptic arc stretching from his early work right up to the present.

We see then that the numerous arcs in Pynchon's novels work as a structuring structure affecting his *oeuvre*, giving it a shape or the appearance of some cohesive greater whole as Faulkner achieved with Yoknapatawpha County. (This is not the same as a saga or series like Tolkien's Ring cycle which would run the risk mentioned above, rather it brings to mind the 'world' constructed by William Blake which takes the appearance of an organic whole.) David Cowart contemplates Pynchon's literary career and proposes that "one reads the Pynchon *oeuvre* as an ideational *roman fleuve*" (*Dark Passages*, 166), a statement whose accuracy depends on the meaning behind his term. A literary term like *bildungsroman* or *roman a clef*, this classification has its own history so in the spirit of Raymond Williams we might look briefly at some meanings given to the term *roman fleuve*. The Encyclopedia Britannica states that it is "series of novels, each one complete in itself, that deals with one central character, an era of national life, or successive generations of a family." Merriam-Webster calls it "a novel in the form of a long usually easygoing chronicle of a social group (as a family or a community)." In a similar fashion Collins deems it a "novel or series of novels dealing with a family or other group over several generations." Larousse offers something different: "Roman dans lequel le cours du récit se déroule tantôt avec rapidité, tantôt avec lenteur. Roman ou récit d'une longueur excessive." And finally from an institution that shapes the discourse of academic language, Oxford states that the *roman fleuve* is "A novel featuring the leisurely description of the lives of closely related people. A sequence of related, self-contained novels."²⁹² Many of the definitions above focus too exclusively on one family or social group, so if this is what Cowart has in mind it does not quite fit. To apply the term "ideational *roman fleuve*" to Pynchon's work is problematic, and unnecessarily so when one can discuss it in terms of the specific development of his creative project.

But let us look more closely at Oxford's "sequence of related, self-contained novels," could this be applied to Pynchon's career? It would be a less than linear sequence, surely. And it is questionable how contained they are if characters from other novels enter. And yet they are fairly autonomous texts and they are certainly related even to the extent of kinship groups. What sequence would bring these elements into order? What order do we impose on the multiple and intersecting narratives? But

²⁹² The quoted definitions are from the respective web pages of the individual institutions mentioned.

perhaps those are not the questions to ask. Perhaps it would be better to ask what supports this edifice with its multifaceted exterior that blends baroque, gothic and modern at a glance. The arc is what best fits this function; either as parabolic arc or catenary curve or even tangent arcs, they appear with great consistency in Pynchon's novels and fit in as an aspect of his creative project which in *Against the Day* reaches out as none of his other novels have. The overarching in that novel spans the spatial and temporal reach of Pynchon's writing just as it spans the distance between the sciences (*Naturwissenschaften*) and the human sciences (*Geisteswissenschaften*). For example, Lew Basnight connects the two US coasts where the events depicted in Pynchon's writing often take place. What David Cowart has called Pynchon's "California novels" are connected through Lew Basnight to Maxine Tarnow. Lew becomes their predecessor, even if Oedipa was in print decades before him. Similarly, the rise and fall of the rocket in *Gravity's Rainbow* is shadowed by the airship's flight in *Against the Day*. In a sense then, Pynchon's most ambitious novel occupies a place in his creative project that is central to connecting the various works, and yet I am not arguing for *Against the Day* as the center from which his works radiate. Rather, Pynchon's creative project becomes most apparent with this largest work that he sets in place like a keystone that allows the structure to bear the weight of its narrative load. The novel functions as a chronotopic keystone that allows Pynchon's novel to 'hold hands.' As the reader of *Against the Day* finishes the novel, in which La Jarratierre has just disconcertingly reappeared, s/he leaves the characters in the early 1920s, the raging Twenties that would give way to the enraged and maddened Thirties, the Holocaust and the Rocket. Given all this I am tempted to say of Pynchon, as Bourdieu does of Faulkner, that his,

[...] novels are also veritable machines for exploring time which, far from offering a ready-made theory of temporality which only needs to be made explicit, instead oblige readers to *make* this theory for *themselves*; they make it from the material supplied by the narrative of the temporal experience of characters and, more importantly, from reflections on their own temporal experiences as acting agents and as readers, reflections which are aroused by the questioning of their *reading routines*. (RA 327)

Readers are then left to make sense of it all, the factual and the fabulous, and ask themselves if they are on an extraordinary path towards grace or some more ordinary path, blindly keeping time to the mad pace of events.

In the sections above I have tried to bring to light the structuring devices that Pynchon consciously uses and that exist in addition to the chiasmic structure of the social field in the novel as well as the literary field in which the author is positioned. It should be clear that these structure the novel as well as giving a structure to Pynchon's *oeuvre* in which *Against the Day* functions as the keystone that allows the various chronotopes of his novels to connect. The conic geometry that Pynchon has drawn on in the past allows the elliptical narrative lines appear, disappear and reappear in comet-like fashion, occasionally crossing. This structure permits the return of characters and thus in part explains the reappearance of La Jarratierre. The elliptical paths are then represented by the solid figure of the ellipsoid which I have argued fits with Pynchon's creative project. The grand arc of his literary trajectory appears to start with two essential points: entropy and paranoia, reflecting his dual inheritance. The two terms are perhaps the most associated with his name, however, with the production and publication of *Against the Day* there is a new coordinate: Grace.

Chapter 11 - Prelude to a Conclusion

The Importance of Pynchon: The Circulation of his Works

Bourdieu's sociology of literature involves the study of the author's habitus and the literary field to understand the work of art, and the analysis above achieves that. But what can it tell us about the arc of this not so absent author? Where does he stand in stand in our contemporary social field? (This question pertains most specifically to the US social field; Pynchon would simply not figure into a different social space, e.g. Spain or Germany, equally.) After all, one of the most interesting things about the famous author is how unknown he is. So in this brief section I will point out some factors that can be used to measure this.

There can be no argument that Pynchon is firmly positioned at the autonomous pole of cultural production and that he has accumulated a significant amount of capital which he can use to legitimate or criticize events or movements, although in Pynchon's case the public use of his capital in this respect is limited. Still, he has the symbolic power of words that he deploys in his fiction to position himself regarding issues in society, for example xenophobic falsehoods about immigrants. It is this capacity that Susan Sontag referred to when she wrote:

Writers can do something to combat these clichés of our separateness, our difference --- for writers are makers, not just transmitters, of myths. Literature offers not only myths but counter-myths, just as life offers counter-experiences --- experiences that confound what you thought you thought, or felt, or believed. (6)²⁹³

Her words echo Pynchon's in the blurb for *Against the Day* in which he writes of the book that, "Contrary-to-the-fact occurrences occur. If it is not the world, it is what the world might be with a minor adjustment or two. According to some, this is one of the main purposes of fiction." She would likely agree that *Against the Day* confounds our categories of perception and temporality.

And yet, someone may say, it is fine to assert that he has such and such a position in the literary field, but is there any quantifiable manner to confirm or disprove this

²⁹³ Susan Sontag 2003 Friedenspreis Speech.

besides the study of book sales? (One need not be an 'expert' to know that volume of sales is not synonymous with a consecrated status.) The answer is an unhesitant and emphatic yes. One reviewer of *Against the Day* wrote that, "Pynchon's web presence, in the form of mailing groups and websites devoted to his work, is unrivalled by few contemporary novelists."²⁹⁴ In an era in which many authors spend a great deal of time managing their web presence, the fact that Pynchon has so much of one while shunning media is a testament to his significant social and symbolic capital. This also implies a fairly wide audience, larger than what some may expect for an author that is considered to be an 'author's author.' This might have appealed to Pierre Bourdieu, given that John Speller states, "What Bourdieu claims to admire in Grass's work is in fact his 'search for means of expression to convey a critical, subversive message to a very large audience'" (BL 143) something that is evident in Pynchon's writing. But web presence as instanced by forums or query entries are not enough to determine an author's standing.

A more certain measure is inclusion of the author and his/her works in university syllabi, anthologies or as subjects of dissertations or in other places. One of the other places that an academic can look to determine the standing (or their measure of capital) of an author is a publication like *The Oxford Encyclopedia of American Literature*. Consulting this tome one will find that writers who have greater capital are afforded more space whereas those authors who have not gained such a dominant position are restricted to a few paragraphs (another indication of how social space and physical space are related). Thus, it is no surprise to find that the entry for William Faulkner has several pages whereas the entry for Maxine Hong Kingston is much shorter; it should be no surprise that Thomas Pynchon's entry is nearly as long as Faulkner's or Kerouac's, a clear sign of his standing in the literary field. (There is no entry for Pynchon's Cornell friend and fellow writer Richard Fariña.) Anthology inclusion is more difficult for Thomas Pynchon. From the anthologies I have been able to study, Pynchon is often included but due to the size of his texts the example of his writing is normally limited to the short story "Entropy."²⁹⁵ But considering that anthologies are not that quickly replaced, it

²⁹⁴ Ludovic Hunter-Tilney "Invisible Man: Elusive, Anarchic, Encyclopaedic." *The Financial Times*, 2 December 2006,

²⁹⁵ I suspect that in the future anthology samples of Pynchon's writing will grow to include extractions of famous sections of text as has been done with James Joyce's novels which also do not lend themselves easily to anthology inclusion.

would be interesting to have data on dissertations involving Pynchon, however that has been difficult to research and process.²⁹⁶ Fortunately, one may also study the author's presence in university syllabi, something that has become easier with the creation of the Open Syllabus Project in late 2016. According to data from the website, Pynchon's most present work in university syllabi is *The Crying of Lot 49* which has a 'teaching score' of 68.8 (this indicates how often a work is taught). Compared to many other authors in his cohort, Pynchon can be said to have a strong presence in the literary field.²⁹⁷ One final possible measure of an author's measure of capital is based on the awards and prizes s/he has received. In the case of Thomas Pynchon this is again more difficult because he suffers a reverse Matthew Effect (accumulated advantage) as Robert Merton called it. Several of the most consecrated writers in Pynchon's cohort have been given multiple awards whereas Pynchon has only a few; this is not because he is a 'worse' writer. Simply by responding as he has to certain prize offers, Pynchon has made it less likely that anyone will nominate him. These measures can give us an idea of where a writer stands in the field and what their volume of capital is. The above does not exhaust the ways in which an author is measured in relation to others in the field, but it does demonstrate that beyond Pynchon's popularity in forums or other digital platforms he has a position in the US social and, specifically, cultural field for which it is hard to find comparison.

The purpose of this brief chapter is to show that by a number of metrics one can safely say that Thomas Pynchon occupies a significant place in the literary field and is assured of his place in the canon that future students will read and study. Following Bourdieu's logic regarding the dual economies (and their respective logics and cycles) of

²⁹⁶ Michel Rycx, Pynchon scholar (and creator of www.vheissu.net, a website full of Pynchon bibliographic material), informs us that from 1963 to 2010 "one can identify at least 2,000 scholarly articles on Pynchon and his works, and over 400 Ph.D. dissertations, in at least 27 languages." Although this does something to demonstrate Pynchon's presence in the literary field, it needs to be held up against other authors' standings in order to bring the information into relief.

²⁹⁷ Only a few other authors have works that are taught with a greater frequency. Toni Morrison's *Beloved* has a 'teaching score' of 94.8, DeLillo's *White Noise* is scored at 71.2, and Lorraine Hansberry's *Raisin in the Sun* stands at 75.4. Other 'major authors' have their most present books in syllabi taught with less frequency. Roth's *American Pastoral* has a 'teaching score' of 53.2 and E.L. Doctorow's *Ragtime* is scored at 57.1. Many well-known authors fared considerably worse. Of course, Pynchon's other works have a much smaller presence in university syllabi. In order of importance, *Against the Day* is in a penultimate position compared with other Pynchon novels and has an almost non-existent score of 0.5; novels in a similar position from other authors are often taught more frequently. For example, Phillip Roth's *Everyman* and John Updike's *The Witches of Eastwick* (both of which are in seventh place in order of importance in the respective author's oeuvre) have higher 'teaching scores' than *Against the Day*.

the literary market, it is perhaps too soon to say what place his later novels will have in the literary field as they have not had much time yet to enter university syllabi or gain in sales over time against the best-sellers published at the same time. And while *Against the Day* may never be taught with the same frequency as Pynchon's earlier novels, it will always stand as a central work in his oeuvre based on its connection to the other novels.

Chapter 12

Conclusion

“Shall I construct a world” is a question asked by Oedipa Maas in *The Crying of Lot 49*. This question is often seized upon by academics and used to support their arguments but it also reflects the uncertainty they face as they build their argument and lay an orderly façade over the unruly textual mass. Such concerns are understandable given that for a while it was believed that the small squares separating sections in *Gravity’s Rainbow* were meant to symbolize the squares on cinema-film reels, a belief put to rest by comments from the editor Corlies Smith. After all, Pynchon’s novels are a fine entrance to the rabbit hole that one can tumble down when literary study foists an interpretation on a work. How does one arrive at what James Bohman calls “fallibilistic claims to knowledge that are intersubjectively valid and capable of public adjudication?”²⁹⁸

In response to these concerns and questions my reaction has been to draw on the work of Pierre Bourdieu and specifically to apply it to the work of Thomas Pynchon. And, “So what,” some may ask. Another novel, another French intellectual and his terms. All quite understandable. However, even though I know that the relevance of this dissertation to my field will not be immediately noticeable, I am comforted by the fact that my work is rather unique by virtue of being the first to apply Pierre Bourdieu’s sociology of literature to one of Pynchon’s novels. As much as I would like to think that this is entirely due to my own virtues, I know that it has more to do with me re-discovering the author and the sociologist at about the same time. Upon reading *Against the Day* I knew that I had encountered a thesis for my dissertation; here was a book that seemed made to analyze in much the same way that Bourdieu had done in *The Rules of Art* with Flaubert’s *Sentimental Education*. Despite the differences between the French and American literary fields as well as those between Flaubert and Pynchon, it struck me that certain homologies were present. The question was whether or not the

²⁹⁸ James Bohman “Holism without Skepticism” in *The Interpretive Turn* edited by David Hiley, James Bohman, and Richard Shusterman (Cornell UP, 1991) pp. 132.

structure of the social world in the novel was in some way a refracted version of the author's own social world and his place within it, and specifically the literary field. The great unknown was if *Against the Day* would demonstrate a chiasmic structure, that structural reproduction of the social field that is produced by the authorial practice which is in turn produced by habitus in response to the field and its position therein, that Bourdieu found in *Sentimental Education*. The analysis would also reveal the genesis of the creative project as well as Pynchon's trajectory and the novel's place in both, and whatever structures they might have. I had no idea of how much labor would be involved in applying the methodology nor of the obstacles I would encounter.

Summary of the Dissertation

This thesis was never meant to produce a totalizing reading of the novel, no *explication de texte* offering a hermeneutic interpretation, a close reading that scours the text from cover to cover in an attempt to explain it all. In fact, the aim of Bourdieu's sociological literary analysis is to overcome the unnecessary dichotomy of internal versus external literary analysis. To borrow from him, *Against the Day* offers readers "a vision one could call sociological if it were not set apart from a scientific analysis by its form" (RA 31). Curiously, one of Pynchon's acquaintances once described him as "a professional sociologist, studying people."²⁹⁹ As such a sociological reading of the novel is especially appropriate and well suited to expose those landmarks and practices that indicate the structure of social space. In this way one can "objectivize the novelistic illusion, and especially the relations to the so-called real world it assumes, is to remind ourselves that the reality against which we measure all fictions is merely the recognized referent of an (almost) universally shared illusion" (RA 34).

However, this is not as simple as it sounds. Studying and explaining how the field of power cuts across and constrains the fields of cultural production (literary, intellectual, etc.) were arduous but necessary preliminary steps for studying Pynchon's habitus and trajectory. This then allowed me to analyze the space of possibilities and

²⁹⁹ From an interview with Chrissie Jolly, posted on waste.org on 23 Oct. 1996 by Jules Siegel. The posts offer a number of insights into Pynchon's private life.

the genesis of Pynchon's creative project. Although I have focused primarily on *Against the Day*, it was only by reading a great deal of additional material that I was able to outline that genesis. I have shown that the novel can be held over against the living social world in which an agent exercises various practices as the embodied consciousness of biological individuals that inhabit a specific social world. The chiasmic structure that stands between fields and can be perceived in social space is demonstrated by the movements and position-takings of characters in the novel as their narratives progress. In addition, this dissertation demonstrates that *Against the Day* occupies a special position in Pynchon's creative project as it functions as a chronotopic keystone connecting his various novels. Moreover, the analysis has evinced more purposefully employed structures that overarch through the novel in elliptical paths so that the defining structure in *Against the Day* is the ellipse and the ellipsoid, revealing how Pynchon makes use of conic geometry to provide a subtle structure to his novels. The result shows a less absent author than has typically been stated to be the case and also brings to light the importance of the last line and that new term in Pynchon's trajectory: Grace. As this new term, with all its metaphysical underpinnings, appears in Pynchon's work, it stands in contradistinction to that more scientific concept, entropy, which was associated with Pynchon's writing early on in his career.

This brief synopsis belies the difficulty in using Bourdieu's method for a novel as maximalist and encyclopedic as *Against the Day*. The unwieldy text caused long time Pynchon reader and critic Tom LeClair to forward the speculative complaint that no one except "Pynchonists" would finish the book.³⁰⁰ He continues, "I hope I'm wrong. I hope some future scholar will read the novel twenty times and either illustrate how it recapitulates the whole story of narrative or demonstrate how every piece fits together into a four-fold design,"³⁰¹ putting the waggish tone aside one notes LeClair's frustration. This was picked up on by the editors of *Pynchon's Against the Day: A Corrupted Pilgrim's Guide* (one of the first full length books to focus exclusively on the novel) as they attempted to respond to LeClair's cry for an explanation of the book. And

³⁰⁰ Tracking book sales of the novel on Amazon provides a picture that contradicts LeClair's claim. In the time that I have tracked *Against the Day's* Amazon book number it has shown steady sales that points to a readership beyond the community of "Pynchonists".

³⁰¹ Tom LeClair "Lead Zeppelin" Review of Thomas Pynchon's *Against the Day* in *Bookforum* Jan. 2007.

although the collection of essays goes a great length in studying “predominant dimensions of the book’s pursuits” it does not provide the holistic reading for which LeClair seems to beg (this should not be seen as a criticism as the individual essays are able to focus more narrowly on their subject and provide real insight). Admittedly, our endeavors are rather different so it is no surprise that the resulting studies go in somewhat different directions.

Goals and Achievements

The objective behind this dissertation was to apply Bourdieu’s sociological literary analysis to Thomas Pynchon’s biggest novel and determine to what extent the sentient data and empirical information could be used to study the novel in a manner similar Bourdieu’s work with Flaubert. This involved looking closely at the reviews and the wider literary field as well as tracking down any information I could to make sense of what some claimed was a senseless novel. Fifteen years ago the use of Bourdieu’s work for literary study was almost non-existent and in studies of Pynchon’s work it was entirely absent and many academics were still unfamiliar with Bourdieu’s contribution to the human sciences. As Nicholas Brown and Imre Szeman write in the introduction to *Pierre Bourdieu: Field work in Culture*,

This is an opportune time to consider the possibilities that Bourdieu's sociology offers for cultural criticism. For while Bourdieu's work has never been about anything other than culture in the broadest sense, the past several years have seen the publication and translation of a number of books that promise to expand the discussion of the importance and significance of Bourdieu's work within the humanities (2).

Because Bourdieu’s approach makes use of empirical data and the many techniques involved in literary study, the academic is not limited to close reading or strict study of the text. By pursuing my initial goal, the first application of Bourdieu’s ideas in the study of a Thomas Pynchon novel, the project led me to other achievements. My research has led to the discovery of information that was hitherto unknown. Although it was widely assumed that Pynchon’s father was a Republican, due to his position in the local government, there was nothing to confirm or disprove it. In the course of my research I came across something in the notes of Richard Nixon and found that Pynchon’s father had been at a meeting in 1960 in Nassau Co. with the then Vice-president (Pynchon Sr.

was listed as Republican Leader Town of Oyster Bay). This indicates a great deal about the family's social position and the environment in which Pynchon's primary habitus developed. Additionally, reading an interview with one of Pynchon's former Cornell friends (Tod Perry) I came across mention of a couple that had what amounts to a 'Salon' in Greenwich Village that Pynchon and friends visited a number of times. It belonged to Hans and Gerda Meyerhof who were Jewish and had fled Germany – Gerda Meyerhof was a photographer and knew the German novelist Martin Beradt as well as Hannah Arendt. This setting would have been quite formative for the budding novelist's point of view. Moreover, tracking Amazon book ranking numbers had never been performed and the picture that emerges is quite telling; it shows that although Pynchon is firmly positioned at the autonomous pole of literary production he is not the author's author that some would claim as his book sales apparently outstrip many of his peers (William Gass, Robert Coover, etc.). In other words Pynchon's works continue to circulate (being bought and consumed and talked about) but it is not due entirely to university syllabi obliging students to buy his works. Also, by looking back at private correspondence I have provided a clearer picture of the genesis of Pynchon's creative project from its nascent appearance in the mid 1960's, a project of great magnitude requiring uncommon dedication and energy that would take years to finish.³⁰² What is revealed is a savvy author, one who has a 'feel for the game' as Bourdieu was fond of saying. (One cannot fail to notice how Pynchon has never declared himself a "postmodern" writer and thus escapes being tied to that label and its recent loss of cultural capital.)³⁰³ And yet despite having occupied a position of 'art for art's sake' (his rejection of fame and awards and the bourgeois life make him Flaubert's counterpart in this way) he has not doomed himself to the monkish life of the man of letters. Thomas Pynchon has been fortunate in that he has escaped Flaubert's regret about not having a family; Pynchon has his cake and he eats it, too.

By studying the novel this way, one also sees that *Against the Day* constitutes an expense of capital, not so much a wager as a demonstration of Pynchon's capital (it is

³⁰² I propose that having finished the core of his creative project with *Against the Day*, Pynchon has been free to extend his project with the novels *Inherent Vice* and *Bleeding Edge*.

³⁰³ Over the last decade or more a number of academics who were quite invested in the concept of "postmodernism" have declared it to be past. See essays by Brian McHale or Linda Hutcheon.

hard to imagine an unknown writer producing such a book and getting it published without significant cuts). Furthermore, despite the variety of genre types employed and the number of narratives present in *Against the Day*, it is very much driven forward by the drama that surrounds the Traverse family and centers on Kit who, I have shown, stands in relation to Pynchon in manner similar to which Frédéric stands in relation to Flaubert. Finally, with this study it is clear that Pynchon has contributed to the “symbolic struggle” (BL 140) since the beginning, though most notably from *Gravity’s Rainbow* on. However, whereas in *Gravity’s Rainbow* the technocrats are the faces of evil, in *Against the Day* it is the corporate world, represented by Scarsdale Vibe, with its neoliberal imperative to commodify everything under the law of the market.

Implications of the Research Conducted

Any aspiring academic knows that his or her dissertation will not be widely read, and yet it seems to me an error if based on that one produces academic work that limits itself to addressing a small group of readers. While it is true that a dissertation most have a tight focus and make a specific contribution to its field, it is my feeling that in these times of budget cuts that so often target the humanities before other research fields we must consider how our work can produce ripples that may have effects outside of the small space we move in within the our respective fields. To that end I want to look at the potential importance for my field of literary study in a larger context. The research and work that constitute this dissertation obviously add to the growing body of literature that draws on Bourdieu’s work and the same must be said for its contribution to Pynchon studies. But is that where it stops, small ripples in a small pond isolated and not in communication with those other bodies in the academic field? It seems to me that that contributes to the situation that Gerald Graff and others have bemoaned, and have put faculty budgets or even their existence in the balance. However, it does not have to be that way. I believe that there are wider reaching possible implications for this line of research. In the following I lay out a few of those and also point to limitations in Bourdieu’s approach.

Instead of starting with those ripples which would most immediately affect the field in which I operate, the academic subfield of literary study, I would like to start by looking a bit more broadly a field. What some see as a critical moment in education is especially so for the various university faculties that compose the humanities and human sciences such as English studies, foreign language departments, etc. Bringing Bourdieu into literary study allows academics to “teach the conflict,” as Gerald Graff suggests,³⁰⁴ by seeing literary feuds as so much positioning in the literary field. Furthermore, Pynchon’s works lend themselves to greater dialogue between what C.P. Snow called Two Cultures of the sciences and the humanities. This requires some explaining. In a report for the Collège de France prepared by Pierre Bourdieu and François Gros it was suggested that joint classes be created that would be taught by a professor of the human sciences and one from mathematics or the co-called ‘hard’ sciences of physics or biology, for example. This view was restated in one of Bourdieu’s final publications in which he states:

The opposition between ‘science’ and ‘humanities’ that still dominates the organization of teaching today, as well as the mentalities of teachers and parents, can and must be overcome by a teaching able to profess both science and the history of sciences or epistemology, to induct students into art and literature as well as aesthetic or logical consideration of these subjects, to teach not only mastery of language and literature, philosophical and scientific discourse, but also active mastery of the logical and rhetorical procedures that these involve.³⁰⁵

This may sound like a radical proposal but it would certainly do a great deal to reduce the degree of Balkanization in academia and would also increase dialogue between disparate academic groups. As such I think it can be fairly well argued that the application of Bourdieu’s work may help academics break out of their institutional canton and start to engage with others that have rather different ideas or approaches to the production of knowledge and cultural products and that Pynchon’s novels provide a great vehicle for that endeavor. In tandem with this idea of using Bourdieu to “teach the conflict,” there may be other implications of this research project that couples Pynchon and Bourdieu, though more specifically through the study of Pynchon’s novels. Perhaps the foremost of these is that they open the door to the possibility of a dialogue

³⁰⁴ Gerald Graff presents this proposal in his book *Beyond the Culture Wars: How Teaching the Conflicts Can Revitalize American Education* (Norton, 1992).

³⁰⁵ Pierre Bourdieu *Political Interventions*, edited by Franck Poupeau and Thierry Discepolo, translated by David Fernbach (Verso, 2008), pp. 180.

about the double-bladed ramifications and consequences of the development of technology and its creep into every aspect of our lives. The novels, taken along with Bourdieu's well-aimed criticisms of the deleterious effects of neo-liberalism on cultures and societies, provide a quasi neo-Luddite stance from which to question the present infatuation with technology, an opportunity to look at the equation of technological advance with progress with a skeptical lens.

Those may sound like rather grand claims for the potential effects of my research but I do not think them unrealistic. Of course it stands to reason that the effects of my work will be most immediately felt first in the area of the study of Pynchon's novels and only later, to whatever degree, in the broader literary field. The effect that I see coming from this is that Pynchon scholars now have an example of the application of Bourdieu's approach and the set of tools employed to execute that analysis. Bringing to bear the study of reviews, dissertations, encyclopedia entries, book sales over time, and positions taken in publishing or in literature, yields a view of a literary work and its author in way hitherto rarely seen. Moreover, this approach is amenable to the development of the so-called digital humanities that allows for study of a corpus and such approaches as Franco Moretti's 'distant reading'. And yet there must also be limitations to any method or theory, as Bourdieu would have been quick to add, lest it be too facilely or inappropriately "incorporated"³⁰⁶ into a system of relations to which it does not really lend itself. Richard Shusterman thinks that Bourdieu, among others, runs the risk of "losing sight of the aesthetic experience and its more perceptual and immediate values," although this is not a concern that I share regarding the limits of Bourdieu's sociological literary analysis. Bourdieu's method is perhaps best suited for and limited to study of literatures of societies with a greater degree of differentiation. For example, it strikes me that it would be less suitable for the study of oral literature from a tribe deep in the Amazon or of nomadic peoples living in the steppes of central Asia, such as the Tyvans. In societies such as those there is a lesser degree of differentiation and thus it would not have the opposing poles of cultural production so it would be difficult or impossible to analyze in the same manner that Bourdieu did in *The Rules of Art* or other texts where

³⁰⁶ When Duke University invited Bourdieu to attend a conference, he eventually declined but sent a text expressing his concern over possible distortions of his work; see "Passport to Duke" by Pierre Bourdieu printed in *Metaphilosophy* 28:4, Oct. 1997.

he applied his approach to literary study or comment.³⁰⁷ And as regards the application of Bourdieu's approach to Pynchon's writing, there may be some who see it as limited or overly reductive since it does not make an attempt to include every line or page in its study. However, it seems to me that that criticism misses the point of his theory which is radically different from the line-by-line close readings of the New Criticism and later formalists that shaped and limited literary criticism for so much of the twentieth century.

Future Research Possibilities Based on the Dissertation

Based on the research and analysis of *Against the Day* and the arguments and claims put forward here, there are several future lines of study and research that lie open. For example, on one level we may consider the automated future that everyday draws closer, not only in the industrial manufacturing sector where it has long been replacing the human work force, but now also in the service-sector and mid-level positions previously thought to be unsusceptible to automation. The economic impact of further automation in the form of technological job displacement is an increasingly discussed subject amongst not only economists but also politicians. As the same time the subject of drones for military and commercial use has provoked a debate in society over their ethical or safe and secure use. An automated tomorrow makes it almost certain that the works of Thomas Pynchon, whose oeuvre is marked by the presence of automata, will come to occupy a place in curricula and syllabi that far outweighs that of his peers; the names of William Gass, Robert Coover, and John Barth will fade into the pages of literary history. As today most people recognize the name William Shakespeare but not Kit Marlowe, George Peele or Michael Drayton (his contemporaries) so tomorrow it will be Pynchon's name that stands out from his contemporaries. Of course it is one thing to assert this and another to study and confirm it. Over the next two to three decades that hypothesis can be studied and confirmed or disproved by employing those tools and methods that Pierre Bourdieu first outlined.

³⁰⁷ Aside from his major study of Flaubert, Bourdieu has applied his approach to texts by Apollinaire or Faulkner.

There are other future lines of research that are almost incumbent upon me to pursue since they were put forward in this dissertation; there remains a great deal to do regarding the research I have only just begun here. One research priority for me is a scientifically conducted survey of Pynchon readers, and to that end I have already been in contact with other Pynchon scholars as well as Tim Ware, the webmaster of an important website dedicated to the works by Thomas Pynchon.³⁰⁸ Additionally, I plan to continue my study of syllabi and dissertations by extending it to Pynchon's contemporaries in order to make a comparison of their relative canonization in academia. I agree with Pierre Bourdieu when he writes:

In my view, the sociology of cultural products must take as its object the whole set of relationships (objective ones and also those effected in the form of interactions) *between the artist and other artists*, and beyond them, the whole set of agents engaged in the production of the work, or, at least, of the *social value* of the work (critics, gallery directors, patrons, etc.).³⁰⁹

And another research task that I have committed myself to is that instead of relying solely on the study of the 1955 cohort of US writers conducted by Bo Eklund et al., I would like to apply their methods to the 1960 and/ or 1965 cohort(s) of US writers and thus bring a tighter analytic focus to the period of Pynchon's entrance into the literary field. Along similar lines there is still a need for a rigorous application of Multiple Correspondence Analysis (MCA) to the sentient data related to the agents in the social field, a task that will clearly require cross-disciplinary collaboration. Performing this in tandem with a mapping of authors' starting positions and movements (school, publisher, etc.) would allow academics to see authors through new systems of relations; from this view two authors so close in age as Thomas Pynchon and Ken Kesey may appear to be further apart in the literary field than a younger author such as David Foster Wallace. It is here as academics handle not only a number of authors but also texts that one may contemplate the extent to which new approaches to literary study (the so-called digital humanities) may prove amenable to Bourdieu's sociology of literature.

³⁰⁸ Tim Ware created the website thomaspychon.com but also the very important wikis to which readers have contributed; these wikis are essential tools in the study of Pynchon's novels.

³⁰⁹ From "But Who Created the Creators?" in *Sociology in Question* pp. 140.

Endgame: Grace or...?

In closing that which has not been opened all the way there is always the risk that something is caught or pinched in the process. It would be ridiculous to try to explain again why I have chosen to write a dissertation on such a mammoth book; I can only say that I am all too aware that what lays behind the cover of *Against the Day* has not been fully covered here and I am left with the feeling that I should have pointed out more examples in which Bourdieu's work and Pynchon's fiction support one another. However, perhaps it is best to leave others to find these other cross-overs between the texts.

As fledgling academics, we make a great investment but also a gamble as we choose our area of study. For me it was important to work with an author whose project has a scope of concern that reaches out to the wider world; in retrospect it would be difficult for me to focus so exclusively on a writer like Jack Kerouac. At the same time I knew I had to find an approach whose explanatory power convinced me in a way that many theorists that have come to the fore over the last several decades did not, something that stood on ground more solid than the charismatic wave that brings it briefly to the crest of academic fame. To this end my concerns have been respect for the living author Thomas Pynchon and fidelity to the ideas of the late Pierre Bourdieu. I do not know how well I have done in both respects; my sincere intent is my only comfort for any faults in that regard.

This dissertation has demonstrated that not only is Pynchon "embedded in the world that he transforms into writing" (Berressem, 174) but that it is that world and the habitus he has acquired in it that are central to the creative process. We have seen how a struggle in one field has its homologue in another, how the social space of agents in the novel and their distance from centers of capital are refracted visions of the author's own world. But more importantly it has shown that the works that Pynchon's practice produces are not merely fanciful exercises of authorial imagination and erudition but rather are his own responses to what Frank Kermode has called "the dilemma of fiction and reality."³¹⁰ After all the novel pretends to be "[...] what the world might be with a

³¹⁰ Frank Kermode *The Sense of an Ending* (Oxford UP, 2000) pp. 131.

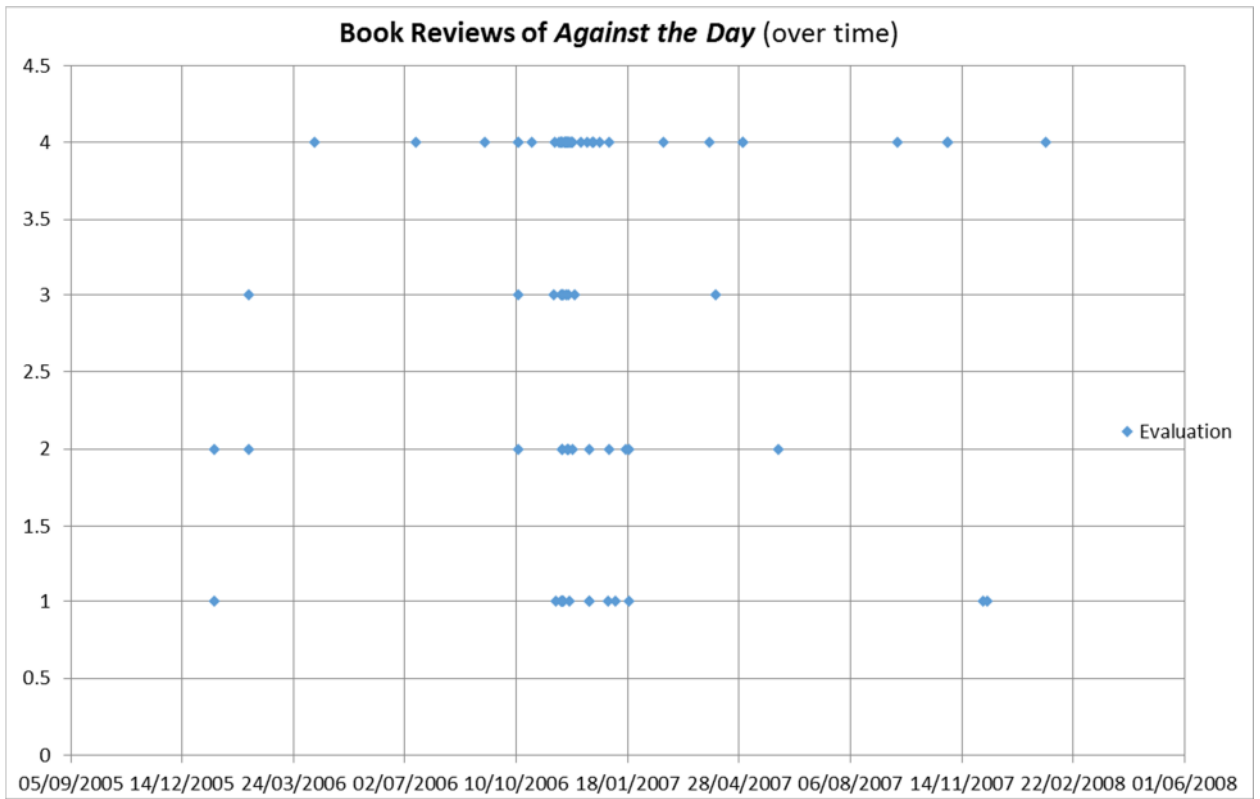
minor adjustment or two,” so it should not be surprising that it may have significance for some readers despite its unwieldy weirdness. In the end novels and other books come to occupy a place in the literary and social field of a specific place, but also, and just as meaningfully, in the lived trajectory of readers as agents in the social field. John Speller writes that “Bourdieu himself took inspiration from literary texts... and he found in the multi-layered prose of Proust, and in the polynomasie of Flaubert, Joyce, or Faulkner, techniques to help him describe the complexity of reality” (p187). It could easily be argued that Pynchon fills this role for many readers and I believe that we can benefit similarly from *Against the Day*, a global novel (or “World-Narrative”) that obliges us to ponder the still-to-come of our own social world and any great chasm we may standing before as we pass through a century of painful centenaries.

Painted on a very big canvas, Pynchon’s mega novel has the look of a magnum opus meant to sit alongside *Gravity’s Rainbow*; in comparison, *Vineland* and *Mason & Dixon* look contained in scope. Strong on fact while freely mixing in fiction, the historicity of this fabulous novel keeps the reader anchored to a history with very real events, events that echo disturbingly in our own time a century later, although “No reference to the present day should be intended or inferred.” Whether the focus is on the past or obliquely pointed toward the present there is a preoccupied vision that differs from that of the German sociologist from whom Pynchon has drawn on, Max Weber. Ralph Schroeder writes that “An interesting divergence between Weber and Pynchon is that whereas Weber saw the empty American space as a unique opportunity to shape a new culture, Pynchon identifies precisely the opposite effect; that the process of the conquest of this empty space obliterates cultural possibilities.”³¹¹ The apocalyptic worries of Pynchon’s youth have not faded but rather modulated and there is still a concern that we are dancing towards the edge of the Anthropocene in romantic expectation of a grand finale. Only now Pynchon has posited that there is at least the possibility of grace. So if we dance it is under the apocalyptic blade we hang over our own heads. Grace or apocalypse depends on us, on whether we continue to whirl towards the edge. Perhaps with time people will come to see that the rockets falling over the heads of others may soon come bearing down on our own corner of the earth,

³¹¹ Ralph Schroeder *Max Weber Studies* 1.2 2001, pp. 161-177.

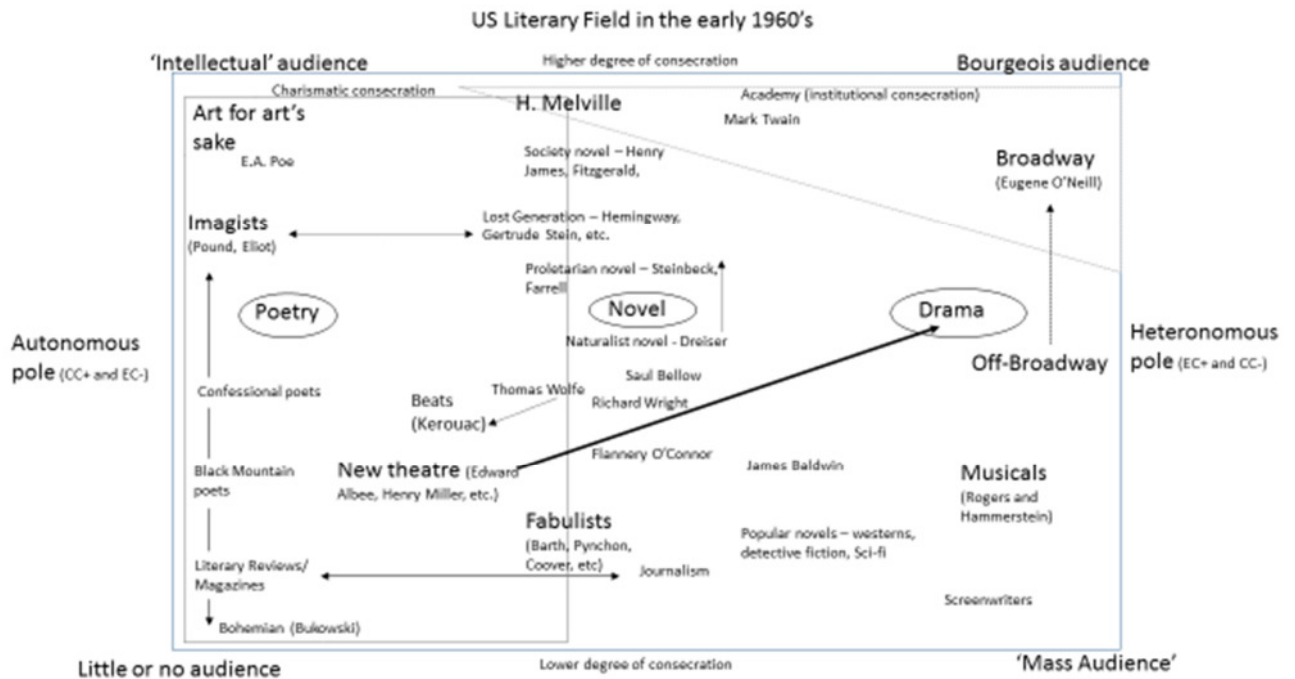
that the apocalypse that awaits others must consume us all. And the reader is left to choose – against the day.

Appendix I: Book Reviews of *Against the Day*



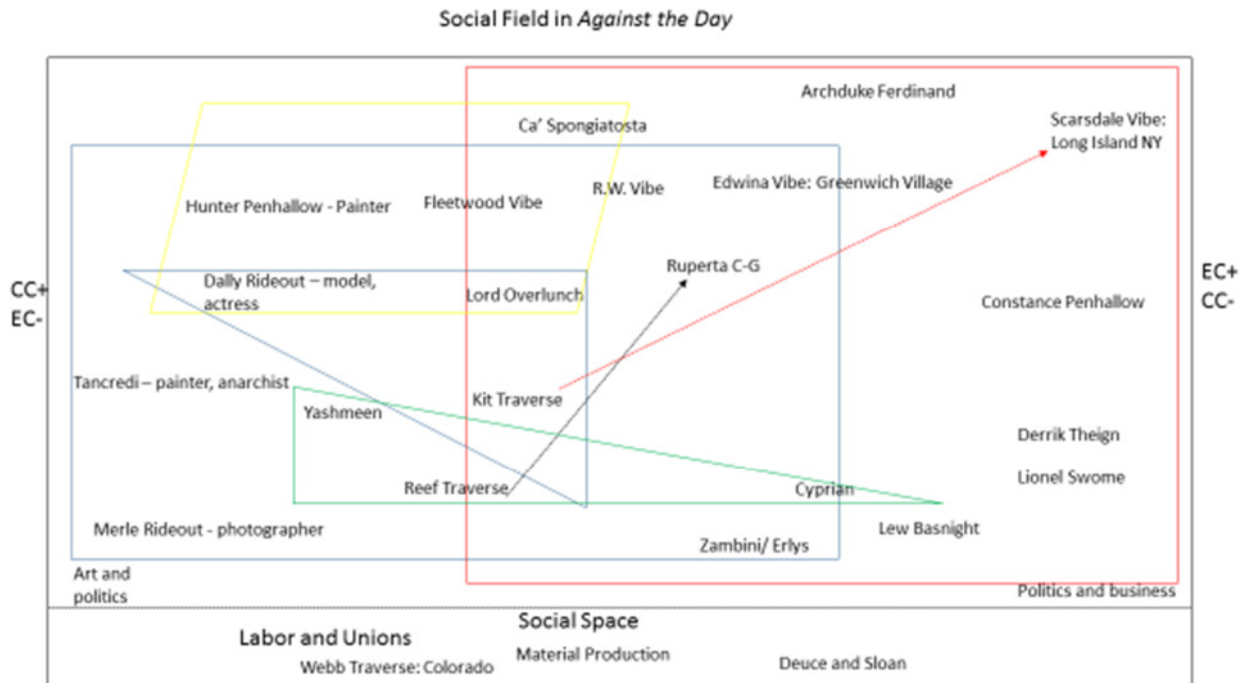
The above graph makes it clear that early reviews were not necessarily more likely to be negative. It also shows that positive reviews continued to appear well after the release date, more so than negative ones.

Appendix II: The US Literary Field in the Early 1960's



Following on Andrew Milner's adaptation of Bourdieu's 'map' in *The Rules of Art*, I have tried to depict the positions and distribution of capital available to agents competing in the US literary field at the end of the 1950's and beginning of the 1960's. One finds Pynchon at the outset with both a low degree of consecration and in no position to make money from his art. As he gains symbolic capital in the form of awards and praise, he attains a greater degree of consecration and his works eventually achieve canonic status with the US literary field. Today one would locate his position in the upper left hand corner; still oriented toward the pole of autonomous production, he has a highly consecrated status and gains economic capital due to the long-cycle of his book sales which accrue over time.

Appendix III: The Structure of Social Space in *Against the Day*



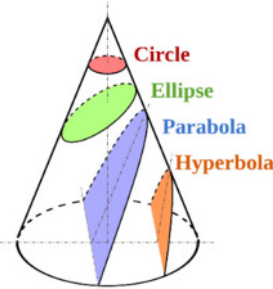
The above image is meant to serve as a sort of ‘map’ of some characters’ positions (and occasionally their movement) in the social space that is depicted in *Against the Day*. It should be noted that Kit’s access to a position (Yale) in which he can acquire competences and capital is dependent on and connected to Scarsdale Vibe. Reef, on the other hand, gains access to European spas (and later information about Scarsdale) through his connection with Ruperta who has a greater concentration of economic and ‘legitimate’ cultural capital than the son of a poor miner. Dally also leaves her father Merle in Colorado and has an artistic career that is very dependent on Hunter Penhallow, a wealthy scion who chooses painting over the family business. One can see that these characters have had positive trajectories.

Many characters maintain their position without much change. R.W. Vibe, as a wealthy producer of tasteless musicals, has a position in part connected with art, however, he is ultimately and inherently oriented toward the heteronomous pole of artistic production that sustains the hegemonic grasp of the dominant portion of society. Minor characters often experience little or no change as Derrik Theign or Lionel Swome both of whom fulfill their bureaucratic duties and little more. Of course given that there

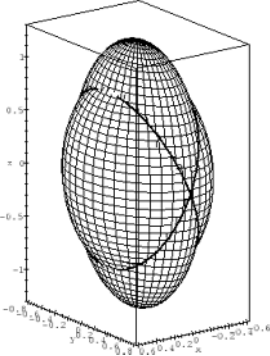
are such a great number of characters in *Against the Day*, it would be impossible to try to place them all within this schema.

Appendix IV: Conics, Ellipses, and Ellipsoid

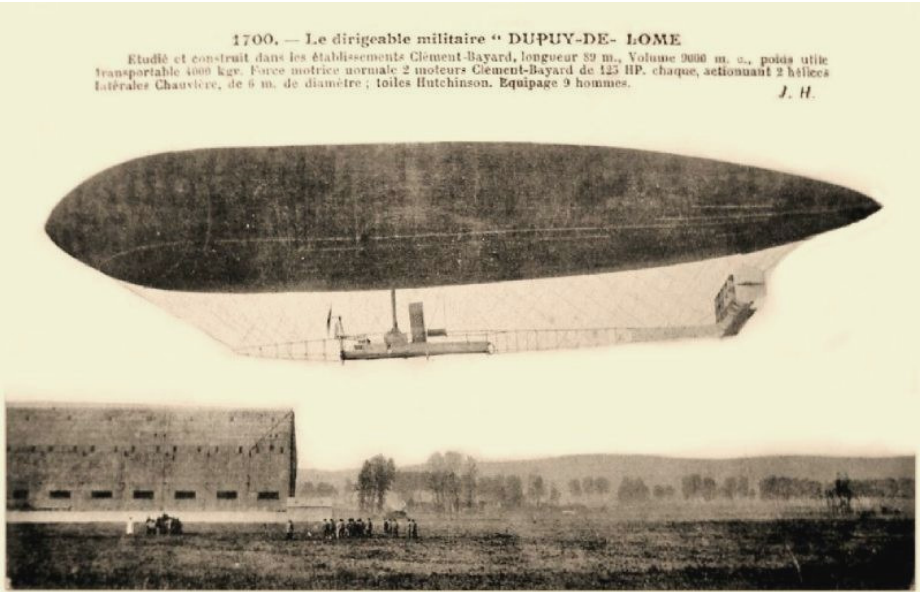
Conic Sections



Ellipses and ellipsoid



Dirigible



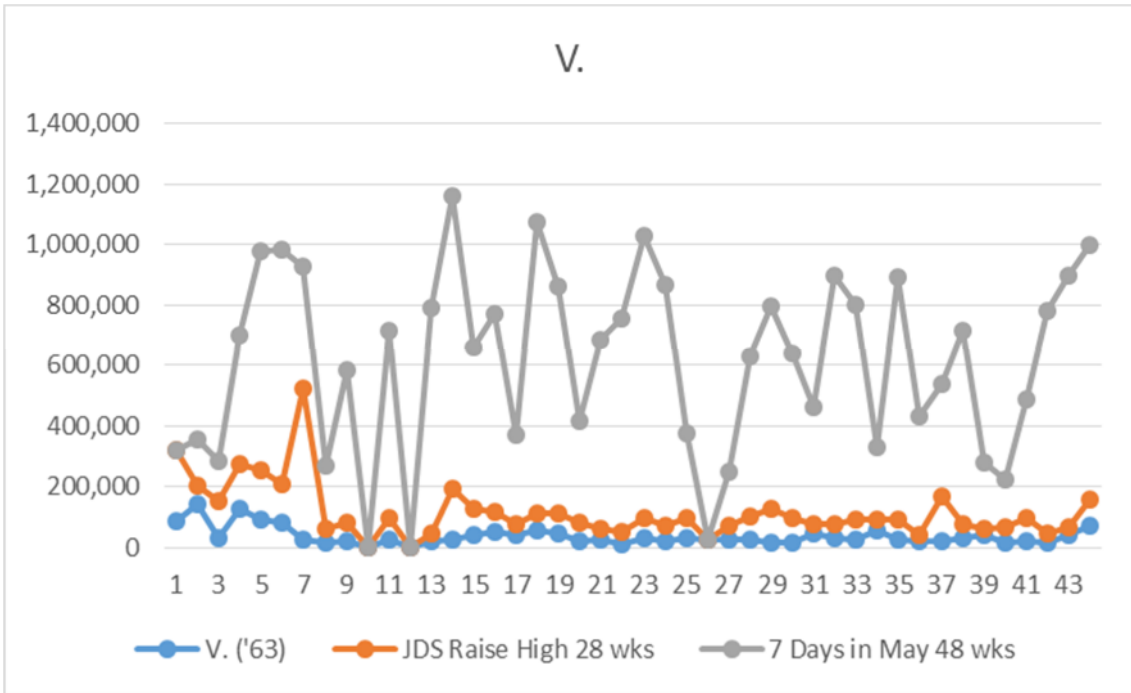
(Images courtesy of Wikipedia)

Appendix V: Book Sales – Bourdieu’s “Two Modes of Ageing”

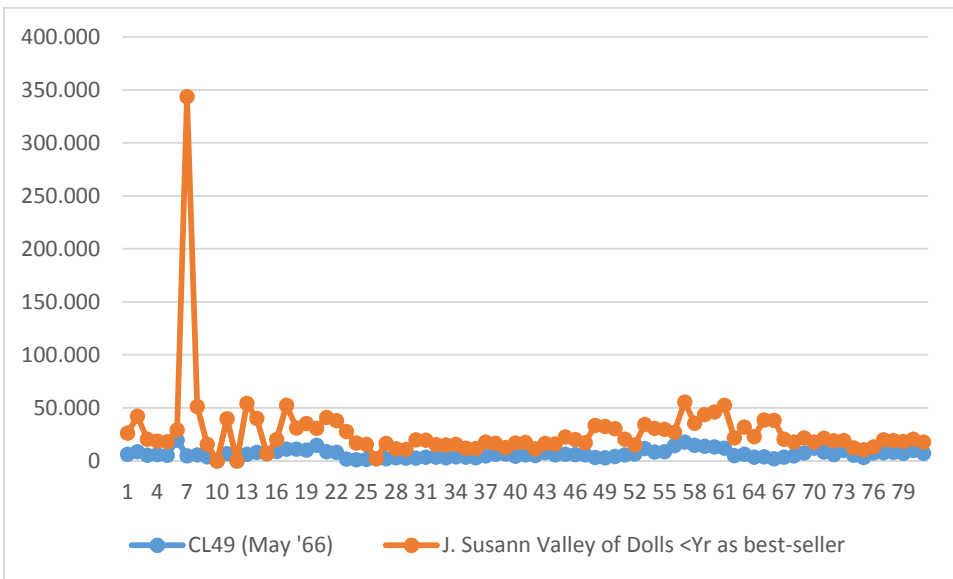
The two cycles of literary production and the respective life cycles of their products that Bourdieu demonstrated in *The Rules of Art* (142-150) can most readily be seen by comparing Pynchon’s early novels to the Best-sellers that were on the market at that time. The data below was gathered by tracking Amazon book ranking numbers. Neither Pynchon’s debut novel *V.* nor his second, *The Crying of Lot 49*, made it to the *New York Times Best Seller List* and thus their sales numbers in their respective years of release were less significant than the best-sellers. Over time the trend changes and it is the best seller “with no tomorrow” (RA 147).

(Amazon book ranking numbers are not simply an indication of the number of books sold but rather how the book stands in comparison with other books and their sales histories; the algorithm that produces the numbers is as unknown as the exact number of units sold of a single book. It is known that the lower the Amazon ranking number the more sales the book has. A rough estimate of units sold can be made by referring to work done by author Theresa Ragan in 2013. She estimates³¹² that an Amazon book ranking between 35 and 200 may mean book sales from 2,000 to 500 to units a day. An Amazon number of 500 – 3,000 could indicate sales between 200 and 50 books a day. An Amazon number of 10,000 to 50,000 would be from 15 to 3 books a day; any book with an Amazon ranking of 100,000 or higher may sell about a book a day. Thus a book like *The Road* by Cormac McCarthy, which has often had a book ranking number below 1,000 may sell anywhere from 100 to 200 books a day. In contrast *Middle C* by William Gass is often ranked well over 100,000 and thus can be said to have a weak circulation, it is neither toted not talked about. Pynchon’s early novels maintain fair Amazon rankings as his debut novel *V.* has an average ranking around 50,000 and *The Crying of Lot 49* runs between 5,000 and 10,000.

³¹² I have consulted with people (for example, Mark Kohut) that work in publishing and they agree that the estimates sound about right.



Comparing *V.* to *Seven Days in May* (a thriller) or even J.D. Salinger's *Raise High the Roof Beam Carpenters* shows that Pynchon's debut novel has a greater weight on the market than either of those formerly popular novels.



Likewise, comparing *The Crying of Lot 49* to Jacqueline Susann's *Valley of the Dolls* reveals that Pynchon's second novel is in greater circulation than the former best-seller. This seems to bear out Bourdieu's concept of the two cycles of production and the respective 'ageing' of the novels.

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Resumen de Tesis: El Arco de Pynchon

Al afrontar el desafío de resumir un texto (por ejemplo, novela, poema, etc.) es normal que los estudiantes se sientan “desconcertados”. ¿Cómo contar o describir un texto con concisión sin perjudicar el modelo? Este sentimiento se multiplica para el doctorando al tratar de resumir su tesis. Pero en esta dificultad redonda parte de su valor. ¿No debería un potencial académico ser capaz de ofrecer una descripción sucinta de la obra antes de entregarla a sus lectores? Grandes pensadores han dedicado numerosas líneas y páginas en prefacios e introducciones para enmarcar o presentar sus pensamientos, de modo que la respuesta a la pregunta anterior sólo puede ser afirmativa. La cuestión entonces es cómo llevar a cabo la tarea en esta tesis que estudia la novela descomunal de Thomas Pynchon, *Against the Day* (*Contra el Día*) a través de la lente de la multifacética obra del sociólogo francés Pierre Bourdieu.

Corriendo el riesgo de ser tachado de excesivamente simplista o reductivo, la tesis que presento podría describirse como una aplicación de la obra de Pierre Bourdieu al estudio de la obra *Against the Day* de Thomas Pynchon y su lugar en su trayectoria literaria. Aunque sólo esta descripción no será suficiente. Esta tesis estudia *Against the Day* de Thomas Pynchon y valora su posición en la trayectoria del autor, pero asimismo es un estudio de la posición del autor en el mundo literario. Más que aportar una interpretación del texto en su conjunto, la tesis pretende determinar si el espacio social de la novela es una imagen refractada del entorno social de Pynchon y, de ser así, hasta qué punto. Este enfoque permite al analista literario ubicar a Pynchon en el campo literario y

marcar el camino desde el autor “ausente” hasta el autor ligeramente más visible, un arco entre la entropía y “*gratia*”.

Sin embargo, una cosa es declarar estos objetivos y otra diferente llevarlos a cabo. Aplicar los métodos y los conceptos desarrollados por Pierre Bourdieu requiere algo más que simplemente emplear su terminología. Aunque Bourdieu aporta un ejemplo en *The Rules of Art*, uno no puede aplicar la moda del “corta – pega” para el estudio de Thomas Pynchon en el campo literario de EEUU, en parte por la falta de datos sensibles sobre información biográfica o sobre sus publicaciones (publishing information). En sí, la utilización del análisis literario de Bourdieu requiere gran esfuerzo de investigación, pero los resultados añaden nuevos conocimientos significativos al estudio de la obra de Thomas Pynchon.

Lo pasos que sigue la tesis se basan en gran parte en la obra de Pierre Bourdieu pero también en las explicaciones de la metodología de Bourdieu de John Speller. Antes de comenzar con la aplicación de la metodología, la tesis se centra en el estudio de las críticas (reviews) de *Against the Day* (y la práctica de los embargos de las críticas) antes de proceder al análisis de las trayectorias entrecruzadas de Thomas Pynchon y el crítico británico James Wood. Esta fase de la tesis muestra las luchas y dinámicas de poder en el mundo literario y cómo los agentes compiten por el capital.

Tras centrarse de forma detallada en cómo las críticas influyen en el mundo literario, la tesis da un giro hacia los pasos concretos del método de Bourdieu. Primero, se lleva a cabo un estudio del mundo literario en EEUU y su relación con el campo del poder;

esto demuestra el grado de autonomía en el campo literario y expone su estructura. Segundo, el campo literario, cuando Pynchon entró a formar parte de él, está analizado y representado con un 'mapa', mostrando qué puestos estaban ocupados o disponibles, para, de esta manera, mostrar la constelación de posiciones y cómo esto influyó a la hora de otorgarle una posición a Pynchon. El siguiente paso es el estudio de la génesis del habitus de Pynchon y considera su trayectoria como agente social y autor. A estos tres pasos que Bourdieu incluyó en *The Rules of Art*, John Speller añade el estudio de textos literarios en el "espacio de la obra". Este método, con su enfoque en el habitus que genera distintas prácticas en campos específicos y por lo tanto reproduce cultura, brinda un claro entendimiento no sólo del proyecto creativo del autor, sino también de lo que Bourdieu denomina el punto de vista del autor.

Tras llevar a cabo esta serie de estudios y análisis, la tesis se centra en cómo y hasta qué punto el espacio social de *Against the Day* se puede denominar una imagen refractada del mundo social de Pynchon. Eso se consigue llevando a cabo una cuidadosa inspección de elementos estructurales que se pueden observar a lo largo de la obra de Pynchon y que se corresponden con lo que se conoce de su experiencia vital. Aquí se argumenta que *Against the Day* ocupa un lugar importante en el proyecto creativo de Pynchon a pesar de no haber ganado estatus canónico. Como nota final a su trayectoria, se valora el lugar que ocupa Pynchon en el campo literario estadounidense. Se demuestra que, a pesar de no contar con presencia visual en la esfera pública, en comparación con otros autores (por ejemplo, Philip Roth, John Barth, etc.), Pynchon tiene una importancia capital y cultural significativa.

La tesis concluye con un resumen sobre sus logros académicos y reconoce sus limitaciones mientras mira hacia futuras líneas de investigación. Continúa con varios apéndices con imágenes y / o datos que apoyan la explicación de los argumentos en la tesis.