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**Incorporated material:**

Some elements of chapter three, in particular relating to the discussion of teeth and dentistry, formed part of an essay submitted for my MA at Durham University. This material has, however, been significantly reworked and revised since then.

# **Dismantling the face in Thomas Pynchon's Fiction**

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## Summary

Thomas Pynchon has often been hailed, by those at wont to make such statements, as the most significant American author of the past half-century. What is indisputable about this simultaneously beguiling and frustrating, prodigiously sophisticated and irrevocably juvenile, not to say admired and reviled writer, is that his fiction has inspired critical readings that are now as appositely voluminous as his novels themselves. Yet no prior critical effort does full justice to the importance of the face in the work of this notoriously “faceless” author, who even had a brown paper bag over his head when depicted in cartoon form on *The Simpsons*. In light of this oversight, this thesis seeks to address what might be called—to borrow from his 1990 novel, *Vineland*—the ‘not-yet-come-to-terms-with face’ in Pynchon’s corpus.

Though always driven by the workings of Pynchon’s writing, various theorists—such as Theodor Adorno, Walter Benjamin, Erving Goffman, and Emmanuel Levinas—are called-upon throughout this study in order to aid the conceptualisation of this ‘not-yet-come-to-terms with face’. Particular inspiration is taken from Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari’s call to ‘dismantle the face’ in *A Thousand Plateaus*. Albeit not in strict adherence to this summons, the first three chapters of this project butcher the face into its dominant component features: eyes, nose, and mouth. These features—as well as the central issues of the final two chapters, the mask and the face respectively—are then traced across Pynchon’s entire oeuvre, including his most recent novel, *Bleeding Edge*, published when this project was already underway. What emerges is a picture of the integral role the face plays in Pynchon’s manifold concerns: surveillance, surgery, dentistry, identity, cinema, drugs, the senses, and so on. This thesis ultimately contends that although frequently defaced and effaced in Pynchon’s writing, the face is nevertheless a prime locus at which ethical and political possibility surface.

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## Abbreviations

### Pynchon's Works

V.—*V.*

CL49—*The Crying of Lot 49*

GR—*Gravity's Rainbow*

SL—*Slow Learner*

'Luddite'—'Is it O.K. To Be a Luddite?'

VL—*Vineland*

'Nearer'—'Nearer, My Couch, To Thee'

Mc&D—*Mason & Dixon*

AtD—*Against the Day*

IV—*Inherent Vice*

BE—*Bleeding Edge*

### Secondary Sources

Given their importance to this thesis, I also abbreviate two of Deleuze and Guattari's studies throughout:

ATP—*A Thousand Plateaus*

WIP—*What is Philosophy?*

The same is true of one of Emmanuel Levinas's works:

TI—*Totality and TI*

### Note on the text

Owing to Pynchon's heavy use of ellipses, I indicate my own when quoting from his texts by placing them in parentheses, thus (...). Unless otherwise indicated, therefore, all ellipses are Pynchon's own.

*In memoriam:*

*James Andrew Griffin,  
my big cousin.*

## Introduction

- My face is a scandal. (Bataille, 'Solar' 8)
- 'Here is Muffin-tin Road,' announces the robot, 'note the smiling faces on all the houses here.' Upstairs windows are eyes, picket fence is teeth. Nose is the front door. (GR 646)
- It's not love  
Which is my face  
Which is a building  
Which is on fire. (Talking Heads, *Love*)

In March 2014, the online social networking service Facebook unveiled a new technology for facial recognition called, almost in appeal to Linda Lovelace fans, *DeepFace*.<sup>1</sup> This system, its developers claim, overcomes many of the problems—'such as lighting, expression, occlusion and aging'—that have beset facial recognition technologies since their inception in the 1960s; consequently, the technology is 'now at the brink of human level accuracy' (Taigman et al. 2, 1). Not to be outdone, Yahoo Labs, in conjunction with Stanford University, publicized their own contribution to facial recognition technology one year later. Christened, in the establishment of a theme, the 'Deep Dense Face Detector' method, this is able to detect faces in real time, even if they are partially obscured, through its deployment of a 'deep convolutional neural network' (Farfadi, Saberian, and Li 1).<sup>2</sup> As Lucas Introna and Helen Nissenbaum have outlined, the benefit of facial recognition over other forms of biometric identification, at least for law enforcement agencies, is that 'it poses fewer demands on subjects and may be conducted at a distance without their knowledge or consent' (21, qtd. in Gates 18). These recent developments in 'the wonders of computer technology'—to borrow from Thomas Pynchon's illuminating introduction to George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*—may thus pave the way for 'social control on a scale those quaint old twentieth-century tyrants with their goofy moustaches could only dream about' ('Introduction' xv).

'Talk about paranoid jitters!' (BE 339). Pynchon's own fiction has always engaged extensively with 'what now seems increasingly to define us—technology' ('Nearer'). Inger

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<sup>1</sup> Facial recognition technology is here understood as the ability of a computer to match a person's face with their name.

<sup>2</sup> I follow the original formatting employed by the creators of these technologies, hence the italicisation of *DeepFace* as compared to the placement of 'Deep Dense Face Detector' within quotation marks.

H. Dalsgaard even suggests that his

body of work [is] almost defined by its preoccupation with the parameters and paraphernalia of science and technology: *from the way it relates to and defines the very nature of power structures, industrialization or capitalism* to its occasional, seemingly self-indulgent, nerdish romps around the material and technical details of some imagined gadget or piece of electronic equipment or machinery. ('Science' 156, italics mine)

The DeepArcher application ('[l]ike "departure," only you pronounce it DeepArcher') in Pynchon's latest novel, *Bleeding Edge*, is but one of the 'nerdish romps' Dalsgaard identifies, all of which go to show that it would be wrong to see Pynchon simply as a 'technophobic crazy' (*BE* 327; 'Luddite'). After all, he still feels able to write of the '*wonders* of computer technology,' while elsewhere he highlights technology's 'good intentions' ('Introduction' xv, italics mine; 'Nearer'). But Pynchon also never fails to recognize technology's imbrication with power structures, nor that technologies, as Gilles Deleuze observes, 'express those social forms capable of generating them and using them' ('Postscript' 6). If 'all [the FBI] care about is identifying faces'—as Brock Vond, a federal agent, claims in Pynchon's *Vineland*—then facial recognition technologies certainly have 'far reaching social and cultural implications' (*VL* 210; Taigman et al. 1). Kelly Gates suggests that these technologies are 'being envisioned to fulfil certain perceived social necessities and political-economic demands of large-scale capitalist societies' (16). With urbanisation, (im)migration, developments in communication and transportation technology, and so on, leading to 'cit[ies] of overflowing faces,' facial recognition technology promises to keep track of this ever more fluid populace (DeLillo 26). Yet Gates makes the vital point that these technologies are 'inescapably tied to cultural assumptions about the relationship between the face and identity, including enduring beliefs about faces as carriers of signs that reveal the essential qualities of their bearers' (21). These suppositions—which are encapsulated in the very name Facebook—are consistently interrogated in Pynchon's fiction. Indeed, much of his writing is motivated by the question posed in his magnum opus, *Gravity's Rainbow*: 'Is that who you are, that vaguely criminal face on your ID card, its soul snatched by the government camera as the guillotine shutter fell?' (*GR* 134).

Of course, '[n]obody ever looks like their "mug," you ought to know that by now' (*AtD* 432). Yet were we to feel 'metaphysically inclined,' Facebook's *DeepFace* system could be seen as 'only a small part of a much vaster integrated continuum,' defined by various attempts to 'read a stable, individual identity directly off the body' (*BE* 345; Gates 14). While the practice of physiognomy—which Charles Darwin defined as 'the recognition of

character through the study of the permanent form of the features' (7)—has been around for millennia, perhaps the most significant event in this continuum was the invention of photography in 1837. As Tom Gunning argues, 'the extremely individualizing processes of photography allowed for a new positivist science of observation of the face and its expressions' (6), hence François Delaporte's contention that photography 'produced the modern face' (34, qtd. in Rives 140). Invented at a time when the physiognomic writings of Johann Kaspar Lavater were very much in vogue, photography galvanized efforts of facial classification. In addition to more recent iterations with which we are all familiar—mug shots, passport photos, ID cards, and so forth—we might think of the electro-stimulated analysis of facial expressions by Guillaume Duchenne, a figure I will return to later in this thesis, or Hugh W. Diamond's cataloguing of the faces of the insane. Diamond's attempts to uncover 'the face of madness' are still seen to have a cultural relevance in *Vineland* when Zoyd Wheeler, in order to get his maintenance payments, tries 'to rat what was on his head and face into a snarl he hoped would register as insane-looking enough for the mental health folks' (Gilman, *Face*, VL 4). Pynchon shows an awareness not just of psychiatric but of criminological categorisation too, particularly through the repeated references he makes to Cesare Lombroso, who believed it was possible to 'tell bad hats just from their facial types alone'; 'some faces are criminal faces, is the long and short of it' (*AtD* 682, 681). As Brock Vond continues to ascribe to Lombroso's 'undeniably racist' ideas, and has even 'learned to extend his Lombrosian analysis from faces to bodies,' Pynchon evidently does not share Ishmael's opinion that physiognomy is a 'passing fable,' rather diagnoses its still pervasive influence (VL 272, 276; Melville 387).

Pynchon resists the bureaucratisation of identity initiated by this continuum, however, via the inherent instability and frequent illegibility of the face in his texts. Take *Gravity's Rainbow*, a novel in which many characters have unstable appearances: 'Some part of Ludwig's lemming, Ursula, for instance, is 'always blurred, too quick for the shutter,' while Gavin Trefoil, who possesses the gift of '*autochromatism*,' has a face that ranges in colour from 'bright magenta' to a 'face as blue as Krishna' (GR 556, 125, original italics, 276). We could think of the ostensible protagonist, Tyrone Slothrop, too. Finding himself surrounded by a 'lotta (...) tail sections' in the Mittelwerke, the underground factory that produced the V-1 and V-2 weapons during the Second World War, Slothrop looks at his face in their 'dimpled ripply metal surfaces, (...) watching it warp and slide by, just a big underground fun house here folks . . . .' (GR 304). As we will often see in this thesis, what initially appears to be little more than throwaway tomfoolery on Pynchon's part actually has

a deeper resonance: Slothrop's experience at the Mittelwerke foretells how his identity will become '[s]cattered all over the Zone' (GR 712). Consequently, '[t]here is no way to tell which of the faces is Slothrop's,' and he thus cannot 'be "found" (...) in the conventional sense of "positively identified and detained"' (GR 742).

Pynchon's questioning of the 'false assumption that identity is single, soul continuous,' is by no means limited to Slothrop's experience (V. 307). Indeed, as this supposition is one of 'the facades into which our consciousness crashes,' Pynchon's writing ceaselessly demonstrates the 'manifested untruth of total identification' (Adorno 17, 6). This is particularly true of 'the lead vocalist' of Spotted Dick in *Inherent Vice*, who decides to 'change his name legally to Asymmetric Bob, after his bathroom mirror revealed to him, three hours into a mushroom experiment, that there were actually two distinct sides to his face, expressing two violently different personalities' (IV 127). Asymmetric Bob is but one of copious Pynchon characters—including Oedipa Maas, Doc Sportello and Maxine Tarnow—to have a particularly unsettling experience in front of a mirror (CL49 27; IV 168; BE 411). Resonating with Freud's discussion of his own reflection whilst on a train ('Uncanny' 247), what all these moments indicate is that there is something uncanny, *unheimlich*, unhomely, about the face. By disavowing this, 'the conventional sense' of the face as the legible home of identity, Pynchon suggests, places us under house arrest (GR 742).

Pynchon toys with this idea on the couple of occasions when houses are seen to have faces in his work. In addition to the houses on Muffin-tin Road in *Gravity's Rainbow*, which form one of this introduction's epigraphs, are those in Pynchon's early short story, 'The Secret Integration.' Here, Tim Santora thinks of his friend Grover Snodd's house 'as a person' with 'a pleasant old face, windows for eyes and nose, a face that always seemed to be smiling,' and even says 'hello to it each time he came over' (SL 140). The 'plain, gambreled honesty' of Snodd's house is in sharp contrast, however, to those in Gilded Estates:

Instead there were mysterious deep eyes fringed in gimcrackery and wrought-iron masks, cheeks tattooed in flowered tiles, great portcullised mouths with rows of dead palm trees for teeth, and to visit one of them was like reentering sleep, and the loot you came away with did not ever seem that real; (...) it was the spoils of dream. (SL 140, 149–50)

Although these may just be 'perfectly normal' moments of apophenia or pareidolia—the experience of seeing meaningful shapes, most commonly faces, in random visual stimuli, such as the Internet favourite of Christ's face in a piece of toast, or Hitler's face in a house,

which Pynchon would bracket under the wider term ‘paranoia’—they also reveal something about the status of the face in Pynchon’s writing (Waxman; Bell). Firstly, ‘The Secret Integration’ offers in microcosm the range of faces in Pynchon’s fiction: there is the occasional ‘smiling’ and ‘pleasant’ face; a wide range of faces that are threatening, ‘mysterious’ and dream-like; while many are—like the houses in Northumberland Estates, ‘the new part of Mingeborough’—‘more or less identical,’ with ‘nothing (...) to interest or to haunt, no chance of loot that would be any more than ordinary (...), no possibilities for hidden life or otherworldly presence,’ leading us to keep ‘coming back, to nothing: nothing but the cheerless earth’ (*SL* 149–50). Secondly, where Michael Taussig argues that ‘[Walter] Benjamin asks us to consider architecture as an example of habituated physiognomic knowing,’ what Pynchon draws attention to is the tendency to think of the face as a form of architecture, as the house and home in which identity is supposedly confined (‘Physiognomic’ 209).<sup>3</sup> In his work, the face is thus a ‘building on fire,’ to borrow from Talking Heads, though we need not view this negatively: like Zoyd’s dreams of his burning house in *Vineland*, we can see it as an attempt to ‘release it from its captivity’ (Talking Heads, *Love*; *VL* 374). That is, in keeping with Pynchon’s wider resistance to the reduction of ‘Possibilities into Simplicities that serve the ends of Governments,’ his repeated demonstration of the various ways the face eludes the containing snares of ‘the government camera’ opens it as a prime locus of ethical and political possibility in his fiction (*Me&D* 345, original capitalisation; *GR* 134).

i) **‘not-yet-come-to-terms-with-face’** (*VL* 374)

Although many critics, to whose contributions I shall turn in due course, have noted various aspects of the face’s significance in Pynchon’s now formidable oeuvre—hardly surprising given that ‘[i]nside the closed, inbred world of academia,’ as Maxine Tarnow puts it, Pynchon is one of the most critically appraised authors of the past fifty years, with well over one hundred monographs and edited collections, several hundred doctoral dissertations, and journal articles numbering in the thousands devoted, at the very least in part, to his work—there is yet to be a study that takes the face as its primary subject of investigation, a negative balance this thesis seeks to redress (*BE* 433). This relative paucity of engagement with the face has many potential explanations. On one hand, the face in Pynchon’s fiction is often, like Stray’s in *Against the Day*, ‘veiled in its own penumbra,’

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<sup>3</sup> Tony Tanner’s observation that in *Gravity’s Rainbow* ‘it is not always clear whether we are in a bombed-out building or a bombed-out mind’ is apt here, too (*Thomas Pynchon* 51).

taking on a seemingly illegible quality which means that critics have, perhaps, been ‘afraid somehow of misreading it’ (*AtD* 231). This sense of an all but uninterpretable blankness is accompanied, on the other hand, by a kind of hermeneutic overload, like Shasta Fay Hepworth’s ‘heavy combination of face ingredients’ that Doc Sportello cannot ‘read at all’ at the outset of *Inherent Vice* (*IV* 3). The face is, then—and this is not just true in Pynchon’s novels—both dearth and excess. But ‘the most important and mysterious surface we deal with’ is also so ‘wordlessly familiar’ that even when we do feel able to read it, our capacity to do so remains beyond articulation, as indicated by Slothrop’s realisation that ‘instructing him, dunce and drifter, in ways deeper than he can explain, have been faces out the train windows’ (McNeill 4; *AtD* 1050; *GR* 626). The face’s familiarity is, however, constantly disrupted in Pynchon’s writing. Despite prior critical efforts, there is thus what we might call, to borrow from Prairie Wheeler’s scrutiny of her reflection in *Vineland*, a ‘not-yet-come-to-terms-with face’ in Pynchon’s texts which needs to be explicitly addressed (*VL* 374).

But if novelists ‘study faces’ as ‘part of the business,’ to borrow words from the photographer Merle Rideout in *Against the Day*, quite why Pynchon is worthy of this isolated study requires further elucidation (*AtD* 337; *IV* 319). In addition to being renowned for writing wacky, yet ‘often impossibly complicated, tales of dispossession and betrayal,’ which might be seen as both ‘a complete counter-history of America’ and a ‘deep parable of consumer capitalism,’ Pynchon is notorious for his ruthless protection of his privacy (*VL* 172; Berressem, ‘Coda’ 170; *IV* 119). He has shielded his face from wider public viewing since the publication of *V.* in 1963, which has earned him the moniker ‘the Faceless One’ in Larry Daw’s irreverent biographical sketch (Daw). Even Pynchon’s public “appearances” on two episodes of *The Simpsons* saw his cartoon version, for which Pynchon provided the voiceover, depicted with a brown paper bag over his head. Like the novelist E. I. Lonoff in Philip Roth’s *The Ghost Writer*, Pynchon appears to believe that ‘to associate his face with his fiction [is] a ridiculous irrelevancy’ (Roth, *Ghost* 10). Or perhaps, like Michel Foucault, he writes ‘in order to have no face’ (Foucault, *Archaeology* 17).

There are obvious affinities between Pynchon and Bill Gray, the protagonist of Don DeLillo’s *Mao II* (a novel which Pynchon not coincidentally saw fit to blurb), too. Gray is a ‘famous reclusive novelist’ who ‘hasn’t been photographed in what? We must be speaking in the multi decades’ (DeLillo fourth cover, 24). Yet as the photographer of writers, Brita Nillson, muses in *Mao II*: some ‘people still want the image, don’t they? The writer’s face is the surface of the work. It’s a clue to the mystery inside. Or is the mystery in



the face?’ (DeLillo 26). There have been plenty of unsavoury attempts to deliver Pynchon ‘from every mystery that hover[s] over his chosen life’: the journalist, James Bone, for instance, ‘erased [Pynchon’s] seclusion’ by surreptitiously snapping him in Manhattan in 1997 (DeLillo 221). (Bone’s attempt to shake Pynchon’s hand afterwards was apparently met with an understandably dismissive ‘get your fucking hand away from me’ (Dubini and Dubini).) To put aside these shenanigans, Pynchon’s withholding of his face need not be seen as a sign of reclusiveness, which in any case, he suggests, is only ‘code’ for ‘doesn’t like to talk to reporters’ (qtd. in Krafft 14); instead, it intimates a profound awareness that, as Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari contend, ‘[t]he face is a politics’ (*ATP* 181).

‘Political! well I should say so, but then it’s all political isn’t it’ (*AtD* 681). It is at this juncture where we can begin to introduce a key theoretical coordinate for this thesis, Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of ‘faciality’ in *A Thousand Plateaus* (*ATP* 167–192). Although many facial theories will be integral to my attempt to conceptualise the face in Pynchon’s writing—‘the face of the Other’ in Emmanuel Levinas’s ethics (*TI* 24); Deleuze and Guattari’s own concept of the face of ‘the Other Person’ (*WIP* 19); Deleuze’s exploration of the ‘affection-image’ in cinema (*Cinema 1* 87); as well as countless other commentaries on the face by figures such as Giorgio Agamben, Béla Balázs, Georges Bataille, Walter Benjamin, Erving Goffman and so on—it will be more instructive to introduce these ideas at appropriate moments in this thesis’s body text. To outline too much theory here would also give the wrong impression; rather than seeking to map theory onto Pynchon’s writing, this thesis has always taken its impetus from his fiction itself.

Indeed, we even find Deleuze and Guattari in *Vineland*, where it is noted that ‘Ralph Wayvone’s library happened to include a copy of the indispensable *Italian Wedding Fake Book*, by Deleuze & Guattari’ (*VL* 97). In truth, this hardly seems like a glowing reference: the jarring juxtaposition of ‘indispensable’ with ‘*Italian Wedding Fake Book*’ suggests but one of many jibes that Pynchon casts at academic theory throughout his oeuvre. But Pynchon’s opinion of Deleuze and Guattari’s work, which is little more than speculation here, is irrelevant. What matters is that ‘the correlations of Deleuzian theory with Pynchon’s fiction are powerful and crucial,’ as Steven Weisenburger correctly points out (‘Hyper-Embedded’ 70), though not without a somewhat typical elision of Guattari.<sup>4</sup> Many successful studies of Pynchon’s writing have consequently drawn connections with

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<sup>4</sup> For example, Deleuze wrote to Arnaud Villaini: ‘You must correct the way you tend to overlook Felix. Your perspective remains correct and you can discuss me without Felix. However, *Anti-Oedipus* and *A Thousand Plateaus* are written completely by him just as they are written completely by me, depending on two possible viewpoints’ (qtd. in Dosse 503).

Deleuze and Guattari, most proficiently Stefan Mattessich's *Lines of Flight* and the special issue of *Pynchon Notes* on 'Schizophrenia and Social Control' (Cassidy and O'Hara). Despite their many merits, these works fail to recognize that in Deleuze and Guattari's thought, as well as in Pynchon's fiction, the face is 'one of the most integral concepts, recurrent figures and fundamental problems of philosophy' (Flaxman and Oxman 39).

The same cannot be said of Samuel Thomas's *Pynchon and the Political*; indeed, his third chapter on 'The Theatre of Operations' (63–87) engages explicitly with Deleuze and Guattari's faciality plateau. Though I will further acknowledge the substantial contribution Thomas's work has made to this thesis later in this introduction, it is worth saying here that his focus rests almost exclusively on the face of Evan Godolphin in *V*. There are, however, many more faces in Pynchon's oeuvre that can be productively viewed in conjunction with Deleuze and Guattari's faciality plateau. Critical possibility is, then, far from exhausted by Thomas's endeavours, especially as he suggests that Godolphin's face 'still has more stories to tell' (77). Turning to Deleuze and Guattari's concept of faciality in *A Thousand Plateaus* will enable us to tease out further correspondences with Pynchon's fiction.

Given the complex, abstract discourse of Deleuze and Guattari's faciality plateau, I want to first outline, as plainly as possible, the main points I shall be taking from it as this should at least give us 'things to hold on to' (GR 663). The first is that the face is socially produced, rather than simply 'an envelope exterior to the person who speaks, thinks, or feels' (ATP 167). Second, this socially produced face plays an integral role in the functioning of political power, or, to be more specific, 'the capitalist/Christer gridwork' (AtD 1208). And third, capitalism's faciality machine 'propagates waves of sameness,' reducing polyvocal heterogeneity into univocal homogeneity (ATP 178). It is these three points, in particular, that will be integral throughout this thesis's attempt to conceptualise the face in Pynchon's writing, hence the need to firmly establish them here.

To take first, then, 'the social production of face' (ATP 181). One way into this idea is via *Gravity's Rainbow*, where Franz Pökler comes to realize 'how his own face might be plotted, not in light but in *net forces acting upon it* from the flow of Reich and coercion and love it moved through . . .' (GR 423, italics mine). Pökler's recognition that his face is caught in a web of forces which affect and even constitute it severely problematizes any notion that the face reflects an essential identity. For Deleuze and Guattari, we can even say that 'it is faces that choose their subjects'; that is, 'You don't so much have a face as slide into one' (ATP 180, 177). Thus, if it is true that 'when power corrupts, it keeps a log of its progress, written into that most sensitive memory device, the human face,' then the

face can no longer be seen as the expression of an ahistorical subject: it is, rather, a socio-political text (*VL* 195).

Yet this is just one aspect of the face's social production for Deleuze and Guattari. Indeed, their faciality plateau is more concerned with how the face developed 'as a specific text for analysis and interpretation' (Rives 140). This is, they suggest, 'an entirely specific idea' because '[c]ertain social formations need face' (*ATP* 176), but 'not all societies make faces' (Deleuze, *Negotiations* 26). It is here where we must draw a distinction between the head and the face: 'The head is included in the body, but the face is not' (*ATP* 170). Evidently, Deleuze and Guattari's use of 'face' here means something quite—if not altogether—different from what they designate as 'the concrete face,' the front of the head (*ATP* 168). As Deleuze writes elsewhere, 'the face is a structured, spatial organization that conceals the head, whereas the head is dependent on the body, even if it is the point of the body, its culmination' (*Francis* 19). For Deleuze and Guattari, in fact, the face

is produced only when the head ceases to be a part of the body, when it ceases to be coded by the body, when it ceases to have a multidimensional, polyvocal corporeal code—when the body, head included, has been decoded and has to be *overcoded* by something we shall call the Face. (*ATP* 170, original italics and capitalisation)

Deleuze and Guattari term the mechanism that carries out this production '*the abstract machine of faciality (visagéité)*,' which produces faces as '*white wall/black hole* system[s]' (*ATP* 169, 167, original italics). The white wall is what 'the signifier needs in order to bounce off; it constitutes the wall of the signifier, the frame or screen,' whereas the black hole is what 'subjectification needs in order to break through; it constitutes the black hole of subjectivity as consciousness or passion' (*ATP* 168). The key point for Deleuze and Guattari is that this production of face 'ensure[s] the almightiness of the signifier as well as the autonomy of the subject' (*ATP* 181). We should not fail to hear the Christian inflection here: 'The face is Christ,' Deleuze and Guattari claim—which is why faciality is marked as 'Year Zero'—and for 'the *almightiness* of the signifier,' or 'signifiante,' we might read "the word"; for 'subjectification,' "the soul" (*ATP* 176, 167, 181, italics mine). Since faciality designates the overcoding of the body, of all corporeal coordinates, Deleuze and Guattari suggest that it was 'under the sign of the cross'—to which, let us not forget, the body was nailed—'that people learned to steer the face and processes of facialization in all directions' (*ATP* 178–79). After all, as *Gravity's Rainbow* whimsically notes, 'those of the Moslem faith are not keen on having snaps taken of them in the street' (*GR* 14).

So what the face underwrites for Deleuze and Guattari is a particularly Western, Christian conception of subjectivity: understood as a ‘veil of the soul’ (Conley 102), the face establishes both a ‘black hole’—or ‘central computer’—which has an ‘exceptional need to be protected from any intrusion from the outside’ (*ATP* 177, 179); and a white wall—or ‘screen upon which the signifier is inscribed’—that makes the subject ‘accessible to a reading that fixes meaning’ (Doane, ‘Close-Up’ 105). The ‘multidimensional or polyvocal semiotics’ of the body are ‘disciplined’ and a ‘single substance of expression’ is produced in their stead (*ATP* 181). Faciality hence, as Frida Beckman explains, ‘works to describe the mechanism whereby the polyvocality of bodies is claimed and made legible by a dominant reality’ (157). We should be clear here that Deleuze and Guattari also claim that faciality establishes ‘the landscapification of all worlds and milieus,’ affecting not just the head and the body, but ‘surroundings and objects,’ too (*ATP* 181). Faciality might more correctly be understood ‘as the appropriation of expression by the signifying regime, the production of legible surfaces,’ rather than necessarily pertaining simply to the concrete human face (Beckman 157). Nevertheless, concrete human faces are very much the frontal aspect of this machine owing to ‘the efficacy of the ciphering’ they make possible; they just ‘cannot be assumed to come ready-made’ as they are socially produced (*ATP* 175, 169). To clarify what the faciality machine will signify in this thesis, then, it will be to designate the aforementioned continuum of facial categorisation which has attempted to ‘stabilize the messy ambiguity of identity, to automatically read a stable, individual identity directly off the body’ (Gates 14). The face on the ID card that Pynchon throws into question, for example, is one that is produced by the faciality machine.

Moving to the second main point from Deleuze and Guattari, the face can play an integral role in ‘the organization of power’ (*ATP* 175). ‘[F]aces are distributed and faciality traits organized,’ they state, but only within ‘*[c]ertain assemblages of power [that] require the production of face*’ (*ATP* 169, 175, original italics). As ‘the classic power icon,’ in Daniel McNeill’s terms (127), the face is obviously integral to ‘despotic or authoritarian formations’ (*ATP* 180–81). *Nineteen Eighty-Four* provides a pertinent example when Winston sees ‘the face of Big Brother, black-haired, black-moustachio’d, full of power and mysterious calm, and so vast that it almost filled up the screen’ (Orwell, *Nineteen* 18–19). Big Brother’s face effects the organization of the signifier: it is only after his face has faded from the screen that ‘the three slogans of the Party’—‘WAR IS PEACE/FREEDOM IS SLAVERY/IGNORANCE IS STRENGTH’—are displayed (Orwell, *Nineteen* 19).

The face is often the focal point of counterattacks in Pynchon's oeuvre because of its association with totalitarian power. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, for instance, Byron the Bulb dreams of his 'Guerrilla Strike Force [getting] Herbert Hoover, Stanley Baldwin, all of them, right in the face with one coordinated blast' (GR 649). George Levine argues that even the reader, the interpreting consciousness that would attempt to totalize the polyvocality of Pynchon's corpus, is not immune from these defacing acts: 'Certainly, [Pynchon] rubs our faces in shit, as though we were all General Puddings' ('Risking' 135). We should note the prevalence of pie fights, too, as 'what friend hasn't wanted to—in terms you can recognize—*push a pie* in your face? eh?' (GR 375, original italics). As well as facilitating slapstick humour, throwing a pie in Pynchon's fiction suggests a desire to wrest power from the face, like the 'brilliant doomed conspiracy to hit Stalin in the face with a grape chiffon pie' we hear of in *Gravity's Rainbow* (GR 353). Yet as this conspiracy is 'doomed,' it provides evidence of Pynchon's recognition that 'profound social change will not result from head-on assaults,' as Leo Bersani puts it (184). Though these may be 'pure' acts, their obvious limitation lies in 'the Führer principle' that underlies them, as if power were solely consolidated in the face of 'a powerful leader' (GR 708, 95). In Pynchon's texts, indeed, often the inverse is true: those with the most power are faceless, like the 'They,' the 'faceless firm,' and the corporations with 'no specific face' in *Gravity's Rainbow*, or the 'faceless committee' the eponymous surveyors appear to be at the whim of in *Mason & Dixon* (GR 543, 243; *Me&D* 45). With the desire to 'Recognize the Faces of Those with the Knowledge' likely to be forlorn, it would certainly be wrong to claim that 'the power of the face (*la puissance du visage*), engenders and explains social power (*pouvoir*)' (*AtD* 957, original capitalisation; Deleuze and Guattari, *ATP* 175).

Nevertheless, while despotic and authoritarian 'concrete assemblages of power' trigger the faciality machine, 'it is within the semiotic of capitalism,' Deleuze and Guattari write, 'that signifiante and subjectification effectively penetrate. Thus it is in this semiotic that faciality, or the white wall/black hole system, assumes its full scope' (*ATP* 182). In contrast to the singular face of the despot, capitalism produces multiple faces. This 'commodification of any and all faces' finds its expression in numerous arenas: we need only think of the star system of Hollywood, of '[f]aces well known from the illustrated press,' and so on (Davis 1; *AtD* 247–248). Milan Kundera highlights these processes in *Immortality* when Agnes picks up a magazine 'devoted to politics and culture. It contained no catastrophes or nude beaches with princesses; instead, it was full of faces, nothing but faces ... Altogether, the magazine contained two hundred and twenty-three faces' (34).

Throughout this thesis we will see that Pynchon is just as attuned as Kundera to ‘the face-shaping powers of capital’ (Werth 101). To take just one example here, however, Esther Harvitz’s nose job in *V.* is shown to be motivated by her desire for a nose that is ‘[i]dential’ to ‘the retroussé nose’ projected ‘in the movies and advertisements’ (*V.* 45). Pynchon’s fiction is, then, concerned with how the face is produced under capitalism in particular.

We can now introduce the third point from Deleuze and Guattari, which is the faciality machine’s propagation of ‘waves of sameness’ (*ATP* 178). The face is ‘not a universal,’ they propose, rather ‘it is White Man himself, ... the typical European’ (*ATP* 176). The retroussé nose, for example, is ‘the sign of the WASP or White Anglo-Saxon Protestant,’ and Esther’s nose job is thus an attempt to eradicate the visibility of her Jewishness (*V.* 45). In what will be a constant refrain in this thesis, Pynchon sees the faciality machine’s incorporation of difference into the same as its fascistic operation. The face of Brock Vond—a ‘fascist prick,’ no less—makes this particularly evident (*VL* 305). While Brock is a ‘Mad Dog’ with ‘control-freak desires,’ he doesn’t ‘feel like any thug or, more important, look like one either’; he passes the Lombrosian test (*VL* 347, 349, 276). Despite his ‘Bobby Kennedy haircut [and] softly outdoor skin,’ Brock is ‘more photogenic than cute’ (*VL* 200). This photogenic quality, however, indicates that Brock’s face attains its power from the technological apparatus of the faciality machine. In one ‘8x10 (...) Fresson-process studio photograph,’ Brock looks like ‘he’d just had a buffer run all over him, the high smooth forehead, the cheeks that still hadn’t lost all their baby fat, the sleek and pointed ears, small chin, and slim little unbroken nose’ (*VL* 300). In contrast to Esther, Brock’s face, especially his nose, is the faciality machine’s norm. Like Crocker Fenway in *Inherent Vice*—whose appearance also suggests that ‘somebody had just run a floor buffer all over his face’—the polished surface of Brock’s face prevents the appearance of faciality traits that might ‘elude the organization of the face’; his face, that is, permits no alterity within its domain (*ATP* 171).

Many critics have suggested that because Brock Vond is “faced”—unlike, say, the ‘faceless firm’ of *Gravity’s Rainbow* (*GR* 543)—Pynchon intimates greater ‘chances for recovery in *Vineland*. Precisely because it operates on a diminished scale,’ N. Katherine Hayles argues, ‘the problems seem more solvable, more as if they had a human face in contrast to the inhuman, looming presences that haunt *Gravity’s Rainbow*’ (25). Sean Carswell echoes Hayles’s remarks when he states that Prairie Wheeler ‘can look her oppressor [Brock Vond] in the eye and make a joke about haemorrhoid cream. The human

face of the oppressor makes possibilities for resistance more palpable' (2). There are several problems with these views, however. Prairie later whispers 'You can come back'—as if, like her mother Frenesi, she cannot resist Brock's 'aura'—while Zoyd realises that his own 'half-hop[e]' for a 'run-in with Brock' is 'never going to happen in any frontal way' (*VL* 384, 374). More importantly, Hayles and Carswell overlook the fact that Brock's 'overseers' have had him 'under surveillance,' as well as Brock's own nightmares of 'people so rich and powerful he'd never even seen them' (*VL* 279, 275). Oppressive power structures are expressed 'in, but not limited to, the person' of Brock Vond; 'the Real Ones,' though 'often well within reach,' might, like the night, 'at any turn (...) prove unfaceable' (*VL* 108, 276, 80, 374). As Lauren Berlant writes of the "Face of America" ... gracing the covers of *Time*, *Mirabella*, and the *National Review* in 1993, the 'facialization of U.S. injustice makes it manageable,' but is only 'an imaginary solution' (398, 406). A further issue is that, as Deleuze and Guattari put it, 'there is even something absolutely inhuman about the face,' which is particularly true in the case of Brock as his partner, Roscoe, has to imagine that Brock was somehow 'more human-faced' (*ATP* 170). What Hayles and Carswell elide, then, is the repressions that the face itself, especially Brock's, can effectuate; it is a 'monstrous hood. Necessarily so because it is produced by a machine' (*ATP* 190).

The monstrosity of the face for Deleuze and Guattari is that it leaves you 'pinned to the white wall and stuffed in the black hole'; 'You are recognized,' they declare, 'the abstract machine has you inscribed in its overall grid' (*ATP* 181, 177). The faciality machine constitutes the face, as Amy Herzog outlines, as 'a means of individuation, categorization and identification according to a matrix of surveillance, power and control' (70). And '[a]t every moment,' Deleuze and Guattari argue, 'the machine rejects faces that do not conform, or seem suspicious,' excluding, for example, those 'whose facial type or colouring is not approved of for managerial or professional positions' (*ATP* 177; Williams 34). (*Nineteen Eighty-Four* plays off this idea with the notion of 'facecrime,' which is wearing 'an improper expression on your face' (Orwell, *Nineteen* 71, original italics).) As much as the faciality machine produces 'white male faces' as the norm, Pynchon shows how it can be equally defacing: we might think here of the 'faceless droves' of the concentration camps in *Gravity's Rainbow*; of the horrifying moment in *Against the Day* when Scarsdale Vibe says: 'Make sure you damage the face, fellows. *Batti! Batti la faccia*, yes? Destroy it. Give the little shitass's Mamma something to cry about'; or of *V*'s suggestion that botched surgery following the First World War 'produced a generation of freaks and pariahs who along with those who'd received no restorative surgery at all became a secret and horrible postwar

fraternity. No good at all in the usual rungs of society, where did they go?’ (*VL* 242; *GR* 580; *AID* 834; *V.* 98–99). This dialectic of the face and facelessness is one that we must remain alert to throughout this thesis.

To summarise the sodden Deleuzo-Guattarian ground covered thus far, ‘[t]he face is a politics’ because it is produced by certain power formations to facilitate biopolitical control (*ATP* 181). As an article of ‘Christian Capitalist Faith,’ it underwrites a particular understanding of subjectivity and identity, while performing a homogenising function (*VL* 232). It is because of this backdrop that the face is such a problem in Pynchon’s texts. Yet, as Gregory Flaxman and Elena Oxman explain, ‘if the face is caught up in or captured by politics, the politics of the face constitutes a project to dismantle its determinations’ (49). By insistently posing the question—‘Is that who you are, that vaguely criminal face on your ID card, its soul snatched by the government camera as the guillotine shutter fell?’—Pynchon’s oeuvre, I contend, should be viewed as just such a project of facial dismantling (*GR* 134).

Before I turn to an explication of this study’s methodology, it is worth situating it further in the already bulging body of Pynchon criticism. The idea that Pynchon dismantles the face fits into a broader sense of Pynchon as a dismantler. Sascha Pöhlmann, for example, argues that Pynchon’s ‘postnational imagination’ is geared towards ‘dismantling the hegemony of nation-ness as a metanarrative,’ with *Gravity’s Rainbow*, in particular, seeking ‘to dismantle all glorious talk of liberty, patriotism and the like’ (*Postnational* 8, 304). Pöhlmann’s views share many affinities with other Pynchon critics: David Witzling claims that Pynchon engages in the ‘dismantling [of] the signs of [racial] authority’ (31); David Cowart proposes that Pynchon’s exploration of ‘power’s insidious—or blatant—workings’ always operates ‘with an eye to imagining a world in which various oppressive forces can be countered, dismantled, and resisted’ (‘Genealogy’ 387); Katrin Amian maintains that *V.* enacts a ‘careful dismantling of the epistemological desires that feed Stencil’s quest,’ thereby questioning ‘modernist assumptions’ (107); and so on. The question of form is important here too: Pöhlmann rightly notes that ‘Pynchon’s very way of telling stories dismantles the claims to authority of any one story’ (*Postnational* 182), while Charles Russell even suggests that Pynchon ends up ‘dismantling his own creation in the very act of creating anew’ (268). Evidently, this thesis shares, and is indebted to, the wider critical notion that Pynchon’s writing enacts innumerable processes of dismantling: it is but one note in a critical chord.



Where this thesis differs, however, is in centring its discussion of dismantling on the face. But the face has also been a focal point at various stages in other critical works, if not always in relation to the question of dismantling. There are three main critical interventions I want to mention here—those of Samuel Thomas, Katalin Orbán, and Charles Baxter—as they each respectively capture this thesis’s key considerations with regard to the face: politics, ethics, and reading. To take each in turn: Thomas, as I suggested earlier, engages explicitly with Deleuze and Guattari in his third chapter entitled ‘The Theatre of Operations,’ opening with a quotation—‘A horror story, the face is a horror story’—from their faciality plateau (Thomas 63; *ATP* 169). Thomas enlighteningly explores the interrelationship of surgery and warfare, and how these coalesce on the face of Evan Godolphin in *V*. Following a plane crash in 1918, Godolphin is left with ‘the worst possible travesty of a human face lolling atop an animate corpse’ (*V*. 98–99). What ‘we are made to understand,’ Thomas convincingly argues, is ‘that the damage done to Godolphin’s face ... is a result of military-industrial systems vying for control’ (75). Thomas suggests that Godolphin’s ‘catastrophe of skin’ is therefore ‘a political “language,” a text suspended between disfiguration and figuration’ (67, 82). Certainly, Thomas recognizes that ‘[t]he face is a politics,’ and his argument that the ‘face may be a “horror story” but, at the moment of its dismantling, it opens up an alternative way of “caring” about history, of recovering its ethico-political dimension,’ resonates strikingly with this thesis’s concerns (Deleuze and Guattari *ATP* 181; Thomas 81). However, in addition to the fact that Thomas’s reading is overly-literalized here—dismantling need not mean the actual physical destruction of the concrete face, rather its significations—if faciality ‘is always a multiplicity’ then an investigation of the face in Pynchon’s work needs to extend beyond the single face of Evan Godolphin, despite its undoubted significance (Deleuze and Guattari, *ATP* 182). As we shall see over the course of this thesis, Godolphin’s is far from the only face ‘suspended between disfiguration and figuration’ (Thomas 82). Thomas’s study carries out some vital preliminary spadework, yet there are nevertheless many (black) holes that require further excavation.

If Thomas offers the most important prior injection into Pynchon’s facial politics, it is Katalin Orbán who raises the issue of facial ethics most extensively. Drawing on Emmanuel Levinas’s ethics, to which we shall turn in this thesis’s body text, Orbán discusses many moments in Pynchon’s fiction where confrontations with another’s face create an obligation, ‘a need, however inconvenient, irritating and burdensome, to respond’ (140). For example, Orbán analyses ‘the unique moment’ of Oedipa Maas’s encounter with

the ‘wrecked face’ of the delirium tremens sufferer in *The Crying of Lot 49*—whose ‘terror of eyes gloried in burst veins, stopped her’—as well as Franz Pökler’s eventual recognition of the deceased victims of the Dora concentration camp (‘each face so perfect, so individual’) in *Gravity’s Rainbow* (Orbán 139; *CL49* 86; *GR* 432). However, Orbán glosses over the tensions in Levinas’s work. The face, for Levinas, is *not* simply ‘a theme under my gaze ... spreading itself forth as a set of qualities forming an image’; indeed, ‘the face of the Other at each moment destroys and overflows the plastic image it leaves me’ (*TI* 50). Thus, while this thesis sympathises with Orbán’s claim that Pynchon’s work ‘displays a sensitivity to *singularity* that prevents generalization and commutation’ (145), if Levinas is to be productive for an analysis of the face in Pynchon’s texts then we need to be clear on what he actually takes the face to be, which will be a particular concern in my final chapter.

The last critical intervention to mention here is that of Charles Baxter, who traces the influence of F. Scott Fitzgerald’s *The Great Gatsby* on *The Crying of Lot 49* in an article entitled ‘De-Faced America.’ Baxter argues that ‘in both these novels certain themes and preoccupations having to do with history, culture, and “reading” coincide, and they do so around a central image: the face’ (23). To be sure, the centrality Baxter ascribes to the face is not unproblematic: Alec McHoul and David Wills rightly warn critics to be wary of identifying a ‘Grand Unifying Theme’ in Pynchon’s fiction (3, original capitalisation); indeed, as Molly Hite observes, Pynchon invites ‘readers to construct explanatory structures that imprison them’ (156). This thesis’s attempt to address the face is itself inevitably in ‘danger of collapsing’ Pynchon’s fiction ‘into a single issue’ (*VL* 365). Yet rather than the ‘rashly centripetal’ approach that Dwight Eddins acknowledges his own study takes (xi), I make no claim, *pace* Cicero, that ‘[e]verything is in the face’ (qtd. in McNeill 1). Instead, as ‘the determinable flaw in every concept makes it necessary to cite others,’ to borrow from Adorno (53), I adopt a more centrifugal approach, with the face operating as a starting point from which to branch out into Pynchon’s wider concerns.

Baxter is nevertheless correct to highlight the significance of both the questions of reading and defacement. As Susan Stewart points out, the face ‘is a kind of “deep” text’—*DeepFace*, indeed—and ‘one of the great *topoi* of Western literature has been the face as book’ (127, original italics, qtd. in Doane, ‘Close-Up’ 97). The face is customarily an ‘index of character’ in the novel (Baxter 23). Though Pynchon attempts to resist these impulses—it is often striking how undetailed his facial descriptions are—it must also be said that he cannot help but occasionally succumb to them, the rotten teeth of Captain Blicero as a signifier of his degraded soul being just one example (*GR* 94). As Deleuze and Guattari

state, '[t]he organization of the face is a strong one' (*ATP* 188). Pynchon's facial dismantling will inevitably go incomplete as he writes in a form that is inherently physiognomic, while, in truth, 'we all try to read faces' as '[s]ome faces are better than some books' (DeLillo 26). Reading itself is indeed physiognomic, an attempt to uncover deeper meanings from a textual surface, which is why Barbara Johnson proposes the face as a 'figure for reading' (14). Reading for the face is always and already, then, a reflection back upon the act of reading. Part of the difficulty of Pynchon's fiction, Baxter suggests, is that 'the blank look of [Dr.] Eckleburg' in *The Great Gatsby* seems to be 'everywhere, on everybody's face' (35), as indicated by Stencil's suspicion in *V.* that 'all faces are blank masks' (*V.* 487). Although partially true, this view is not without its limitations. Notably, Baxter overlooks the most important faces in *The Crying of Lot 49*, those made by Dr. Hilarius, which can hardly be characterised in this manner. Baxter also concedes to a certain fatalism when he states that 'the face is so de-faced that analytical effort is just wasted' (35). It seems more instructive, however, if we follow the lead of *Gravity's Rainbow*, which notes 'graffiti on the broken walls where facing has been shot away to reveal the brick underneath—broken in specific shapes that may also be read. . . .' (*GR* 623). As graffiti are 'the etchings of human longing' in Pynchon's work, then contrary to Baxter's claims we should turn toward this 'ruinous mosaic, facing outward into the Waste . . . outward from the sheltering city . . . readable only to those who journey outside . . . eyes in the distance . . . barbarians' (Slade, 'Religion' 178; *GR* 105).

Despite the insights of the critics listed here, there still remains a 'not-yet-come-to-terms-with face' in Pynchon's fiction, particularly as the facial discussions of Thomas, Orbán, and Baxter do not extend beyond *Gravity's Rainbow*, only the third of Pynchon's eight novels (*VL* 374). But as Pynchon's texts are renowned for their sheer quantity of characters—of whom it is not just '*SEVEN-faced Rugevit!*' who has multiple faces—and as 'each new Face, is a new distraction,' there are some methodological issues to be addressed so that we do not find ourselves 'slipping every which way, like lines of a face seen too close' (*GR* 528, original italics and capitalisation; *Mc&D* 752; *AtD* 300). Rather than taking a book-by-book approach to show how the face is dismantled in each of Pynchon's novels, I will dismantle the face into its component parts and trace these features across Pynchon's work as a whole.

This strategy undoubtedly requires some justification. In the first instance, this barbaric reading—which even Deleuze and Guattari would characterize as 'the approach of a demented experimenter who flays, slices, and anatomizes everything in sight' (*ATP*

171)—is open to the same charge of over-literalization that I earlier directed towards Thomas's work. As Herzog argues, it 'would be a mistake to read Deleuze and Guattari's work on faciality in a literal sense, focusing too closely on concrete human faces, rather than on structures of power' (71). Yet in addition to the fact that the faces in Pynchon's fiction are, of course, not literal, concrete ones, this thesis has always, as I stated earlier, taken its direction from Pynchon's writing itself. Our cue comes not from Deleuze and Guattari, then, rather the 'Maidens down by the Bridge' in *Mason & Dixon*, 'who are said to possess Rouge-Boxes with miniature mirrors set inside the Covers, that allow them to View their Features, tho's one at a Time' (*Me&D* 129). While abiding by Adorno's dictum that 'the dismantling of systems ... compels our thinking to abide with minutiae' (33), this disaggregation of the facial gestalt facilitates the uncovering of an under-acknowledged politics of the eyes, nose and mouth—as well as the mask, facelessness, and the face—in Pynchon's writing.

It is also entirely viable to consider Pynchon's oeuvre in its entirety owing to the continuities between his texts. While we must be alert to fostering the impression of univocality, of making Pynchon's texts one homogeneous unit, 'it seems clear that the interplay between Pynchon's novels,' as Martin Eve rightly notes, 'validates an approach that sweeps his canon and does not rely on a hermetically sealed "book" object for its structure' (*Pynchon and Philosophy* 15). *Bleeding Edge*, for instance, makes several knowing nods to Pynchon's earlier works: when Reg Despard is 'scrutinizing a cheese danish,' we cannot help but recall 'Slab the painter' in *V.*, 'whose eyes are open has technical skill and if you will "soul." But is committed to cheese Danishes'; Maxine Tarnow's statement that 'Tuesday's my Tupperware party' alludes to the opening of *The Crying of Lot 49* where Oedipa Maas has returned 'home from a Tupperware party'; and so on (*BE* 80; *V.* 360; *BE* 220; *CL49* 5). Even Thomas's study, which mainly examined each of Pynchon's novels separately, did not follow the chronology of publication dates, rather the texts' socio-historical settings in order to show, as Thomas puts it, how they "time travel" into one another' (42). Where Brian McHale suggests that the elegiac passages about Katje, Bianca, and lost girls 'form among themselves an isolable textual strand or constellation, a kind of dispersed micro-text in the *Gravity's Rainbow* macro-text' (*Constructing* 105), it is also possible to see that, as Stephen Joy has argued with regard to the fiction of Thomas Mann, 'the 'clinical scrutiny to which bodies in these texts are subject produces a fragmentary pattern, where an organ ... can be expropriated from the body'; it is thus '[r]efigured as a leitmotif, and raised to a level as part of the orchestration of the work' (469). If we read for the face's

component features, we can actually identify an ocular micro-text, a nasal micro-text, and so on, distributed across Pynchon's corpus. Since the face is 'a multiplex phenomenon that never can be fully accounted for within a simple or singular account,' as Daniel Black contends (2), this strategy additionally enables us to consider the face from multiple perspectives, thereby heeding David Cowart's maxim that 'the only proper approach to [Pynchon's] work must be eclectic' (*Allusion* 4).

Admittedly, there is a degree of artificiality here. As Vicki Bruce has shown, we process 'the face as a configuration' and 'our impression of one part of the face is affected directly by other parts' ('Identikit' 188); everyday facial perception, that is, rarely works by an appraisal of each individual feature, rather we tend to 'see the whole shape at once' (*GR* 165). *Against the Day's* Professor Renfrew certainly has a point when he suggests that the '[b]est procedure (...) is not to look at components singly—one begins to run about the room screaming after a while' (*AtD* 774). Even Deleuze and Guattari warn that '[m]adness is a definite danger' when dismantling the face (*ATP* 188). Ideally, the chapters of this thesis, like Deleuze and Guattari's plateaus, would be read in '[p]arallel, not series. (...) Not A before B, but all together'—'everything in a single timeless snapshot, the way master chess players are said to regard the board' (*GR* 159; *AtD* 774). Such an undertaking is, at least in this context, impossible: 'Try to design anything that way and have it work' (*GR* 159). But this thesis's chapters nevertheless exist in 'tension, not totality'; dismantling here is 'the demonstration of essential discontinuities rather than the disintegration of essentially integrated wholes' (Rives 151; Harper 48, qtd. in Fitzpatrick 99). After all, there are various facial features this thesis will not be able to cover, intimating what Levinas understands as the face's 'refusal to be contained' (*TI* 194). Like Maxine Tarnow, for example, I will largely have to resist 'any eyebrow commentary,' even though we might see the eyebrow as 'the great supporting player of the face' (*BE* 204; McNeill 199). The same is mostly true of beards, moustaches, chins, cheeks, foreheads, as well as facial frames such as ears, hair, 'enormous face-hiding hats,' and so on (*AtD* 355). Inevitably, by prioritising certain features, this thesis cannot help but contribute to the 'organization of the face,' despite seeking to dismantle it (Deleuze and Guattari, *ATP* 171). Nevertheless, by zooming in on Pynchon's treatment of the eyes, the nose, the mouth, the mask, and the face itself, we disrupt the face's 'totalizing power,' that is, the way that it establishes 'a relationship between inside and outside [and] arranges its component parts—mouth, eyes—into a coherent whole' (De Man 92; Rives 146). This process permits the exposure, as Béla Bála

claimed of the cinematic close-up, of ‘partial physiognomies which betray something different than the total expression had tried to suggest’ (qtd. in Koch 171).

My first chapter will consider eyes, though sometimes more correctly the eye, in Pynchon’s work. We begin here because vision is a concern in every chapter of this thesis; this chapter must therefore carry out the groundwork necessary before an inspection of the face’s other features. Given the eye’s imbrication with the faciality machine, it is often viewed suspiciously in Pynchon’s texts: with ‘Lines of Sight,’ he suggests, come ‘Flows of Power’ (*Me&D* 522). Many critics, such as Thomas, have hence explored the potentials of invisibility in Pynchon’s oeuvre. Although Pynchon undoubtedly questions ‘the hegemony of vision’ in modernity, this critical trend nevertheless obscures Pynchon’s attempts to find ‘[v]isual experiences that might prove useful’ (Levin, *Modernity*; *AtD* 368). Drawing on Georges Bataille and Walter Benjamin, in particular, I will attempt to show that Pynchon’s ‘dialectics of seeing’—to borrow terms from Susan-Buck Morss’s analysis of Benjamin’s *The Arcades Project*—seek to uncover visual potential (Buck-Morss, *Dialectics*). Albeit heavily qualified, Pynchon’s texts suggest that there are visionary experiences, such as crying or those brought on by hallucinogenic drugs, which are ‘bereft of the synoptic and objectifying virtues of vision’; as such, they promise ‘a relation or an intentionality of a wholly different type’ (Levinas, *TI* 23).

The nose will be the focus of my second chapter. My first point of consideration will be the aforementioned nose job Esther Harvitz receives in *V*. Although this has received much critical treatment, by couching my analysis in the terms of Deleuze and Guattari’s faciality plateau, unlike previous critical endeavours, I aim to highlight how various discourses relating to gender, sexuality, race, as well as cosmetic surgery, all coalesce on Esther’s nose. As Esther’s operation also appears to ‘flip a secret switch or clitoris somewhere inside her nasal cavity,’ it will function as a springboard for the second part of this chapter, which will examine the ‘unsettling presence of nasal desire’ in Pynchon’s fiction (*V*. 109; *AtD* 91). One of the most common instances of nasal desire is the insufflation of cocaine, particularly in the case of Mucho Maas—otherwise known as ‘Count Drugula, or Mucho the Munificent’—in *Vineland* (*VL* 309). Some critics are too monolithic in their appraisals of the connotations of narcotics in Pynchon’s oeuvre: David Cowart, for instance, argues that ‘taking drugs [in Pynchon’s writing] remains a powerful metaphor for the idea of an alternative to the rapacious capitalism and consumerism that afflict American society’ (*Dark Passages* 120). But different drugs carry different significations, and the ingestion of cocaine, far from being ‘an alternative,’ becomes

symptomatic of a territorialised desire that refuses to ‘ask anything’ (V. 438). In an attempt to unblock this ‘stuffiness-by-induction in the nasal cavities,’ my last nasal investigation will consider the overlooked significance of smell in Pynchon’s work (V. 438). Engaging with Adorno and Max Horkheimer, among others, I propose that where Frederic Jameson characterises the postmodern by its ‘historical deafness’ (xi), Pynchon diagnoses, instead, a historical anosmia. What I will term Pynchon’s olfactory poetics, however, are not only integral to his affective exploration of history, but also perform a radical revaluation of an often neglected sense.

Our next port of call will be the mouth. As Georges Bataille states, ‘terror and atrocious suffering turn the mouth into the organ of rending screams’ (‘Mouth’ 59). This is certainly true in Pynchon’s fiction, too. The sense of the mouth as a terrifying black hole is essential for the focal episode of this chapter’s first section: the ‘Disgusting English Candy Drill’ at Mrs. Quoad’s in *Gravity’s Rainbow* (GR 118). Many of Pynchon’s most established critics, such as Brian McHale and Molly Hite, too willingly read this scene simply as evidence of Pynchon’s propensity to clown around. Conversely, I argue that it is through the dense black hole of Tyrone Slothrop’s mouth where the other dense black hole looming over *Gravity’s Rainbow* is most insistently invoked: the Holocaust. The mouth is also a site where Pynchon explores the Foucauldian notion of disciplinary power, especially through the various menacing dentists in his oeuvre. By assessing the importance of underappreciated oral tropes—such as lipstick, chewing gum, teeth, and biting—we will see how the mouth is arguably the most bleakly portrayed facial feature in Pynchon’s writing, particularly as many mask-like and chilling smiles come to suggest that ‘the mask is now the face itself, the abstraction or operation of the face. The inhumanity of the face’ (Deleuze and Guattari, *ATP* 181).

My fourth chapter will attempt, as comprehensively as possible, to account for the various masks evoked in Pynchon’s oeuvre. These range from ‘[g]ood-natured and penetrable disguises, as at masked ball,’ to the more threatening ski masks worn by the ‘patriotic badasses known as Vigilant California’ in *Inherent Vice* (GR 742; IV 139). The most salient moment of masking comes at ‘Carnesalve,’ a counter-Carnival staged in Venice, the ‘city of masks,’ in *Against the Day* (AtD 897, 795). While a mask here seems to proffer the chance ‘to become imperceptible, to become clandestine,’ I will argue that Carnesalve actually reveals Pynchon’s reservations with regard to the potentials of the Bakhtinian carnivalesque (Deleuze and Guattari, *ATP* 171). It is not just the literal mask which I will investigate in this chapter, however. As one way we might see the face, to

follow Giorgio Agamben, is as ‘the irreparably being-exposed of humans and the very opening in which they hide and stay hidden’ (91), Pynchon’s fiction constantly shows an awareness of the masking capabilities of the face itself. Drawing on Erving Goffman, who rarely crops up in Pynchon criticism, and his notion of ‘the performance of self in everyday life,’ various masking tropes will be considered: poker-faces, cosmetics, the masquerade of femininity, and so on (Goffman, *Presentation*). Many of these combine in the figure of Katje Borgesius in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, whose ‘lifeless non-face,’ or ‘terrible Face That is No Face,’ also evokes the death-mask, as does Godolphin’s in *V*. (GR 222, original capitalisation). Katje’s ‘*futureless* look,’ her thoroughly defaced face, encapsulates the repeated sense in Pynchon’s work that there is ‘precious little room for any hope at all’ (GR 208, 86, original italics).

At this point, it might seem like Pynchon agrees with O’Brien in *Nineteen-Eighty Four*: ‘If you want a picture of the future, imagine a boot stamping on a human face—for ever’ (Orwell, *Nineteen* 307). Given ‘[h]ow horrible the face’ can look in his work (*V*. 83), we may be left wondering:

Where is the hand of mercy  
Where is the kindly face  
Where in this heedless slaughter  
Find we the promis’d place? (*AtD* 55)

Certainly, Pynchon’s fiction is ‘short on optimism,’ tackling an ‘outstandingly dark and death-laden time’ in which ‘sad human shittiness’ is all too plentiful (*IV* 303; *VL* 181, 261). My first four chapters of facial dismantling will indicate just how effaced and defaced the face often is in his writing as a result. Yet, to follow Charles Russell, we can still pose the question: ‘And out of this dismantling—a promise?’ (272). For Judith Chambers, in terms apposite to this thesis, ‘Pynchon faces and dismantles the ongoing destruction and reconfiguration of our world and provides us the means for renewal’ (126). While taking care to avoid a descent into ‘happy horseshit,’ my final chapter will argue that Pynchon ‘hopelessly (hopefully?)’ turns his ‘hopeful hopelessness’ towards a reimagining of the ‘overcoded face of the capitalist era’ (*VL* 179; Orbán 167; Eve, ‘Whose Line’ 929; Dosse 256).

Drawing on various theories of the cinematic close-up—including those of Bálazs, Benjamin, and Deleuze—I contend that by putting the face repeatedly into close-up in his writing, Pynchon attempts to think ‘non-identity in and through identity itself’ (Dallmayr 38). That is to say, by bringing the face into such intense focus in his work, Pynchon



convicts the face, at least and insofar as it is understood under the rubric of faciality, ‘of non-identity with itself—of the non-identity it denies, according to its own concept’ (Adorno 147). We must be clear here that by close-up I do not necessarily mean detailed facial descriptions as such; indeed, as I have already suggested, quite the inverse is often true. Rather, Pynchon consistently explores the face’s various significations and ‘determinations’ (Flaxman and Oxman 49). Where a major influence on his work, Rainer Maria Rilke, felt able to write that ‘a face is a face’ (*Notebooks* 6), what we see in Pynchon’s oeuvre is a sustained ‘[r]eflection upon its meaning, [which] is the way out of the concept’s being-in-itself as a unit of meaning’ (Adorno 12). Undeniably, this attention to the face risks upholding and sustaining the faciality machine as much as resisting and dismantling it, as does this thesis’s attempt to read for the face, as if it was separate from all corporeal codes. But Adorno suggests that negative dialectics is ‘tied to the supreme categories of identitarian philosophy as its point of departure’ (147). Ultimately, Pynchon’s thinking of non-identity through the face can be seen in conjunction with Deleuze and Guattari’s concept of ‘the Other Person’ in *What is Philosophy?*, which they define as ‘a possible world, the possibility of a frightening world. This possible world is not real, or not yet, but it exists nonetheless: it is an expressed that exists only in its expression—the face or an equivalent of the face’ (*WIP* 17). With the face thereby emerging as a key site of ethical and political possibility in Pynchon’s writing, his project of facial dismantling has marked affinities with Hunter Penhallow’s ruminations on the body in the work of Venetian painters, such as Titian and Tintoretto, while in discussion with Dally Rideout in *Against the Day*:

‘The body, it’s another way to get past the body.’

‘To the spirit behind it—’

‘But not to deny the body—to reimagine it. Even’—nodding over at the Titian on the far wall—‘if it’s “really” just different kind of greased mud smeared on cloth—to reimagine it as light.’

‘More perfect.’

‘Not necessarily. Sometimes more terrible—mortal, in pain, misshapen, even taken apart, broken down into geometrical surfaces, but each time somehow, when the process is working, *gone beyond*.’ (*AtD* 651, original italics)

## Pynchon's Eyes

- [T]he eye interprets everything—speaking, understanding, shitting, fucking—in terms of seeing. (Deleuze and Guattari, *Anti-Oedipus* 6)
- The eye may be prophylactic, but it cannot be beneficent—it is maleficent. In the Bible and even in the New Testament, there is no good eye, but there are evil eyes all over the place. (Lacan, *Four* 118–19)
- No one's expression is quite right. The wee creatures leer, the fiercer beasts have a drugged or sedated look, and none of the humans have any eye-contact at all. (GR 82)

For Deleuze and Guattari, the eyes are the 'black hole of faciality,' making them more integral to the functioning of the '*white wall/black hole* system' than any other feature of the face: 'first the eyes,' they state (*ATP* 171, 167, 170). Our process of facial dismantling must begin, then, with the fabled windows to the soul. Tony Tanner's comment that eyes 'are emphasised throughout' *V.* is actually applicable to Pynchon's entire oeuvre ('Caries' 56). To think of just three characters with particularly noteworthy eyes: Signor Mantissa's must be accorded 'an asterisk denoting especial interest' in *V.*; Frenesi Gates's 'notorious blue eyes' are frequently emphasised in *Vineland*; and Yashmeen Halfcourt is said to possess 'extraordinary eyes' in *Against the Day* (*V.* 159; *VL* 39; *AtD* 746). Eyes also go through numerous variations in Pynchon's work. They are often as 'huge and expressive as those you'd expect to see more in magazine illustrations than out in this troublesome world' (*AtD* 255). The angel that visits Basher and his wingman in *Gravity's Rainbow*, for instance, has eyes that 'go towering for miles'; Mason sees 'Huge, dark eyes' in Jonas Everybeet's crystal in *Mason & Dixon*; and Metzger's 'suffering eyes [fill] the screen' at the end of the *Cashiered* film in *The Crying of Lot 49* (GR 308; *Me&D* 442; *CL49* 28). Eyes can be set wide—'O-O'—which is frequently linked to ideas of childhood, innocence, and yearning, or narrow—'0.0'—which is more commonly associated with the 'closely set, purposeful eyes of a predator' (*IV* 77; *VL* 79; *Me&D* 589). Shapes vary from 'ovals' to 'squared,' and colours range from '*glowing* white,' through 'yellow' and 'purple,' to the 'muddy brown almost black eyeball' of Captain Blicero in *Gravity's Rainbow* alone, not forgetting the recurrent 'red-eyed dooper's stare' across Pynchon's fiction as a whole (GR 465, 436, 634, 557, 271, 670; *IV* 70). In addition to the bodily eye, eyes come in other materials, such as glass and lapis lazuli (*V.* 343; GR 282), as well as in more abstract forms: mind's eyes, evil

eyes, private eyes, ‘colonial eyes,’ and so forth (GR 344). Given the prevalence of eyes in Pynchon’s texts—gazing, looking, glancing, surveying, ‘staring, staring. . . .’—the question to pose here can be lifted from *Against the Day*: ‘why should he be paying so much attention to (...) eyes’ (GR 597; *AtD* 825)? What are we to make of this persistent ‘eyeball treatment’ (*AtD* 1003)?

For all the ocular modulations in Pynchon’s writing, the predominant impression is one of ‘unfriendly eyeballs’ and ‘too many Stares’ (*IV* 85; *Mc&D* 127). Despite the occasional appearance of ‘kind eyes,’ the ‘optic sensorium’ is habitually treated with suspicion owing to Pynchon’s profound awareness of what David Michael Levin has termed the ‘hegemony of vision’ in modernity (GR 555; *AtD* 467; Levin, *Modernity*). Vision, Levin contends, has been ‘elevated to the paradigm for knowledge and rationality,’ as the idea that “to see is to know” attests (*Modernity* 7). This ‘ocularcentrism,’ as Pynchon’s texts reveal, bears a ‘deep complicity with the subjugating forces of capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy’ (Jay, ‘The Rise’; Drobnick 10). From the telescope-wielding surveyors Charles Mason and Jeremiah Dixon of the eighteenth century, through to the way we ‘lap and suck at the flow of image’ on cinema, television, and computer screens in the twentieth and twenty-first, Pynchon suggests that with ‘Lines of Sight’ come ‘Flows of Power’ (*VL* 335; *Mc&D* 522).

Consequently, many critics have explored invisibility in Pynchon’s work. Samuel Thomas, for instance, argues that ‘the question of invisibility, of actions and objects not ordinarily accessible to atrophied senses, recurs throughout Pynchon’s writing’ (51). This is undoubtedly true: but two of countless pertinent cases might be the ‘invisibility wardrobe’ of DL Chastain, so-called ‘mistress of invisibility,’ in *Vineland*, or the White City Investigations ‘detective agency’ in *Against the Day*, where ‘invisibility is a sacred condition, whole darn floors of office buildings being given over to its art and science’ (*VL* 134, 177; *AtD* 148). The notion of ‘atrophied senses,’ moreover, an expression David Cowart likewise employs (*Allusion* 88), is integral not only in relation to my exploration of vision here but also in the discussion of smell in my subsequent chapter. However, I want to turn away from Thomas’s claim that invisibility attains ‘some kind of utopian function against the power cells of Enlightenment’ in Pynchon’s fiction (50). While Stray may reminisce about her ‘early notions of the Anarchist life and its promise of a *greater invisibility*’ in *Against the Day* (*AtD* 1097, original italics), ‘it is also true,’ as Martin Eve states, ‘that the power mechanisms themselves are visually elusive, therein residing the dystopian function’ (*Pynchon and Philosophy* 137). We should not forget, either, that ‘there are individuals and

groups forcefully made invisible' by these 'invisible forces' (K. Smith 196; *VL* 208). Although Pynchon is incontrovertibly interested in what is 'well past the smeared boundaries of the visible,' his novels, like Ralph Ellison's *Invisible Man*, also call attention to those things which are invisible not because they literally cannot be seen, rather that we 'train ourselves away from to keep from looking further' (*AtD* 489; *GR* 720). Even though the Enlightenment—which has sought to make 'everything (...) more visible, easier to access'—may be the 'prime target' of *Gravity's Rainbow's* 'cultural politics,' Pynchon nevertheless still seems to hold on to the possibility of bringing certain things to light, of revealing 'the deep, the scarcely seen' (*BE* 342; McHugh 5; *GR* 74). Our critical appraisals would therefore be limited were we 'never to focus on anything that can be seen'—albeit obviously not in a literal sense—in his work (*BE* 404). The evident 'denial of ordinary vision' in Pynchon's writing does not preclude him from intimating, following Nicola Tesla in *Against the Day*, that there are '[v]isual experiences that might prove useful' (*AtD* 269, 368).

Though this issue 'sure merits a closer look,' a few prior caveats are necessary (*IV* 243). The first is an acknowledgement of this chapter's limitations, which concurrently expose a problem with this thesis's attempt to view the face's features 'one at a Time' (*Me&D* 129). As much as I would like to be 'cleared pretty much all the way to Eyes Only,' visual considerations do not just pertain to the eye ('broadly understood as including the complex of muscles, flesh and even hair around the eyeball') but the whole face (*BE* 352, original capitalisation; Jay, *Downcast* 10). That is, questions of vision and visibility—'linger,' as we will do, 'on the rest of the face'—are integral to each and every chapter in this thesis; we will be 'drawn inevitably again to these eyes' (*V*. 159). Indeed, several significant visual concerns of Pynchon's fiction, such as the mutual gaze, or photography and cinema, will have to be addressed primarily in later chapters. Yet as one of this chapter's arguments, outlined in greater detail below, is that Pynchon's novels propose we 'need practice in seeing,' we will be able to approach these other issues with that practice already, it is hoped, underway (*AtD* 442). Rather than claiming to provide a total picture of the eyes and vision in Pynchon's fiction, then, the more modest aim of this chapter is to carry out a reasonably 'fast eyeball diagnostic' in order to introduce concerns that will be played out and developed across the thesis (*IV* 175).

Second, although I am attending principally to human eyes, Pynchon's writing makes it difficult to maintain such a narrow focus. On one level are animals: the 'great blooming optic lobes' of Octopus Grigori in *Gravity's Rainbow* (*GR* 52); the 'personal stare of

the 'Torpedo, or Electric Eel' in *Mason & Dixon* (*Me&D* 432, original italics); the 'strange gleam' and 'light of understanding' in the eyes of the dog Pugnax in *Against the Day* (*AtD* 618–19); and so on. On another, are seemingly inanimate objects: the 'Wig-Stand' which 'direct[s] (...) a socketed Stare' in *Mason & Dixon* (*Me&D* 521); the plastic white chess knight 'watching [Slothrop] out of its staring shadows' in *Gravity's Rainbow* (*GR* 436); the 'greenish dead eye of the TV tube' gazing at Oedipa Maas at the beginning of *The Crying of Lot 49* (*CL49* 5); and so forth. On yet another level are more abstract, immaterial eyes, such as 'the political eye,' the 'Eyes of Texas,' 'The Unsleepin [*sic*] Eye with all its corporate resources'—the list really does go on (*GR* 338; *AtD* 729, 202). This forbidding range of eyes is in danger of making this chapter's terms slightly muddy, even 'Unfoachused [*sic*], as we Lensmen say' (*Me&D* 272). But these immaterial eyes are integral to Pynchon's political conceptions and necessarily impinge upon our reading of the physical eye. In order to navigate this 'ocular maze,' we will thus proceed as follows (*IV* 14). Beginning with 'the eye of power,' to borrow from Michel Foucault, we will examine the various ways in which Pynchon links this eye to the notion of 'unrelenting surveillance,' to the paranoid fear of 'that city of the future where every soul is known, and there is noplac [*sic*] to hide' (Foucault, 'Eye'; *AtD* 556; *GR* 566). We will then turn to the eye of what Martin Jay terms 'Cartesian perspectivalism,' which I shall detail further below, out of which the eye of power has grown (*Downcast* 69). This eye, which aims to be dispassionate and objective, will lead us to a consideration of 'eyes with no life' in Pynchon's fiction (*V*. 303). These all but dead eyes are often 'struck with selective hysterical blindness' and the notion of unseeing eyes will therefore be our fourth point of investigation (*AtD* 1218). The exploration of these four eyes will firmly establish the negative understanding of vision in Pynchon's texts, an essential step if the claim there are 'visual experiences that might prove useful' is to have any credence (*AtD* 368).

As Kathryn Hume has pointed out, Pynchon nonetheless 'mounts a surprising number of alternatives to the negative paranoid vision' across his oeuvre—though, she maintains, these seem to 'blossom in *Against the Day*' ('Alternate' 11)—and the work of two thinkers in particular, Georges Bataille and Walter Benjamin, will help us to unearth this 'different kind of seeing' (*AtD* 834). Pynchon, Bataille, Benjamin: not quite a threesome of natural bedfellows. In *The Culture of Redemption*, which addresses these three writers, among others, Leo Bersani argues that 'the shapes of a literature *without* redemptive authority are most carefully investigated in ... Baudelaire, Nietzsche, Bataille, and Pynchon,' the exclusion of Benjamin implying Bersani's belief that his thought carries so-called

‘redemptive authority’ (2, original italics). For all the merits of Bersani’s reading, his dismissal of Pynchon’s repeated invocations of the hope for redemption, grace, safety, refuge, and so on, is too cursory. To be sure, the potential for redemption, whatever that might entail, is far from authoritative or unambiguous in Pynchon’s writing, but it is not altogether elided. At an ocular level, Pynchon’s texts, on one hand, enact a violent, dethronement of the eye worthy of Bataille; yet on the other, they intimate the possibility for a more ‘redemptive optics’—or ‘countersight’—allied to the thought of Walter Benjamin (Jacobs 42; *VL* 152). It is in the uneasy balance, or fraught ‘constellation,’ of these thinkers where the eye might be salvaged from the technocratic surveillance state it has helped to construct (Benjamin, *Arcades* 462). The potentially ‘useful’—albeit heavily qualified—‘visual experiences’ in Pynchon’s writing include crying, visionary experience, and a widening of the perceptual field, both spatially and temporally, in the cultivation of a critical, ‘cognizant eye’ (*AtD* 368; *VL* 367). There is a lot of ground to cover beforehand, however, so we must now turn to the ‘eye of power’ in Pynchon’s texts and ‘see what we can see’ (*IV* 4).

i)      **‘The Unsleppng Eye’** (*AtD* 57)

In ‘The Eye of Power,’ Foucault defines Jeremy Bentham’s model of the panopticon as a ‘system of isolating visibility ... which exists to serve a rigorous, meticulous power’ (154). Pynchon, as delineated in this thesis’s introduction, has always been preoccupied with the idea that ‘someday everybody’s gonna wake up to find they’re under surveillance they can’t escape’ (*IV* 365). Surveillance, we should note, does not always take strictly visual forms: Pynchon’s fiction is attuned to auditory surveillance—‘We have an ear in the villa,’ Demivolt discloses in *V*.—and frequently preoccupied with the surveillance capabilities of the computer, which ‘never has to sleep, or even go take a break. It’s like it’s open 24 hours a day. . . .’ (*V*. 478; *VL* 91). One of *Bleeding Edge*’s predominant concerns, furthermore, is the surveillance capacity of the Internet. Nicholas Windust—who ‘does not after all seem to be FBI. Something worse, if possible’—rearticulates George W. Bush’s flagship education bill into the Internet realm: ‘No keystroke left behind’ (*BE* 108, 105). Nevertheless, the ‘dream of a transparent society, visible and legible in each of its parts,’ evidently underlies the deployment of these technologies and, more importantly, the figuration of the power they serve is frequently ocular in Pynchon’s writing: ‘Ahrhh! Like a giant Eye! ever a-stare!’ (Foucault, ‘Eye’ 152; *Mc&D* 695).

In *Gravity's Rainbow*, for example, the defining image of the dollar bill, the 'Eye at the top of the pyramid,' is mentioned three times (GR 484, original capitalisation, 585, 587). The eye of providence on American currency clearly allies Christianity and capitalism, a common trope in Pynchon's corpus, while *Gravity's Rainbow* also suggests that it 'is difficult to look for long at the strangle single eye crowning the pyramid which is found on every dollar bill and not to begin to believe the story'—that it represents a 'gigantic Masonic plot under the ultimate control of the group known as the Illuminati'—'a little' (GR 587). Many critics have seen moments like this as evidence of Pynchon's 'paranoia grown cosmic' (Sanders 148). However, despite Maxine Tarnow's proposal in *Bleeding Edge* that 'paranoia's the garlic in life's kitchen, right, you can never have too much,' Pynchon never allows us to cede fully to the paranoid view: we can only believe 'a little' (BE 11; GR 587). Kathryn Hume claims that paranoia in Pynchon's fiction is actually 'diminishing as of *Against the Day*,' his 'least paranoid' novel ('Alternate' 3). Yet Michael Jarvis is right to point out that *Against the Day* nonetheless 'reinstates ... the familiar gnostic cabal system,' with the eye still aligned with power (5). Lew Basnight, for instance, conceives of 'The Unsleeping Eye' as the symbol of power on two occasions, whilst Nate Privett, 'personnel director at White City Investigations,' recruits Lew to the agency by stating: 'You think working for the Eye's a life of moral squalor, you ought to have a look at our shop' (*AtD* 57, 202, 48).

In addition to displaying an awareness of the twentieth-century 'desire to control military operations from above through optical devices'—as Clement Lévy, echoing Paul Virilio, has noted (162)—*Against the Day* also furthers Pynchon's concern with 'overhead surveillance' (*VL* 209). With their 'hydrogen skyship *Inconvenience*' armed with 'a small observatory's worth of telescopic gear,' the Chums of Chance carry out 'regular surveillance runs,' as if *Inconvenience* 'were some giant eyeball, perhaps that of Society itself, ever scrutinizing from above' (*AtD* 40, 3, 15). The Chums's skyship recalls the 'observer balloons (...) stationed in the sky' while the Adenoid rampages across London at the outset of *Gravity's Rainbow*, as well as the 'devoted enforcement from the sky' by Brock Vond, otherwise known as 'Death from Slightly Above,' in *Vineland* (GR 15; *VL* 172, 375). This 'angel's eye-view' is integral to the paranoiac conception of the all-encompassing range of surveillance: '*we see you from above there is nowhere to go it's your last alley, your last stormcellar*' (GR 54, 684, original italics).

The eye is evidently often shorthand in Pynchon's fiction, then, for the 'Agents Unknown of Power Invisible' (*Me&D* 746). It is vital to note, however, that although the eye seems to suggest a single, all-powerful overseer, '[o]ne doesn't have here,' as Foucault

proposes, ‘a power which is wholly in the hands of one person who exercises it alone and totally over the others. It’s a machine in which everyone is caught, those who exercise power just as those over whom it is exercised’ (‘Eye’ 156). For instance, Brock Vond is held ‘under surveillance’ by ‘[i]nternal review boards within Justice’ in *Vineland*, while the ‘network of observers,’ snitches and informers in the same novel implies that the ‘summit and the lower elements of the hierarchy stand in a relationship of mutual support and conditioning, a mutual “hold”’ (*VL* 279, 221; Foucault, ‘Eye’ 159). Indeed, as Hannah Möckel-Rieke argues, power in *Vineland* is ‘primarily linked ... to the act of looking, that is, not merely the “panoptic” look of surveillance, but also the identificatory and the voyeuristic look or the exhibitionistic pleasure of being looked at’ (67). The eye is thus not simply the site of an all-powerful gaze, rather where power struggles are played out.

This is frequently signalled by military metaphor in Pynchon’s texts. Maxine Tarnow’s ‘Conquering Eyeroll’ in *Bleeding Edge*, for example, echoes the way Tenebrae ‘has invented and refin’d a way of rolling her eyes, undetectable to any save her Target, upon whom the effect is said to be devastating,’ in *Mason & Dixon* (*BE* 362; *Me&D* 262). Eyes can be ‘presented like weapons in a duel’ and act as a ‘weapon of witness’ (*AtD* 467; *VL* 273). Countless Pynchon characters therefore have their eyes ‘on defense,’ with some even taking ‘guard behind eyeglasses presented like Wagnerian shields’ (*VL* 312; *GR* 416). Because it might be ‘dangerous to risk more than sidelong Glances’ (‘try to get even eye contact it’s yer [*sic*] ass, babe’), it is perhaps no surprise that so many of Pynchon’s characters ‘ain’t exactly (...) wallerin [*sic*] in eye contact’ (*Me&D* 333, original capitalisation; *VL* 196; *IV* 83). The prevalence of ‘no eye-contact eyes’ undoubtedly means that the potentially ‘suicidal folly’ of making eye contact is particularly significant in Pynchon’s fiction—as Stefan Mattessich states, it ‘matters’—but a detailed examination of the implications of a direct look at the other will have to be reserved for later in this thesis (*VL* 139; *GR* 275; Mattessich, *Lines* 94).

What needs to be noted here is that the widespread ‘eye-avoidance’ in Pynchon’s writing reveals that ‘we are beings who are looked at, in the spectacle of the world. That which makes us consciousness institutes us by the same token as *speculum mundi*’ (*Me&D* 147; Lacan, *Four* 75, original italics). For Jacques Lacan, this is an ‘essential point—the dependence of the visible on that which places us under the eye of the seer’ (*Four* 72). We do not see without at first being given-to-be-seen. Everyone—and everything, as the conclusion to this thesis will explore further—is implicated in this web of gazes. We are thus ‘caught, manipulated, captured in the field of vision’ (Lacan, *Four* 92). What’s more,



‘the indignity of being observ’d’ is heightened by the fact that ‘[we] see only from one point, but in [our] existence [we are] looked at from all sides’; any hope of keeping a ‘defensive eye out in all directions’ is forlorn (*Me&D* 707; Lacan *Four* 72; *VL* 43). The recognition of this fact need not be taken negatively, though; indeed, ethics is only possible after the acknowledgement that ‘*another person* [is not] necessarily second in relation to a self’ (Deleuze and Guattari, *WIP* 17, original italics). The problem for both Lacan and Pynchon is that ‘the pre-existence of a gaze’ has been overlooked by the preponderant ‘geometral’ or ‘flat’ optics of modernity, ‘whose relation with the institution of a Cartesian subject, which is itself a sort of geometral point, a point of perspective, we cannot fail to see’ (Lacan, *Four* 85–86). To clarify what Lacan means here, we can now bring in the eye of what Martin Jay calls ‘Cartesian perspectivalism’ (*Downcast* 69).

ii) **‘just a recording eye’** (GR 216)

Jay’s notion of Cartesian perspectivalism connects, in accordance with Lacan, the theories of scientific rationality advanced in the wake of René Descartes—Cartesianism—with the developments of perspective in the visual arts by Filippo Brunelleschi and Leon Battista Alberti in the Italian Renaissance. One of the most striking effects of ‘the dominant, even totally hegemonic, visual model of the modern era’ was to further the distance between subject and object; ‘the gap between spectator and spectacle widened’ (Jay, ‘Scopic’ 6, 8). Rather than ‘*knotting*’ the eyes and vision ‘*into*’ the world of the pre-existing gaze, Cartesian perspectivalism sought a ‘disentanglement from’ it, attempting to be ‘unmoved by all fluctuations of sense and sensibility’ (GR 3, original italics; Levin, *Opening* 106). Significantly, however, eye is more exact than eyes here: borrowing a term from the French psychoanalyst and film theorist Christian Metz, Jay outlines that within the ‘scopic regime’ of Cartesian perspectivalism,

th[e] eye was singular, rather than the two eyes of normal binocular vision. It was conceived in the manner of a lone eye looking through a peephole at the scene in front of it. Such an eye was, moreover, understood to be static, unblinking and fixated, rather than dynamic, ... producing a visual take that was eternalized, reduced to one “point of view,” and disembodied. (‘Scopic’ 7)

The objective was, as Stephen Dodsun-Truck explains in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, to ‘observe without passion,’ to be ‘[j]ust a neuter, just a recording eye’ (GR 216). The eye here is not exactly the material eye of the face. That is, the concern is not so much with ‘Dixon’s

pronounc'd limp and bile-stain'd Eyeballs,' for example, rather the 'third eye in [the] forehead' or 'the mind's eye,' which *Gravity's Rainbow* suggests August Kekulé brought over from architecture into chemistry, indicating its influence across numerous fields (*Me&D* 749; *VL* 39; *GR* 411). Whilst Jay highlights the dominance of Cartesian perspectivalism, he does not equate hegemony with exclusivity: 'the scopic regime of modernity may best be understood as a contested terrain, rather than a harmoniously integrated complex of visual theories and practices' ('Scopic' 6). This is important for this chapter's claim that Pynchon attempts to challenge the prevailing conception of vision via a 'counternarrative' typical of his work (Pöhlmann, *Against*). Yet we need first to further establish how Cartesian perspectivalism has made vision 'the most reifying of all our perceptual modalities,' which *Mason & Dixon* clearly demonstrates (Levin, *Opening* 65).

Towards the beginning of the novel, Mason prays for 'clear nights and perfect seeing,' a phrase echoed once the drawing of the Mason-Dixon Line nears completion and we hear that Mason and Dixon will be 'off again for more glamorous foreign duty where the Seeing's perfect' (*Me&D* 66, 691, original capitalisation). The 'perfect seeing' that Mason and Dixon attempt to attain by lying 'beneath the Snout' of the telescope is inherently passive and 'eternalized,' reminding us of Friedrich Nietzsche's Zarathustra who would characterise their goal as the '*immaculate* perception of all things: [to] want nothing from [things], except [to] lie there before them like a mirror with a hundred eyes' (*Me&D* 648; Jay, 'Scopic' 7; Nietzsche, *Thus* 106, original italics). Though Karen Jacobs might be correct to argue that 'Descartes's infamous assertion of the division between mind and body is arguably far less stable and certain than is typically acknowledged' (10), *Mason & Dixon* also discloses how vision was disembodied under Cartesian perspectivalism. The astronomers' 'Weightless Obs[ervations]' of the night sky—of 'the Sweeps of Stars' that 'converg[e] at the Eye'—are separated from the 'earthly back-wrenching Toil the Obs demand by way of Expression' (*Me&D* 681). Cartesianism sought an objective way of "seeing" that was not hampered by the illusions or limitations of the blinking, bodily eye. The corporeal eye's shortcomings are, however, variously indicated in *Mason & Dixon*: Dixon suggests that the measurements around the anomalous Delaware Wedge need only be done 'by Eye' as they do not need to be as precise, while the very deployment of the telescope, with its 'Brass elongating into the Heavens,' obviously acknowledges the eye's restricted capacities (*Me&D* 324, 648). As Merle Rideout says to Lew Basnight in *Against the Day*: 'Right before your eyes—or lens, 'cause you do need some magnification' (*AtD* 1192).

Pynchon makes it abundantly clear, however, that Cartesian perspectivalism's attempts to overcome 'the imperfect vision of humans' have not been without disastrous effects (*V.* 388). Instead of recognizing that 'the eye is a sort of bowl,' under Cartesian perspectivalism vision was often represented 'by a straight line of light, sharply focused, absolutely clear' (Lacan, *Four* 94; Levin, *Opening* 68). If 'Lines of Sight' are linked with 'Flows of Power' in Pynchon's writing, and if '[n]othing will produce Bad History more directly nor brutally, than drawing a Line, in particular a Right Line, the very shape of Contempt, through the midst of a People,' then the 'strictly monocular rationality' of Cartesian perspectivalism is directly implicated in the historical abuses Pynchon's fiction charts (*Mc&D* 522, 615; Levin, *Opening* 106). This is not only true of the Mason-Dixon Line but also the eastern borders of the German Südwest, the site of the Herero genocide with which both *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow* are so preoccupied. Cartesian perspectivalism has 'contributed in the most fundamental and decisive way to the modern extension and domination of the instrumental world-view,' as we shall see when we turn to Blicero and Franz Pökler in *Gravity's Rainbow* shortly, and suffers from its own blindness: 'tho' Slaves passed before [Dixon's] Sight, he saw none. *That* was what had not occur'd' (Levin, *Opening* 96; *Mc&D* 398, original italics). Obscuring the 'restlessly throbbing eye' of the physical body, the 'disincarnated coldness' of Cartesian perspectivalism's mechanical eye is seen to incarcerate vision in Pynchon's writing; the corporeal eye can only look 'out from its prison window' as it is held 'hostage, like this, beneath the Instrument pois'd upon it' (*VL* 60; *Downcast* 591; *V.* 261; *Mc&D* 648). The destructive consequences of the 'absolute eye that cadaverizes life' directly impinge upon the material eye itself in Pynchon's fiction, which is populated with copious lifeless eyes that we are now ready to bring into focus (Foucault, *Birth* 66; *GR* 216).

### iii) **'eyes with no life'** (*V.* 303)

Numerous characters in *V.* have 'eyes with no life' (*V.* 303). For instance, Melanie L'Heuremaudit's eyes are 'dead,' even before she impales herself; McClintic Sphere has a glass eye; and in a song, the 'eyes of a New York woman' are noted to be as 'Dead as the leaves in Union Square/Dead as the graveyard sea' (*V.* 394, 343, 141). The most significant example is, however, the eponymous V. When she is under the guise of Vera Meroving, Kurt Mondaugen—whose surname means 'mooneyes' in German—is able to observe that 'her left eye was artificial: she, noticing his curiosity, obligingly removed the eye and held it

out to him in the hollow of her hand' (*V.* 488, 237). Although *V.* is obsessed 'with bodily incorporating little bits of inert matter' (*V.* 488), Kathleen Fitzpatrick argues that 'the most central, most focal, if you can pardon the pun, of the objects that finally comprise *V.*, is that glass eye' (99). Figured as a watch 'with the iris in the shape of a clock'—'the evil eye of time itself,' as one officer sees it—Vera Meroving's artificial eye comes to represent the mechanical nature of vision under Cartesian perspectivalism (*V.* 299, 388). The eye is hence inextricably linked to the degradation into the inanimate that *V.* charts, as in *V.*'s eyes something 'nightlike had found its way here, distilled and pre-shaped in eyes that only this morning had reflected sun, whitecaps, real children' (*V.* 337).

This sense of ocular deterioration is mirrored in *Gravity's Rainbow* where the 'myopic witch's eyes' of the Nazi Rocket engineer, Captain Blicero, are effectively 'the evil eye that sours the milk'; they are 'maps of his Kingdom,' a 'Kingdom of Death' (*GR* 724, 254, 670, 722). The novel often remarks upon Blicero's yearnings for transcendent transformation, of his 'desire to break out—to leave this cycle of infection and death' (*GR* 724). He has been 'stunned irreversibly (...) away from the weak, the failed smells of real breath,' and his eyes are thus, like the Cartesian eye, 'withdrawn from the flesh of the world' (*GR* 724; Levin, *Opening* 106). With his Cartesian eye centred on technology's transcendent promise, Blicero becomes emblematic of the callousness of the 'instrumental world-view' (Levin, *Opening* 96). His objectifying gaze, in which there is 'just *no passion at all*,' leaves no space for the other, as we see when he regards Pökler with 'the blank look of one who is taking another for granted' (*GR* 216, original italics, 401). With his eyes becoming 'too dangerously spaced beyond the words' as they seek only 'their final darkener,' Blicero's 'muddy brown almost black eyeball'—in addition to his rotten teeth, which my mouth chapter will discuss in greater detail—demonstrates the full extent of the corrosiveness of Cartesian perspectivalism (*GR* 724, 428, 670). Blicero has 'grown on, into another animal . . . a werewolf . . . but with no humanity left in its eyes'; indeed, his 'wrinkled wolf-eyes' are so lifeless that they have gone 'on into [their] animal north, (...) tough cells with the smallest possible flicker inside, running on nothing but ice, or less' (*GR* 486).

It is worth noting that as Pynchon reflects twentieth-century horrors at an ocular level through *V.* and Blicero (as well as the 'woman in black' who confronts Slothrop and Margherita Erdmann, with 'all the malaise of a Europe dead and gone gathered here in the eyes as black as her clothing, black and lightless'), then their eyes remain windows to their, albeit degraded, souls (*GR* 458). That is to say, as much as this thesis argues that Pynchon attempts to dismantle the understanding of the face in discourses such as physiognomy and

Lombrosian criminology, his novels, in keeping with the genre, are nevertheless inherently physiognomic. Pynchon's texts are inexorably implicated in the processes they seek to critique, as we shall see repeatedly over the course of this thesis, and eyes persist as an integral sign of character. In addition to Blicero, we might recall the 'mackerel eyes' of Miklos Thanatz, whose surname already carries associations with death, or *Gravity's Rainbow's* declaration that 'most women's eyes are only functional,' both of which suggest a widespread subjective dissolution that intimates there is 'no humanity left' in humanity itself (GR 666, 232, 486).

The deadness of human eyes in Pynchon's oeuvre is made all the more evident by two recurrent tropes. First, the absorption of light: in *V.*, for instance, Lucille's eyes are noted 'to absorb all light in the street,' while in *Vineland* Hector's eyeballs seem to have 'vanished, the shine faded to matte surfaces that were now absorbing all light that fell on them' (*V.* 141; *VL* 302). The most telling example, however, is Frenesi Gates. Originally her eyes are of a 'defiance of blue unfadable,' but after her political betrayal they deteriorate into a state where they are 'gathering most of the light, eyes so long loved, glaring now, savage with a fore-glimpse of some rush into fate, something shadowless and ultimate' (*VL* 195, 286). Second, is the contrast between these dead human eyes and the pregnant gazes of inanimate objects. In addition to the ones I listed earlier—such as the Wig-Stand in *Mason & Dixon*—but two further examples might include the suspicion that 'official pain, official death [will be] watching all night from the porcelain eyes of statues,' or Hector's anxious fear that the Tube might 'suddenly (...) stop showing pictures and instead announce, "From now on, I'm watching you"' (GR 728; *VL* 340).

Although it would be incorrect to state that all eyes are lifeless in Pynchon's writing—Geli Tripping's, for example, show no 'sign of corrosion' (GR 290)—Tanner's observation that 'detached and impotent stares' predominate in *V.* is nevertheless pertinent to Pynchon's entire corpus ('Caries' 56). We need only think here of the 'nation of starers,' or the 'undirected eyes' of 'scarred dope-fiend faces,' in *Gravity's Rainbow*; of the 'insomniac unavenged' Thanatoids in *Vineland*; or of the New York residents watching the aftermath of 9/11 on their television screens in *Bleeding Edge*, 'staring like zombies, unable in any case to process what they were seeing' (GR 429, 644; *VL* 324; *BE* 321). As the television tunes us to 'viewer, that is, brain defective status,' Pynchon suggests that 'critical abilities' have 'lapsed,' with 'that whole alternative America' consequently 'el deado meato' (*VL* 337, 283, 373). With eyes in Pynchon's fiction often little more than the 'blank lunes' of 'staring children,' it is perhaps no surprise that even God's 'own jaundiced and bloodshot eyeball

[is] looking back at us without much enthusiasm' (*AtD* 1015; *VL* 273, 361). For staring, as Pynchon exposes, necessarily entails blindness.

iv) **'eyes staring straight ahead, unseeing'** ('Mortality')

Blindness is a recurrent concern in Pynchon's oeuvre. David Witzling, for instance, asserts that *V.* was Pynchon's attempt 'to work through the ubiquitous blindness to the realities of Cold War America' (19), whilst Shawn Smith maintains that *Vineland* is preoccupied with 'an America largely blinded by the culture industry and the consumerist ethos of the mid-eighties' (106). To be clear, blindness is meant in a figurative sense here. Rather than a physical inability to see, it signifies what people fail to see, 'or to do justice to reality,' as Adorno writes, 'will not allow themselves to see' (41). Though there are countless explorations of this idea in Pynchon's writing—such as *Inherent Vice's* suggestion that '[p]eople in this town saw only what they'd all agreed to see'—the case of Franz Pökler in *Gravity's Rainbow* is particularly instructive (*IV* 315).

Pökler has been separated from his daughter, Ilse, while working on the Rocket with Blicero at Peenemünde. He sees Ilse once a year at Zwölfkinder, a kind of Nazi Disneyland, before she is taken back 'as abruptly and invisible as before' to 'a re-education camp' (*GR* 422, 428). It is unclear, however, if the same girl visits him every year:

The only continuity has been her name, and Zwölfkinder, and Pökler's love—love something like the persistence of vision, for They have used it to create for him the moving image of a daughter, flashing him only these summertime frames of her, leaving it to him to build the illusion of a single child . . . what would the time scale matter, a 24<sup>th</sup> of a second or a year. (*GR* 422)

Here Pynchon alludes to the illusory quality of film where twenty-four still frames are played per second, 'fooling the eye' into seeing a continuous flow of images (*AtD* 507). Because Pökler's eye has seemingly been tricked by those above him, many critics have interpreted him sympathetically. Joseph Slade, for instance, claims that Pökler 'emerges as the most moving character' in *Gravity's Rainbow* ('Religion' 185), while Charles Clerc states that the 'entire Pökler section [*GR* 397-433] exudes a kind of sympathy for the nonpolitical [*sic*] citizen, the starry-eyed scientist, the patriotic but uninformed worker, the little man and "his poor harassed German soul"' ('Film' 129; *GR* 426). These readings are wide of the mark. For the novel makes clear that Pökler knew, 'all along, that Ilse was living in' the Dora concentration camp next door to Peenemünde but, in a move that is far from

apolitical, ‘made a choice’: despite knowing ‘the truth with his senses,’ Pökler ‘allowed all the evidence to be misfiled where it wouldn’t upset him’ (GR 421, 428).

Pökler’s ‘precision eye’ epitomises Cartesian perspectivalism’s blindness to the ‘imploring eyes of the Other’ (GR 421; Bernasconi, ‘Alterity’ 52). ([H]ow had he missed it till now? Such swimming orbits of pain’ (GR 428).) As with V. and Blicero, Pynchon also renders the problems with Pökler’s character in his eyes: ‘Something was in them, (...) something others saw and knew they could use, and found how to. Something Pökler missed’ (GR 425). Because Pökler needs ‘to be at someone’s command,’ his eyes seem to say—as the ironically titled ‘Victim in a Vacuum!’ song would have it—‘Won’t somebody take advantage of me?/ (...) Just a slave with nobody to slave for’ (GR 427, 414). Though Pökler’s failure to recognize this would accord with Molly Hite’s identification of a ‘trope of the absent insight’ in Pynchon’s work (31), Pökler, who feels his guilt ‘prick[ling] at his eyes and membranes like an allergy,’ nevertheless comes to the realisation that he has ‘refrained from the only act that could have redeemed him. He should have throttled Weissmann where he sat’ (GR 428). Insight is not so much absent here as ‘a bit late’ (GR 428). Yet sympathy for the fact that Pökler ‘may have felt that he ought to look, finally,’ still seems misplaced (GR 432). That he gives ‘a random woman’ his wedding ring—which, if ‘she lived, (...) would be good for a few meals, or a blanket, or a night indoors, or a ride home’—is small penance considering ‘he could not (...) have been ignorant’ of the horrors being perpetrated at Dora and Nordhausen (GR 433, 428). In contrast to Thomas Moore’s insipid reading of Pökler’s ‘bottomless innocence and consequent helplessness against evil’ (96), then, we should rather see Pökler as the very embodiment of what Hannah Arendt terms ‘the banality of evil,’ which actually makes Pökler just as monstrous as Blicero (Arendt). For from the very beginning he was able to ‘*see*—the starved bodies, the eyes of the foreign prisoners being marched to work at four in the morning in the freezing cold and darkness’—yet ‘helped with his own blindness’ in order to avoid the ‘inconveniences of caring’ (GR 428, original italics).

Pynchon makes it evident, however, that we should hardly see Pökler as an isolated case. Indeed, when Pökler is among the many bearing witness to the A4 test as the ‘failure rate *must* be brought down,’ the narrator states that ‘if there is a massive failure of vision this morning in the Polish meadow, (...) certainly it’s not unique to this time, this place’ (GR 426, original italics). Elsewhere in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, for example, Gwenhidwy accuses Pointsman of being unable to see ‘the blacks and Jews, in their darkness. You can’t’ (GR 172). The idea of a ‘failure of vision’ stretches across Pynchon’s oeuvre: *Bleeding Edge*, for

instance, highlights capitalism's 'blind faith that resources will never run out, profits will go on increasing forever'—a faith serviced by 'code monkeys (...) who'll just go jumpin in blind, fodder for the machine'—whilst in *V*. Sidney Stencil has thought of telling Carruthers-Pillow that the First World War must

dear lord, not [be thought of as] the Nameless Horror, the sudden prodigy sprung on a world unaware. We all saw it. (...) If it came as any surprise to the public then their own blindness is the Great Tragedy, hardly the war itself. (GR 426; BE 338, 48; *V*. 459)

Even the ending of *Against the Day*—which many critics, such as Seán Molloy, have seen to promise 'a new paradise or Shambala'—is more correctly characterised by 'negative potential,' as Rodney Taveira notes (151).<sup>1</sup> For not only are there 'slum conditions' aboard the skyship, hardly a signifier of paradise, but the notion of widespread blindness is echoed once the *Inconvenience* has 'grown as large as a small city'; indeed, it 'is so big that when people on the ground see it in the sky, they are struck with selective hysterical blindness and end up not seeing it at all' (*AtD* 1218). There is a palpable and consistent awareness across Pynchon's work of 'a seeing which is not a seeing,' of a prevalent tendency 'to see injustices happening and ignore them' (Levin, *Opening* 65; *VL* 195). Mason is, then, not the only one with the 'gift of sleeping with [his] Eyes open wide' (*MeD* 493).

v)      **'brimming slash-slash of eyes'** (*V*. 217)

To take stock of the negative picture of the eyes and vision we have drawn thus far, Pynchon's fiction sees the eye to be inextricably linked with power and aligned with an objectifying and reifying conception of thought, the destructive effects of which are reflected in the frequently lifeless and unseeing eyes of his characters. One way in which Pynchon reacts to this passivity of the eye bears resemblance to twentieth-century art movements such as Dada and Surrealism. Famously, Marcel Duchamp's readymades were a reaction against 'retinal art,' in which the artist was viewed, to use Dodson-Truck once again, as 'just a recording eye' (Humble 244; GR 216). Like Byron the Bulb in *Gravity's Rainbow*, the Surrealists, in particular, sought to 'penetrate the sleeping eye, and operate among the dreams of men' (GR 653). Pynchon acknowledges his interest in Surrealism in the introduction to *Slow Learner*, stating that 'the Surrealists (...) really caught my attention,'

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<sup>1</sup> Molloy's text is difficult to reference exactly as it has neither clear page nor paragraph numbers. The particular quotation here is in the second paragraph of the 'Transcending Politics' section of his article.



while also suggesting that Surrealism is an ‘influence’ he has ‘abuse[d]’ throughout his work (*SL* 22). The impression Surrealism has made on Pynchon can be found at an ocular level.

As Jay explains, for the Surrealists the eye was ‘less the organ of pure and noble vision, than a target of mutilation and scorn, or a vehicle of its own violence’; as such, in ‘most cases, the eyes (or often the single eye) were enucleated, blinded, mutilated, or transfigured ... into other shapes like eggs, whose liquid could be easily spilled’ (*Downcast* 260). Man Ray’s *Object to be Destroyed* (1923), for example, proves an appropriate intertext with Pynchon’s work. In this piece, the ticking arm of a metronome was adorned with a photograph of an eye, tying the enucleated eye once again to the mechanical and temporal, as we saw with Vera Meroving’s artificial ‘evil eye of time itself’ (*V.* 388). Whilst we could consider the artworks of other Surrealists, such as Salvador Dalí’s *The Eye* or René Magritte’s *The False Mirror*, I want to focus on probably the most notorious ocular exploration in twentieth-century aesthetics: Georges Bataille’s novella, *Story of the Eye*. Although Bataille was not strictly a Surrealist and even fell out with Surrealism’s founder, André Breton, there is still evidence in this work of ‘the law of the Surrealist image as formulated by Reverdy’—the idea that, as Pynchon puts it, ‘one could combine inside the same frame elements not normally found together to produce illogical and startling effects’ (Barthes, ‘Metaphor’ 124; *SL* 22). Moreover, there are echoes of Bataille’s ocular investigations in Pynchon’s fiction that are in need of critical acknowledgement.

Given both their penchants for the surreal, pornographic and transgressive, Bataille is not a name that comes up in Pynchon criticism as often as we might expect, the efforts of Mark Robberds notwithstanding. Yet even Robberds fails to address the influence of Bataille’s ocular writings. Bataille is constantly preoccupied with the eye—as his essays ‘The Eye,’ ‘The Solar Anus,’ and ‘The Pineal Eye’ attest—but it is in *Story of the Eye* where we see ‘the most ignoble eye imaginable,’ owing to the novella’s ‘very equivalence of the ocular and the genital’ (Jay, *Downcast* 221; Barthes, ‘Metaphor’ 122). By way of brief synopsis, *Story of the Eye* charts various bizarre sexual experiences involving the unnamed narrator and Simone, such as her ‘mania for breaking eggs with her behind’ (*Story* 14). The ovular becomes allied with the ocular when Simone is heard playing ‘gaily with words, speaking about *broken eggs*, and then *broken eyes*’ (*Story* 34, original italics). As Roland Barthes discerns, this sets up an eye/egg syntagmatic chain (‘Metaphor’ 124). The two most harrowing events, which firmly dethrone the eye from its hegemonic position, soon follow.

First, at a bullfight, Simone asks for a bull’s testicles—‘two peeled balls, glands the size and shapes of eggs, and of a pearly whiteness, faintly bloodshot, like the globe of an

eye' (*Story* 51)—to be presented to her, increasing the chain to eye/egg/testicle. The bullfight comes to a violent end when the eye of Granero, the torero, is enucleated by the bull's horn as Simone simultaneously bites into one of the testicles, the other being inserted into her vagina:

Two globes of equal size and consistency had suddenly been propelled in opposite directions at once. One, the white ball of the bull, had been thrust into the "pink and dark" cunt that Simone had bared in the crowd; the other, a human eye, had spurted from Granero's head with the same force as a bundle of innards from a belly. (*Story* 54)

Second, once they have escaped to Seville, Simone and the narrator, accompanied by Sir Edmund, a rich Englishman they have met, torment a priest for his perceived hypocrisy. Sir Edmund removes the priest's eye with a pair of scissors and Simone then places 'this apparently fluid object' between her thighs, up 'the crevice of her arse,' and tries, as she did earlier with eggs, to squeeze it between her buttocks, before putting it in her vagina and pissing over it (*Story* 66). We can now see why Jay calls this 'the most ignoble eye imaginable' (*Downcast* 221); it has been well and truly enucleated, and subjected to ritualised, sexual violence.

In *V.* and *Gravity's Rainbow*, in particular, there are many symbolic similarities with *Story of the Eye*. Most pertinently, when she is under the guise of the Bad Priest, V.'s eye is forcibly removed, directly recalling the action in Seville above (*V.* 343). (This scene also resonates with Bataille's essay 'The Eye,' in which he tells of 'the eye of Crampon, condemned to death and approached by the chaplain an instant before the blade's fall; he dismissed the chaplain, but enucleated himself and gave him the happy gift of his torn-out eye, *for this eye was made of glass*' (19, original italics).) Although *Gravity's Rainbow* does not, despite its many graphic sexual scenes, equate the ocular with the genital quite as explicitly as Bataille—aside, perhaps, from Major Marvy's note to himself that 'He isn't fucking her eyes, is he?'—the novel still mentions 'ladies with hard-boiled eggs for eyes,' draws attention to Marvy's 'Easter-egg eyes,' and adds further terms to the syntagmatic chain when zeroes are noted to 'coincide with eyes, nipples, and cunts' (*GR* 606, 231, 308, 583). Rhetorical moves such as this clearly depose the eye of its privileged status.

There are allusions to ocular violence in Pynchon's later work too. In *Inherent Vice*, for example, Puck Beaverton has a 'skull with the dagger in its eye socket,' and in *Against the Day* Zlatko and Vastroslov, in revenge for the fact that one of Vlado's eyes was taken from his corpse, use a 'woodworker's gouge' to remove both of Derrick Theign's eyes: 'Two eyes for an eye, (...) this is Uskok practice—for we are savages, you see, or in a

moment (...) you *don't* see' (IV 248; *AtD* 980, original italics). Links with another of the famous ocular texts of Surrealism—Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí's film, *Un Chien Andalou*, the first scene of which involves an eyeball being slit by a razor—further the impression of ocular destruction. *Un Chien Andalou* is not only echoed in *Story of the Eye* when Simone suggests that the word urinate reminds of her 'terminate, the eyes, with a razor,' but also in *Gravity's Rainbow* when Margherita Erdmann 'lean[s] over [Slothrop], brushing tears from his face with the tips of her nails. The nails are very sharp, and pause often when they approach his eyes' (Bataille, *Story* 34, original italics; GR 444). These moments indicate that the ideas of mastery tied to the eye, as discussed earlier in this chapter, ignore the fact that it is 'so easily harm'd, even at play' (*Mc&D* 648).

Another of the 'blinding obsessions' Pynchon shares with Bataille is that of unbearable light, such as the 'all but unendurable moonlight' in *Against the Day*, or the sun at Swakopmund in *V.* that 'seems to fill the entire sky (...), hurt[ing] the eyes' (Bataille, *Story* 54; *AtD* 631; *V.* 266). In spite of the many intimations of imminent ocular destruction, Pynchon does not, however, seek to terminate the eye and vision completely. As even Bataille concedes, 'the eye—as Stevenson exquisitely puts it, a *cannibal delicacy*—is, on our part, the object of such anxiety that we will never bite into it' ('The Eye' 17, original italics). Though there might be a desire to escape the oppressions of the visual realm in Pynchon's texts, they still acknowledge that we are inextricably 'caught, manipulated, captured in the field of vision' (Lacan, *Four* 92), just as Man Ray's *Object to be Destroyed* was re-titled *Indestructible Object* when it had to be reconstructed. Instead, then, of adhering to the injunction in the Gospel of St. Matthew that 'if thy right eye offend thee, pluck it out, and cast *it* from thee,' we can see the threat of ocular violence in Pynchon's fiction, as John Dugdale points out, in the light of 'Conrad's famous determination "*to make you see*"' (*The Bible: Authorized King James Version* Matthew 5:29; Dugdale 87, original italics). This idea is most clearly expressed in *Against the Day* when Tancredi approaches Scarsdale Vibe with a 'precious instrument of destruction'—'a bounded and finite volume of God's absence'—which Tancredi believes 'would change any who beheld it, even this corrupted American millionaire, blind him to the life he had been inhabiting, bring him to a different kind of seeing' (*AtD* 834).

Though Pynchon likewise attempts to bring us to 'a different kind of seeing,' this is never unambiguously positive: as Toon Staes rightly notes (546), Tancredi suffers a violent death at the hands of Vibe's stooges before he is able to say 'here is all you need to stand before and truly see' (*AtD* 834). Moreover, while Pynchon seeks to make us aware of 'all

the presences we are not supposed to be seeing (...)—that we train ourselves away from to keep from looking further,’ this comes with the suggestion that any illumination might, like Pan’s face, be ‘too beautiful to bear’; blindness could ‘be like a sudden blow’ (GR 720–21, 51). Nevertheless, if we have ‘fallen into the habit of seeing dead things better than live ones’ owing to Cartesian perspectivalism, Pynchon deems it necessary, in line with the thought of Walter Benjamin, to try ‘to penetrate all this by the dialectic of awakening’ (*AtD* 442; Buck-Morss, *Dialectics* 319). Because ‘a dissenter’s exact imagination can see more than a thousand eyes peering through the same pink spectacles,’ Pynchon’s texts propose that we ‘need practice in seeing’ (Adorno 46; *AtD* 442).

It is vital to note that although ‘[h]ow one *sees* is crucial’ in Pynchon’s fiction, as Wes Chapman observes, he ‘never allows the reader an extra-ideological perspective from which to see’ (13, original italics). That is, Pynchon recognizes ‘there is no privileged vantage point outside the hermeneutic circle of sight as perceptual experience, social practice, and discursive construct’ (Jay, *Downcast* 587). Where Yvonne Klose claims that in *The Crying of Lot 49* Oedipa is able ‘to at least temporarily step outside of the system and become what constructivists call an observer of the second order’ (93), Christy L. Burns’s argument that Pynchon’s interest lies in ‘drawing out the dialectics more than emphasizing the vantage point *outside* of history’ seems more accurate (4, original italics). As such, to follow Karen Jacobs, our attention should be on the ways “‘the eye in the text” [can] renegotiate its relation to forms of knowledge and power’ (3). For all the eyes of power, dead eyes, blind eyes, and so on, Pynchon’s texts nonetheless submit that there are ‘visual experiences that might prove useful,’ yet only if they are ‘bereft of the synoptic and totalizing objectifying virtues of vision’ (*AtD* 368; Levinas, *TI* 23). Though far from unambiguous, potential might be found in crying; visionary experience; and a widening of the visual field which simultaneously ‘reaffirms allegiance’ to the ‘limits’ of vision (*AtD* 879). These practices, I argue, can be seen as Pynchon’s attempt to cultivate a critical, ‘cognizant eye’ (*VL* 367).

vi) **‘eyes about to spill over with tears’** (GR 294)

Nearly all of Pynchon’s main characters cry at one point or another, despite, and sometimes even because of, their alleged flatness. Crying, of course, is even part of the title of Pynchon’s second novel and forms one of its first significant events. Oedipa, whose name recalls the blinded Oedipus, remembers being in front of Remedios Varo’s *Bordando*

*el Manto Terrestre*, the central painting of a triptych she saw with Pierce Inverarity in Mexico City. The painting is populated by ‘a number of frail girls with heart-shaped faces, huge eyes, spun-gold hair,’ imprisoned atop a circular tower, embroidering a tapestry which spills ‘out the slit windows and into a void, seeking hopelessly to fill the void’ (*CL49* 13). Oedipa’s reaction to the painting is strong:

Oedipa, perverse, had stood in front of the painting and cried. No one had noticed; she wore dark green bubble shades. For a moment she’d wondered if the seal around her sockets were tight enough to allow the tears simply to go on and fill up the entire lens space and never dry. She could carry the sadness of the moment with her that way forever, see the world refracted through those tears, those specific tears, as if indices as yet unfound varied in important ways from cry to cry. (*CL49* 13)

Although this is one of the earliest of Oedipa’s ‘all manner of revelations,’ we should hesitate to read it too positively, particularly as she wears ‘dark green bubble shades’ (*CL49* 12–13). Not only do these recall the sinister ‘greenish dead eye of the TV tube’ that stares at her at the beginning of the novel, but they also mean that Oedipa’s cry is private, withheld from view (*CL49* 5).

In one of the most thorough explorations of the significance of crying, Levin argues that it is ‘the rooting of vision in the ground of our needs: the need for openness; the need for contact; the need for wholeness,’ though he nevertheless acknowledges that ‘crying often expresses ... only the ego’s narcissism’ (*Opening* 184). Since crying is often little more than a narcissistic, stylized show of the ‘usual waterworks,’ its potential capacity to uncover ‘indices as yet unfound’ is heavily qualified in Pynchon’s fiction: as *Bleeding Edge*’s narrator sardonically asks, ‘What, now it’s all gonna go saline, here?’ (*AtD* 1013; *CL49* 13; *BE* 462). In *Against the Day*, for example, Deuce Kindred’s ‘display of the eyeball hydraulics’ is ‘not as becoming in a man (...) as tales of romance in the ladies’ magazines would lead you to think. Fact there were times it could be downright repellent’ (*AtD* 543). Furthermore, *Vineland* irreverently notes that ‘[f]ollowing the wisdom of the time, Zoyd’—who sees crying as ‘another form of pissing’—‘had been giving in to the impulse to cry, (...) Getting In Touch With His Feelings at top volume’ (*VL* 297, original capitalisation). Being ‘taken by the high salt wave’ evidently cannot be a wholly redemptive force in Pynchon’s writing (*VL* 297).

Indeed, crying is often intensely impotent, ‘so without comfort that eyes are drawn, seized by the tear-glands and dragged to find, to find at all cost, the path that has disappeared so suddenly’ (*GR* 656). The tragic powerlessness of crying is unmistakable in both *V.* and *Gravity’s Rainbow*. During her disassembly, ‘two tears grow and slip from the

outside corners of [V.'s] eyes'—reminiscent of Man Ray's *Tears*—yet she is unable to resist being dismantled (*V.* 343). Kurt Mondaugen, moreover, finds 'nothing remarkable about [Evan Godolphin's] eyes save tears,' and perhaps nothing speaks the desolation *V.* charts more than Godolphin's 'mutilated' and 'crying' face on the final page of the novel (*V.* 253, 492). In *Gravity's Rainbow*, where so many eyes 'have been left to weather and to tears,' Jessica Swanlake realises that 'she must not cry: that the vague eyes in the knitted window won't seek their Beast any more earnestly for her tears,' whilst Katje Borgesius 'looks up to see exactly how [Enzian's] face will be mocking her. She is stunned instead to see tears running, running over his cheeks. "*You've only been set free*" (*GR* 232, 43, 661). Crying at such moments is 'the speech of powerlessness, helplessness, ... a response to what history has made visible'—death, destruction, mutilation (Levin, *Opening* 172). It expresses complete despair, further indicated at Webb Traverse's funeral in *Against the Day* where the 'once spell-binding eyes' of his widow, Mayva, run with tears 'so alarming in their suddenness and silence—just there all on Mayva's face, as if they were symptoms of a condition no doctor'd have the heart to name' (*AtD* 243).

Though it is therefore true, as *Gravity's Rainbow* observes after Pökler cries, that 'no prison wall ever [dissolves], not from tears'—another way of saying, as Nathanael West strikingly puts it, '[o]nly those who still have hope can benefit from tears'—crying is nevertheless based on 'an integrative process of sensuous rooting, rather than ... an abstract process of cognitive synthesizing in accordance with certain rules' (*GR* 433; West 63; Levin, *Opening* 190). That is, as opposed to 'directing wide-eyed Glances upward'—yearning, like Blicero, for transcendence whatever the cost—crying is grounded firmly in the terrestrial; it 'is the rooting of vision in the world' (*Me&D* 520; Levin, *Opening* 191). Importantly, crying does not just pertain to the eyes but the whole body—like the 'great bodylong wave of sorrow beginning to approach, to grow, to shake [Takeshi] apart' in *Vineland*—making us acutely aware of our corporeality (*VL* 161). Contrary to the 'disincarnated coldness' of the eye of Cartesian perspectivalism, which seeks to 'observe without passion,' crying can be deeply affective, an 'excess of raptures,' like laughter, 'that shatters me' (Jay, *Downcast* 591; *GR* 216; Bataille, *Tears* 20). It offers potential rupture throughout *Against the Day*: when he watches Dally sleep, for instance, Merle Rideout feels 'an unmanly warmth about the eyeballs (...) surprise him,' whereas Lew Basnight's eyes gleam 'with unaccustomed emotional dew' when he thinks about 'a past obligation that would not let him go but continued to haunt, to insist' (*AtD* 80, 210).

The most noteworthy examination of the potential of crying, however, comes with Reef Traverse. Early in *Against the Day*, Stray suggests that Reef doesn't 'know what crying looks like,' which makes the novel's subsequent events all the more salient (*AtD* 409). After visiting Professeur Pivoine in Nice, Reef 'passe[s] into one of those twilit states where it seemed his brother [Kit] was there, hovering a foot or two in the air and glowing in a peculiar way,' before apologising to Kit's apparition for doing 'everything wrong' (*AtD* 955). Yet Reef's voice is soon 'paralyzed as if in a nightmare,' indicating language's own impotence in the face of despair, and he can only cry: 'It was like one of those orgasms early in life, a timeless event whose power can't be measured. He shook with it' (*AtD* 955). Admittedly, this is another private moment, like Oedipa's, which no one else sees, echoed further when the 'relief' Cyprian feels on meeting Vesna, after a torrid trip through the war-torn Balkans, is 'enough to make him start crying, too. Nobody noticed' (*AtD* 944). But we should not forget that Reef's emotional outburst comes after a scene of public crying when the café he and Flaco are in is bombed:

Leaving these so abruptly wounded bourgeoisie, crying like children, children again (...) *As they cried, they found they were able to look into one another's eyes*, as if set free from most of their needs to pretend adulthood, needs in force up until what was only a few seconds ago. (*AtD* 954, italics mine)

Similarly to the 'poor human palimpsests shivering under their government blankets' in *Gravity's Rainbow*—'drugged, drowning in tears and snot of grief so real, torn from so deep that it surprises, seems more than their own'—crying here seems to be an affective way to open vision (*GR* 50). It can turn us towards the other and enable a moment of eye-contact that, as we saw earlier, is so hard-won in Pynchon's texts. Reef, too, is surprised by his crying—'All he could have cried for, and he was crying over this'—yet it is this surfeit of affect that leads him to recognise his responsibility to Kit more than at any other time in the novel (*AtD* 955). Although this may come, like Pökler's eventual acknowledgement of the horrors of Nazi Germany, 'a bit late,' Reef's perception of his place in the world is nevertheless altered by this 'timeless event whose power can't be measured' (*GR* 428; *AtD* 955).

Nonetheless, there is no unequivocal 'cry that might abolish the night' in Pynchon's fiction (*CL49* 81). We cannot ignore, for example, the fact that Deuce Kindred continues to be 'a really dedicated badman' and eventual serial murderer in Hollywood, despite finding his eyes 'filling unexpectedly with salt water, some outrush of emotion trapped prickling just behind his nose,' on hearing of the death of Sloat Fresno (*AtD* 219, 536). The

turn towards the other is by no means guaranteed. Yet, for all the hesitations with which Pynchon's writing treats crying, it is still a potentially affective, if not always effective, way of contesting the dominance of Cartesian perspectivalism because it is rooted in this 'bare mortal World that is our home, and our Despair' (*Me&D* 345). We might see the tearful moments in Pynchon's fiction, then, as 'the crying which gives our vision its historical task': to no longer turn a passive, blind eye, but to try and see 'intensely,' even 'excessively,' 'the visible and torn remnant of a Sub-History' (Levin, *Opening* 174; Mattessich, *Lines* 123; *Me&D* 162). This practice seems to rely, too, on openness to visionary experience.

vii) **'an eye (...) subject to visions'** (*V*. 71–2)

In *The Arcades Project*, Walter Benjamin famously argues that the development of capitalism instigated 'a new dream-filled sleep' (391). Underlying capitalism's 'blatant promulgation of the endless pursuit of novelty and progress' (Shaw 112), Benjamin sees the 'reactiva[tion] of mythic forces': 'What matters here is that the face of the world, the colossal head, precisely in what is newest never itself changes—that this "newest" remains in all respects the same' (*Arcades* 391). As Max Pensky explains, 'the promise of eternal newness and unlimited progress encoded in the imperatives of technological change and the cycles of consumption now appear as their opposite, as primal history, the mythic compulsion towards endless repetition' (187). By failing to recognize this, and succumbing instead to the allure of ceaseless novelty, 'the collective consciousness sinks into ever deeper sleep' (Benjamin, *Arcades* 389). Benjamin's ideas share many affinities with Pynchon's fiction. Indeed, Doc Sportello's musings in *Inherent Vice* directly parallel *The Arcades Project*: 'More and more lately he'd been brooding about this great collective dream that everybody was being encouraged to stay tripping around in. Only now and then would you get an unplanned glimpse at the other side' (*IV* 176). The notion of a dreaming collective is a repeated refrain, tied to the notion of blindness we explored earlier: 'People in this town saw only what they'd all agreed to see, they believed what was on the tube or in the morning papers half of them read (...) and it was all their dream about being wised up, about the truth setting them free' (*IV* 315).

Pynchon returns to this idea constantly in *Bleeding Edge*, too. Gabriel Ice is said to have slipped into 'a tubelit clustergeek existence, often unsure if he was awake or dreaming,' while Chazz tells Tallis that Ice is 'rich, maybe even smart, but he's like all you people, livin in this dream, up in the clouds, floatin in the bubble, think 'at's [*sic*] real, think



again' (BE 125, 465). *Bleeding Edge* is damning in its diagnosis of a widespread 'consensual delusion' that the 'dotcom balloon would ascend forever' (BE 302, 107). 'Never was better than delusional back then,' Driscoll observes, and the question of delusion recurs throughout the text: 'delusions of grandeur'; 'towering delusions about being exempt'; 'the delusional state [America's] in'; the delusion of '[e]verybody [that] thinks they live "in the real world"'"; and so on (BE 50, 280, 424, 355, 450). In spite of the preponderance of this collective dream-state, Pynchon's 'dialectics of seeing'—which, to borrow from Susan Buck-Morss's parsing of Benjamin's thought, can be defined as 'a powerful materialist method of transforming visual perception, one that ... could compel a collective "awakening" from the soporific effects of mass culture, and inform and inspire revolutionary politics' ('Dream World' 334)—nevertheless invoke possibilities for puncturing this pervasive delusion.

Hallucinogenic drugs—such as the 'mushrooms (...) with new properties of visionary enhancement' that some 'fungologists' search for in *Against the Day*—are one potential source of awakening regularly explored in Pynchon's writing (*AtD* 128–29). In particular, it is with LSD—which, if 'good for anything, [helps] tune you to different unlisted frequencies'—where we see this possibility most extensively investigated (*IV* 61). For Doc—whose private investigation firm both takes as its logo 'a rendering of a giant bloodshot eyeball in the psychedelic favourites green and magenta,' and is aptly named 'Location, Surveillance, Detection'—acid was 'outlawed (...) as soon as they found it was a channel to somethin [*sic*] they didn't want us to see,' a statement that echoes Mucho Maas's claim in *Vineland* that 'acid gave us the X-ray vision to see through that one, so of course they had to take it away from us' (*IV* 14, 195; *VL* 314).<sup>2</sup> LSD, indeed, plays a vital role in Mickey Wolfmann's transition from 'real-estate big shot' to 'acid-head philanthropist':

I feel as if I've awakened from a dream of a crime for which I can never atone, an act I can never go back and choose not to commit. I can't believe I spent my whole life making people pay for shelter, when it ought to've been free. It's just so obvious. (*IV* 4, 252, 244)

Yet Mickey's attempts to give back all the money he has made land him in 'the deepest shit he could get in' (*IV* 150). He is seemingly abducted by the Golden Fang before being 'programmed into Ojai for a little brain work,' becoming 'a born-again family man anymore' who has reverted to his 'old greedy-ass ways' (*IV* 334, 252). As much as there is sympathy with the prospect of channelling 'mystical visions and cosmic vibrations' in

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<sup>2</sup> For an early study on colour in Pynchon's work that makes particular reference to green and magenta see Hayles and Eiser.

Pynchon's work, then, these by no means correlate with political change (Ginsberg 36). Doc's intense acid trip—courtesy of some LSD provided to him by Vehi Fairfield, who 'sure does a [*sic*] awful lot of acid' as it 'helps him see'—still leaves him caught in 'a vortex of corroded history, (...) a future that seemed dark whichever way he turned,' recalling the moment in *Against the Day* where Chick Counterfly begins to suspect that 'through some nonearthly means his optic sensorium was being locally addressed and systematically deluded, without disturbing the reign of an unresponsive darkness' (*IV* 105, 110; *AtD* 467).

The different visual frequencies offered by LSD are often all too temporary because 'you always do come back to old Realityland, don't you' (*GR* 699). Though it is hence true, as Zoyd realises in *Vineland*, that the 'acid adventures (...) came in those days and they went, some we gave away and forgot, others sad to say turned out to be fugitive or false,' a faint hope remains that 'with luck one or two would get saved to go back to at certain later moments in life' (*VL* 285). Perhaps it's worth taking another look at Doc's trip. In addition to revealing to him the endangered plight of Shasta Fay, Doc also has a vision of the mythical lost continent of Lemuria, and a 'spirit guide Kamukea' helps him to see that 'for tens of thousands of years all wars in Indochina had really been proxy wars, going back, back to the previous world, before the U.S., or French Indochina, before the Catholic Church, before the Buddha, before written history' (*IV* 105, 109). There is a sense here that Doc might be able to become—like Signor Mantissa in *V*.—one of the 'few visionaries: men above the immediacy of their time who could think historically' (*V*. 113). For in Doc's vision, as in Benjamin's thought, 'the dreamlike illusion of historical progress is shattered, and revealed as the hell of repetition' (Pensky 191). Although the attempt to revise vision in Pynchon's texts is seen to require more than the simple dropping of an acid tab, or a psilocybin feast—as Kamukea informs Doc: 'I have brought you this far, but now you must return through your own efforts' (*IV* 110)—hallucinogenic drugs may nonetheless offer, as Benjamin wrote of his experimentations with hash and opium, a 'preliminary lesson' (*One-Way* 227).

It comes as little shock that Pynchon—who is 'first and foremost,' or 'above all a historical novelist'—ties visionary thinking to the capacity to 'think historically' (S. Smith 1; Dalsgaard, Herman, and McHale 5; *V*. 113). His fiction constantly reimagines our 'acquired knowledge of the past, seeing again what we thought we knew' (Thompson 174). For example, according to Burns, Pynchon employs 'a parallax method' in *Mason & Dixon*, that is, 'a temporal form of parallax, a synchronization of the past with the present' (1). This 'parallax method' is not an understanding of the 'past cast[ing] its light on what is

present, or what is present its light on what is past,' rather, it is remarkably similar to what Benjamin terms the 'dialectical image'—'that wherein what has been comes together in a flash with the now to form a constellation' (*Arcades* 262). While this is an essential idea, I will be exploring it in more depth in my next chapter's discussion of smell because Pynchon's attempts to form an olfactory "image" are not only more striking but also largely unaccounted for in prior critical literature.

What is worth highlighting here is that, as Amy J. Elias has outlined, another crucial part of Pynchon's conception of history is that it 'is produced by event,' where event is 'not just something that happens in everyday life: it is on the order of a cataclysmic explosion, revelation or singularity that reconfigures the social, epistemological and political landscape from that time forward' (124, 128). Such events proffer the potential for what Benjamin terms 'profane illumination' (*One-Way* 227). In the words of Michael Taussig, this is 'the single most important shock, the single most effective step, in opening up "the long-sought after image sphere"' ('Physiognomic' 207). A relevant case in Pynchon's fiction, in addition to the bombing of the bourgeois café we investigated earlier, is the Tunguska event of 30<sup>th</sup> June 1908 in *Against the Day*. The largest explosion caused by a celestial object in recorded history, this 'heavenwide blast of light' is evidently an event in line with Elias's definition, particularly as *Against the Day* suggests it was 'the voice of a world announcing that it would never go back to what it had been' (*AtD* 875). That such events are able to have an impact on vision is indicated clearly by Kit Traverse: '[s]ince the visitation at the Stony Tunguska,' we are informed, Kit has 'noticed that the angle of his vision was wider and the narrow track of his life branching now and then into unsuspected side trails' (*AtD* 882). Ever since Yusef's experience in *V*.—'from the corner of his eye now: miracle'—Pynchon's writing has always drawn attention to what goes on 'at the edges of [the] optic lobes' (*V*. 67; *VL* 83). Indeed, as Katalin Orbán points out, the very attempt to stay abreast of Pynchon's complex narratives 'demand[s] the alertness of one's peripheral vision' (159). By recurrently 'introduc[ing] what was elided in the geometral relation—the depth of field'—Pynchon resists the narrow linearity of Cartesian perspectivalism and, concomitantly, widens our historical perspective beyond the 'official narrative' (Lacan, *Four* 96; *BE* 322). Corresponding to Benjamin's rummages through the 'trash of history' (*Arcades* 461), Pynchon's texts suggest that 'the places we should be looking [are] not in newspapers or television but at the margins, graffiti, uncontrolled utterances, bad dreamers who sleep in public and scream in their sleep' (*BE* 322).

Although *Bleeding Edge* states that Maxine Tarnow has ‘learned to trust’ her ‘bad dreams,’ the novel nonetheless questions the capacity for ‘profane illumination’ through its exploration of ‘The Day Everything Changed’—9/11—or, as the text typically refers to it, ‘11 September’ (BE 270, 378). (‘9/11’ occurs only once in the text, demonstrating *Bleeding Edge*’s resistance to the ‘official narrative’ (BE 325, 322).) Perhaps 11 September was not so much ‘when “everything changed,”’ however, rather, as Maxine’s ‘emotherapist’ Shawn declares, ‘[w]hen everything was revealed. No grand Zen illumination, but a rush of blackness and death. Showing us exactly what we’ve become, what we’ve been all this time’ (BE 30, 340). If 11 September was, as Shawn claims, an attack on what America ‘worships above everything else, the market, always the holy fuckin market,’ *Bleeding Edge* proposes that it was not only a ‘terrible tragedy’ but also a potential ‘reset button for the city, the real-estate business, Wall Street, a chance for it all to start over clean’ (BE 338, 387). Yet 11 September becomes symptomatic of a ‘failure to read brought on by an unreadable flash,’ a trope Stefan Mattessich has identified throughout Pynchon’s oeuvre (‘Telluric’ 2). The following day,

[e]verybody is still walking around stunned, having spent the previous day sitting or standing in front of television screens, at home, in bars, at work, staring like zombies, unable in any case to process what they were seeing. A viewing population brought back to its default state, dumbstruck, undefended, scared shitless. (BE 321)

Instead of a moment of awakening, we are returned to the question of staring explored earlier in this chapter; 11 September provided America with the ‘chance to grow up,’ Heidi asserts, ‘instead it chose to default back to childhood’ (BE 336).

Pynchon plainly feels that our present media-saturated environment lessens the chance for profane illumination: ‘Give us too much to process, fill up every minute, keep us distracted,’ Mucho Maas opines in *Vineland*, which resonates with Reg Despard’s prophetic proclamation in *Bleeding Edge* that ‘someday, more bandwidth, more video files up on the Internet, everybody’ll be shootin everything, way too much to look at, nothin [*sic*] will mean shit’ (VL 314; BE 143). Additionally, as the media in *Bleeding Edge* serve those ‘forces in whose interests it compellingly lies to seize control of the narrative as quickly as possible,’ a new way of looking at things, of “‘awakening” from the soporific effects of mass culture,’ seems a remote promise in Pynchon’s fiction (BE 327; Buck-Morss, ‘Dream World’ 334). After all, towards the end of *V.*, Benny Profane says that he hasn’t ‘learned a goddam thing’ (V. 454)

Visionary eyes and experiences are thus ‘highly ambiguous’ in Pynchon’s texts (Chapman 14). Though they might, in the case of Miles Blundell, ‘abruptly’ heal ‘some blindness (...), allowing him at last to see the horror transpiring on the ground,’ there are still figures like Minoru—‘an idiot savant with X-ray vision’—or Slab ‘the painter, whose eyes are open, has technical skill and if you will “soul.” But is committed to cheese Danishes’ (*AtD* 1150; *VL* 144; *V*. 360). Part of the problem with Benjamin’s visionary thinking for Theodor Adorno, as Karen Jacobs neatly summarises, is that ‘the apprehension of dialectical images is inseparable from (a disavowed) intervention and expertise’ (216). The shock of the profane illumination, likewise, does not seem enough unless one is already predisposed, or ordained with the capacity, to recognize the ‘unplanned glimpse at the other side’ (*IV* 176); that is, as Slavoj Žižek writes with regard to the thought of Alain Badiou, ‘the Event itself is visible as such only to an already engaged subject’ (*Ticklish* 145).

Miles makes this evident in *Against the Day*. He ‘alone among the crew possesse[s] the clairvoyance the situation require[s]’ because the ‘allegiances’ of the other Chums of Chance are ‘to be found in a world more tangible’ (*AtD* 469, 283). Although Miles displays an openness to the affective potentials of crying discussed earlier in this chapter, ‘tears among’ the rest of the Chums are ‘virtually unknown,’ further indicating Miles’s privileged status (*AtD* 469). The problem is that while Miles may be influenced by the ‘*visual conduits* that more and more seem to find [him] in the course of [his] day,’ his intense visionary experiences—such as ‘the prophetic vision of St. Mark, *but in reverse*’—have little to no effect on the flow of events (*AtD* 470, 282, original italics). Despite Miles’s realisation during one of these visionary episodes that the Chums’s duty ‘is not to penetrate into Asia in hopes of profit (...) not to rise in the hierarchies of power,’ the inability of the rest of the crew to share Miles’s experiences ultimately means that ‘the boys (...) grasp unreflectively at a chance to transcend “the secular,” even at the cost of betraying their organization, their country, even humankind itself’ (*AtD* 283, 126).

The limitations of Miles’s ability to occasionally ‘see everything just as clear as day, how . . . how everything fits together, connects,’ are further highlighted by the fact that it ‘doesn’t last long, though. Pretty soon I’m back to tripping over my feet again’ (*AtD* 26). Different ways of seeing things can be ‘momentarily visible’ at best (*Me&D* 389). But what Pynchon is attempting to do, like Benjamin, is ‘to cultivate a particular capacity for *recognizing* such moments’; he searches, that is, for ‘the ways in which a certain kind of *active* observer may discern, amidst ruins, keener visions’ (Pensky 181; Jacobs 209, both original

italics). Pynchon does not, then, cast a wholly ‘unforgiving eye’ over visual possibilities: ‘they woke, the Thanatoids woke’ (*IV* 129; *VL* 325). Furthermore, if the goal is to attain ‘a visionary thinking which is at work in our *experiences* with vision: diagnostic, critical, attentive to closures and even the smallest opportunities for some opening,’ Pynchon does not disavow the labour required: ‘You need practice in seeing’ (Levin, *Opening* 9, original italics; *AtD* 442). We can now approach the final eye to be discussed in this chapter, the critical, or in *Vineland*’s terms, ‘cognizant eye’ (*VL* 367).

viii) **‘the cognizant eye’** (*VL* 367)

Writing on *Against the Day*, Heinz Ickstadt perceives ‘a movement away from all substitutes of the Transcendent ... toward those luminous glimpses of, and “chance encounters” with, the “unseen world” that is revealed in and through the body and its senses’ (42; *AtD* 954). While the Chums of Chance’s attempted transcendence at the novel’s conclusion problematizes this reading, the idea that ‘[s]ometimes the Invisible will all at once appear’ certainly recurs throughout Pynchon’s writing (*MeD* 486). Though these moments are based on ‘chance,’ rather than directly willed, to recognise them nevertheless involves an essential cognizance. As Louis Althusser proposes in *Reading Capital*:

To see this invisible ... requires something quite different from a sharp or attentive eye: it takes an *educated eye*, a revised, renewed way of looking, itself produced by the effect of a “change of terrain” reflected back upon the act of seeing. (Althusser 26–28, original italics, qtd. in Levin, *Opening* 73)

This bears resemblance to Martin Jay’s claim that vision is a ‘contested terrain, rather than a harmoniously integrated complex of visual theories and practices’ (‘Scopic’ 4). It is vital to note that the ‘educated’ or ‘cognizant’ eye Pynchon’s fiction seeks to develop in response to Cartesian perspectivalism is not a substitute mastery; he recognizes that ‘[n]o seeing sees everything, and no skill or practice can alter that’ (Elkins 95). Indeed, the limitations of the eyes and vision are constantly highlighted, as the private eyes of his fiction would only be too quick to attest. Some critics have even suggested that ‘Pynchon’s greatest achievement ... is his superb evocation of the encyclop[a]edic vision, which he consistently undermines to expose our insistent but futile desire to understand the world’ (Dalsgaard, Herman, and McHale 5). It is not so much that Pynchon is trying to get us to a point where we can say ‘I can see *real good*,’ then (*IV* 178, original italics); rather, as Josh S. Cohen has argued with regard to many of Pynchon’s contemporaries, his insistence ‘on the historicity of the seeing

subject ... enables the forging of a critical visual agency, resistant yet aware of its limitations, and active while refusing the privileged perspective of the master-subject' (12).

For example, in contrast to the monocular aspirations of Cartesian perspectivalism, Pynchon, as Justin St. Clair argues, draws our attention to 'binocular disparity'—the fact that each eye perceives the world slightly differently because of their different locations in space—and his texts might thus be characterised by an 'insistence upon double vision' (69). St. Clair highlights the pertinent example of Charles "Blinky" Morgan in *Against the Day*: 'Each of Blinky's eyes (...) saw the world differently, the left one having undergone an obscure trauma, either from a premature detonation during a box job or from a naval howitzer while fighting in the Rebellion' (*AtD* 68).<sup>3</sup> What St. Clair neglects to mention, however, is that there are important precursors in Pynchon's oeuvre. In *Vineland*, for example, 'the newborn Prairie' has 'one of her eyes plastered shut and the other rolling around wild, which [Zoyd takes] to be a deliberate wink' (*VL* 285). More significant, though, is Charles Mason, who at one point 'gestur[es] vigorously with his Thumb, at the Eye, much wider than his partner, that he uses for Observation' (*Me&D* 556). This larger eye is the product of his scientific endeavours—it is the dominant eye of Cartesian perspectivalism. Mason's eyes are, of course, inextricable from the notion of 'Lines of Sight, Flows of Power,' because of the central role his telescopic observations play in the construction of the Mason-Dixon Line (*Me&D* 522). But there is even resistance at the level of Mason's eyes, particularly when he 'steps back, gazing upward, comparing the Creation as seen by the Naked Eye, with its Telescopick Counter-part,' exclaiming: 'I am unsteady with this' (*Me&D* 333). Mason, in line with Althusser's claims, is forced to reflect upon the act of seeing here. His consequent uneasiness also puts a different spin on what seem like just throwaway comedy moments, such as when he 'fall[s] into an Alternating squint, with one left-right-left Cycle taking about a Second,' or his '*Reverse-Squint*' in response to Dixon's teasing, 'each Eye, that is, doing the opposite of what it usually does when he peers thro' a Telescope' (*Me&D* 657, 73 original italics). By highlighting Mason's binocular disparity, Pynchon intimates how even this astronomer's eyes refuse to accord with the 'strictly monocular rationality' of Cartesian perspectivalism (Levin, *Opening* 106).

At such junctures—complemented by the narrator's note in *Against the Day* that whenever Kit's friend Umeki's eyes 'came away from the [telescope], they were unfocused,

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<sup>3</sup> As the Pynchon wiki points out, Pynchon mentions the left eye 'quite a bit' ('Pages 17-19 | *Gravity's Rainbow*'). In addition to Blinky, other notable examples include V., the Weimaraner in *Gravity's Rainbow*, and the 'tattered tommy' with 'his own left eye shot away' that Brigadier Pudding sees on his way to visit Domina Nocturna in the same novel (*V.* 237; *GR* 18, 232).

inflamed, as if subject to two sets of laws' (*AtD* 633)—we can see that Pynchon is putting the dominant conception of the eyes and seeing under erasure. This can be via various perspectives that do not abide by the linear laws of 'geometral optics'—Iceland Spar and the panoramas, anamorphoscopes, paramorphoscopes, and so on, in *Against the Day*—or even at a linguistic level (Lacan, *Four* 88). As well as the moment in *Inherent Vice* when Sloane Wolfmann is said to be 'going along with the whole bought-and-sold routine, not even eye contact with other men, especially not ones she's been, what's the word, seeing,' this latter point is perhaps most conspicuous in the vaguely utopic ending of *Against the Day*, where it is suggested that from 'this precise point along the shoreline it was possible to "see" on the far shore a city, crystalline, redemptive' (*IV* 252; *AtD* 1214). To be sure, this may now be 'some distant, no longer accessible shore' (*Me&D* 434). Yet Pynchon's placement of seeing within inverted commas corresponds to Taussig's conception of Benjamin's thought:

what is troublesome and exciting is that not only are we stimulated into rethinking what "vision" means as this very term decomposes before our eyes, but we are also forced to ask ourselves why vision is so privileged, ideologically, and other sensory modalities are, in Euro-American cultures at least, so linguistically impoverished yet actually so crucial to human being and social life. ('Physiognomic' 209)

Pynchon dethrones vision from its position of mastery through his dialectics of seeing. This is never wholly redemptive: 'for every beacon, an episode of intentional blindness' (*AtD* 279). But if 'Some need a perfect deep Blank, and cannot scry in Ghost-Quartz,' whereas 'Others, before too much Clarity, become blind to the other World,' then Pynchon attempts to negotiate this dialectic to find 'the variable point of visual acuity that can never be fixed' (*Me&D* 442; Mattessich, 'Telluric' 8). Learning to reconceive the eye, Pynchon intimates, far from resoundingly hopefully, that 'under different circumstances, of which as usual there are not enough,' we might learn to see again (*BE* 379).

To conclude, it is indisputable that the 'optic sensorium' is viewed with a large degree of suspicion in Pynchon's works (*AtD* 467). It has been integral in the development of all those master narratives his fiction 'relentlessly questions and undermines': capitalism, colonialism, the Enlightenment, and so forth (McHale, 'Pynchon's Postmodernism' 98). We traced this negative picture of the eyes via their association with power, passivity, lifelessness, and selective blindness. Yet it is also true that Pynchon does not entirely disavow the potential for 'visual mercy,' instead 'push[ing] us to open ourselves to visionary levels' (*GR* 489; Hume, 'Mason' 68). These might be uncovered by crying, hallucinogenic



drugs, or by attempting to see ‘dimensionally, stereoscopically, into the depths of the historical shade’ (Buck-Morss, *Dialectics* 292). Vision is clearly a practice in Pynchon’s work; he ‘reaffirm[s] allegiance to its limits’ as there is still so much ‘we have not learned to see’ (*AtD* 879; *GR* 760). But as faces ‘invite [a] special kind of seeing,’ this practice is one we will attempt to foster over the course of thesis (Elkins 181). Plain here, as the nose begins to rear its head, is that Pynchon’s dialectics of seeing wholeheartedly resist the notion of visual fixity: ‘Nothin stays the same. Somethin [*sic*] has happened to my eyes. . . .’ (*AtD* 242).

## Pynchon's Noses

- [A]lmost everything depends on a beautiful nose ... A slight upward or downward turn of the nose has often determined the life's happiness of a great many maidens. (Schopenhauer 77)
- 'Look at it, the nose,' he said. 'Why does she want to get that changed. With the nose she is a human being.' (*V.* 50)
- 'Who is this person without rank, who goes in and out through the portals of the face?' is how he put it (...) "'Portals"' is supposed to mean eyes, but right away I figured nostrils.' (*BE* 202)

Having opened up questions of vision in my previous chapter, we continue our process of facial dismantling by moving on to the most strikingly visible part of the human face: the nose. Pynchon's fiction is replete with significant noses. *V.*, for instance, introduces us to the 'remarkably acute nose' of Pig Bodine, a recurrent character in Pynchon's texts, as well as relating the harrowing details of Esther Harvitz's rhinoplasty at the hands of the plastic surgeon, Shale Schoenmaker (*V.* 129). *Gravity's Rainbow* puts the nose through monstrous distortions: the 'giant Adenoid' rampaging around Mayfair at the novel's outset; Tyrone Slothrop's 'nasal hardon'; the 'Götterdämmerung of the mucous membranes' caused by Duane Marvy's 'Atomic Chili'; and so on (*GR* 14, 439, 559). ('I am the Berlin Snoot supreme, Oberhauptberlinerschnauze Enzian' (*GR* 660).) The nose is completely disfigured in *Vineland* as Mucho Maas suffers a 'nasal-breakdown' owing to his heavy consumption of cocaine, leaving him at the whim of another sinister medical figure, the 'dedicated and moralistic rhinologist' Dr. Hugo Splanchnick (*VL* 309–10). Yet Mucho is certainly not the only character to ingest drugs nasally: but three of countless further examples include Emil "Säure" Bummer in *Gravity's Rainbow*, Ernie Triggerman in *Vineland*, and Avram "Avi" Deschler in *Bleeding Edge*. In *Mason & Dixon*, Mason 'feels a cold Nose at his ear' while 'dreaming of America, whose Name is something else, and Maps of which do not exist,' with Dixon reporting 'the same Nose, the same Message' (*M&D* 757). Mason and Dixon are also only two of many Pynchon characters who have significant olfactory experiences, as we shall see over the course of this chapter. Noses remain noteworthy in Pynchon's most recent novels: in *Inherent Vice*, the running of Doc Sportello's nose is 'a sure sign he [is] onto something,' whilst in *Bleeding Edge*, Maxine Tarnow encounters the 'überschnozz' of Conkling Speedwell—a 'freelance professional Nose,' or 'private Nose'—who was 'born

with a sense of smell far more calibrated than the rest of us normals [*sic*] enjoy' (IV 56; *BE* 235, 201–02). Even this limited set of examples makes it evident that there is a nasal microtext in Pynchon's work, one which is yet to receive appropriate critical treatment, notwithstanding the numerous commentaries on Esther's nose job. Indeed, although it is some twenty-five years since one critic noted a 'thread of cross-references' and expressed his 'hope' to 'at some point ... write about the noses in *Gravity's Rainbow*,' it is telling that this unrealised desire is articulated within the space of an endnote (Duyfhuizen, note 10). The significance of the nose in Pynchon's fiction has, thus far, predominantly been relegated to fleeting asides; there has been no attempt, we might say, to 'get it right on the nose' (*AtD* 1180). This chapter thus proposes that it is time to heed Frenesi Gates's suggestion in *Vineland*: 'Hey, and let's not forget nostrils, huh?' (*VL* 215).

The nose is, quite literally, 'central to the face' (Gilman, *Making* xx). In *The Face*, however, Daniel McNeill claims that 'aside from its blatant existence, few things are plain about the nose. It is ... symbolically bipolar, physically protean, and even semi-secessionist' (30). (We need only think here of Nikolai Gogol's short story 'The Nose,' in which a Russian official's nose leaves his face to take on a life of its own (113–140).) The nose's symbolic bipolarity can be appreciated by stating something obvious: it is both a protrusion from the face and a material site into which the world intrudes. As 'that part of man [*sic*] which stands prominent in his face,' the nose can be a substitute-phallus, as Tristram Shandy knows all too well (Sterne 172). At the same time, however, the nose is a cavity, an orifice, breathing, smelling, and opening the body out to infection, which is why the nose is 'the front door' when the face is figured as a house in *Gravity's Rainbow* (*GR* 646). Of course, some entrances are voluntary, as the various nasal drug habits in Pynchon's writing attest. Nevertheless, the nose is more frequently intruded upon. This can occur in many forms: for instance, when Roger Mexico suggests in *Gravity's Rainbow* that Jessica Swanlake is not just catching a cold, 'You're catching the War. It's infecting you and I don't know how to keep it away,' he not only raises the question of infection but intimates how, in contrast to the turning of a blind eye we explored in my previous chapter, it is not possible to turn a blind nose (*GR* 177). The nose is also invaded by numerous random objects in Pynchon's novels: a 'fuzzy thick dingleberry,' 'a bug,' even 'thick, cold, day-before-yesterday's Spotted Dick,' and so on (*GR* 67; *AtD* 1107; *Mc&D* 57). Most notable, though, are the frequent incursions of overwhelming smells, such as the 'stink of shit [that] floods [Brigadier Pudding's] nose' in *Gravity's Rainbow* (*GR* 235). It is this oscillation between nasal potency and vulnerability that underpins the enquiry driving this chapter: are there

particular ethical and political questions opened up by the nasal microtext in Pynchon's work?

In order to address this question, this chapter will proceed with a tripartite structure, beginning with the visible outside before making its way inside, through the front door. In the first part, we shall turn to *V.* and the disturbing case of Esther's nose job. Not only is this one of the most significant nasal events in Pynchon's fiction, but it is also, Katrin Amian argues, 'one of the most brutal, vulgar, yet clinically precise narrative performances in American fiction' (100). Many critics, such as Amian and George Levine, have quite rightly focussed on how 'the reader becomes drawn into the act of bodily disfigurement' by way of Pynchon's narrative techniques, with *V.*'s 'non-judgemental protean narrator' evidently 'participat[ing] in the technical joys and power lust' the scene recounts (Amian 100; Orbán 150; Levine 121). Yet since David Witzling is correct to maintain that 'there is a sociohistorical correlative to virtually every one of Pynchon's rhetorical moves' (24), I will attempt to locate Esther's nose job more firmly within a wider context in which other writers, such as Philip Roth and Betty Friedan, were also responding to 'the distinct culture of the turn of the 1960s [that] made ... analogies between Nazi and American life seem particularly natural and appropriate' (Fermaglich 3). Whilst Michael Kowaleski may be right to state that '[t]he narrative eye in this scene is not entirely focused upon Esther's nose' (242), by introducing insights from recent cultural histories of cosmetic or 'aesthetic' surgery I argue that various sociohistorical discourses relating to race, gender, sexuality, and so on, nevertheless coalesce on her 'Jew nose' (Gilman, *Making*; *V.* 103). Esther's nose ultimately undergoes operative 'correction' in order to make it 'identical' to an 'ideal of nasal beauty' established by 'movies, advertisements, magazine illustrations,' and so forth (*V.* 103). Consequently, Esther's rhinoplasty exposes Pynchon's understanding of the dehumanizing and homogenising function of the faciality machine, especially as Slab maintains that Esther's pre-operative nose makes her 'a human being' (*V.* 50).

Although the 'routine' violence to which Esther's nose is subjected is undoubtedly disconcerting, a sense of uneasiness is only increased by the fact that Esther is 'sexually turned on' both before and after the operation, 'as if Schoenmaker had located and flipped a secret switch or clitoris somewhere inside her nasal cavity' (*V.* 97, 109). This last point will feed us into the second part of this chapter, which will consider 'the unsettling presence of nasal desire' across Pynchon's oeuvre (*AtD* 91). After examining, among other examples, the 'notorious Leningrad nose-fetishist Shatsk,' Slothrop's aforementioned 'nasal

hardon,’ and the plethora of ‘cocaine habitués’ in Pynchon’s writing, our attention will come to rest on the ‘nasal breakdown’ of Mucho Maas—alias ‘Count Drugula, or Mucho the Munificent’—in *Vineland* (GR 352, 439, 481; *VL* 309). The ‘sudden ecstatic peaks’ of Mucho’s cocaine abuse crystallise the disquieting quality of desire territorialised on and into the nose, indicating that such ‘stuffiness-by-induction in the nasal cavities,’ to draw on the experience of Fat Clyde and Johnny Cantango in *V.*, becomes symptomatic of a refusal to ‘ask anything’ (*VL* 310; *V.* 438); of, in Deleuzo-Guattarian terms, a desire that comes to desire its own repression. Therefore, in contrast to David Cowart’s argument that drugs ‘are to *Vineland* what the Tristero is to *Lot 49*—a metaphor serving the vision of a different social reality,’ cocaine in fact becomes redolent of consumer complicity (*Dark Passages* 98).

We will attempt to unclog this nasal blockage via an exploration of smell in Pynchon’s fiction. As opposed to the ‘hegemony of vision’ explored in my previous chapter, Pynchon’s texts reveal that modernity has ‘waged a total war against smells’; Mucho’s is not the only nose that has been ‘ice[d] out’ (Levin, *Modernity*; Bauman 25; *VL* 311). Although the prevailing olfactory impression of Pynchon’s novels is perhaps ‘an odor of death inescapable,’ smell nevertheless resists, in both a spatial and temporal sense, the linearity of the ‘capitalist/Christer gridwork’ (GR 372; *AtD* 1208). By drawing on Walter Benjamin, Theodor Adorno and Max Horkheimer, among others, I suggest that critics have failed to properly notice the significance of smell to both Pynchon’s affective exploration of history and his consideration of a visionary thinking—an America ‘whose Name is something else, and Maps of which do not exist’—not based upon visual experience alone (*Me&D* 757). Corresponding to my arguments regarding Pynchon’s attempts to cultivate a ‘cognizant eye’ in my previous chapter, I argue that Pynchon’s olfactory poetics, to slightly alter Hanjo Berressem’s terms, endeavour to reevaluate the preterite status of smell because to ‘the cognizant nose in particular, the olfactory sector—or smell, as it is known, can be a medium for the most exquisite poetry’ (*VL* 369; Berressem, *Poetics*; *AtD* 689). We must turn first, though, to those noses which are mutilated, destroyed, and broken down in Pynchon’s fiction, the ‘main one now being Esther’s nose’ (*V.* 51).

i) **‘So now, 800 for a nose job’** (*V.* 50)

Esther’s nose job in *V.* is undoubtedly one of the most viscerally affective passages in Pynchon’s writing. We are taken step by stomach-churning step through the injections,

bone-sawing, fracturing, and so on, that lead to Esther's nose being 'all wobbly now' (*V.* 108). Before the operation begins, the plastic surgeon, Shale Schoenmaker, sadistically asks: 'You want to look, Esther? See what we're going to do to you?' (*V.* 105). Not only does this mean that Esther watches the procedure, but it allows for the 'subtle shifts in focalization' throughout the operation, 'forcing the reader into the roles of both victim and perpetrator while carefully blurring the boundaries between the two' (Amian 101). We are, like Esther, 'half victim, half in control,' because 'Pynchon never allows the reader an extra-ideological perspective from which to *see*,' to recall my previous chapter concerns (*V.* 50; Chapman 13, original italics). Afforded no distance from the operative violence, the prose 'implicates us' (Levine 121); we become voyeurs of violation. For Levine, moreover, the 'most disorienting and testing quality' of Pynchon's writing, particularly during Esther's nose job, is 'its almost sullen resistance to judge the various horrors it coldly narrates' (121), an opinion echoed in Katalin Orbán's claim that Pynchon's 'narrative voice rarely judges any of the horrors it recounts' (151). Indeed, as Levine rightly notes, the 'prose participates in the brutal virtuosity it describes' (121). Like Schoenmaker, it does not 'wast[e] any motion,' and technical terms such as 'glabella' and 'chrondectomy' give 'a look of educated class' that correlates to Schoenmaker's 'love with [his] own skill in plastic surgery' (*V.* 105, 108, 110; *SL* 14; *V.* 297). While the writing thus perpetuates, as it simultaneously uncovers, the violence of a rhinoplasty, there are nevertheless various ways in which it enables us, like Esther, to '[g]et an education' (*V.* 105).

One of the most noticeable aspects of the surgical procedure is the assortment of instruments, some twenty in total, which Schoenmaker uses: 'a two-inch needle,' 'an angle-bladed pull-knife,' 'Allis clamps,' and so forth (*V.* 104–08). Though these are all part of surgery's 'armamentarium'—'the equipment of medicines, instruments, and appliances used by a doctor'—we cannot fail to hear armament here either: these tools are weapons (*V.* 104; 'armamentarium, n.'). As Samuel Thomas has observed, plastic surgery's links to warfare are frequently highlighted in *V.* because there is 'a line here that runs all the way from the battlefield to air-conditioned clinics in the Hollywood hills' (76). Since soldiers in the First World War had to peep over trenches Kilroy-style, the 'foolish nose hanging over the wall was vulnerable to all manner of indignities: fist, shrapnel, machete' (*V.* 436). It was even 'flirting with castration,' just one of many moments in Pynchon's work where, as we shall see in the second part of this chapter, the nose is associated with the phallus (*V.* 436). This exposure meant that the face was frequently horrendously damaged—as the images in Ernst Friedrich's *War Against War!* dramatically demonstrate—but 'luckily for some,' *V.*

wryly notes, ‘a law of supply and demand’ was created in the field of plastic surgery and ‘new techniques’ were ‘developed by necessity’ (V. 99). Warfare’s defacing effects are felt most intensely by Evan Godolphin, who is left with the ‘worst possible travesty of a human face lolling atop an animate corpse’ (V. 98–99). Although Godolphin’s facial disfigurement is due to a plane crash, rather than trench combat, we are nonetheless ‘made to understand,’ Thomas persuasively argues, ‘that the damage done to Godolphin’s face ... is a result of military-industrial systems vying for control’ (75). This damage is made all the more dramatic by the fact that Godolphin previously ‘carried the natural foppishness of the early aviators to extremes’: the most well-maintained appearance has been shattered (V. 98).

It is Godolphin’s ‘mutilated face’ that initially inspires Schoenmaker to become a plastic surgeon (V. 492). In this sense, Thomas is correct when he states that Godolphin’s surgery ‘prefigures’ Esther’s nose job (76). The common word in both their experiences is ‘mutilated,’ and it is no coincidence that Schoenmaker’s assistant is a ‘juvenile delinquent’ named Trench (V. 360, 45). As Esther’s rhinoplasty is only a ‘routine operation,’ with the whole procedure taking ‘less than an hour,’ Pynchon suggests that the instrumental brutality and violence of warfare have become normalised (V. 105, 108). However, though Thomas’s focus on the interlinked histories of surgery and warfare uncovers the history underlying the efficiency of Schoenmaker’s supply, it cannot account for Esther’s demand. As Sander Gilman maintains, cosmetic or ‘aesthetic’ surgery actually developed in a way ‘parallel to [yet] different from reconstructive surgery’ (*Making* 16). As well as alluding to another determining factor in the development of plastic surgery by noting the presence in Schoenmaker’s office of ‘a sexless being with hereditary syphilis’—whose nose ‘hang[s] down like a loose flap of skin, covering the mouth’—Pynchon acknowledges that ‘[m]ethods had been in existence since the fifth century B.C. for rebuilding noses, [and] Thiersch grafts had been around for forty or so years’ before the First World War (V. 102, 99). Jacques Joseph, or ‘Nosef’ as he became known, carried out ‘the first, modern rhinoplasty’—one which left ‘no visible scar’—in 1898, while John Orlando Roe had carried out similar procedures in the 1880s in Rochester, New York (Gilman, *Jew’s* 184–85). Evidently, then, while warfare may have honed surgical techniques, demand for cosmetic alteration preceded the First World War and has only increased since. There are certainly other contributory factors we need to take into consideration. Indeed, though Godolphin’s war-shattered face may have prompted Schoenmaker into his ‘sympathetic beginning’—a dedication ‘toward repairing the havoc wrought by agencies outside his own sphere of

responsibility (...) [and] other instruments of civilian disfigurement’—*V.* proposes that by the time he operates on Esther his ‘sense of mission’ has suffered ‘a deterioration of purpose; a decay’ (*V.* 99, 101). He has become affected by a ‘conservative laziness,’ reflected in his cultivation of ‘the Tagliacozzi look,’ and now perpetuates his own form of violence: ‘Trafficking in human vanity, (...) propagating the fallacy that beauty is not in the soul, that it can be bought. Yes (...) it can be bought, Miss Owlglass, I am selling it. I don’t even look on myself as a necessary evil’ (*V.* 101, 97, 47).

As Virginia Blum remarks, cosmetic surgery ‘happens in a culture where we are impaled on the effects of first impressions’ (126). Unlike the rest of the ‘medical freemasonry,’ cosmetic surgeons rely upon consumer demand, rather than what might loosely be termed medical necessity (*V.* 101). With an increasingly urbanised and consumerist environment exerting pressure on self-presentation, Esther’s desire for a nose job reveals a ‘conviction’ that is ‘central to the practice of plastic surgery’: ‘internal feelings and even character can be transformed by interventions on the surface’ (Blum 32). She sees the rhinoplasty as an opportunity to undo ‘[t]wenty-two years of social unhappiness’—the particular causes of which we shall turn to shortly—and her nose job thus marks ‘the passage from psychoanalysis into body engineering’ (*V.* 107; Berressem, *Poetics* 74). As well as being referred to as a surgeon, Schoenmaker is also noted to be a ‘craftsman,’ ‘magician,’ ‘mechanic,’ and so forth (*V.* 45, 103). This is indicative of the idea of the surgeon as a creator, ‘a magical word that can be used,’ Pierre Bourdieu argues, ‘once one has defined the artistic operation as a magical, that is, typically social operation’ (qtd. in Gilman, *Making* 149). Schoenmaker even comes to be seen as a deity: ‘It was like talking over with God, calm and businesslike, exactly how you wanted to enter the world’ (*V.* 103).

Seeking an idealised form devoid of ‘certain imperfections,’ Esther’s desire for a rhinoplasty shows how ‘the surgical solution has allowed us to hold onto an idealized self-image’ (*V.* 297; Haiken 45). The promise Schoenmaker sells is that he ‘could bring out the true, perfect Esther which dwelled inside the perfect one. Her soul would be there on the outside, radiant, unutterably beautiful’ (*V.* 297). At work here, as *V.*’s narrator notes, is a ‘kind of Platonism,’ revealing ‘a culture that simultaneously dichotomizes and conflates mind and body’ (*V.* 297; Blum 131). Schoenmaker sees Esther’s ‘soul’ as distinct from her ‘body’—‘the abstraction behind the reality’—yet reflected physically, too (*V.* 297). As schön is German for both beauty and good, the reductive message projected by Schoenmaker is therefore: being good is looking good is feeling good; one’s identity is directly mirrored on the facial surface.



The still pervasive influence of physiognomy that I claimed Pynchon diagnoses in my introduction is certainly evident here, as is Schoenmaker's status as a cog in the faciality machine. What becomes apparent in *V.* is that Schoenmaker's message is in itself a violent one, with connotations that are particularly gendered and racial. To take gender first, Schoenmaker's schön-making plainly becomes a chapter in the 'story of how the female body came to be produced' (Gerhard 10). This is something that Thomas's focus on warfare cannot account for: although Schoenmaker originally wants 'to do something *for men* like Godolphin,' until 1970 over 90% of cosmetic surgery operations were carried out on women, while a similar percentage of the surgeons who performed these operations were men (*V.* 100–101, italics mine; Haiken 11–12). For Virginia Blum, this statistic would clearly highlight the 'preassigned roles of those who get to look, operate, impress upon and make versus those who are looked at, assessed, receptive, and changed' (12). Pynchon highlights masculine coding throughout *V.*: as well as the plethora of notably phallic instruments used during Esther's operation, Rachel Owlglass hears 'the thud of Trench's knife practice,' whilst Trench later greets Esther's 'series of internal injections' with the chant, 'Stick it in . . . pull it out . . . stick it in . . . ooh that was good . . . pull it out . . .' (*V.* 48, 105). Aesthetic surgery thus had—indeed, continues to have—a distinctive impact on women and, as we shall see shortly, Jewish women in particular.

It is worth noting here that *V.* was published in the same year as one of the seminal works of feminism, Betty Friedan's *The Feminine Mystique*, a text which helps to contextualize one side of Esther's 'social unhappiness' prior to her operation (*V.* 107). Esther is what Friedan would call a 'sex-seeker' (212). Friedan argued that in a society dominated by the feminine mystique—which said that the 'highest value and the only commitment for women is the fulfilment of their own femininity'—there was 'no road to achievement, or status, or identity, except the sexual one: the achievement of sexual conquest, status as desirable sex object, identity as a sexually successful wife and mother' (28, 216). (The best-selling *Sex and the Single Girl*, by the future *Cosmopolitan* editor Helen Gurley Brown, unquestionably promoted the ideas of sexual conquest and desirability Friedan identified.) Yet Friedan suggested sex was 'strangely joyless' in this context and 'fail[ed] to lead to self-esteem' (212, 226), which is certainly true in the case of Esther, who has been 'to bed with so many of the Whole Sick Crew' (*V.* 103). Furthermore, Friedan claimed that this 'sexual sell' left women 'drained . . . into the buying of things' (185). As Slab observes, Esther only 'takes home 50 a week, 25 comes out for analysis, 12 for rent, leaving 13. What for, for high heels she breaks on subway gratings, for lipstick, earrings,

clothes. Food, occasionally' (V. 50). With half of Esther's pay-check going on analysis, there is an indication here that, as Friedan puts it, 'Freudian and pseudo-Freudian theories settled everywhere, like fine volcanic ash,' in the 1940s and 1950s, becoming what she saw as 'the ideological bulwark of the sexual counter-revolution in America' (98, 80). Esther is evidently struggling, then, with 'the pervasive and contradictory messages about sexuality and identity in the 1950s,' which have left her feeling, like many women of the time, a 'sense of paralysis' (Gerhard 4; Coontz 57).

One of Friedan's central arguments was that the feminine mystique idealised marriage and cultivated woman as 'Occupation: housewife' (47). As Stephanie Coontz points out, a report of the President's Commission published in the same year as *The Feminine Mystique* 'affirmed the centrality of women's identity as wives and mothers' (17). Carolyn Herbst Lewis maintains that marriages therefore 'became imbued with great social and political, as well as personal, significance in the 1950s and 1960s' because they demonstrated 'adherence to the "American" way of life' and functioned as a metonymic 'shoring up of the national security state' during the Cold War (101). These marriages, Friedan contended, were deemed to offer the housewife the chance to find her 'true feminine fulfilment,' itself 'the cherished and self-perpetuating core of American culture' (7–8). In this context, in which the pressures on self-presentation I highlighted above were felt most pertinently by women, a 'woman's face was her currency' in the marriage market (Haiken 39). V. demonstrates an awareness of these pressures when Rachel Owlglass visits Schoenmaker's office:

The doctor was busy this morning. The office was crowded, Rachel figured, because it takes four months for a nose job to heal. Four months from now would be June; this meant many pretty Jewish girls who felt they would be perfectly marriageable were it not for an ugly nose could now go husband-hunting at the various resorts all with uniform septa. (V. 45)

June—as Burt Zollo warned *Playboy* readers in 1954—was 'the marriage month' (Dines 4), and Schoenmaker and his assistant are thus revealed to *entrench* gender roles as every 'girl' Schoenmaker operates on is being prepared for the marriage market before 'she becomes, as she must, a Jewish mother' (V. 48). That Schoenmaker's patients are 'girls' is an indication of 'the continued *infantilizing* of American women' that Friedan—whose own mother urged her to have a nose job—lamented (105, original italics). With '[n]o other road to fulfilment ... offered' than the feminine mystique, they are being readied for what

Friedan termed in a highly resonant, if not equally problematic, phrase: the ‘comfortable concentration camp’ of the suburban home (15, 248).

While Friedan used this phrase more in a rhetorical sense—stating later in *The Feminine Mystique* that the ‘suburban house is not a German concentration camp’ (249)—it shows how she was one of many writers who compared ‘the psychological and social dehumanization of Nazi Germany to the conformist, bureaucratic and technocratic mass society of the United States’ at ‘the turn of the 1960s,’ as Kirsten Fermaglich has indicated (3).<sup>1</sup> Fermaglich suggests, however, that this cultural trend—which she examines in the work of Friedan, Stanley Elkins, Stanley Milgran, and Robert Jay Lifton—had the ‘substantial pattern of eliding the subject of Jewish victims’ (13). This is patently not the case in Pynchon’s work, as in addition to highlighting the masculine violence of ‘medical knifeplay,’ he demonstrates that Esther’s rhinoplasty is an attack on Judaism, too (*AtD* 955). Trench, for example, ‘amuse[s] himself between patients by throwing scalpels at a wooden plaque presented to his employer by the United Jewish appeal’ (*V.* 45). Furthermore, Schoenmaker’s offices are located ‘at the fringes of Germantown,’ which, when coupled with his ridiculous Germanic chutzpah during Esther’s operation—‘Now ve shorten das septum, ja’—clearly links the surgery he performs on ‘Jewish girls’ to the Nazi atrocities of the Second World War (*V.* 107).

Pynchon’s concerns have direct parallels in the work of Philip Roth, who has always been preoccupied with the cultural significance of the Jewish nose. During an argument with his mother in *The Ghost Writer*, for instance, Nathan Zuckerman states:

Ma, you want to see physical violence done to the Jews of Newark, go to the office of the plastic surgeon where the girls get their noses fixed. That’s where the Jewish blood flows in Essex County, that’s where the blow is delivered—with a mallet! To their bones—and to their pride! (Roth, *Ghost* 106)

Zuckerman’s suggestion echoes *Goodbye, Columbus*, the novella which first brought Roth to prominence in 1959. In this text, Brenda Patimkin, a Jewish girl with whom the protagonist Neil Klugman is besotted, declares: ‘I had my nose fixed’ (Roth, *Goodbye* 18). Throughout *Goodbye, Columbus*, Brenda is seen to be far more assimilated into American life than Neil, who is also Jewish, and this is symbolically rendered at the level of the nose. Whilst it might be tempting to dismiss Brenda and Esther as overly narcissistic, in the field of cosmetic surgery, as Blum has convincingly argued, ‘broadly social and narrowly narcissistic impulses ... are in the end interlinked’ (9). What both Roth and Pynchon expose is the cultural

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<sup>1</sup> The ‘turn of the 1960s’ is, for Fermaglich, the period from 1957-1965 (2).

coding of the nose; they demonstrate that what Jewish Americans ‘choose to treat are precisely the features that are culturally selected as [their] distinguishing physical traits’ (Blum 3). Sander Gilman points out that the Jewish nose is ‘one of the central loci of difference in seeing the Jew’; it is the “striking feature” which marks the Jew as different’ in the cultural imagination (*Jew’s* 180, 176). This, above all else, is why Esther has come to ‘hat[e] her figure-6 nose’ (*V.* 102). It is also why Schoenmaker’s offices are so heavily populated:

It disgusted Rachel, her theory being that it was not for cosmetic reasons these girls got operated on so much as that the hook nose is traditionally the sign of the Jew and the retroussé nose the sign of the WASP or White Anglo-Saxon Protestant in the movies and advertisements. (*V.* 45)

As the faciality machine projects images of ‘those tiny bridgeless wonders whose nostrils point northward automatically at birth,’ Esther is left with an ‘alien feeling,’ with her subsequent nose job becoming a signifier of her ‘physical acculturation’ (Roth, *Portnoy’s* 145–46; *V.* 103; Gilman, *Jew’s* 177).

It is vital to remember that *V.* emerged during ‘a period in American culture before the Holocaust became “the Holocaust,”’ which makes Pynchon’s intervention—and Roth’s in *Goodbye, Columbus*—all the more arresting (Fermaglich 81). R. Clifton Spargo argues that the ‘belated institutionalization of the Holocaust as a memory within American consciousness’ was due to the ‘universalist and integrationist ethos of the 1950s’ (94). With all the ‘Jewish girls’ in Schoenmaker’s office seeking ‘uniform septa,’ Pynchon exposes, and ultimately provides a critique of, the attitudes of ‘the recuperative decade’ (*V.* 45; Roth, *Ghost* 13). Where the key word in Roth’s texts is ‘fixed,’ in *V.* it is the related ‘correction’ (*V.* 103). To the question Schoenmaker poses to Esther—‘What sort of nose did you have in mind?’—the novel offers the response:

What else: Irish, she wanted, turned up. Like they all wanted. To none of them did it occur that the retroussé nose is an aesthetic misfit: a Jew nose in reverse, is all. Few had ever asked for a so-called ‘perfect’ nose, where the roof is straight, the tip untilted and unhooked, the columella (separating the nostrils) meeting the upper lip at 90°. All of which went to support [Schoenmaker’s] private thesis that correction—along all dimensions: social, political, emotional—entails retreat to a diametric opposite rather than any reasonable search for a *golden mean*.

(...)

‘But,’ he’d been able to rationalize years before, ‘there is harmony and harmony.’ So, Esther’s nose. Identical with an ideal of nasal beauty established by movies, advertisements, magazine illustrations. Cultural harmony, Schoenmaker called it. (*V.* 103, italics mine)

Where many Jewish immigrants into the United States in the early twentieth-century saw it as the *goldene medina*—having a ‘vision of America,’ as David Biale comments, ‘in which the Jews might both be integrated and still retain their distinctiveness’ (18)—Pynchon suggests that ‘the instability and multiplicity of Jewish identity’ was overwritten by the ‘emphasis on universalism’ in the 1950s and early 1960s (Biale 31; Fermaglich 9). That is, he implies that the particularity of the ‘paradigmatic minority’ was being dissolved—analagously to the Nazi attempt to eradicate the Jews—in the simmering liquid of the cultural ‘melting pot’ (Biale 32; Zangwill). Esther’s nose job consequently reflects a wider cultural drive toward assimilation and ‘alignment’ (*V.* 101).

The faciality machine evidently plays a critical role. The ‘repressive force’ of ‘movies, advertisements, magazine illustrations,’ and so on, establishes the ‘White Anglo-Saxon Protestant’ or ‘typical European’ nose as the ‘ideal of nasal beauty’ (Meyerowitz 231; *V.* 103; Deleuze and Guattari, *ATP* 176; *V.* 103). (We might recall Brock Vond’s ‘slim little unbroken nose’ here (*VL* 130).) Since Esther’s nose is made ‘identical’ to this ideal, Pynchon indicates that the identity thinking of the faciality machine permits no space for the other. It is at this point where we can see the full extent of Schoenmaker’s ‘deterioration of purpose’ (*V.* 101). He services capitalism’s faciality machine, exploiting his cultural power through his ‘high’ price, while his ‘bank balance is big enough so [he doesn’t] get disillusioned’ (*V.* 45, 49). Although he claims to not be ‘selling out any Jews’—seeing the pressures of the beauty industry, like warfare, as outside his ‘own sphere of responsibility’—his surgical practice is understood to be yet another mode of ‘unnatural and traitorous (...) civilian disfigurement’ (*V.* 48, 101). Pynchon also implies that Schoenmaker sells a false promise because Esther’s ‘hump-nosed habits [continue] by force of momentum,’ and her baby, fathered by Schoenmaker, will still ‘come out with a big hook nose’ (*V.* 108, 305). There are, however, murmurings of *V.*’s own potential anti-Semitism here: Esther’s baby’s nose suggests Jewish immutability. That is, it accords with the Third Reich’s conception of ‘the *Mischlinge* born to Jews and non-Jews,’ which held ‘that there was a Jew nose and this specific form of the nose was dominant in mixed marriages and ... a fixed, inherited sign of being Jewish’ (Gilman, *Jew’s* 180). As so often in his fiction, Pynchon is perilously close to what he apparently seeks to critique.

What Esther’s nose job nevertheless reveals is a sense of, as Friedan put it, ‘the progressive dehumanization that is taking place’ (227). Schoenmaker acknowledges this when he states: ‘All that could harmonizes with a face, if you were going to be humanistic about it, was obviously what the face was born with’ (*V.* 103). Through Esther’s

rhinoplasty, Pynchon shows how there is ‘something absolutely inhuman about the face’ of the faciality machine: in order to create Esther’s new nose, Schoenmaker has to make ‘two duplicate casts or death-masks,’ whilst Esther struggles to find ‘something human’ in his eyes during the operation (Deleuze and Guattari, *ATP* 170; *V.* 103, 106). The face constructed by the faciality machine is even a mask for its own violence: ‘[n]o one had told Esther that anything about the operation would hurt’ (*V.* 105). Consequently, Esther’s nose job indicates Pynchon’s awareness of the faciality machine’s eradication of difference within an idealised image of the same, in the pursuit of a ‘[c]ultural harmony’ with no discordant notes—or noses (*V.* 103).

ii) **‘the unsettling presence of nasal desire’** (*AtD* 91)

In the first part of this chapter, we have seen how Pynchon exposes the various pressures that provoke Esther’s desire for a nose job. But *V.* is also adamant that we see Esther as ‘half victim, half in control’ (*V.* 50). Because a ‘mystique does not compel its own acceptance’ (Friedan 146)—as demonstrated by Rachel Owlglass, a Jewish woman who resists Schoenmaker’s cultural power—Esther’s complicity is frequently highlighted: ‘she sees nothing wrong’ in paying ‘to get the body she was born with altered and then fall[ing] in love with the man who mutilated her’ (*V.* 360). Indeed, her sexual desire is just as disturbing as the homogenising processes Pynchon uncovers. Before her operation, Esther is said to have ‘felt passive, even (a little?) sexually aroused,’ and afterwards she roams

the East Side in fugue, scaring people with her white beak and a certain shock about the eyes. She was sexually turned on, was all: as if Schoenmaker had located and flipped a secret switch or clitoris somewhere inside her nasal cavity. A cavity is a cavity, after all: Trench’s gift for metaphor might have been contagious. (*V.* 104, 109)

There is an element of this metaphoric contagion across Pynchon’s oeuvre, in which we find a recurrent and ‘unsettling presence of nasal desire’ (*AtD* 91). Although many critics have highlighted the importance of desire in Pynchon’s writing—Robert Hipkiss, for example, argues that Pynchon’s fiction is ‘all about desire,’ especially its ‘stylization’ in the twentieth century (37)—its curious nasal dimension remains unexamined. By investigating the nose’s clitoral and phallic associations in Pynchon’s work, before exploring the significance of the insufflation of cocaine, I argue that ‘nasal desire’ is so ‘unsettling’ because it is frequently synecdochic of a desire that comes to desire its own repression, ‘or

rather,' in Stefan Mattessich's useful terms, a 'desire that desire take the form reserved for it in the theory of repression' (*Lines* 141).

To begin with the clitoris, then. Though Alfred Kinsey's infamous *Sexual Behavior in the Human Female* had proposed, ten years prior to *V.*'s publication, that the clitoris, rather than the vagina, was the prime locus of female sexual pleasure, Esther's rhinoplasty occurs at a time where 'a passive and receptive vaginal orgasm' was still widely considered to be 'the hallmark of a well-adjusted and normal femininity' (Lewis 86, 88). Where the clitoris would later be seized upon as 'a distinctively feminist bodypart' in the 1960s and 1970s, before this it was very much the 'discarded lover in the sexual drama of Freudian womanhood' (Gerhard 6, 34). As Lewis explains:

Neither physicians nor psychiatrists denied the existence of or possibility for clitoral orgasm; rather, they insisted that the clitoris was the primary organ of sexual pleasure during childhood, but in puberty, and particularly with the approach of marriage, a healthy, mature woman transferred her focus to the vagina. (91)

*V.* seems to have absorbed these cultural codes, which find their roots in Freud's *Three Essays on the Theory of Sexuality*. Esther appears to be 'a personality arrested at the level of infantile fantasy' throughout the novel, and this is reflected in the clitoral pleasure of her nasal cavity (Friedan 231).

Yet where the dominant conception of the clitoris saw it as 'a dangerous aberration ... harbo[u]ring an aggressive sexuality,' in Esther's case it is, equally troublingly, aligned with a sense of passivity (Gerhard 22, 34). It seems to denote the 'masochistic reflex mechanism' by which Helene Deutsch, building on Freud's concept of penis envy, defined female sexuality (Deutsch 81, qtd. in Gerhard 37). Esther's operation is full of sadomasochistic detail: after all, 'aren't scalpel and probe as decorative, as fine extensions as whip and cane?' (GR 103). She is 'strapped to the table,' and we are informed that 'nothing before in her experience had hurt so much' (*V.* 102, 103). Furthermore, the narrator notes that 'never before had she been so passive with any male,' with Esther experiencing a 'delicious loss of Estherhood' as she 'becom[es] more and more a blob, with no worries, traumas, nothing' (*V.* 108, 106). Where '[p]assivity has only one meaning' for Esther—it is what leads to her being 'sexually turned on'—it also only seems to have one meaning for Pynchon, who does very little to question the cultural coding of the feminine as passive, the masculine as active, throughout his oeuvre (*V.* 108, 109). While I will be exploring these issues more thoroughly in my fourth chapter, it is evident here that *V.* condemns Esther's nasal desire as an indication of her passive complicity, rather than 'the deviancy of

clitoral sexuality' (Gerhard 22). That is, it reflects her 'seduction and initiation into the dark joys of social control' (VL 83).

In line with the symbolic bipolarity of the nose identified by McNeill (30), Esther's nose is not only seen as a cavity but also carries phallic associations: post-operation, it is 'a proud sickle, pointing, you felt, at the big Westchester in the sky where all God's elect, soon or late, ended up' (V. 50). These connotations are apparent across Pynchon's oeuvre: in *Against the Day*, for instance, Darby Suckling's 'nose begin[s] to run' following Chevrolet's offer to see backstage (*AtD* 32). This is echoed in *Inherent Vice* where Doc Sportello's nose frequently runs, or itches 'furiously,' sometimes as a 'sure sign that he [is] on to something,' though also an accompaniment to a 'hardon' (*IV* 202, 56, 217). The most memorable moment, however, is when Trudi is 'kissing [Slothrop] into an amazing comfort' in *Gravity's Rainbow* (GR 439). The bizarre consequence of this is that Slothrop's

*nose actually seems to be erecting, the mucus beginning to flow yes a nasal hardon here and Trudi has certainly noticed all right, how could she help but . . . as she slides her lips over the throbbing snoot and sends a yard of torrid tongue up one of his nostrils . . . he can feel each pink taste-bud as she penetrates even farther, pulling aside the vestibule walls and nose-hair now to accommodate her head, then shoulders and . . . well she's halfway in, might as well—pulling up her knees, crawling using the hair for hand and footholds she is able to stand at last inside the great red hall. (GR 439, original italics)*

In order to make sense of this incident, Thomas Moore proposes that Slothrop's 'nasal hardon' is probably a reference to 'Freud's idea that the body extremities can be sublimated substitutes for the phallus' (133, note 27). There is definitely an element of this, as well as further evidence of *Gravity's Rainbow's* exploration of polymorphous perversity because there are 'no favo[u]red sense or organs, all are equally at play' (GR 439). But what Moore misses is that Slothrop's nose is not just a phallus here; Trudi climbs into it, penetrating it, until she comes to stand in 'the great red hall.' Like Esther's, it is a cavity, too. As well as Freud, then, both Slothrop and Esther's nasal desire are likely an allusion to the ideas of one of Freud's associates and close friends—at least for a time—Wilhelm Fliess.

Fliess posited that there is 'a shared relationship between the tissue of the nose and that of the genitalia' as they evolve 'embryologically at the same stage' (Gilman, *Jew's* 188). Because of this direct link between the nose and the sexual organs, according to Fliess, 'the nose is regularly influenced by abnormal sexual satisfaction' owing to a 'nasal reflex neurosis' (qtd. in Masson 76–77). Fliess thus believed that treatment and intervention in the corresponding area of the nose—particularly via the surgical administration of cocaine, the drug that will be coming into focus shortly—would allay these sexual disorders. Fliess often



botched his surgery, most notably in the case of Emma Eckstein, as he forgot to remove the gauze that Eckstein, like Esther, had ‘jammed far up her nostrils’ (V. 108). Though Fliess’s ideas have been widely discredited, Pynchon often ascribes an ‘abnormal sexual satisfaction’ to the nose. In addition to the cases we have already investigated, there is also the ‘notorious Leningrad nose-fetishist’ Shatsk in *Gravity’s Rainbow* (GR 352).

Shatsk works with Tchitcherine, who is forever ‘fending off’ Shatsk’s ‘nasal advances,’ on the Committee for a New Turkic Alphabet (GR 352). Shatsk’s fetishization of the nose is so intense that he has, ‘yes, more than once (...) been unable to refrain from reaching out and actually *stroking* the noses of powerful officials’ (GR 352, original italics). It is worth remembering here that Freud’s discussion of fetishism begins with a discussion of the ‘extraordinary case’ of a ‘young man’ who had ‘exalted a certain sort of “shine on the nose” into a fetishistic precondition’ (‘Fetishism’ 152). Given that the nose is clearly associated with the phallus in *Gravity’s Rainbow*—which is in turn allied with the hardened ‘nose assemblies’ of the ultimate fetish in the novel, the Rocket (GR 304)—Shatsk’s nasal fetishization is metonymic of the fetishization of ‘too much meaningless power’ that the novel diagnoses, whilst simultaneously furthering Pynchon’s presentation of ‘non-normative sexual behaviour in *Gravity’s Rainbow* as indicative of a death wish’ (GR 351; Sears 108). Shatsk’s nasal fetishism, that is, indicates his ‘dreamy fatality’ with regard to the ‘Futurist nosedive, with its aesthetics of blood and explosion’ (VL 299; *AtD* 1207).

To the symbolic linking of the nose, the phallus, the Rocket, and death, Pynchon also adds snot and nose-picking. Slothrop’s ‘crystal brown visa for Nordhausen,’ for example, is ‘a dried piece of snot,’ while the first rocket that falls in the novel comes ‘just as’ Slothrop—whose penis, let us not forget, is supposedly stimulated by the rocket—‘[i]s reaching to pick his nose’ (GR 299, 25). Even the presence of chilli in Pynchon’s fiction—such as the menudo in *Inherent Vice*, which ‘got your nose running just looking at it,’ and ‘the energetic local chilli known as El Chinganariz [Nosefucker]’ in *Against the Day*—continues these associations (IV 256; *AtD* 430). This is particularly evident with Major Duane Marvy’s ‘Atomic Chili’ in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, ‘a test of manhood’ which leaves the two Americans who consume it ‘blinded, noses on fire and leaking incredible quantities of snot, undergo[ing] what the authoritative *A Cheapskate’s Guide to the Zone* aptly describes as “a Götterdämmerung of the mucous membranes”’ (GR 559). Despite these connections, however, we must remember, as Molly Hite observes, that Pynchon’s ‘invitation to play literary detective is duplicitous’ because ‘[t]oo many clues turn out to be red herrings’ (49). How important is it, for instance, that Slothrop’s penis is ridiculed by three slurs from ‘Neil

*Nosepicker's Book of 50,000 insults*? (GR 83, original italics)? Is there any significance to the fact that Slothrop, following his dissolution, is left 'plucking the albatross of self now and then, idly, half-conscious as picking his nose' (GR 623)? Does it matter that one of the moves that Inoshiro Sensei teaches DL in *Vineland*—a move 'excluded from the Kumi-Uchi, or official ninja combat system'—is 'the Nosepicking of Death' (VL 127)? Perhaps, to borrow from Leo Bersani, 'the most interesting point to be made about these repetitions is that they obscure the sense of a motif in the very process of appearing to constitute one. ... [T]heir recurrence produces what might be called nonstructurable continuities' (121). Pynchon both encourages us down the road to 'the analysis "stick shift = penis," or nose-picking = masturbation, whilst simultaneously taking it out from under our feet (VL 133).

In spite of these reservations, the snotty web I have highlighted forms an important backdrop to the most sustained investigation of 'nasal desire' in Pynchon's work: cocaine (ab)use. To be sure, many drugs are ingested nasally in Pynchon's fiction: Frau Gnab, for example, takes a pinch of snuff in *Gravity's Rainbow*, while Dixon gives 'out opiated Philtres to all who would but gesture toward their noses' in *Mason & Dixon* (GR 492; *Mc&D* 682). Unexpected substances are inhaled too: *Inherent Vice* mentions 'hibiscus blossoms that merely snorting would send you off onto nasal acid trips,' while in *Bleeding Edge* Avi Deschler is seen with a 'computer-duster nozzle up his nose, committing propellant abuse' (IV 77; *BE* 425). Nevertheless, cocaine is certainly the most common: 'the door is the house's *nose*, and the door is open, a-and all of those snowy white crystals are blowing up from Muffin-tin Road in a big cloud right into the—' (GR 646, original italics). Alan Friedman observes that 'crystals in *Gravity's Rainbow* of snow, cocaine, or terror'—even snot, perhaps—'are images of order at the price of a death' (97). This is a useful starting point to begin the questioning of David Cowart's claim that 'taking drugs [in Pynchon's writing] remains a powerful metaphor for the idea of an alternative to the rapacious capitalism and consumerism that afflict American society' (*Dark Passages* 120). Though this might be partially true of, say, LSD, as we saw in my previous chapter, or the 'useful substance' that is marijuana, Cowart's view does not hold for cocaine (*SL* 10). Indeed, we might say that it is cocaine that crystallises the relation Pynchon draws between 'nasal desire' and a repressive political power (*AtD* 91).

*Gravity's Rainbow* has barely begun before cocaine becomes an issue. The 'fantasist-surrogate' Pirate Prentice encounters '*a giant Adenoid*. At least as big as St. Paul's, and growing hour by hour' (GR 12, 14, original italics). This 'lymphatic monster'—which sounds like a 'stupendous *nose* sucking in snot'—is throwing 'London, perhaps all England,

[into] mortal peril’ by rampaging around Mayfair (GR 14, original italics). Far from selecting its victims at random, the Adenoid has a ‘*master plan*, it’s choosing only certain personalities useful to it—there is a new election, a new preterition abroad in England here’ (GR 15, original italics). As no one in the Home Office ‘knows *what* to do,’ Pirate attempts the ‘awful chore’ of communicating with the Adenoid, though he’s not ‘nasally equipped’ enough for the task (GR 16, original italics). It is telling that in the attempts to contain the Adenoid,

admirers of Dr. Freud the Adenoid clearly had no use for, stood on stepladders up against its loathsome grayish flank shovelling the new wonderdrug cocaine—bringing *bods* full of the white substance, in relays, up the ladders to smear on the throbbing gland-creature, and into the germ toxins bubbling nastily inside its crypts, with no visible effects at all (though who knows how that *Adenoid* felt, eh?). (GR 16, original italics)

The political threat posed by the Adenoid is placated by cocaine, of which, let us recollect, both Freud and Fliess were proponents. There is already a hint here, then, that the drug will become associated with an oppressive state apparatus in Pynchon’s writing.

Having said this, *Gravity’s Rainbow* does display a certain degree of sympathy—more so than *Vineland*, as we shall soon see—for cocaine. One aspect of this comes during the novel’s discussion of a significant year in Pynchon’s fiction: 1904. Marked as one of history’s ‘critical points’ in *V.* and *Gravity’s Rainbow*, Pynchon proposes that 1904 was when the horrors of the twentieth century really began: ‘it was the year the Germans all but wiped out the Hereros, (...) the year Ludwig Prandtl proposed the boundary layer, which really got aerodynamics into business,’ and so on (GR 451–52). It was also ‘the year the American Food and Drug people took cocaine out of Coca-Cola, which gave us an alcoholic and death-oriented generation of Yanks ideally equipped to fight WWII’ (GR 452). The suggestion here appears to be that we can trace the ‘silly-ass national emergency exercise’ of the War on Drugs to 1904, too (VL 340). The taking of cocaine in *Gravity’s Rainbow* is thus an act of resistance to both the Second World—and this future—War. Amongst the wide range of ‘cocaine habitués’ in the novel—Osbie Feel, for example, seeks ‘[o]ne grand eruption’ by shooting ‘[t]he last of his wartime stash,’ while Major Marvy knows ‘so many nose habits between here ‘n’ Wiesbaden you’d need three *ton* ‘n’ that wouldn’t last the suckers a day’—it is perhaps Emil “Säure” Bummer, in addition to the Adenoid, who sticks in the mind (GR 481, 536, 604, original italics). During a debate about tonality with ‘Gustav the composer,’ Säure

sits grinning with an ivory spoon, shovelling incredible piles of cocaine into his nose, going through his whole repertoire: arm straight out swinging in in a giant curve *zoom* precisely to the nostril he's aiming at, then flicking in the lot from two feet away without losing a crystal . . . then a whole bunch gets tossed up in the air like a piece of popcorn and nose-gobbled *ngkok* on target, inside where it's smooth as a Jo block, not a cilium in sight there since the Liebknecht funeral, if not before. (GR 621, original italics)

As Säure acknowledges, these nasal habits are deeply entwined with, and affected by, the functioning of the market and the war. Indeed, the potassium permanganate shortages created by the V-2 Rocket have brought 'disaster down on the cocaine market, Kerl'—'[t]hat machinery of yours was not exactly the dooper's friend' (GR 375, 376). But as the novel suggests the 'true war' is 'a celebration of markets,' there is an element of resistance in the 'anarchy' and 'chemical irresponsibility' on the cocaine black market—'Clay, talcum, cement, even, it got this perverse, flour!'—which does not abide by the usual laws of profit (GR 105, 375). Since there is 'no way to tell anything for sure' without the permanganate, Säure informs Slothrop that with a 'little novocain [*sic*] to numb the tongue, something bitter for the taste, (...) you could be making enormous profits off of sodium bicarbonate' (GR 375–76). However, he also notes that there were '[l]ook-alikes that were worth even more than cocaine—but the idea was that someone should get a sudden noseful of milk, hahahahah! (...) and that was *worth the loss?*' (GR 375, original italics).

Despite this sense of resistance to market logic, Säure's ingestion of a white powder with an ivory spoon cannot help but invoke death in light of the symbolic links *Gravity's Rainbow* draws between whiteness and death. Furthermore, although cocaine helped many soldiers cope with the horrors wrought by 'instruments of civilian disfigurement' during the Second World War, owing to the 'nearly complete parallelism between analgesia and addiction' it soon becomes yet another signifier in Pynchon's fiction of 'a historical moment for which addiction has become a general condition' (V. 101; GR 348; Mattessich, *Lines* 107). This 'deterioration of purpose' is reflected in two issues of *Time* magazine (V. 101). The first, from 1949, called cocaine 'The White Goddess,' which is of particular resonance with Pynchon's fiction considering his frequent allusion to Robert Graves's concept of the same name (Streatfeild 188). The second, from 1981, christened cocaine 'the All-American Drug': the regenerative power of the Goddess is replaced by 'the American vulnerability' to suffer from an 'impulse-control deficit' (Streatfeild 247; VL 346; IV 279). A similar shift is marked in *Gravity's Rainbow* via Richard M. Zhlub, a thinly-veiled portrait of Richard M. Nixon offered towards the novel's conclusion. Riffing off Nixon's famously large nose, Zhlub is said to suffer 'from a chronic adenoidal condition, which affects his speech. Friends and detractors alike think of him as "the Adenoid"' (GR 754). We have

moved, then, from the Adenoid that announces ‘a new election, a new preterition’ at the novel’s outset, to Nixon’s call for a ‘War-on-drugs! War-on-drugs!’ (GR 15; VL 357).

The War on Drugs—‘a timeless, defectively imagined future of zero tolerance,’ in *Vineland*’s terms—was officially put into law on 28<sup>th</sup> January 1972, only a year before *Gravity’s Rainbow* was published (VL 221). Nixon’s ‘heavy antidrug spiel’ declared the ‘evils of drug abuse’ to be ‘public enemy number one,’ with Nixon stating: ‘If we cannot destroy the drug menace, it will destroy us’ (VL 311, 347; Streatfeild 253). Drugs, the ‘Sacrament of the Sixties,’ would soon become ‘the Evil of the Eighties,’ as the ‘Nixonian Reaction continued to penetrate and compromise further what may only in some fading memories ever have been a people’s miracle, an army of loving friends’ (VL 342, 239). In *Vineland*, Pynchon explores how ‘national drug hysteria’ and the fear of being ‘at the mercy of any numb-nose Class IV offender’ have allowed for a ‘continuing pattern of executive aggrandizement,’ as well as the ‘gutting of the Fourth Amendment’ (VL 310, 352; Thoreen 216). Pynchon evidently ‘attacks the new fascism exemplified by the war on drugs,’ which is signalled in *Vineland* by the fact that the ‘monster program’ CAMP—the Campaign Against Marijuana Production—is led by Karl Bopp, ‘former Nazi *Luftwaffe* officer and subsequently useful American citizen’ (Schaub, ‘California’ 34; VL 221–22). Moreover, *Vineland* is predominantly set in 1984, a clear reference to George Orwell’s novel, and is full of vitriolic rhetoric condemning ‘the scabland garrison state the green free America’ has been ‘turning into,’ warning us that ‘soon they’re gonna be coming after everything, not just drugs, but beer, cigarettes, sugar, salt, fat you name it, anything that could remotely please any of your senses, because they need to control all that. And they will’ (VL 314, 313).

This is the context for Cowart’s view that drugs ‘are to *Vineland* what the Tristero is to *Lot 49*—a metaphor serving the vision of a different social reality’ (*Dark Passages* 98). We might recall, for instance, the moment where some Reaganite ‘skywriters’ have ‘billowed (...) DRUG FREE AMERICA in red, white and blue over Sherman Oaks,’ which some ‘guerrilla elements’ have responded to by ‘launching skyrockets charged to explode in the shape of the letter S and aimed at the space right after the word DRUG, changing the message some’ (VL 342). Nevertheless, we need to nuance Cowart’s view because different drugs carry different significations in Pynchon’s writing. Despite Pynchon’s evident distaste for the War on Drugs, cocaine in *Vineland* is not so much an alternative to, but the pinnacle of, the over-indulgences of consumerist society.

No character makes this clearer than ‘the Head of Heads,’ Mucho Maas (*VL* 311). Mucho is, of course, Oedipa’s husband in *The Crying of Lot 49*, where he becomes ‘[p]sychedelicized far ahead of his time’ owing to his increasing dependence on LSD (*VL* 309). Come the time of *Vineland*, however, he has entered into another, not so ‘groovy world of addictive behavior’ (*IV* 94):

By the standards of those high-riding days of eternal youth [the 60s], Count Drugula, or Mucho the Munificent, as he also came to be known, figured as a responsible, even sober-sided user of psychedelics, but cocaine was another story. It hit him out of nowhere, an unforeseen passion he would in his later unhappiness compare to a clandestine affair with a woman—furtive meetings between his nose and the illicit crystals, sudden ecstatic peaks, surprising negative cash flow, amazing sexual occurrences. Just as he arrived at that crisis point between wild infatuation and long-term commitment, his nose went out on him—blood, snot, something unarguably green—a nasal breakdown. (*VL* 309–10)

Cocaine heightens the relation between the nasal and the sexual that we have been exploring in this chapter’s second section. This has always been one of its most notorious effects: Coca-Cola once marketed itself as ‘A most wonderful invigorator of the sex organs,’ whilst *Newsweek* suggested that ‘Orgasms go better with coke’ (Streatfeild 121, 216). Yet, in the case of Mucho, this heightened desire eventually fosters its own repression, as Mucho has to seek treatment from ‘a dedicated and moralistic rhinologist,’ Dr. Hugo Splanchnick (*VL* 310). After seeing Splanchnick’s ‘Room of the Bottled Specimens’—which includes ‘the Necrotic Sinus,’ among others, displayed in a ‘[l]urid pink light’ like ‘the cheaply acquired meat displays of a failed supermarket’—Mucho signs a ‘short letter of agreement’ in ‘blood’ (*VL* 310–11). Much to the ‘snoot croaker’s merriment,’ Mucho’s nose is then ‘hypodermically iced out’; desire has ultimately engendered its own repression (*VL* 311).

Adding to the unsettling quality of this ‘nose medic’s dubious pact’ is a sense of governmental conspiracy (*VL* 311). In an oft-quoted passage, Ray Ibble pretends to read from the Bible, proclaiming:

notice how cheap coke has been since ’81? However in the world do you account for that? (...) Harken unto me, read thou my lips, for verily I say that wheresoever the CIA putteth in its meathooks upon the world, there are also to be found those substances which God may have created but the U.S. Code hath decided to control. Get me? Now old Bush used to be head of CIA, so you figure it out. (*VL* 353–54)

‘Powder to the People!’ (*VL* 259). Ibble’s suppositions correlate with the findings of the journalist Gary Webb, who claimed that during Reagan’s administration, the CIA were

aware that the Nicaraguan Contras were trafficking cocaine into the United States and channelling profits back into their resistance movement. *Vineland* is not simply about ‘the federal government’s intolerance of drugs,’ then, rather suggests an operation analogous to that of the Golden Fang in *Inherent Vice*, who ‘not only traffic in Enslavement, they peddle the implements of Liberation as well’ (Cowart, *Dark Passages* 110; *IV* 294). That is, the Golden Fang ‘get[s] its customers strung’ out—predominantly on heroin, though Dr. Rudy Blatnoyd offers Doc Sportello some ‘lab quality’ cocaine ‘just in from Darmstadt’—before selling ‘them a program to help them kick’ (*IV* 192). In *Vineland*, the implication is that the government encourage cocaine to be trafficked and consumed—‘coke that they held the *spoon* for you and shit?’—in order to create work for sinister medical professionals like Splanchnick, from whom there is then no escape: ‘nasal therapists, they’re in your life forever’ (*VL* 337, 113, original italics).

Like Coy Harlingen in *Inherent Vice*, Mucho becomes complicit with this oppressive state apparatus: ‘Why brothers, the new trip, the only true trip, is the Natch, and being on it,’ he declares, reinforcing the messages of ‘the anti-drug hysteria leadership, suddenly perceived as the cutting edge of hip’ (*VL* 311, 342). The same is true of Sid Liftoff and Ernie Triggerman, a pair of ‘finks, Nazi collaborators, and neo-McCarthyite stooges’ (*VL* 342). Ernie, a former cocaine abuser, is found sitting in a

glazed silence that would have suggested his return, in this time of crisis, to his childhood religion, Soto Zen, except for the way he was unable to keep handling his nose, with agitated fussing movements, as if trying to primp it into shape like a hairdo. (*VL* 340)

We cannot help but recall Esther’s passivity, here. Commenting on her ‘mystical experience’ during her operation, Esther states: ‘What religion is it—one of the Eastern ones—where the highest condition we can attain is that of an object—a rock. It was like that’ (*V*. 106). The problem for Pynchon seems to be that although initially the ‘world goes clarifying’ when you put ‘a big fingerful of the flaky white into nostrils right ‘n’ left,’ this lucidity actually masks an unquestioning attitude. This is clearly demonstrated by Fat Clyde and Johnny Cantango in *V*., whose self-inflicted nasal blockages are indicative of the unreflective outlook of the Whole Sick Crew: ‘But they didn’t ask for clarity. Didn’t ask anything, not so much from booze-tangled tongues as from a stuffiness-by-induction in the nasal cavities’ (*V*. 438). Instead of offering ‘an alternative to the rapacious capitalism and consumerism that afflict American society,’ cocaine in Pynchon’s texts therefore reinforces a particular social reality, channelling nasal desire, unsettlingly, into the service of a

repressive state apparatus that wants to ‘restore fascism at home and around the world’ (Cowart, *Dark Passages* 120; *VL* 265).

iii) ‘something invisible’s going on, tha must feel it, smell it. . . ?’ (*Mc&D* 478)

In the first two parts of this chapter, we have explored how Pynchon’s examination of the nose uncovers the homogenising functioning of the faciality machine, as well as showing how desire can become complicit with a repressive political power. There is one final nasal investigation to make. As indicated in my previous chapter, a key concern in Pynchon’s writing is ‘atrophied senses’ (Thomas 51; Cowart, *Allusion* 88). Abeer Fahim claims that Pynchon attempts to redress this atrophy by giving the senses ‘a prominent place’ in his fiction: ‘seeing, hearing, and touching are especially significant parts of the characters’ connection to the world’ (8). Whilst I sympathise with Fahim’s desire for a greater sensory appreciation of Pynchon’s work, the vital role that smell plays is neglected here. Pynchon’s texts reveal that the desensitized noses of Mucho, Ernie, Fat Clyde, and so on, miss out on a key part of sensory experience: in being ‘iced out,’ they ‘pass nose-numb before the Perfumes of Celebes’ (*VL* 310; *Mc&D* 311). Although some critics have started to pick up on the olfactory undercurrents in Pynchon’s writing—Rodney Taveira, for example, detects an ‘olfactory dark conjugate of the slaughterhouses’ wafting through *Against the Day* (145–46)—little has been said on the importance of smell to Pynchon’s political and affective exploration of history.<sup>2</sup> Perhaps the most penetrating comment has come from Jeffrey Severs, who argues that the ‘harsh smells of mining camps’ in *Against the Day* ‘constantly undermin[e] an abstracted version of capitalism with its material underpinnings’ (‘Abstractions’ 224). This is a useful springboard but we need to go deeper. Despite the ‘polyaromatic’ quality of Pynchon’s smellscape—we might think here of the ‘unmistakable (...) smell of resin,’ ozone, semen, nitro, cabbage, ‘steaks, chops, venison, chilli, coffee and beer and so on’—his writing tends towards the mephitic and the malodorous (*AtD* 450; *GR* 485; *AtD* 226).<sup>3</sup> In *Gravity’s Rainbow*, for instance, Franz Pökler is wrapped by the ‘odors of shit, death, sweat, sickness, mildew, piss, the breathing of Dora,’ whereas Frank Traverse is assailed by the smell of ‘corpses and gasoline and burning flesh’ in *Against the Day* (*GR* 432; *AtD* 1117). In short, we can nearly always ‘smell Death in it,’ with Pynchon’s

<sup>2</sup> To give a few further examples: Martin Eve notes the presence of ‘Bongo, the olfactory prodigy aboard the Seahorse’ in *Mason & Dixon* (*Pynchon and Philosophy* 119), while Inger Dalsgaard comments that ‘the smell of dead tissue and excrement evokes death in the trenches’ in *Against the Day* (‘Readers’ 128), yet neither critic elaborates further on smell’s significance than these observations.

<sup>3</sup> Smellscape is a term I borrow from *Aroma: The Cultural History of Smell* (Classen, Howes, and Synnott 97).



language simultaneously reflecting a very potent danger of odorous engulfment: ‘wrapping,’ ‘gathering,’ ‘surrounding,’ ‘threatening, haunting,’ ‘suffocating,’ ‘flooding,’ ‘overwhelming,’ and so forth (GR 351, 754, 236, 285, 94; *AtD* 982, 452).

It is the contention of this final nasal section that one way we need to view—or should that be smell?—Pynchon is in a manner similar to the Grand Cohen’s tentative thoughts on the Gentleman Bomber of Headingly in *Against the Day*: ‘Suppose the Gentleman B. is not a simple terrorist but an angel, in the early sense of “messenger,” and in the fateful cloud he brings, despite the insupportable smell, the corrosive suffocation, lies a message’ (*AtD* 779). As Constance Classen, David Howes, and Anthony Synott have proposed, when olfaction is the subject of literary discourse it is ‘often a political statement’ (87). This is most certainly true of Pynchon’s work: the ‘something invisibl[e] going on’ in this section’s subtitle is ‘American politics’ (*Mc&D* 478). This collision of smell and politics is integral to what I shall term Pynchon’s olfactory poetics, which play an essential role in his general endeavour to ‘[d]ive right down (...) into all that—that waste-pit of time!’ (*VL* 173). By uncovering ‘some residue of history’ via olfaction, the ‘fateful cloud’ of ‘insupportable smell’ that Pynchon conjures is an attempt, comparable to the concerns of my previous chapter, to develop a ‘cognizant nose’ (*IV* 46; *AtD* 779, 689). In spite of the ‘corrosive suffocation,’ I thus argue that Pynchon’s literary stinkbombs—like the ‘fragrant Sheets’ of the Macaroni’s ‘clandestine printing press’ in *Mason & Dixon*—bear ‘to sensitiz’d *Nasalia*, sub-messages of Youth and Longing’ (*AtD* 779; *Mc&D* 390, original italics).

Before we examine the status of smell in Pynchon’s texts, it is worth saying a few words on olfaction more generally. In contrast to vision’s hegemony, to recall my previous chapter, Zygmunt Bauman argues that modernity has ‘waged a total war against smells’ (25), almost as if ‘the world decided perfume was the only smell the nose was meant for’ (Morrison 8). In *Gravity’s Rainbow*, for example, odours have been expunged from the metropolitan centre, from the ‘odorless’ Sub-Ministry that promotes ‘Odorless and Official Death’ (GR 752, 688). We might remember Blicero, too, whose focus on transcending the body leads him to be ‘stunned irreversibly away from real Gottfried, away from the weak, the failed smells of real breath’ (GR 724). In one of the most well-known comments on olfaction, Freud speculated that the ‘beginning of the fateful process of civilization would have been marked by man’s adopting of an erect posture,’ which caused a ‘devaluation of the olfactory stimuli’ (*Civilization* 45–6). Consequently, Adorno and Horkheimer explain, in civilization ‘smell is regarded as a disgrace, a sign of the lower social orders, lesser races,

and baser animals' (148). (This is particularly true of Pynchon's much-beloved pigs, which are not only 'really groovy, in fact far groovier than any humans their name ever gets applied to,' but also possess, like their namesake Pig Bodine, 'remarkably acute nose[s]' (VL 129; VL 197).) George Orwell recalls how in childhood he often heard that 'the lower classes smell' (*Road* 149), an idea Pynchon plays off in *Gravity's Rainbow* when a 'middleclass bride-to-be' is 'covering all trace of her smell' (GR 131). Clearly, then, if vision is the sense of the elect, smell is the preterite sense.

Given Pynchon's concern with the preterite in all its forms, his fiction's emphasis on an 'inexhaustible complex of odors' is therefore a response to the 'general devaluation of, and inattention to, olfactory power and meaning' in modernity (*AtD* 6; Classen, Howes, and Synnott 84). His texts can be seen within a wider context of tracing a historical olfactory consciousness, an increasing trend in the thirty years since the publication of Alain Corbin's *The Foul and the Fragrant*. Before we turn to Pynchon's own contribution to this field, a brief caveat is necessary. Although the failure to critically address the importance of smell in Pynchon's texts could be attributed to 'the olfactory illiteracy of the modern west,' my focus on smell is not an attempt to make it the privileged sense in Pynchon's writing, rather to acknowledge its under-appreciated role both within his fiction and the sensorium more generally (Classen, Howes, and Synnott 92). Osmology is, after all, only one part of cosmology in Pynchon's fiction.

In *Aroma*, Classen, Howes, and Synnott ask: 'could a heightened olfactory consciousness be dangerous to the established order in the modern West?' (4). Pynchon undoubtedly suggests that smell can, at the very least, pose questions to this order. One way is at a spatial level. As we saw in my previous chapter, Pynchon exposes vision's 'deep complicity with the subjugating forces of capitalism, colonialism, and patriarchy' (Drobnick 10). David Seed subsequently argues, partially correctly, that the cartographic practice of Mason and Dixon is 'implicated in vested commercial and political interests, as well as in the processes of colonization' (84). This is certainly true of cartography based on telescopic measurements. Seed neglects, however, the significant role olfactory mapping plays in the text. On the third page, for instance, Pitt and Pliny are 'Announc'd by Nasal Telegraph' when they enter with the Pewter Coffee-Machine; on his visit to Jenkin's Ear Museum, Mason 'can smell the town upon the Wind, the Smoke and Muck-Piles, long before he sees it'; at 'the Edge of York,' Mason and Dixon 'smell wood-smoke with a sensible Fat Component, and follow their Noses to the Merry Ghosts'; and so forth (*Me&D* 7, 175, 766). A more intuitive cartographic practice is intimated here, one that is less

dominated by the rationalizing and distancing processes of vision encapsulated in the Mason-Dixon Line.

Although there are numerous occasions where Pynchon's characters are directed by olfaction—such as the moment in *Against the Day* when ‘the crew of the *Inconvenience* [are] in effect flying blind, guided only by their sense of smell’—perhaps the most significant case of olfactory mapping comes when Dixon is in Cape Town (*AtD* 129). While he is ‘assailed without mercy by his Sensorium, almost in a swoon,’ we are informed that

Invisible through the long Dutch workday, life in the Cape Night now begins to unwrap everywhere. Dixon smells the broiling food, the spices, the livestock, the night-blooming vine, the ocean voracious and immense. He is acquiring a nasal map of the Town, learning, in monitory whiffs, to smell the Watch,— pipes, sheep-fat suppers, pre-Watch gin,— and to take evasive action . . . learning to lurk, become part of the night, close enough to slave-borne lanterns passing by to feel their heat as easily as he may scent the burghers' wives through the curtains of their sedan chairs,— the St. Helena coffee, English soap, French dampness. In the distance the nightly curfew cannon barks, announcing Dixon's transition to the state of Outlaw. (*Me&D* 77–8)

Admittedly, we should hesitate to read this passage too positively. If *Gravity's Rainbow* is right to suggest that colonies provided space for colonial man ‘to enjoy the smell of his own shit’—another instance of unsettling nasal desire in Pynchon's work—then it is perhaps equally troubling that Dixon is lured by the exotic and ‘unrelenting Vapor of debauchery’ that would ‘not merely tempt a Saint,—Heavens, ‘twould tempt an Astronomer’ (*GR* 317; *Me&D* 78). Nevertheless, smell is clearly associated with outlawed and fugitive elements capable of unwrapping the linear markings of—and resisting containment by—the ‘capitalist/Christer gridwork’ (*AtD* 1208). As Clare Brant states, ‘smell has an indeterminate relation to space, or, it has a clear relation but one that shows space to be indeterminate, unbounded’ (555), an idea reaffirmed at the Traverse-Becker breakfast in *Vineland* which sends ‘out branching invisible fractals of smell, reaching out all over the place’ (*VL* 323). Particular political potency is attained in Pynchon's fiction when the relationship olfaction holds with space reveals destruction that would otherwise be hidden. The mephitic vapours of Dora that wrap Pökler in *Gravity's Rainbow*, for instance, escape the concentration camp walls to reveal the horrors within, and similar attention is drawn to the destructive effects of industrial farming in *Against the Day* when the Chums follow ‘the stock in their somber [*sic*] passage from arrival in rail cars, into the smells of shit and chemicals, old fat and tissue diseased, dying, and dead’ (*GR* 432; *AtD* 59).

It is in the association between smell and death, or the absent-presence of the dead, where Pynchon's olfactory poetics start to realise their affective, political power. His fiction

constantly evokes ‘the smell of excrement and dead tissue,’ and almost every act of horror leaves an olfactory trace, ‘an echo, like an odor, trailing after’ (*AtD* 455; *Me&D* 723). In *Against the Day*, for example, Nato tell Frank Traverse that he ‘can smell them [the Huertistas] . . . Like Indian blood. Like burned crops and stolen land. Like gringo money’ (*AtD* 438). The most significant moment, however, is when Mason visits the site of the Massacre at Lancaster and is ‘quite ‘Torpedo’d’ by ‘[a]lmost a smell’ (*Me&D* 436). He later conveys to Dixon that what he smelled was ‘Lethe-Water. One of the things the newly-born forget, is how terrible its [*sic*] Taste, and Smell. In Time, these People are able to forget ev’rything’ (*Me&D* 436). The Lethe River was one of the five rivers of Hades in Greek mythology and to drink its water was to ‘forget ev’rything.’ With mass-slaughter thus concealed and forgotten in history, Pynchon uses smell to facilitate processes of *aletheia* whereby historical destruction—‘unseen, unheard, though perhaps, who could be sure, not unscented’—is disclosed, or unconcealed (*VL* 258). For it is as Mason and Dixon chain through wetlands—with ‘each Step breaking through to release a Smell of Generations of Deaths, something in it, some principle of untaught Mechanicks’—that Dixon delivers his famous speech on the ‘public Secret [and] shameful Core’ of slavery and colonialism, realising his and Mason’s inexorable complicity with these processes (*Me&D* 692). Though ‘Official Death’ has sought to be ‘Odorless,’ masking its atrocity, Pynchon in fact suggests that the offense of colonial and capitalist history is ‘rank. It smells to heaven!’ (*GR* 688; Shakespeare III. iii. 37)

The metonymic link between olfaction and memory is crucial here. Writing about the famed madeleine moment in Marcel Proust’s *À La Recherche du Temps Perdu*, Walter Benjamin states: ‘No one who knows with what great tenacity memories are preserved by the sense of smell, and smells not at all in the memory, will be able to call Proust’s sensitivity to smell accidental’ (‘Proust’ 209). In truth, Benjamin neglects Proust’s sense that both smell *and* taste ‘bear unflinchingly, in the tiny and almost impalpable drop of their essence, the vast structure of recollection’ (Proust 54). The same might be said of Pynchon: in *Bleeding Edge*, Avi Deschler says that Elaine’s Tongue Polonaise is a ‘time machine of the mouth, my darling, Proust Schmoust, this takes a man straight back to his bar mitzvah,’ intimating that Proust is concerned merely with a time machine of the nose (*BE* 251). Nevertheless, Pynchon is as deeply attuned to the mnemonic tenacity of olfaction as Proust. At the Candlebrow Conference in *Against the Day*, for instance, the Chums of Chance find Smegmo—‘an artificial substitute for everything in the edible-fat category, including margarine’—amongst the condiments, which Miles Blundell proceeds to

quizzically sniff:

'I have smelled something like this before,' pondered Miles, 'yet not in this life. For . . . in the way that certain odors can instantly return us to earlier years . . .'

'Nasotemporal Transit,' nodded the savvy youth. 'There's a seminar on that tomorrow over at Finney Hall. Or do I mean day before yesterday?'

'Well, sir, this Smegmo concoction here takes me back even *further* than childhood, in fact clear on back into a previous life, to *before I was even conceived*—' (*AtD* 459–60, original italics)

For Inger Dalsgaard, 'time travel [in *Against the Day*] can be rooted in science, in an alternative reality or a "spirit" realm, or in an innovative technology—without any one of these modes necessarily excluding the others' ('Readers' 122). What Dalsgaard neglects, however, despite Pynchon's playfulness in the passage above, is the novel's exploration of the body's own, albeit limited capacity to 'instantly return us to earlier years' through olfaction (*AtD* 459).

Jonathan Gil Harris contends that this capability highlights smell's 'polychronicity': that is, a palimpsesting of diverse moments in time, as a result of which past and present coincide with each other' (467). This 'polychronicity'—or the potential for 'Nasotemporal transit'—is repeatedly exhibited across Pynchon's oeuvre. For example, relating his return on a meat-ship, Mason says to Dixon: 'Ahrrrh! the Smell alone might have done for me. Quite snapp'd me back, yes it did, like a Spring, back to that damn'd Cape' (*Mc&D* 736); Slothrop's memories of his haunting past are frequently triggered by the 'soft and chemical smell' of Imipolex G, which is, like Smegmo for Miles, 'a smell from before his conscious memory begins' (*GR* 285); and in *Against the Day*, Dally's recollection of her mother Erlys begins when a smell 'sneak[s] in by way of Dally's nose, something else, beyond time, before memory or her first baby words, the snoot-subverting fragrance of lilies of the valley' (*AtD* 394). This 'snoot-subverting fragrance'—elsewhere said to be a 'scent at the edge of her memory, ghostly, as if a presence from a former life had just passed through' (*AtD* 78)—suggests not only the relation of smell with memory in Pynchon's fiction, but also 'smells not at all in the memory,' beyond time, before memory or first baby words, before, perhaps, even being conceived (Benjamin, 'Proust' 209).

The issues of consciousness and involuntariness are vital here. As readers can have no conscious memory of all the smells Pynchon invokes—neither, it must be said, can Pynchon—the expressive power of his olfactory poetics must address a more affective 'principle of untaught Mechanicks' (*Mc&D* 692). After all, 'the fleeting realm of scent' is a 'domain that leaves no traces in history,' and we are, obviously, only reading a book

(Süskind 3). Nonetheless, Benjamin suggests that the involuntary memory in Proust is most powerful when it is

one in which the materials of memory no longer appear singly, as images, but tell us about a whole, amorphously and formlessly, indefinitely and weightily, in the same way as the weight of his net tells a fisherman about his catch. Smell—that is the sense of weight of someone who casts his nets into the sea of the *temps perdu*. And his sentences are the entire muscular activity of the intelligible body; they contain the whole enormous effort to raise this catch. (Proust 209, original italics)

Since Pynchon's fiction 'reunites the present with the genealogy of destruction that spawned it,' the amorphous and formless whole we are told about is the 'unrelenting Vapor' of 'Generations of Deaths' in colonial and capitalist history, a 'Collective Ghost of more than household scale' (S. Smith 185; *Me&D* 78, 692, 68). Pynchon is, like Proust, a 'fisherman in the fog, casting his lines again and again into the invisible river,' 'the sea of time, the sea of memory and forgetfulness, the years of promise, gone and unrecoverable' (*AtD* 284; *IV* 341). Smell is absolutely integral to this, especially because unlike our capacity to turn a blind eye investigated in my previous chapter, it is not possible to turn a blind nose. Involuntarily, smells invade: Dixon, for example, displays 'an inability to deny or divert the Gusts that sweep him' in Cape Town, whilst Brigadier Pudding senses 'mustard gas (...) washing in, into his brain with a fatal buzz as dreams will when we don't want them, or when we are suffocating' (*Me&D* 78; *GR* 232). Who could forget, moreover, Pudding's act of coprophagic self-effacement when he lies under Katje's dilating asshole as 'the stink of shit floods his nose, gathering him, surrounding' (*GR* 235)?

To be sure, such mephitic moments cannot be unambiguously positive. Pynchon's fiction, as previously stated, is typified by an 'odor of death inescapable,' and can thus be characterised by 'what forensic Noses like to call the deathmask, the way the indoles of bodily decay assume precedence over all notes that might be present' (*Me&D* 372; *BE* 442, original capitalisation). Without this preponderance of 'insupportable smell[s],' however, Pynchon's olfactory poetics would not 'have any value' (*AtD* 779; Rushdie 442). Indeed, it is actually in those places that are 'darkest and smel[l] the worst' where we find faint whiffs of 'sub-Messages of Youth and Longing' in Pynchon's writing, paving the way for what Saleem Sinai, in *Midnight's Children*, calls 'nasal ethics' (*GR* 433; *MD* 390; Rushdie 442). Though smells might threaten to 'swoon [us] clean away,' it is precisely because there is 'no escape from the smell'—because the 'persuasive power of an odour cannot be fended off [as] it enters into us..., fills us up, imbues us totally'—that olfaction opens us towards the other (*Me&D* 656; *AtD* 843; Süskind 86–7). As Adorno and Horkheimer maintain:

Of all the senses the act of smelling, which is attracted without objectifying, reveals most sensuously the urge to lose oneself in identification with the Other [*sic*]. That is why smell, as both the perception and the perceived—which are one in the act of olfaction—is more expressive than other senses. When we see we remain who we are, when we smell we are absorbed entirely. (149, original capitalisation)

In contrast to the subject-object dichotomy augmented by vision, and despite the risk of subjective dissolution and eradication, olfaction carries potential for a more immanent, intuitive and affective connection to the world. The sustained attention to smell in Pynchon's oeuvre therefore starts to, if not overcome, then at least question the 'devaluation of the olfactory stimuli' Freud noted to be the work of civilization (*Civilization* 45–6). Corresponding to my previous chapter's argument regarding his attempts to develop a 'cognizant eye,' Pynchon suggests that the nasal faculties can be cultivated, evoking ideas of an 'instructed nose' and a 'sure nose' (*VL* 367; *AtD* 453, 478). Indeed, in an exchange between the demented 'gasophile' Replevin and Lew Basnight in *Against the Day*, Replevin proposes that to 'the cognizant nose in particular, the olfactory sector—or smell, as it is known, can be a medium for the most exquisite poetry,' to which Lew responds: 'Sounds almost religious, sir' (*AtD* 689).

Although Kathryn Hume is undoubtedly correct to caution against taking 'half-heard spiel in a grotesque carnival' as 'the philosophy either of the author or of the whole novel' ('Religious' 186), when viewed alongside other textual evidence from across Pynchon's corpus, Replevin's statement takes on significant weight. Pynchon's olfactory poetics invest in the 'cognizant nose' for the reasons we have seen: spatially, 'fugitive odors' flow, like Aether, 'ever toward the continuous as against the discrete,' thereby resisting the linearity of the 'capitalist/Christer gridwork' (*Me&D* 366; *AtD* 64, 1208); temporally, the body's capacity for 'Nasotemporal transit' questions 'a particular sort of time, uniform, one-way, in general not reversible,' with olfaction's potent links to memory enabling a powerful invocation of a spectral past that might otherwise be 'unrecorded, charm'd invisible to history' (*AtD* 460; 'Nearer'; *Me&D* 268); and affectively, smells compel recognition, both of the other and our own perviousness, simply because they cannot be ignored. Though this rediscovered olfactory appreciation may not offer a political praxis—as Saleem Sinai observes, a 'nose will give you knowledge, but not power-over-events'—Pynchon's efforts to nurture a 'cognizant nose' nevertheless contribute to 'the affective, sensorial tuning and retuning of the social body' (Rushdie 426; Highmore 136).

As a result, we can add a temporal coordinate lacking in Harris's notion of smell's 'polychronicity' (467): the future. In addition to introducing us to the 'überschnozz' of

Conkling Speedwell, *Bleeding Edge* notes that one of his associates is even ‘proösmic—she can foreshell things that’re going to happen’; indeed, picking up on a ‘reverse *sillage*, a wake from the future,’ she promptly vacates New York before the terrorist attacks on the World Trade Centre (*BE* 235–36, original italics). Indubitably fantastical, this could all be easily dismissed as one of many ‘utopian dreams’ that are little more than ‘defective forms of time-travel’ (*AtD* 1056). However, Pynchon’s texts intimate that if we are to reach a better future—perhaps one full of ‘bakery smells,’ like the *Inconvenience* at the end of *Against the Day*—then, as Plug informs the Chums of Chance, we ‘Gotta use ah snoot ... till ah snoot tells us we’re dere [*sic*]’ (*AtD* 1217, 451–52). Pynchon is aware of the fallibility of his olfactory poetics, which remain irrevocably indefinite: ‘perfume and shit and the smell of brine . . . and the smell . . . *of . . .*’ (*GR* 531, original italics). Added to this indefiniteness is the sense that we may not be, like Pirate Prentice, ‘nasally equipped’ enough for the task (*GR* 16). Yet Pynchon’s olfactory poetics—expressive, instructive, affecting, sensitizing—imply that we must rely ‘upon such frail expectations, fugitive as the smell of a Roast through an open window’ (*Me&D* 420). The numerous sensitive noses in his fiction form a sharp contrast to the ‘iced out’ noses of Esther and Mucho, among others, pointing towards the possibility for a certain form of sagacity—with all its etymological connotations of having ‘an acute sense of smell’—much like the ‘ever-alert’ Lindsay Noseworth (*VL* 311; ‘sagacity, n.’; *AtD* 6). All in all, Pynchon may well want us to echo Nietzsche’s claim that ‘[m]y genius is in my nostrils,’ for as his great rival for the master of olfaction states:

[W]hen from a long-distant past nothing subsists, after the people are dead, after the things are broken and scattered, taste and smell alone, more fragile but more enduring, more unsubstantial, more persistent, more faithful, remain poised a long time, like souls, remembering, waiting, hoping, amid the ruins of all the rest. (Nietzsche, *Ecce Homo* IV i; Proust 54)



## Pynchon's Mouths

- [O]n important occasions human life is still bestially concentrated in the mouth: rage makes men grind their teeth, while terror and atrocious suffering turn the mouth into the organ of rending screams. (Bataille, 'Mouth' 59)
- 'I specialize in abuses of power, I'm good, I'm fast, I enjoy it.'  
'My dentist talks like that. This will be fun.' (VL 360)
- Well, Under The Sign Of The Gross Suckling. Swaying full-color picture of a loathsome fat drooling infant. In one puddinglike fist the Gross Suckling clutches a dripping hamhock (sorry pigs, nothing personal), with the other he reaches out for a human Mother's Nipple that emerges out into the picture from the left-hand side, his gaze arrested by the approaching tit, his mouth open—a gleeful look, teeth pointed and itching, a glaze of FOODmunchmunchyesgobblemmm over his eyes. (GR 707)

Plainly, the mouth is as important in Pynchon's work as the eyes and the nose. The first few pages of *V.* alone tell of the removal of Ploy's teeth and 'Suck Hour' at the Sailor's Grave bar, while later in the novel the dentist Dudley Eigenvalue offers his theories on 'psychodontia' (*V.* 11, 13, 153). *Gravity's Rainbow* contains many significant oral events: Slothrop's 'hopeless [tongue] holocaust'; Brigadier's Pudding's urolagnia and coprophagia; Katje's memories of Blicero's teeth—'long, terrible, veined with bright brown rot'—which she 'recalls (...) before any other feature'; and so forth (GR 118, 235–36, 94). In addition to introducing the Golden Fang—a 'bunch of honky dentists' and apparent heroin cartel who work 'out of some weird-ass building look [*sic*] like a big tooth'—*Inherent Vice* recounts Coy and Hope Harlingen's need for 'new choppers' owing to a firm slap from the 'soiled hand of smack' (*IV* 293, 300, 312). But mouths are not only noteworthy in these three novels: Pynchon's fiction is replete with 'face-stuffing activities,' even 'food craziness,' and more than the odd jibe at 'depraved yuppie food preferences' (*IV* 97; *VL* 20, 35). With many of his characters also 'smoking, chewing gum, drinking coffee, some all at the same time,' the mouth consumptive's function is evidently a recurrent concern (*VL* 75). Likewise, 'dicks going into mouths [*is*] a popular motif,' as are oral musical instruments such as the kazoo, harmonica, and saxophone (*BE* 306). Various smiles are depicted across Pynchon's oeuvre too, ranging from the insincerity of 'identical Corporate' and 'big California smiles,' to the 'totally unreal gesture of civility' that can be expressed by an 'unmistakably friendly smile,' without forgetting one of Pynchon's favourites, the shit-eating grin (GR 210; *IV* 79, 334; *AtD* 1216). This is by no means a comprehensive list of the mouth's role in Pynchon's

fiction. Indeed, when Deleuze and Guattari propose that Kafka ‘manifests a permanent obsession with food, ... an obsession with the mouth and with teeth and with large, unhealthy or gold-capped teeth’ (*Kafka* 20), they could just as easily be talking about Pynchon, perhaps literature’s greatest odontophobe. Although prior critical interventions, turned to below, have touched on aspects of the mouth’s significance in Pynchon’s writing, no study attends as intensely to the mouth as this chapter will do, a singularity of focus that enables re-readings of certain well-known passages and firmly establishes the import of the oral microtext in his work.

In and on the mouth, Michel Foucault remarks, ‘depths and surfaces are articulated’ (*Language* 179). Yet where my previous chapter began with the surface visibility of the nose and then moved into the olfactory depths, here we will proceed contrariwise, remaining in the depths before making our way to the surface. Deleuze provides us with a rationale for this procedure. Though Foucault highlights the repeated ‘emphasis of the mouth’ (*Language* 179) in Deleuze’s *The Logic of Sense*—which discusses, for example, the Cheshire Cat in *Alice in Wonderland*, as well as the mouth in the work of Antonin Artaud and Melanie Klein—we should note that it is a significant figure in Deleuze’s other studies, too; it is the subject of important asides in his work with Guattari, as we saw in relation to Kafka above, and plays an important role in *Francis Bacon: The Logic of Sensation*. It is in Deleuze’s study of Bacon—who stated that he ‘always hoped ... to paint the mouth like Monet painted a sunset’ (Sylvester 50)—where we find this chapter’s guide, because here Deleuze proposes that ‘beyond the scream there is the smile’ (*Francis* 25).

Complementing my comments on olfaction in the previous chapter, the mouth—the ‘classic visual icon of threat’—is a site where Pynchon explores a ‘threatening, haunting’ history, to the ‘terror and atrocious suffering’ of which the only responses are ‘rending screams’ (Joy 467; GR 285; Bataille, ‘Mouth’ 59). Our first oral examination, drawing on Sara Guyer as well as Deleuze, will thus be of the various screaming, occasionally disembodied mouths in Pynchon’s fiction. These mouths are an essential backdrop to the focal episode of this chapter’s first section: the ‘Disgusting English Candy Drill’ at Mrs. Quoad’s in *Gravity’s Rainbow* (GR 118). Most critics, such as Brian McHale, habitually see this simply as ‘a memorable slapstick scene’ (*Constructing* 70), which takes as its premise that ‘the English are kind of weird when it comes to the way things taste,’ but this obscures the fact that the physical effects Slothrop endures are the closest *Gravity’s Rainbow* comes to evoking ‘what *really* went on’ in concentration camp gas chambers (GR 116, 296, original italics). As Katalin Orbán points out, ‘the Holocaust as an event is conspicuously—even

radically—missing from a text so obsessed with Western progress as a technology of death’ (161), which makes the novel’s note that Slothrop’s ‘tongue’s a hopeless holocaust’ all the more significant (GR 118). Given the undeniably comic quality of the scene, we must therefore ask: ‘For pity’s sake, is *this* ethical?’ (GR 56, original italics). By introducing Patrick O’Neill’s thoughts on black, or what he terms ‘entropic humour’—‘the comic treatment of material which resists comic treatment’ (90)—this chapter’s first section will attempt to reappraise the relegation of the ‘Disgusting English Candy Drill’ to pure slapstick, arguing instead that it is where *Gravity’s Rainbow* insistently poses and provokes questions regarding the ethics of representation (GR 118).

The second, lengthier part of this chapter, which is itself divided into four sections, will explore the relevance to Pynchon’s corpus of Enzian’s notion in *Gravity’s Rainbow* that ‘[t]he Mouth lately has been too much in service’ (GR 522, original capitalisation). Because Colin A. Clarke has ably demonstrated how Mason and Dixon ‘supress uncomfortable ... questions with profuse amounts of food and drink’ (83), my focus will initially be on Pynchon’s awareness of the importance of chewing gum and lipstick to American efforts in the Second World War, which is less critically accounted for. The mouth here becomes another site, echoing my previous chapter’s concerns, where Pynchon raises the issue of a desire that comes to desire its own repression. Although critics such as Doug Haynes have highlighted the recurrence of ‘dubious dentists’ in Pynchon’s fiction (‘Under’ 7), quite why this is the case is in need of further elucidation. One tempting explanation, both for Pynchon’s odontophobia and general ‘obsession with the mouth and with teeth,’ can be found in the few public photographs in which we see his resemblance to *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s Floyd Perdoo, a ‘slightly bucktoothed and angular American’ (Deleuze and Guattari, *Kafka* 20; GR 271). Yet to move beyond the most perfunctory of psychoanalytic speculations, the dentist, I argue, is the epitome of the Foucauldian concept of disciplinary power in Pynchon’s writing: ‘Brush your teeth and go toddling off to war’ (GR 8). Understanding the dentist as such will help to unearth the significance of other critically underappreciated tropes: teeth, biting, and, lastly, the smile. Of all the face’s features, the mouth is portrayed most bleakly in Pynchon’s work. Even a ‘rare smile’ can be deeply unsettling: Ned Pointsman’s, for example, will ‘haunt’ Roger Mexico ‘as the most evil look he has ever had from a human face’ (GR 273, 89). Indeed, rather than offering a moment of intersubjective connection, the smile in Pynchon’s fiction is more often a kind of mask, the very face of American late capitalism itself. Before we come to rest on this surface, we must first plunge into the harrowing oral depths, turning now to the mouth as figure of the void.

i) **'a wide-open human mouth, mortal, crying, screaming'** (*AtD* 142)

In *The Logic of Sense*, as Sara Guyer outlines, Deleuze 'identifies two modes of nonsense (or literature) and distinguishes between a literature of the face and a literature of the mouth' (82). The puns and gobbledegook of *Alice in Wonderland* serve as his prime example of the former—a literature of face, figure and surface—whereas the biting, crunching, plosive nature of Artaud's work exemplifies the latter, a literature of depths and orifices. Given Pynchon's penchant for puns, silly acronyms, and so forth, it is certainly true that his fiction, on one level, fits with Deleuze's first category. Yet this surface quality has been over-emphasised in the field of Pynchon criticism—as epitomised by Lance Olsen's claim that in Pynchon's writing 'language becomes a meaningless and joyous affirmative freeplay in a world without truth' (81)—which is precisely why the darker undercurrents of the 'Disgusting English Candy Drill' have been obscured (*GR* 118). Before we turn to this episode specifically, we thus need to acknowledge the significance of depths and orifices in Pynchon's writing too, particularly as the mouth is both part of the face—'a surface-holes, holey surface, system'—and part of the 'volume-cavity system proper to the (proprioceptive) body' (Deleuze and Guattari, *ATP* 170).

An open mouth is frequently a terrifying image in Pynchon's oeuvre. In *Vineland*, for instance, Frenesi Gates feels threatened by 'the past [that] was on her case forever, the zombie at her back, the enemy no wanted to see, a mouth wide and dark as the grave' (*VL* 71). The mouth's cavernousness attains especial importance in *Against the Day*. Drawing on Norse mythology, the novel relates the 'tales of Harald [Hårdråde] the Ruthless, son of King Sigurd, sailing north'—'death's region' in Pynchon (*AtD* 142; *GR* 322). Harald eventually comes to the end of the world known as 'Ginnungagap the lightless abyss' (*AtD* 142). This 'huge fuckin [*sic*] opening at the top of the world,' as *Bleeding Edge* puts it, is some kind of 'deep whirlpool that'd take you down and in, like a black hole, no way to escape' (*BE* 357). Ginnungagap is but one of numerous occasions—as many critics, such as Terry Reilly, have detected (140)—where Pynchon invokes the notion of subterranean journeys into the 'so-called "hollow Earth"' (*AtD* 128). These are often tinged with a utopian hope for 'refuge deep in the earth' and 'linked to the possibility of revelations,' as demonstrated by the 'Earth Concave' in *Mason & Dixon* where 'everyone is (...) forc'd at least to acknowledge one another,— an entirely different set of rules for how to behave' (*VL* 255; Berressem, 'Concave' 29; *Mc&D* 741).

Quite the opposite is true with Ginnungagap. Indeed, it is more akin to Brock Vond's journey to 'Tsorrek, the land of death' in *Vineland*: 'Once down under the earth, there would be no way to return (...) All these voices, forever' (*VL* 379). Although Harald just manages to skirt the 'fateful circumference' of Ginnungagap,

[s]omething had called to him out of that vaporous immensity, and he had answered, in a dream, and at the last instant had awakened and turned. For in the ancient Northmen's language, "*Gap*" meant not only this particular chasm, the ice-chaos from which arose, through the giant Ymir, the Earth and everything in it, but also a wide-open human mouth, mortal, crying, screaming, calling out, calling back. (*AtD* 142, original italics)

By figuring this terrifying void as a screaming, lightless mouth, Pynchon highlights how the mouth, in line with Guyer's thought, can 'give figure to what has no proper figure'; that is to say, 'the mouth is a figure of figure prior to figure,' a notion of particular relevance to Ginnungagap which pre-existed the material universe in Norse mythology (Guyer 93). Guyer's claims are not without their problems: as Deleuze writes of the 'Figure' in Bacon's work, there is an 'inevitable preservation of a practical figuration at the very moment when the Figure asserts its intention to break away from the figurative' (*Francis* 34), i.e., though the mouth may invoke a formless void it nevertheless gives it a form; the void by its nature cannot be figured as such. But if we are all 'equally exposed to the jaws of destiny,' if we may all stare into 'the very mouth of Hell!,' then in Pynchon's fiction the mouth, a black hole of faciality, is frequently aligned with a potentially all-consuming, existential abyss (*VL* 18; *AtD* 13).

Ginnungagap is far from the only screaming mouth in the face of what Samuel Beckett's Malone would call 'the great cunt of existence' (*Trilogy* 260). *Vineland*, for example, notes the 'long, desolate howling' of the Thanatoids, as well as Sid Liftoff's readiness 'to lift his throat in desolate, transpersonal cry' (*VL* 345, 340); Deuce Kindred tends 'to scream a lot' to try 'to awaken from his life' in *Against the Day* (*AtD* 1185); and when the eponymous V. is dismantled while under the guise of the Bad Priest, she begins 'to cry. Tearless, half-nasal; more a curious succession of drawn-out wails originating far back in the mouth cavity' (*V.* 344). The cavernousness of the Bad Priest's mouth is emphasised by the fact that 'her teeth [a]re gone,' comparable to Edvard Munch's *The Scream* (*V.* 344). Taken over by 'a fear of losing [God] which was worse than the fear of death,' V.'s long wails come from so deep that they are from a place that is 'past speech,' beyond language, the organised subject and the face; they are 'unlike human or even animal sound' (*V.* 344). From her mouth, a 'godforsaken hole,' comes the expression of an

anguish that language cannot organise, which is true of Domenico—whose screams follow the cutting out of his tongue in *The Crying of Lot 49*—too (Beckett, *Not I* 376; *CL49* 45). The scream is, quite obviously then, representative of ‘atrocious suffering,’ an overwhelming ‘chorale of pain’: ‘[t]he cry that breaks in your chest *then*, the sudden, solid arrival of loss, loss forever, the irreversible end of love, of hope . . . no denying what you finally are . . .’ (Bataille, ‘Mouth’ 59; *AtD* 170; *GR* 671, original italics).

The parallels with Munch and Bacon are apposite here. Deleuze suggests that Bacon’s scream ‘is the operation through which the entire body escapes through the mouth’; that is, ‘the body attempts to escape from itself *through* one of its organs in order to rejoin the field or material structure’ (*Francis* 16, original italics). As Ginnungagap indicates, the mouth in Pynchon’s fiction can be detached from corporeal coordinates. A further example can be found in a description of the Whole Sick Crew in *V*:

tongues and backs of teeth stained purple by this morning’s homemade wine, lipstick which it seemed could be peeled off intact, tossed to the earth to join a trail of similar jetsam—the disembodied smiles or pouts which might serve, perhaps, as spoor for next generation’s Crew. (*V*. 296)

For Guyer, it is important to acknowledge the ‘difference between the face as metonymy of the mouth—a mouth that belongs to someone, to a subject who speaks—and the mouth that belongs to no one, the mouth that becomes a mouth in the opening of a one who—opened, disfigured—has no face’ (90). Guyer’s two mouths bare some resemblance to Deleuze’s two literatures, with the ‘face as metonymy of the mouth’ mapping onto a literature of surface, the ‘mouth that belongs to no one’ onto a literature of depth and orifice. Though facelessness will predominantly be investigated in my next chapter, the idea of a mouth with no face is crucial to the haunting quality that many mouths attain in Pynchon’s writing.

Take Slothrop’s tour of war-torn Berlin in *Gravity’s Rainbow*. Walking along the Jacobistrasse, Slothrop comes to an archway

shaped like the entrance to the Mittelwerke, parabolic, but more like an open mouth and gullet, joints of cartilage receding waiting, waiting to swallow (...) it laughs as it has for years without stopping, a blubbery and percussive laugh, like heavy china rolling or bumping under the water in the sink. A brainless giggle, just big old geometric me, nothin’ t’ be nervous about, c’mon in. . . . But the pain, the twenty, twentyfive years of pain paralyzed back in that long throat . . . old outcast, passive, addicted to survival now, waiting the years out, waiting for vulnerable saps like Slothrop here to expose itself to, laughing and crying and all in silence (...) and how can Slothrop just walk down into such a schizoid throat? (*GR* 436–37)

This passage shows the limitations of Kathryn Hume's opinion that archways in Pynchon are 'linked to light, sacred places, and mystic insight, reflecting the possibility of transition to a different mode of life' ('Religious' 178). There is no transition here, only impasse. Although the archway is also said to have 'two squared eyes,' even a 'Face,' it is hardly a 'subject who speaks'; indeed, it is trapped in silent paralysis, akin to the way Reef Traverse's voice is 'paralyzed as if in a nightmare' when he cries in *Against the Day*, as we saw in my first chapter (GR 436–37; *AtD* 955). Whilst defaced architecture cannot be expected to speak in any conventional sense, we start to see here, particularly with the notion of a 'schizoid throat,' the mouth's involvement with a haunting past that exceeds expression, representation (GR 437).

Pynchon's disembodied mouths have important literary precursors, such as the grin of the Cheshire Cat in *Alice in Wonderland*—'a grin without a cat! It's the most curious thing I ever saw in all my life,' Alice famously exclaims (Carroll 57)—and 'Mouth' in Beckett's play, *Not I*, where a mouth is all that is lit on stage. Beckett takes the idea of a mouth with an ontological status of its own to its horrifying apex. With Mouth detached from the body, for reasons that are never made clear, it ('she!') is now seemingly doomed to an interminable garbling (*Not I* 377). In fact, the lyrics of one of *Gravity's Rainbow* songs offer a brief synopsis: 'Mouth keeps goin' (...)/ Gabbin at a terrible pace' (GR 522). (We might recall Randolph Driblette's comments about *The Courier's Tragedy* in *The Crying of Lot 49* too: 'all the closed little universe in the circle of that stage is coming out of my mouth, eyes, sometimes other orifices also' (*CL49* 54).) Beckett's aim with *Not I* was that Mouth would 'work on the nerves of the audience, not its intellect,' and a terrifying sense of irreparable subjective dislocation predominates (qtd. in Brater 190). Relatedly, in a statement that forms a cornerstone of Deleuze's analysis, Bacon said that he sought 'to paint the scream more than the horror,' attempting, like Munch before him, to capture the sensation of the scream, rather than any particular cause (qtd. in Deleuze, *Francis* 34). All faith in a liberal-humanist subject is seen to have collapsed in Munch, Bacon, and Beckett, and this is powerfully rendered at an oral level, as it is in Pynchon's fiction, too.

The last intertext worth mentioning, before we focus on the 'Disgusting English Candy Drill,' is Nathanael West's *The Day of the Locust*, a potential source for the name Pierce Inverarity in *The Crying of Lot 49*. ('Dr. Know-All Pierce-All' is a cult figure and—in keeping with Pynchon's sneers at healthy eating—'raw-foodist' who is taken as a guide by his followers, such as Maybelle Loomis, 'in the search for Health, along the Road of Life' (West 182, 116).) *The Day of the Locust* famously concludes with its protagonist Tod Hackett

hearing the siren of a police car

scream and at first he thought he was making the noise himself. He felt his lips with his hands. They were clamped tight. He knew then it was the siren. For some reason this made him laugh and he began to imitate the siren as loud as he could. (West 183)

It is moments like this that Gloria Young has in mind when she states that West's 'vision is too black for satire, too bleak for hope' (103). There appears to be no escape from the horrifying world depicted in the novel: Tod's scream is a kind of nightmarish, mechanical paralysis, his throat just as schizoid as the archway on the Jacobistrasse. We might say the same of the fractured narrative voice in *Gravity's Rainbow* as well, which some critics have accounted for by suggesting that the narrator is 'a Vietnam veteran' (Slade, *Thomas Pynchon* 160; S. Smith 16). But *Gravity's Rainbow* does not allow us to pinpoint a distinct locus from which the voice emerges, thwarting the Calvinist 'love for the word' (GR 271). Where else does it emanate from, then, if not a 'schizoid throat' that belongs to no one (GR 437)?

As we have seen, the mouth in Pynchon's fiction is often evocative of an abyssal horror and the source of an immense 'shrieking-outward' in the face of 'dark history' (GR 720; *CL49* 112). This has key ramifications for the episode we have been making our way towards, the 'Disgusting English Candy Drill' at Mrs. Quoad's (GR 118). As I outlined earlier, Brian McHale reads this simply as a 'memorable slapstick scene' (*Constructing* 70), and to give further critical appraisals in a similar vein: Molly Hite merely comments that it is '[o]ne of the funniest episodes in the book' (135), whereas Luc Herman and Steven Weisenburger cursorily dismiss it as 'just another exercise in black humo[u]r' (203). Since Alec McHoul and David Wills are correct to state that 'Pynchon makes it impossible to treat jokes, philosophy, slapstick, death, tasteless movies, God, pornography, physics ... as forms of discourse bifurcated into the "serious" and the "frivolous"' (9), we need to redress this critical oversight. Roger Henkle is one of the few critics to see this episode as '[m]ore than a take-off on the notoriously eccentric English sweet tooth,' but his argument that 'it is also a metaphoric reduction of the joined Pynchon images of war and sex' (274) misses the deeper undercurrent: the Holocaust.

The vital question here is one we should always pose of Pynchon's humour: what, exactly, are we laughing at? If the 'Disgusting English Candy Drill' is funny, it is not only because it satirises the quirkiness of English taste buds but also because of the severity of Slothrop's physical reactions: his mouth fills 'with horrible alkaloid desolation, all the way back to the soft palate where it digs in'; he starts 'coughing violently' while his 'shrivelling



tongue' is 'tortur[ed]'; and 'freezy frosty-grape alveolar clusters [form] in his lungs,' with the whole experience 'hurt[ing] his mouth too much to breathe, even through his nose' (GR 117–118). Two particular sweets are of significance. The first is the Mills Bomb, which leaves Slothrop only 'able to croak' one word—'Poisoned'—and even Darlene, who is likely accustomed to her grandmother's confectionery, starts 'clutching her throat and swaying against [Slothrop]' (GR 117–118). The second is an 'operationally extinct' sweet called the Fire of Paradise (GR 119). Although no longer produced, 'every now and then,' we are told, 'one will surface,' perhaps—in another evocation of an all-consuming mouth—amongst 'electronic components of resin and copper that the War, in its glutton, ever-nibbling intake, has not yet found and licked back into its darkness' (GR 119). The Fire of Paradise has a 'protean taste,' descriptions of which are said to resemble those of 'poison and debilitating gases found in training manuals' (GR 119).

In light of all this, surely it is significant that Slothrop's tongue is said to be 'a hopeless holocaust' (GR 118)? Though Katalin Orbán has otherwise carried out the most successful work on 'the Holocaust's absence and presence' both in *Gravity's Rainbow*—where the word is only used eight times, always in lower case, and never in direct reference to what would now be considered "the Holocaust"—and critical readings of the text, her claim that the Holocaust is always 'a misplaced signifier, an error pointlessly intruding on the normal course of narration,' seems misguided in this context (161, 164). In addition to Slothrop's physical reactions, the name of the Fire of Paradise sweet cannot help but call to mind the etymological roots of the word Holocaust, all-burnt, which in turn correlates to Blicero's hopes for transcendence once the Schwarzgerät reaches its Brennschluss, or end of burning. Pynchon is undoubtedly on incredibly shaky ethical ground as the 'unspeakably awful' events of the concentration camps are never far divorced from the slapstick quality of the scene: what are we laughing at if not torture, suffocation, poisoning (GR 118)?

Evidently, there is more going on in this episode than most critics are willing to concede. Even though Herman and Weisenburger acknowledge a darker undercurrent, their statement that it is 'just another exercise in black humour' reveals an implicit value judgement that saps the scene of any significance (203). Black, or what Patrick O'Neill terms 'entropic humour,' may on one level be understood as a 'refusal to treat what one might regard as tragic materials tragically'; as such, perhaps Herman and Weisenburger view this episode merely as the manifestation of 'a frivolous desire to shock' (O'Neill 90, 83, 91). But O'Neill suggests this need not be the case: black humour can also be 'the expression of a sense of disorientation' (91). If black humour allows us to 'envisage the

facelessness of the void,’ then the fact that Slothrop’s physical reactions are as close as *Gravity’s Rainbow* comes to evoking ‘what *really* went on’ in the Nazi gas chambers means we can see his mouth as ‘the opening of [the ones] who—opened, disfigured—ha[ve] no face’ (O’Neill 100; GR 296, original italics; Guyer 90).

Although some may still view the comic register as inappropriate, Pynchon’s entropic humour works on two levels: first, it obscures the scene’s darker undercurrent, showing how easy it is for horrors to pass before our eyes unnoticed; and second, as a ‘laugh laughing at the laugh’—‘the laugh that laughs ... at that which is unhappy’—it dramatizes the impossibility of ever ‘squeezing any kind of sense, however bleached, out of the victims’ fate’ (Beckett, *Watt* 48, qtd. in O’Neill 91; Adorno 361). Through Slothrop’s mouth, Pynchon therefore poses the vital question: how do you give ‘figure to what has no proper figure’ (Guyer 93)? Because Mrs. Quoad withholds the Fire of Paradise sweet from Slothrop, the full textual arrival of the Holocaust is prevented, leaving it to remain ‘in its particularity,’ as Orbán has convincingly argued, ‘a dense black hole’ in the text (162). Yet we should nevertheless notice that the closest it comes to being represented is via the mouth, itself so often a dense black hole.

ii) **‘the Mouth lately has been too much in service’** (GR 522)

After Harald Hårdråde is fortunate enough to avoid sailing over ‘the lip of the abyss,’ this ‘moment of unsought mercy’ helps him to understand ‘more than he perhaps cared to about desire, and the forsaking of desire in submission to one’s duties to history and blood’ (O’Neill 96; *AtD* 142). Following this cue, we now turn away from the mouth as figurative void to an investigation of the many ways in which it is ‘too much in service’ to political power in Pynchon’s writing. Enzian’s statement regarding the mouth’s complicity, which forms this section’s subtitle above, is actually followed by the claim that there has been ‘[t]oo little coming out of use to anybody’ (GR 522). Though this might be a productive line of inquiry considering Pynchon’s evocation of ‘synchronized voices [that] repeat the same formulas, evasive, affectless,’ I want to focus instead on what goes in- and onto the mouth because these things are more prevalent, whilst still indicative of submission and complicity (*VL* 195). Pynchon frequently evokes the idea of the mouth’s collusion with power: ‘Inform on your friends, kids, get a lollipop from the Captain,’ Doc sardonically pronounces in *Inherent Vice*, whereas the Chums of Chance quite literally receive their orders from the ‘Upper Hierarchy’ at an oral level when Lindsay Noseworth has the

misfortune of chomping down on ‘a pearl of quite uncommon size and iridescence’ in their weekly Oyster Stew (*IV* 97; *AtD* 126).<sup>1</sup> Although there are many things which highlight the mouth’s complicity in Pynchon’s fiction, as we shall see later in this chapter, there are three in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, in particular, to be addressed first: penises, briefly, as ‘dicks going into mouths [is] a popular motif’; chewing gum; and lipstick (*BE* 306).

In the first part of this chapter we saw how the mouth comes to symbolise ‘the great cunt of existence,’ and Pynchon draws an oral and genital connection on many occasions (Beckett, *Trilogy* 260). In *V.*, for example, Benny Profane rests his head near Rachel Owlglass’s labia majora, ‘as if it were a mouth there which could speak to him,’ whilst in *Gravity’s Rainbow* Greta Erdmann whispers ‘out of scarlet lips, open, wet’ (*V.* 422; *GR* 395). If *Gravity’s Rainbow* is concerned, as Lawrence Wolfley claims, with ‘our very Western propensity to seek meaning, to project it into the most empty vaginal void’ (885), it is perhaps no surprise that the abyssal mouth is often the receptacle for one of the novel’s key signifiers, the penis. The act of fellatio, indeed, becomes one of the main indicators of how ‘sexuality is brought into the service of a routinized, militaristic state’ (Chapman 4). As Blicero says to Gottfried: ‘You had nothing, not even by then your mouth’s innocence, to lose’ (*GR* 104). Lyle Bland, for instance, has worked with the FBI ‘hand-in-glove (or, as grosser individuals have put it, penis-in-mouth)’ on a ‘Killer Weed advertising campaign,’ while ‘bitchy little Melvin Purvis’ lights a cigar during the fictionalised capture of John Dillinger and feels ‘already between his lips the penis of official commendation’ (*GR* 581, 522).

The epithet ‘bitchy’ is undoubtedly problematic, especially as the text later laments the prevalence of ‘idle and bitchy faggotry’ amongst those ‘in high places’ (*GR* 616). Allan Wilde is right to identify homosexuality’s alignment with ‘the sterile destructiveness of masculine technologies’ in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, which frequently makes the novel ‘scathingly homophobic’ (87). In a similar vein, Julie Christine Sears argues that Pynchon ‘appears to have accepted the stereotypes of the cold war period that equated homosexuality with Nazism,’ suggesting, too, that in *Gravity’s Rainbow* ‘a homosexual is also a child molester, a masochist, and a sadist’ (112, 109). Homosexuality is even seen as unnatural, ‘held against the entropies of lovable but scatterbrained Mother Nature’ (*GR* 324). Though a thorough exploration of these issues is, unfortunately, beyond the scope of this thesis, given the phallus’s imbrication with the technology of the Rocket, Pynchon troublingly equates the act of fellatio with ‘the fascism in us all, ... the fascism that causes us to love power, to

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<sup>1</sup> Celia Wallhead reads the Oyster Stew episode as an allusion to Rudyard Kipling’s *Kim* (299).

desire the very thing that dominates and exploits and us' (Foucault, 'Preface' xiii). It is a 'submission to one's duties to history and blood,' the expression of a desire that desires its own repression in order to fill a gaping void (*AtD* 142).

It is worth remembering that what poor Ludwig has seen during the search for his lost lemming, Ursula, is 'a lot of chewing gum and a lot of foreign cock' (GR 729). McHoul and Wills note that among the 'good deal of new American things around' during and after the Second World War, chewing gum was 'chief among these in its Americanness' (131). They do not, however, elaborate upon chewing gum's relation to power in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Turning first to the disturbing figure of Clayton 'Bloody' Chiclitz, who appears in each of Pynchon's first three novels, will help here. His surname, as Steven Weisenburger points out, resembles Chiclets, a popular American chewing gum that used to be made from chicle sap and which also became slang for teeth in America by the 1930s; to have "a mouthful of bloody chiclets" was thus to have endured an oral assault (*Companion* 291).

In *Gravity's Rainbow*, Chiclitz is one of 'two smiling fat men,' the other being Major Marvy, who see themselves as 'free enterprisers' (GR 558). Chiclitz was originally a manufacturer of toys—including racist ones, such as 'the enormously successful Juicy Jap'—in 'one tiny independent-making shop' (GR 558; *V.* 227). Yet, as *V.* details, Chiclitz has been 'expanding, buying, merging,' and his company, Yoyodyne Inc., has now become 'an interlocking kingdom responsible for systems management, airframes, propulsion, command systems, ground support equipment' (*V.* 227). From 'humble beginnings' as a small, independent business, then, Yoyodyne has morphed into a vast company that produces 'instruments of war,' while having 'more government contracts than it really knew what to do with' (*V.* 227). The voraciousness of Chiclitz's capital appetite is further evident in *Gravity's Rainbow*. In addition to his corpulence, Chiclitz is running an 'operation' in 'contraband fur coats,' 'cash[ing] in on redeployment,' and employs thirty children he hopes Cecil B. DeMille will one day direct in orgy scenes. 'Officially,' however, Chiclitz is 'one of the American industrialists (...) scouting German engineering, secret weaponry in particular': 'Myself, I think there's a great future in these V-weapons. They're gonna be really big' (GR 557–59).

Though I will address Pynchon's allusion to Operation Paperclip through Chiclitz's scouting activities later in this chapter, Chiclitz's munitions dealings clearly show him to be an embodiment of 'the impulse to empire, the mission to propagate death,' and he thus becomes an indicator of how 'American Death has come to occupy Europe' (GR 722). *Gravity's Rainbow* makes the further suggestion that the 'real business' of the Second World

War was ‘buying and selling’—‘[t]he true war [was] a celebration of markets’—and Chiclitz’s rapacious and imperial activities are a synecdoche for the consolidation of the American capitalist empire (GR 105). In this context, ‘instruments of war’ are not only Yoyodyne’s weapons, however, but also seemingly mundane commodities such as chewing gum, an idea Pynchon alerts us to with Chiclitz’s name (V. 227). Wrigley’s gum, in particular, was a powerful cultural symbol owing to its popularity amongst American GIs who traded it and gave it as gifts throughout the world. Wrigley’s was keen to portray itself as contributing to the war effort, too: the company ran a ‘Remember This Wrapper’ campaign in America when limited supplies meant only the Armed Forces were provided with their flagship products (‘The Story of Wrigley’). Although many characters chew gum in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, even Lazslo Jamf’s ‘robot crab,’ there are two particularly significant moments I want to focus on here to tease out chewing gum’s implications (GR 646).

The first of these is when Tyrone Slothrop sees a young, ‘half-suffocated’ girl being pulled out from ‘under a Morrison shelter’ (GR 24). Opening her eyes and seeing Slothrop, ‘her first words [are], “Any gum, chum?” Trapped there for two days, gumless—all he had for her was a Thayer’s Slippery Elm. He felt like an idiot’ (GR 24). Not having gum for two days is equally as horrifying, it seems, as being trapped under rubble. That gum is the first thing she wants—not food, nor drink—indicates the status it has attained for this young girl: it is the comfort of the most American of commodities, more orally soothing even than a Slippery Elm, a throat lozenge. Amongst the wreckage of the war, then, the American commodity has become established as a potential alleviator of suffering. This is demonstrated further when Slothrop sees the girl ‘smile, very faintly, and he knew that’s what he’d been waiting for, wow, a Shirley Temple smile, as if this exactly canceled [*sic*] all they’d found her down in the middle of’ (GR 24). Both gum and the commodified smile—the latter of which we shall turn to again later in this chapter—are here endowed with the capacity to plaster over the cracks of the war’s destruction.

This idea is cemented in the second important passage, which occurs when Enzian is in conversation with Andreas, during which he

swallows a tablet of German desoxyephedrine then pops in a stick of gum. Speed makes teeth grind, gum gets chewed by grinding teeth, chewing on gum is a technique, developed during the late War by women, to keep from crying. (GR 731)

Like cocaine, to recall my previous chapter, chewing gum is being used to assuage the pain of warfare. The marketing of chewing gum has often highlighted its diversionary comfort;

as past Wrigley's adverts have claimed: 'Chew your little troubles away'; 'Life seems brighter when you chew' (Cinegraphic). But in closing off the potentials of crying that I discussed in my first chapter, chewing gum obstructs the critical eye. As Leon Trotsky argues:

Capital does not like the working man to think and is afraid. . . . It has therefore . . . put up automats in each station and has filled them with disgusting candied gum. With an automatic movement of the hand the people extract from these automats pieces of sweetish gum, and they grind it with the automatic chewing of their jaws. . . . It looks like a religious rite, like some silent prayer to God-capital. (qtd. in Mathews 63)

In *Gravity's Rainbow*, therefore, chewing gum represents the imperial reach of the American commodity, the escapist relief it offers acting as a mask for capitalism's destructive face. The mouth which chews gum is thus, for Pynchon as it was for Trotsky, very 'much in service' (GR 522).

Another key commodity in the war was lipstick. 'In these war years,' *Gravity's Rainbow* proposes, 'the focus of a woman's face is her mouth. Lipstick, among these tough and too often shallow girls, prevails like blood' (GR 232). The cosmetics company Elizabeth Arden claimed that lipstick provided women with their 'war face' (Delano 36), while it also, as Mary Ann Doane explains, became indicative of women's 'split subjectivity'; they had to be both 'masculinized worker and the embodiment of femininity' (*Desire* 29, qtd. in Delano 53). Lipstick consequently carried out a dual function, preserving femininity whilst simultaneously indicating that women were 'tough.' This dynamic is captured neatly by Adrienne Niederritter's essay, 'Speak Softly and Carry a Lipstick,' a pun on Theodore Roosevelt's foreign policy, 'Speak softly and carry a big stick.' Essentially, this involved negotiating peacefully (speaking softly) while using the threat of military might (a big stick) to placate the enemy. Niederitter's re-articulation indicates Page Delano's point that 'the very "props" which sexualized and limited women also offer[ed] ... visibility and assertiveness' (41).

Cosmetics—especially lipstick—were considered so important for women's morale that, as Niederitter highlights, their manufacture was never affected by the restrictions of the War Production Board (5). But any notion that the wearing of lipstick was a 'politically meaningful practice of women in World War II' is certainly not one we find in *Gravity's Rainbow* (Delano 35). Indeed, Pynchon continues a tradition in which, Delano argues, 'a more complex World War II woman has been painted over' (44), as the suggestion that lipstick was worn by 'too often shallow girls' makes all too evident (GR 232). Luce Irigaray would hardly be surprised by this. In an appeal to women to 'reappropriate our mouth,'

Irigaray states: ‘That our lips make us women does not mean that consuming, consummating, or being filled is what matters to us’ (‘When’ 71, 73). The problem for Pynchon seems to lie in the idea that the application of a consumer product to one’s lips can become a signifier of toughness; that is, any notion of depth is written only on the surface by the cosmetic commodity. As lipstick was worn by scores of women who left their domestic surroundings to work in the factories and support the war effort, it is not so much a marker of an ‘unstable/unruly identity’ in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, rather yet another way in which the mouth is ‘too much in service’ to political power (Delano 58; GR 522). Since it was most often red, ‘prevail[ing] like blood,’ the application of lipstick in the novel is but further ‘submission to one’s duties to history and blood’ (GR 232; *AtD* 142).

Fellatio, chewing gum, and lipstick, as I have indicated, are all signifiers of the mouth’s complicity with power in *Gravity’s Rainbow*. But a telling image in the aptly named ‘green little river town of Mouthorgan, Missouri,’ demonstrates that this is far from the whole story: ‘well here come these cancan girls now, Folies-Bergères maenads, moving in for the kill, big lipstick smiles around blazing choppers’ (GR 584). The lipstick we are now familiar with. What needs to be addressed for the remainder of this chapter are teeth and smiles, as well as their policemen, dentists, who are always sinister characters in Pynchon’s fiction. Of course, teeth and smiles often come together: Frau Gnab’s ‘big sweet smile [is] just as toothy as can be’ (GR 496). But having just rested on the surface with lipstick, we will move back into the mouth—a site where ‘depths and surfaces are articulated’ (Foucault, *Language* 179)—as teeth are a site where Pynchon explores the Foucauldian concept of disciplinary power.

### iii) **‘God help us all, Dentists on trampolines’** (*IV* 212)

In his article, ‘The Telltale Teeth: from Psychodontia to Sociodontia,’ Theodore Ziolkowski traces a movement from psychodontia—the idea that one’s teeth are demonstrative of one’s psychological state, a term Ziolkowski actually takes from Pynchon (*V*. 153)—to sociodontia, a ‘cosmetic view’ encapsulated by ‘the grinning face that is ... [a] product of our image conscious culture’ (14). Following Ziolkowski’s lead, which is itself inspired by Kurt Vonnegut’s *Mother Night*, will help us to come to a ‘political interpretation of teeth’ in Pynchon’s fiction (Vonnegut 64). We require first, however, a trip to the dentist. David Cowart rightly highlights a ‘bizarre dentistry theme that *Inherent Vice* shares with Pynchon’s other novels’ (*Dark Passages* 129), which contain numerous ‘dubious

dentists,' most notably Dudley Eigenvalue in *V.*, Dr. Elasmio in *Vineland*, and Dr. Rudy Blatnoyd and the rest of the 'bunch of honky dentists' that make up the Golden Fang in *Inherent Vice* (Haynes, 'Under' 7; *IV* 293). In spite of these critical interventions, dentistry's position in Pynchon's fiction is in need of further elaboration. Haynes's idea of the dentist as an 'anti-miner' ('Under' 7) works neatly with *Inherent Vice*, for instance, but it cannot account for the ways in which dentists are seen to 'specialize in abuses of power' across Pynchon's oeuvre (*VL* 360).

These abuses are analogous to those of the plastic surgeon, Shale Schoenmaker, investigated in my previous chapter; indeed, their correspondence is highlighted by the fact that Esther is 'seated in a dentist's chair' during her operation, as well as by *Gravity's Rainbow*'s note that 'army surgeons and dentists will bond and hammer patent steel for life into [Tchitcherine's] suffering flesh' (*V.* 104; *GR* 702). Moreover, like Schoenmaker, dentists' exploitation of their cultural position repeatedly has a sexual element: the 'lascivious tooth physician,' Dr. Elasmio, for example, is seen 'on his own horny way to an illicit rendezvous,' whereas the 'lecherous toothyanker himself,' Dr. Rudy Blatnoyd, has sexual relations with one of his mentally unstable patients, Japonica Fenway. Blatnoyd also has an affair with his receptionist—'I mean, what dentist doesn't, it's some oath they all have to take in dentist school' (*VL* 226–227; *IV* 173, 345).

The cultural power of the dentist is first established in *V.* when the narrator suggests:

Back around the turn of the century, psychoanalysis had usurped from the priesthood the role of father-confessor. Now, it seemed, the analyst in his turn was about to be deposed of, by all people, the dentist.

It appeared to have been little more than a change in nomenclature. Appointments became sessions, profound statements about oneself came to be prefaced by "My dentist says . . ." Psychodontia, like its predecessors, developed a jargon: you called neurosis "malocclusion," oral, anal and genital stages "deciduous dentition," id "pulp" and superego "enamel." (*V.* 153)

The supposition here actually allies closely with Sarah Nettleton's genealogy of dentistry. Nettleton contests that in the years between the First and Second World Wars dentistry shifted its treatment from a 'purely anatomical to a *psychological space*' (86, original italics). Eigenvalue, who is twice referred to as a 'soul-dentist,' explains to Stencil that 'what the psychoanalysts used to call ambivalence, we now simply call a heterodont configuration,' which is Eigenvalue's diagnosis for the 'approach and avoid' method of Stencil's quest (*V.* 226, 297, 249, 55). Eigenvalue's dominant position is reinforced by the fact that he seems to be aware of Stencil's 'obsession' with *V.* before Stencil even informs him of it (*V.* 155).



The move from the space of the mind to the ‘half-alive hardware’ of teeth—from the mental to the dental—is clearly a variation on the novel’s general theme of creeping inanimateness (*V.* 391). This impression is furthered when it is noted that the ‘teeth (for which, in fact, Eigenvalue had acted as a subcontractor)’ of the ‘marvelous manikin’ SHOCK are ‘the same kind of dentures worn today by 19 per cent of the American population,’ as well as by the fact that whenever V. ‘smiled or grinned in ecstasy there would gleam her *crowning* feature: Eigenvalue’s precious dentures’ (*V.* 285, 412, *italics mine*).<sup>2</sup> McHoul and Wills nevertheless argue that *V.* shows there to be ‘something special’ about teeth; they are ‘proof that the animate could live with the inanimate, that it does of necessity, all along’ (177). While there is some truth to this statement, McHoul and Wills occlude the social construction of teeth. Which is to say, teeth are not simply ‘innocent incisors ‘n’ Momworshipping molars,’ rather, they are deeply imbricated with, even constituted by, the disciplinary discourse of dentistry (*GR* 204). For what is made evident in the passage above is that in the creation of its own ‘jargon,’ psychodontia has given dentistry knowledge of and power over both teeth and their possessors, and the discourse of the dentist thus dominates: ‘My dentist says. . . .’ (*V.* 153).

As Nettleton observes, ‘the way in which the mouth and teeth have come to be policed [is] . . . a fine exemplar of a key theme in Foucault’s work, that is disciplinary power’ (74). Foucault defined this as the ‘penetration of regulation into even the smallest details of everyday life’ (*Discipline* 198). Dentistry is evidently seen as a form of regulating bodies in Pynchon’s writing: ‘Here for my Smile Maintenance appointment with Dr. Rudy!’ (*IV* 170). The dentist’s power is not only in the consultation room, however, but also in the home where we brush our teeth, floss, and so on; the trail of toothpaste tubes ‘wrinkled or embossed by the unconscious hands of London’ in *Gravity’s Rainbow* shows how this self-regulation becomes automatic (*GR* 130). This disciplinary power is intimately related to bio-power, too, an ‘explosion of numerous and diverse techniques for achieving the subjugation of bodies and the control of populations,’ which was, Foucault adds, an ‘indispensable element in the development of capitalism’ (*History of Sexuality* 140). The dentist is always aligned with the functioning of capitalist biopower in Pynchon’s fiction. Before Dr. Elasmó came to run his ‘chain of discount dental franchises called Doc Holliday’s, famous for its \$49.95 OK Corral Family Special,’ he ‘enjoyed a franchise to meddle in the lives and with the precious time of people he didn’t even know,’ issuing

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<sup>2</sup> In my first chapter, I followed Kathleen Fitzpatrick’s argument that ‘the most focal’ part of *V.* is her glass eye, which is, admittedly, seemingly contradicted here (99). Perhaps the pun on crown, though, was simply too good/bad to pass up.

them with ‘a form that required them to come to his offices at a certain time. No-show penalties were never exactly spelled out, only hinted at’ (*VL* 227). The name of Elasmó’s chain highlights the violence of dentistry—which operates ‘in a currency of pain inflicted, pain withheld, pain drugged away, pain become amnesia’ (*VL* 228)—as Doc Holliday was not only involved in the infamous O.K. Corral shootout but was also a trained dentist, whilst the allusion to ‘compulsory visibility’ suggests that we all have to enter ‘Dr. Larry’s World of Discomfort’ (Foucault, *Discipline* 179; *VL* 228).

The first character to feel the full effects of dentistry’s power is the naval engineman Ploy in *V.*’s opening pages. Ploy is ‘always picking fights’ because ‘the Navy have decided to remove all of [his] teeth’ (*V.* 11). This is clearly a disciplinary measure: instead of ‘root canal work,’ Ploy is issued with ‘a gleaming *regulation* set of upper and lower plates’ (*V.* 11, 12 italics mine). Moreover, the work is carried out by ‘dental officers’ (*V.* 11), corroborating Nettleton’s observation that dentists are ‘not simply surgeons ... but custodians’ (80). Foucault defined power as ‘an action upon an action, on possible or actual future or present actions’ (*Essential* 340). Against Ploy’s will—he was, after all, ‘in earnest about keeping his teeth’—his body has been acted upon and his teeth therefore become an ‘inscribed surface of events’ (*V.* 11; Foucault, *Language* 83). Important here is the ‘primitive identification of teeth with potency’ (Ziolkowski 14). Losing one’s teeth is thus a loss of power, which is acknowledged by Freud’s reading of the pulling of teeth in dreams as a symbol of castration (*Interpretation* 345). Linguistic idioms display this sense too: Webb Traverse, for example, suffers his ‘last kick in the teeth’ when Kit leaves in *Against the Day* (*AtD* 546). Ploy has had a symbol of potency taken from him, leading him to see ‘apocalypse,’ scream ‘lengthy obscenities,’ and profess: ‘Man, I want to die’ (*V.* 11, 12). Although Ploy’s body has clearly been regulated, a key idea in Foucault’s thought is that ‘where there is power there is resistance’ (*History of Sexuality* 95). The policing of Ploy’s mouth is not only coercive, but productive too. Following his own “kick in the teeth,” Ploy attacks the same symbol of potency taken from him, swinging ‘from the overhead like an orang-utan, trying to kick officers in the teeth’ (*V.* 11). He engages in the ‘refusal of a scientific or administrative inquisition that determines who one is,’ sharpening his teeth and getting so ‘juiced he went and bit a marine on the ass’ (Foucault, *Essential* 331; *V.* 36).

It is worth pausing here to consider the act of biting in Pynchon’s fiction as Ploy is far from the only one to engage in this act. In *Against the Day*, for example, Ruperta Chirpingdon-Groin’s dog, Moufette, resists Reef’s attempts to put his ‘nice *big dog bone*’ in her mouth with a bite, a comical turn on the primal fear of the vagina dentata (*AtD* 749,

original italics). Further, though limited, examples involve humans such as Slothrop, Katje, and Major Marvy, who ‘gnash[es] about the Harz’ in *Gravity’s Rainbow* (GR 469, 221, 331); non-human animals, including dogs, horses, chimps, and ‘American bugs, who so much resent being brush’d off Human Surfaces, that they will bite anyone for even approaching’ (*AtD* 1089, 815; GR 503; *Me&D* 293); and even inanimate objects, such as the biting watch in *Mason & Dixon* (*Me&D* 325). In addition, Pynchon often invokes vampires and zombies, such as Miskolci in *Against the Day*, who, though ‘not exactly a vampire,’ nevertheless and ‘in obedience to phases of the moon had been known to go around randomly waylaying and rudely biting the odd civilian’ (*AtD* 801).

Miskolci is a member of Derrick Theign’s ‘prætorian apparatus’ in Vienna. The narrator informs us:

Back in the late [18]90s, when vampirism became fashionable owing to the international popularity of the novel *Dracula*, granting biters of all sorts license to obey their impulses in public, Miskolci discovered that, far from being alone with a depraved taste, he was part of a quite-extensive community. A subcircuit of the Buda-Pesth telephone exchange had apparently been reserved for the use of hæmatophages (...) so one of Miskolci’s most valuable assets, for Theign, had been this red haze of connective threadwork, already in being, which surrounded him. (*AtD* 801)

The fantastical notwithstanding, the publication of *Dracula* deterritorialized oral desire, the passage suggests, enabling the formation of a new ‘connective threadwork.’ Yet desire is soon reterritorialized as Theign uses Miskolci not only for his connections, but to torture information out of someone known only as ‘the subject’ (*AtD* 801). Since the subject remains ‘superficially unharmed,’ his piercing screams demonstrate that the ‘Flashin [of] fangs’ really can ‘Do funny thangs [*sic*], to your brain’ (*AtD* 802; *IV* 242). Miskolci’s threatening mouth becomes yet another that performs ‘duties to history and blood’ (*AtD* 142). This serves to clarify the limitations of Ploy’s resistance: he becomes overly aggressive, ‘snapp[ing] his teeth’ at Profane and opening ‘his jaws wide’ to sink his ‘newly-filed dentures’ into barmaids’ buttocks (*V*. 12–13). But the very staging of the question of resistance through biting indicates the wider sense in Pynchon’s writing of a lack of viable modes of political opposition. As Bataille notes, ‘rage makes men [*sic*] grind their teeth’ (‘Mouth’ 59), but there seem to be few avenues in which this anger can be constructively directed in Pynchon’s fiction. Even the embattled agent Hector Zuñiga, who takes a ‘giant bite’ out of the ‘clear sheet candy’ window Zoyd jumps through at the opening of *Vineland*, is eventually so ‘congested in every system of circulation’ that his options do not ‘even include teethgrinding’ (*VL* 12, 344).

iv) **'So show us a smile that's shiny bright'** (GR 9)

To return to dentists, they are at their most powerful in *Inherent Vice*. Doc Sportello, the private eye protagonist, spends much of the novel trying to work out what the Golden Fang is—‘what they call many things to many folks’—and just how far and deep its influence runs (*IV* 159). One of its members, the dentist Dr. Rudy Blatnoyd, claims that the Golden Fang is merely ‘a syndicate, most of us happen to be dentists, we set it up years ago for tax purposes, all legit’ (*IV* 169). Yet the Golden Fang is ‘not just a tax shelter (...) Uh-uh. Much, much more, what you would call vast’ (*IV* 214). In addition to being the name of a ‘big schooner,’ the Golden Fang appears to be an ‘Indochinese heroin cartel’ carrying out ‘scag-related activities in the Far East’ (*IV* 87, 159, 334). *Inherent Vice* hence invokes the menacing, paranoid edge for which Pynchon is now well-known, encapsulated in Jade’s note to Doc: ‘P.S.—*Beware of the Golden Fang!!!*’ (*IV* 77, original italics). Even Blatnoyd—owing to his ‘fatality for rogue profit-sharing activities’—ultimately falls victim to ‘the unthinkable vengeance [the Golden Fang] turn to when one of them has grown insupportably troublesome’; he is seemingly murdered by ‘puncture wounds on his throat, consistent with bites from the canines of a midsize wild animal. That’s what the coroner found. Keep it under your hat’ (*IV* 318, 213).

The ‘honky dentists’ of the Golden Fang conspire to sell heroin—a drug which ‘[s]ucks’ the calcium out of your system like a vampire,’ making ‘your teeth go all to hell’—while also offering services to overcome drug addiction and to repair the dental damage; that is, they ‘not only traffic in Enslavement, they peddle the implements of Liberation as well’ (*IV* 293, 36, 294). As Doc realises:

If the Golden Fang could get its customers strung out, why not turn around and also sell them a program to help them kick? Get them coming and going, twice as much revenue and no worries about new customers—as long as American life was something to be escaped from, the cartel could always be sure of a bottomless pool of new customers. (*IV* 192)

One figure caught in the snares of the Golden Fang’s two markets is ‘The Boards’ former saxophonist, Coy Harlingen. In order to kick his junk habit, Coy agrees to fake his own death and never see his family again, becoming a ‘snitch for the LAPD and a undercover agent for the Viggies [a group of Republican activists called Vigilant California] and maybe the Golden Fang’ (*IV* 313). Coy’s assent comes with a telling request: ‘Can I get some new choppers?’ (*IV* 300). Whilst his new dental configuration takes ‘some adjusting,’ particularly

as ‘the new teeth meant a new embouchure,’ his ‘new choppers’ become the signifier of his ‘reincarnation’ and, concomitantly, his complicity (*IV* 301, 300).

Coy’s wife, the ironically named Hope, also tried to escape from American life by using heroin, which started her on the same journey from ‘[f]lower child to wasted derelict, zap, like magic. And that’s the good part’ (*IV* 36). While LSD signifies the potential promise of new visions in the 1960s and cocaine indicates consumer complicity in the 1980s in Pynchon’s fiction, as we have seen in my previous chapters, heroin marks the end of the hopes and dreams of sixties counterculture. Hope, too, has had to replace her teeth, though unlike the premium dental treatment Coy receives she has to make do with a ‘set of store-bought choppers which, though technically “false,” invited those she now and then did smile at to consider what real and unamusing history might’ve put them there’ (*IV* 36). This history seems, initially at least, to have been tragically transferred to Hope’s daughter, the equally ironically named Amethyst. Amethyst comes from the Greek *amethystos*, meaning “not intoxicated,” yet as Hope was using heroin while pregnant her ‘baby’s appearance,’ as some polaroids reveal to Doc, is ‘swollen, red-faced, vacant’ (*IV* 38).

Although Coy and Hope may be extreme cases, what Pynchon’s texts expose is a ‘real and unamusing history’ underlying all the ‘glittering choppers’ we see in his work, such as the ‘double row of shiny bright teeth’ that belong to the ‘fanged dipsomaniac’ Major Marvy in *Gravity’s Rainbow* (*IV* 36; *GR* 210, 287, 559). Pynchon makes this particularly clear in *Mason & Dixon* and *Gravity’s Rainbow*. In the former novel, a ‘convers[ation] about politics’ is ‘animated’ by nasally ingested coffee-dust, alcohol, tobacco, and, significantly, an abundance of sugar in

lucent brown cones great and little, Ic’d Cupcakes by the platter-ful, all manner of punches and flips, pies of the locality, crullers, muffins, and custards,—no table that does not hold some sweet memento, for those it matters to, of the cane thickets, the chains, the cruel Sugar-Islands.

‘A sweetness of immorality and corruption,’ pronounces a Quaker gentleman of Philadelphia, ‘bought as it is with the lives of African slaves, untallied black lives broken upon the greedy engines of the Barbadoes.’

‘Sir, we wish no one ill,—we are middling folk, our toil is great as anyone’s, and some days it helps to have a lick of molasses to look forward to, at the end of it.’

‘If we may refuse to write upon stamped paper, and for the tea of the East India Company find a tolerable *Succedaneum* in New-Jersey red root, might Philosophy not as well discover some Patriotic alternative to these vile crystals that eat into our souls as horribly as our teeth?’ (*Me&D* 329–30)

The voice that pronounces ‘we wish no ill’ completely ignores the fact that the comfort he receives from ‘a lick of molasses’ relies upon ‘untallied black lives’ in the ‘cruel Sugar-Islands.’ This is a constant theme in the novel: in the opening pages, for example, Rev<sup>d</sup>

Cherrycoke is offered ‘a large Basket dedicated to Saccharomaniac Appetites, piled to the Brim with fresh-fried Dough-Nuts roll’d in Sugar, glaz’d Chestnuts, Buns, Fritters, Crullers, Tarts,’ to which he responds—‘Why, Lads, you read my mind’—even though he is aware of the ‘Negro Slavery, that goes on making such no doubt exquisite moments possible’ (*Me&D* 7, 412). As Brian Thill has convincingly argued, at such moments ‘Pynchon invokes a society wherein the avoidance of discomfort is in part a product of a culture in which the readily available commodity has become too convenient a form of pacification’ (74–5). Lured by the promise of the ‘chowhound’s delight,’ we ‘supress ... uncomfortable questions’ and evade, like Franz Pökler, the ‘inconveniences of caring’ (*IV* 118; Clarke 83; *GR* 428). Yet the ‘unchecked consumption of all these modern substances’—especially, in Pynchon’s fiction, sugar, coffee, tobacco, and alcohol—continues to transmit a ‘real and unamusing history’ because coffee, for instance, is still ‘produced by workers who often receive almost as little profit from it as did the slaves and peasant workers of the eighteenth century’ (*Me&D* 330; *IV* 36; Clarke 88). Dentists, as well as products such as ‘American toothpaste,’ not only mask, therefore, the effects these substances have on teeth by ‘carefully scrubbing away the nicotine stains and tartar,’ but also, in the process, divert potential questions about the provenance of consumer products and their wider societal implications (*GR* 714; *IV* 36). The dentist, in short, despite advising against saccharomania, must also ensure that the consumer can continue to consume and not think past the desire for ‘FOODmunchmunchyesgobblemmm’ (*GR* 707).

If sugar’s ‘vile crystals ... eat into our souls as horribly as our teeth,’ and if we recall that Eigenvalue is a ‘soul-dentist,’ perhaps no teeth say more about the “soul” of the contemporary world than Blicero’s in *Gravity’s Rainbow* (*Me&D* 330; *V*. 226, 297). Katje Borgesius, who ‘belongs (...) cruelly to the Oven ... to *Der Kinderofen*,’ remembers Blicero’s

teeth, long, terrible, veined with bright brown rot (...), the yellow teeth of Captain Blicero, the network of stained cracks, and back in his night-breath, in the dark oven of himself, always the coiled whispers of decay. . . . She recalls his teeth before any other feature, teeth were to benefit most directly from the Oven: from what is planned for her, and for Gottfried. (*GR* 94)

Blicero—who was originally called Major Weissmann, or “white man”—takes his moniker from a Latinized version of a ‘nickname the early Germans gave to Death [Blicker],’ which they saw as ‘white: bleaching and blankness’ (*GR* 322). Blicero desires to ‘break out—to leave this cycle of infection and death,’ a cycle dramatically reflected in his rotten teeth (*GR* 724). He believes the final launch of the Schwarzgerät will bring transcendence, with teeth

benefiting most directly as this will be ‘a whitening, a carrying of whiteness to ultrawhite’ (GR 759). Some critics, such as Judith Chambers, have consequently argued that *Gravity’s Rainbow* ‘intimat[es] prospects for some kind of spiritual transcendence, such as that described by Wernher von Braun’ in the novel’s epigraph (4–5). While there is scope to read *Gravity’s Rainbow* this way, particularly as it is thrice noted that Blicero is ‘only dead,’ in order to see the problems with Chambers’s view we need only quote the chilling words of Luthar von Trotha, the German general who carried out the Herero genocide in Sud-West Africa with which both *V.* and *Gravity’s Rainbow* are so preoccupied: ‘Only following this cleansing can something new emerge, which will remain’ (qtd. in Mamdani 10).

Pynchon is keen to draw a continuum between Nazism, its antecedents, and post-war America, predominantly through allusion to the Joint Intelligence Agency’s Operation Paperclip, which involved the recruitment of Nazi rocket scientists for the NASA space programme following the end of the Second World War. These scientists, such as von Braun, officially had to be “bleached” of their Nazism. Rather than the Second World War being a triumph over fascism, then, *Gravity’s Rainbow* highlights its persistence: ‘I couldn’t go with von Braun,’ Achtfaden remembers Klaus Närrisch remarking, ‘it would only just keep on the same way . . .’ (GR 456). And as ‘[t]eeth and metals endure,’ as Eigenvalue consoles himself, white teeth are not simply a marker of good dental health in Pynchon’s fiction, instead a signifier of an enduring cultural fascism. By covering over a ‘network of stained cracks,’ the dentist helps to maintain ‘The Kingdom of Lord Blicero. A white land’ (GR 486). The various sets of ‘perfect teeth’ seen in Pynchon’s work—Major Marvy’s ‘bright set of teeth,’ Isaiah Two Four’s ‘five-figure California orthodontia,’ Ralph Waynone’s ‘high-ticket dental work,’ and so on—are thus always deeply unsettling (GR 397, 473; *VL* 19, 93). With ‘identical Corporate smiles’ beaming out their ‘multiplication of (...) glittering choppers’ that ‘dazzle’ and distract from a ‘real and unamusing history,’ it is perhaps little surprise that we often see the smile, onto which our attention now turns, treated with more than a little suspicion in Pynchon’s writing (GR 210; *IV* 36).

v) **‘That’s no smile. No. That’s no smile’** (*VL* 288)

To be sure, there are some pleasant smiles in Pynchon’s fiction. In *Vineland*, for example, Prairie feels her mouth ‘stretching (...) to accommodate a smile she could not yet feel the limits of,’ while in *Bleeding Edge* Maxine Tarnow receives a smile from a random woman in New York, which ‘in this bright noisy flow of city indifference comes like a beer on the

house in a bar where nobody knows you' (*VL* 297; *BE* 441). Yet many more have a terrifying quality. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, Pointsman's smile will haunt Roger Mexico as 'the most evil look he has ever had from a human face'; Wimpe has an 'old, old smile to chill even the living fire in Earth's core'; and Enzian's prolonged 'Spaceman Smile turn[s] everything inside a mile radius to frozen ice-cream colours NOW' (*GR* 89, 701, 732, original capitalisation). The picture is little better in *Against the Day*: Scarsdale Vibe's 'rose-dyed smile, the smile of a pope in a painting, framed in a face that didn't customarily smile, [is] one you'd prefer never to see, for it meant trouble on the tracks'; Foley Walker's 'smile, in its satisfaction, [strikes] even Scarsdale as terrible'; Padzhitnoff's 'smile, while perhaps unremarkable down on Earth's surface among, say, a gathering of the insane, here, thousands of feet in the air and far from any outpost of Reason, seem[s] even more ominous than the phalanx of rifles' (*AtD* 1186, 112, 138).

It is crucial to note here that a smile can be as much with the eyes as with the mouth. Indeed, what has come to be known as the Duchenne smile, named after the French physician Guillaume Duchenne, comprises the contraction both of the zygomatic major, the facial muscle that controls the majority of the mouth area, and the orbicularis oculi, which controls the muscles around the eyes, too. A "real" or "genuine" smile—a Duchenne—necessitates the contraction of the orbicularis oculi, whereas a 'sociable, entirely false smile'—like DL's in *Vineland*—is 'an Attitude of the Mouth only,' to recall Maskelyne's 'careful Smirk' in *Mason & Dixon* (*VL* 170; *Me&D* 117). Pynchon continually shows an awareness of this dynamic: in *Against the Day*, for instance, Wren is said to be 'technically (...) smiling though it didn't get quite as far as her eyes,' a sharp contrast to Prairie's dog Desmond who is 'smiling out of his eyes' at *Vineland*'s conclusion (*AtD* 316; *VL* 385).

As we have some conscious control over the zygomatic major but not the orbicularis oculi, we can attempt to discipline our mouth 'to smile with every appearance of sincerity,' like the 'Foreign Service' and 'diplomatic' smiles that *V.* highlights (*V.* 132, 491). Many characters are, therefore, able to use their 'forced' smiles to their advantage: Metzger has his 'winning Baby Igor Smile,' Reef Traverse affects 'the roguish smile that would apparently never fail him,' whilst Slothrop realises, as he smiles at Hillary Bounce, that 'it's working. (...) The best part of all is not that Bounce appears fooled by the smile, but that Slothrop knows now that it will work for him again. . . .' (*GR* 458; *CLA9* 32; *AtD* 1084; *GR* 253). Yet this all goes to show that while, on one hand, the smile 'is perhaps the most immediately expressive muscular contraction of which our bodies are capable' (Trumble



xli)—hence Doc’s willingness to be paid only with ‘a quick smile, long as it was real’ (*IV* 314)—the fact that it can be at least partially disciplined demonstrates, on the other, that it ‘can be a kind of mask’ (Trumble 3).

Before examining issues of masking, the central concern of my next chapter, it is worth summarising what we have uncovered by focussing on the mouth. We have seen how the mouth frequently denotes a figurative void in Pynchon’s fiction and proves to be a crucial site for his investigation of history, particularly the Holocaust. The mouth is a void, however, which we feel a pressing need to fill: penises, chewing gum, lipstick, food, drink, all function as ways of channelling desire into the service of capitalism in Pynchon’s work, a process that is often aided and abetted by the dentist. Notwithstanding the occasionally positive scene of communal consumption, such as ‘the gathering meant to honor the bond between Eula Becker and Jess ‘Traverse’ in *Vineland* (*VL* 369), Pynchon’s depiction of the mouth is predominately negative, even relentlessly so, which is a common description of smiles in his oeuvre, too: Brock Vond dreams of ‘the Madwoman in the Attic’ with her relentless animal smile’ in *Vineland* (*VL* 274–75); Loren Passerine’s smile is ‘practised and relentless’ at the end of *The Crying of Lot 49* (*CL49* 126–27); and in *Mason & Dixon*, ‘a Jesuit in a violet cassock’ has a ‘relentless Smile and brightness of eye only the Mad may know,’ while even the sun is as ‘relentlessly beaming as an idiot’ (*Me&D* 515, 628). Relentless, perhaps, because we are unrelentingly projected images of smiling faces by the faciality machine, a cultural impulse satirised in Barbara Ehrenreich’s *Smile or Die*. But as these smiles are in many senses masks, we can now start to see why Deleuze and Guattari claim that the ‘mask is now the face itself, the abstraction or operation of the face’ within capitalist society, the focus of my next chapter (*ATP* 181).

## Pynchon's Masks

- What do you think of Sartre's thesis that we are all impersonating an identity? (*V.* 130)
- It is no doubt through the mediation of masks that the masculine and the feminine meet in the most acute, most intense way. (Lacan, *Four* 107)
- [H]er face turned  $\frac{3}{4}$  away, not even a profile, but the terrible Face That Is No Face, gone too abstract, unreachable: the notch of eye socket, but never the labile eye, only the anonymous curve of cheek, convexity of mouth, a noseless mask of the Other Order of Being, of Katje's being—the lifeless non-face that is the only face of hers he really knows, or will ever remember. (GR 222, original capitalisation)

Despite this thesis's hitherto concern with the face's component features, there are also moments in Pynchon's writing where it can resemble a 'featureless blastulablob,' taking on a 'form'—like the face of the character with which this chapter will be most preoccupied, Katje Borgesius—that is 'so pictureless, chartless, mapless: so *habitually blank*' (GR 53, 136, original italics). By highlighting the recurrent presence of false smiles in my previous chapter, moreover, we have begun to see how the face can act as a kind of mask (GR 210). Ideas of the mask and masking are invoked across Pynchon's corpus: many characters don a literal mask as physical disguise, while others use their own face as a mask in social interaction, whether through the application of cosmetics, the concealing of emotion, or simply through what Erving Goffman has termed 'the presentation of self in everyday life'—the idea that, as T.S. Eliot's Prufrock would have it, we 'prepare a face to meet the faces that [we] meet' (Goffman, *Presentation* 1; Eliot 27). Apparent already, is that rather than being distinct, the terms face and mask are deeply interrelated. Pynchon makes this evident throughout his oeuvre, from Stencil's suspicion in *V.* that 'all faces are blank masks' through to *Bleeding Edge*'s comical note that Maxine Tarnow has downloaded Nicholas Windust's dossier 'from some Deep Web directory for spooks called Facemask' (*V.* 487; *BE* 108). Yet masks and faces are not just interconnected in Pynchon's novels: the Greek term *prosopon*—the root of the rhetorical trope of *prosopopoeia* (literally, "giving face to")—can mean both face and mask. Crucially, as David Napier observes, the term mask here 'refer[s] to a far broader class of phenomena than the mere object (mask) *prosopon* is usually taken to mean, including the mask, the dramatic part, the person, persona, and the face' (8). Pynchon consistently and explicitly explores this wider understanding of masking. In *Against the Day*, for instance, to give just one example among

many, Cyprian Latewood is said to be ‘free unarguably now from the rigid mask of his old office self’ once he abandons his submissive role with Derrick Theign (*AtD* 1046). In addition to the ‘plain old Mask’ of physical disguise, then, this chapter concerns itself with the way we play certain roles as *dramatis personae*, as well as with the notion that, as Emmanuel Levinas suggests, ‘faces are masks’ (*Me&D* 732; Levinas ‘Ego’ 34, qtd. in Schroeder 260).

In the introduction to this thesis, I claimed that by attempting to read the face in Pynchon’s texts we can come to a fuller understanding of his interrogation of ‘the false assumption that identity is single, soul continuous’ (*V.* 307). Masks and masking play a vital role in this. For Efrat Tseëlon, masking is even ‘the quintessential postmodern device for destabilising categories,’ facilitating the exposure of the ‘multiplicity of our identity’ (11, 5). The first part of this chapter will thus investigate the multiple moments where Pynchon’s characters wear a literal mask. Rather than thoroughly disputing or upholding Julie Christine Sears’s argument that ‘fluidity and fuzziness are celebrated in *Mason & Dixon* more thoroughly than in *Gravity’s Rainbow*’ (120)—though I would be in general accordance with it—I want to take her statement forward into Pynchon’s subsequent novel, *Against the Day*, as it is here where we see the most significant exploration of masking in his work through the staging of a counter-Carnival known as Carnesalve. The question is: to what extent can the events of Carnesalve—which are said to succumb ‘to a masked imperative, all hold on verbatim identities loosening until lost altogether in the delirium’—be read as furthering the celebration of fluidity Sears sees in *Mason & Dixon* (*AtD* 987)? Is Pynchon embracing the possibilities of Mikhail Bakhtin’s concept of the carnivalesque—on which more below—or, conversely, might the apparent potentials of the counter-Carnival actually mask a greater sense of fixity, a dwindling sense of political hope, in Pynchon’s writing? Although Carnesalve seems initially to promise ‘deeper intimacy,’ I argue, the celebration of fluidity is tempered because of Pynchon’s awareness that the mask is caught in an interminable ‘dialectic of concealing and revealing’ (*AtD* 987; Tseëlon 3).

This same dialectic obviously applies to the face itself: after all, ‘[m]uscles of your face have been laughing tight with pain, often trying not to betray *any* emotion, all your life’ (*GR* 643, original italics). The remainder of this chapter will therefore shift its attention away from the mask as physical object to an exploration of masking in a more general sense. Drawing on Michael Taussig’s discussion of an important intertext for this chapter, Thomas Mann’s *Death in Venice*, the main contention here is that at work in Pynchon’s novels is what Taussig terms ‘the face of defacement,’ a dialectical process that reveals ‘how

masklike all faces are—sets of meaningful features, like pictures or texts, trading in apparent permanence or realness for a mobile façade, not unlike writing itself’ (*Defacement* 92). In order to see how the ‘face of defacement’ functions in Pynchon’s fiction, we shall turn first to the thought of Erving Goffman, perhaps, to borrow shamelessly from Wikipedia, ‘the most influential American sociologist of the twentieth century’ (‘Erving Goffman’). While many critics have not hesitated to see Pynchon’s corpus alongside wider sociological thought, the focus has tended, since the first monograph on his writing by Joseph Slade, towards ‘Pynchon’s polygonal adaptation of [Max] Weber’s theories’ (‘Religion’ 170).<sup>1</sup> Although it is true that ‘Pynchon’s indebtedness to Weber is immediately obvious’ (McClure 29)—some of Weber’s key terms, such as rationalization, charisma, routinization, and bureaucracy, recur throughout *Gravity’s Rainbow*, with Weber himself even making an appearance in the novel (GR 464)—our appreciation of the many sociological issues raised by Pynchon’s texts is limited when they are viewed through a singular, Weberian lens. This section will thus attempt to demonstrate how Goffman’s ‘dramaturgical analysis’ of social interaction, particularly in relation to what he terms ‘face-work’—those times where ‘the person’s face is clearly something that is not lodged in or on his [or her] body, but rather something that is diffusely located in the flow of events’ (*Interaction* 7)—can be a helpful way to conceptualise and address many of the sociological concerns raised by Pynchon’s fiction, yet which remain largely unaccounted for in the critical literature.

Following this general engagement with Goffman, we will zone in specifically on Katje Borgesius’s face in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, indisputably one of the most significant, not to mention unsettling, faces in the whole of Pynchon’s writing. Katje is especially adept at using her face as a performative mask, raising issues of masking on numerous levels: the masquerade of feminine identity, the use of cosmetics in the construction of a performative face, and even the death-mask, as Katje’s face is often more a ‘lifeless non-face’ than anything else (GR 222). Indeed, despite T’seëlon’s claims that the mask ‘signals transformation not fixity’ (9), Katje’s mask-like face is more correctly seen alongside Stencil’s viewing of Godolphin towards the end of *V*.: ‘The lantern that night had given an

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<sup>1</sup> To be clear, this quotation actually comes from Slade’s later essay, ‘Religion, Psychology, Sex and Love in *Gravity’s Rainbow*,’ published in Charles Clerc’s edited collection, *Approaches to Pynchon’s Gravity’s Rainbow* (153–199). In addition to Slade and McClure, further enlightening discussion of Weber’s influence on Pynchon can be found in, among others: Thomes Moore’s *The Style of Connectedness* (especially pages 116–149); and Ralph Schroeder’s ‘Weber, Pynchon, and the American Prospect’. My turn away from Weber could be seen as part of an emerging trend. In *Pynchon and Philosophy*, for instance, Martin Eve attempts, ‘via a destabilisation of Weber as the sole authority in readings of Pynchon’s Enlightenment writing,’ to uncover ‘sides to the Enlightenment beyond instrumental reason in Pynchon’s works’ (19).

illusion of change: but Stencil saw now the face was fixed as any death-mask' (*V.* 488). As we have seen earlier in this thesis, Samuel Thomas has provided an astute reading of the destruction of Godolphin's face in *V.*, but the analysis here intends to supplement and extend Thomas's valuable observations to account for the fact that many of the faces mentioned in Pynchon's texts are of 'a realm proper more to ceremonial masks than specific human faces' (*AtD* 1112). Alongside the mutability of identity promised by the mask as facial disguise, then, there is also what Roland Barthes has termed 'the absolute mask,' which 'perhaps implies less the theme of the secret (as is the case with the Italian half mask) than that of an archetype of the human face' ('Face' 56). Pynchon's exploration of the functioning of the abstract machine of faciality, which socially and politically constructs just such an archetype, repeatedly reveals his accordance with Milan Kundera's declaration that 'faces are lamentably alike' ('Painter's' 12). Though the specificity of certain faces is undoubtedly as significant in Pynchon's fiction—an issue to be addressed in my following chapter—investigating the mask will help to uncover how the face is, in Tom Gunning's words, a 'pivot between individuality and typicality' (2). It is this very typicality Deleuze and Guattari have in mind when they claim that within the present capitalist paradigm 'the mask assures the erection, the construction of the face, the facialization of the head and body: the mask is now the face itself, the abstraction or operation of the face. The inhumanity of the face' (*ATP* 181). It is only by acknowledging this inhumane quality, strikingly revealed in those moments in Pynchon's texts where the face is the very death-mask of capitalism, that we can hope to open up a space in which the argument of this thesis's final chapter—that Pynchon's markedly close attention to the face throughout his oeuvre attempts to release it from its strictures as the mask of faciality—can be posited. We have numerous coordinates to map beforehand, however, so we must now turn to the first of these: the mask as facial disguise.

i) **'But another part—an alternate self?'** (*GR* 36)

Pynchon's fiction undoubtedly exhibits a constant interest in the 'self-transformative, self-abandoning capacity' of 'costume theatricals,' which, as the narrator suggests in *Against the Day*, may 'not only [cause] aliases to be inconsistently assigned but identity itself to change' (Orbán 134; *GR* 200; *AtD* 192). We need only think here of the eponymous *V.*, of whom it is remarked that '[d]isguise is one of her attributes,' a phrase that occurs twice in the novel, the second time in reference to Mara (*V.* 388, 462); of Doc Sportello's 'collection of

disguises' in *Inherent Vice* (IV 56); or of Gabriel Ice's appearance in 'some notion of deep disguise' ('Oakley M Frames and a neon avocado lounge suit') in *Bleeding Edge*, without forgetting, of course, the moment where Zoyd Wheeler is 'disguised as the Marquis de Sod's idea of an ordinary Joe' in *Vineland* (BE 361; VL 357). Like Tchitcherine in *Gravity's Rainbow*, it is almost as if '[p]eople who dress up in bizarre costumes have a savoir-vivre—not to mention the sort of personality disorder—that [Pynchon] admires' (GR 390). Although many elements of disguise in Pynchon's texts extend beyond concealing the face—as attested by all the wacky outfits, wigs, and hats (notwithstanding 'enormous face-hiding' ones (*AtD* 355))—Napier's general point that 'a mask is itself not merely the most direct but the most widespread form of disguise' is true of Pynchon's fiction, too (3). In addition to masking devices—such as the fake 'mustache kit' Slothrop had as a teenager, and the shades sported by the likes of Oedipa Maas, Doc Sportello, and Coy Harlingen, the latter of whom has a particular 'gift (...) for projecting alternate personalities'—many characters wear a literal mask in Pynchon's oeuvre as an attempt to be 'zipped up, mask hiding face, safe, clownish-anonymous' (GR 210; IV 299; GR 617). To offer a very limited inventory: Grover Snodd wears 'a zombie mask of his own design' in 'The Secret Integration' (*SL* 177); both Stencil and Vera Meroving sport a mask at different points in *V.* (*V.* 13, 244); three 'long-limbed, effeminate' figures wear 'black silk hose pulled over their faces' in *The Courier's Tragedy* play in *The Crying of Lot 49* (*CL49* 49); Slothrop dons a 'pig mask' when he is playing the role of the tenth-century German pig-hero Plechazunga in *Gravity's Rainbow* (GR 570); DL smiles 'behind her mask,' a motorbike helmet, in *Vineland* (VL 254); the Viggies, or Vigilant California, wear 'ski masks' to hide their faces when engaged in criminal activity in *Inherent Vice* (IV 351); the tech-billionaire and fraudster Gabriel Ice is kitted out in 'a capitalist party mask, with a neo-Stalinist rerun' in *Bleeding Edge* (BE 311); and so forth. Though Mason and Dixon do not wear masks themselves—except perhaps those of each other, as when Dixon borrows a hat and coat and is noted to be 'going as Mason'—they still bear witness to a 'thick humidity of Intrigue and Masks realiz'd in locally obtain'd Fur and Plumage' when they take refuge in a cabin that, in keeping with a common trope in Pynchon's corpus, has 'more room inside than could possibly be contained in the sorrowing ruin they believ'd they were entering' (*Me&D* 347, 412–13).

In spite of these various instances, Pynchon's most sustained and extensive exploration of masks comes in *Against the Day*. At certain points, we could even see the novel as '*The Book of the Masked*,' just one of the text's many moments of self-reflexivity

which stage its concerns explicitly (*AtD* 956, original italics). (Another would be the fact that our exposure to the ‘inexorably rising tide of World Anarchism’ occurs, as it does for the Chums of Chance’s dog Pugnax, ‘safely within the fictional leaves of some book’ (*AtD* 6).) *Against the Day*’s persistent preoccupation with masking is further indicated by the fact that many of its events take place in Venice, with nearly all of the novel’s principal characters spending some time in this ‘city of masks’ (*AtD* 795). As a ‘watercity of mirrorings and reflections,’ too, Venice provides Pynchon with a geographical, historical site in which several of *Against the Day*’s considerations—light, water, historical espionage, governmental surveillance, mirrors, labyrinths, carnival, death, transformation, fixity, and so on—are reflected and refracted, in a similar manner to which light passes through Iceland Spar (Mann 257).

Most pertinently for us here, though, is the fact that Venice is ‘known for its mask industry’ (*AtD* 279). By constantly highlighting this in *Against the Day*, Pynchon recognises that there is no ‘better setting,’ as James H. Johnson writes in *Venice Incognito*, ‘in which to see the mask’s transformations’ (xi). In *Venice Desired*, Tony Tanner argues that masking ‘can release inhibition while concealing intention, intimate unknowable secrets or depthless enigmas and indicate what [Mikhail] Bakhtin calls the rejection of “conformity to oneself”’; masking raises, in short, ‘questions of identity on all levels’ (41). Before addressing these questions, however, it is worth noting that Tanner’s study concerns visions of Venice in the work of several authors, some of whom—especially Lord Byron and Rainer Maria Rilke—are widely recognized to be important influences upon Pynchon’s writing. As well as going through a self-acknowledged ‘Byron-phase,’ “The Story of Byron the Bulb” in *Gravity’s Rainbow* demonstrates, for one critic, ‘what is most vital and least problematic about Pynchon’s achievement as a writer,’ whilst the significance of Rilke’s works, most notably *The Sonnets To Orpheus* and *Duino Elegies*, in the same novel is well-documented (qtd. in Weisenburger, ‘Twenty-Two’ 696; Bloom 1; Haynes, ‘Gravity’; Hohmann). Yet the setting of *Against the Day* in Venice, in conjunction with the novel’s wider concerns, brings to mind the work of another writer with whom Tanner engages, Thomas Mann, which enables us to restate Joseph Slade’s tentative claim that Mann ‘may have influenced Pynchon’ a little more forcefully (‘Religion’ 197, note 7). Turning briefly to Mann’s *Death in Venice* will add texture to our analysis of *Against the Day*, not least because Mann’s vision correlates with many themes of Pynchon’s oeuvre more generally. These include, but are not limited to: a ‘particular fixation with the mouth,’ to recall my previous chapter (Joy 469); tourism and its deleterious effects; the damage wrought by focussing solely on financial profit; political

masking, ‘concealment and denial’; the power of odours; as well as the potential for ‘mutation’, the ‘strange’ and the ‘random’ in the ‘city of water,’ Venice (Mann 215).

Mann’s novella begins with its protagonist, Gustav von Aschenbach, walking in a cemetery. Here he is confronted by an unknown face that inspires thoughts of exoticism and danger, a sharp contrast to the rigidity with which his life has come to be characterised: ‘What he sought was something strange and random, but in a place easily reached. . . . If one wanted to travel overnight to somewhere incomparable, to a fantastic mutation of normal reality, where did one go? Why, the answer was obvious. . . . Ah, Venice!’ (Mann 209–10). In this ‘most extraordinary of cities,’ Aschenbach is beguiled by the beauty of a boy called Tadzio, despite the fact that his teeth, like those of some Pynchon characters, ‘[a]re not as attractive as they might have been: rather jagged and pale, lacking the lustre of health and having that peculiar brittle transparency which is sometimes found in cases of anaemia’ (Mann 213, 228). In the novella’s cruel ironic twist, Aschenbach attempts to leave Venice because he finds the city disagreeable—Tadzio aside—but his luggage is not delivered to the train station with him. Forced to stay, Aschenbach is nevertheless able to continue his observations of Tadzio, ‘concealing under a mask of resigned annoyance the anxiously exuberant excitement of a truant schoolboy’ (Mann 232). Yet an intolerable stench has come to overhang Venice: ‘Odours besieged the mind, the pungent reek of the goats, the scent of panting bodies and an exhalation as of staling waters, with another smell, too, that was familiar: that of wounds and wandering disease’ (Mann 258). Aschenbach eventually discovers, despite public denial and to his own mortal cost, that Venice is infected with cholera, a fact that is being hidden by the authorities because

fear of general detriment to the city, concern for the recently opened art exhibition in the Public Gardens, consideration of the appalling losses which panic and disrepute would inflict on the hotels, on the shops, on the whole nexus of the tourist trade, proved stronger in Venice than respect for truth and for international agreements; it was for this reason that the city authorities obstinately adhered to their policy of concealment and denial. (Mann 257–8)

To put this another way, Venice’s ruling bodies attempt to save face by masking the underlying infestation and deaths for the sake of profit, a process the novella identifies as ‘commercial’—if not quite inherent—‘vice’ (Mann 258).

There are certainly echoes of this idea both in *Gravity’s Rainbow*—where it is suggested that ‘the City will continue to mask itself against invasions we often do not see, whose outcomes we never learn, silent and unnoticed revolutions in the warehouse districts where the walls are blank’—as well as in *Against the Day*, where the ‘ancient town’ of Venice



is said to be ‘progressively settling into a mask of itself’ (GR 662; *AtD* 653). While Pynchon, like Mann, has always been interested in how ostensible order often conceals more unruly processes operating beneath it—the ability of the face to conceal emotion being one further example—he is also preoccupied with the inverse, with how apparent obstreperousness can actually mask entrenched order, too. This is particularly true, as *Against the Day* indicates, of Venice’s renowned Carnival. Undoubtedly, the most important thinker of Carnival is Mikhail Bakhtin, to whom we saw Tanner refer above. For Bakhtin, the carnivalesque—which, he claims, sees its fullest expression in François Rabelais’s *Gargantua and Pantagruel*—denotes the possibility for an overturning of rigid social order during the time of Carnival. Importantly for the purposes of this chapter, we can see ‘[d]eath, masks, [and] make-up’ as integral players in ‘the festival which subverts the order of the city,’ owing to the potential they offer to experiment with a more fluid identity (Derrida, *Dissemination* 142). Yet Bakhtin crucially comments that ‘the official feasts of the Middle Ages, whether ecclesiastic, feudal, or sponsored by the state, did not lead the people out of the existing world order and created no second life. On the contrary, they sanctioned the existing pattern of things and reinforced it’ (9). The ‘fantastic mutation of normal reality’ that Aschenbach so desires and Carnival above all seems to promise is more correctly seen, therefore, as Carnival’s ‘Janus face, its appearance of riot against a more sedate reality’ (Mann 310; J. H. Johnson 204). Since Carnival was heavily policed and sanctioned by the state, it offered less a space for spontaneous and creative expression of unfixed identity, rather one where political hierarchies were maintained.

Masks played a vital role in this. Many critics—Tanner and Bakhtin included—have maintained that by the eighteenth century Carnival was in place for six months of the year, whereas James H. Johnson conversely shows that the wearing of masks in Venice was rather more commonplace, a social custom that coincided with theatre season (49). Instead of viewing masks solely through some kind of laudatory lens of carnivalesque transgression, then, we must see them as far more restrictive:

In early modern Venice, masks served purposes that did not depend on anonymity. Their use defies modern notions that identify masks with deception or a mocking rejection of hierarchy. Masking in Venice was more often conservative, preserving distance, guarding status, and permitting contact among unequals through fictive concealment. *Rather than obscuring identities, masks affirmed their permanence.* (J. H. Johnson xii, italics mine)

‘But wait! There’s more!’ (BE 335). Johnson makes the further point that ‘[e]ven in carnival, masks did not always disguise’ (206). We see evidence of this in *Against the Day*. Owing to

Cyprian Latewood's elaborate attempt to obscure his identity—he is extravagantly 'decked out in a black taffeta ball toilette borrowed from the Principessa, an abbreviated mask of black leather over his eyes, his waist drawn in to an impossibly slender circumference, his small painted face framed by Signor Fabrizio's re-imagining of Yashmeen's hair, curled, powdered, sculpted, woven with seed pearls and Parma violet'—Reef Traverse is 'not sure at first who it' is (*ATD* 988). Yet 'a closer look,' as well as Cyprian's greeting—'Well howdy there, cowpoke'—soon reveals that it's 'Cyprian all right' (*AtD* 988).

Pynchon's acute awareness that masks at Carnival might not only cover the wearer's face but also a deeper sense of political rigidity is principally demonstrated, however, in the staging of a 'secret counter-Carnevale known as Carnesalve' (*AtD* 987). Though Venice has 'slowly regained a maskless condition' as Lent has come to an end, 'the silent communion of masks,' the narrator informs us, 'was not quite done here' (*AtD* 987). In contrast to Carnival, which normally precedes Lent, Carnesalve takes place on a 'slowly drowning palazzo (...) at midnight between Holy Saturday and Easter Sunday,' and is 'not a farewell but an enthusiastic welcome to flesh in all its promise. As object of desire, as food, as temple, as gateway to conditions beyond immediate knowledge' (*AtD* 987). It is at this point where the mask as object of physical disguise receives its most extensive examination in Pynchon's writing:

With no interference from authority, church or civic, all this bounded world here succumbed to a masked imperative, all hold on verbatim identities loosening until lost altogether in the delirium. Eventually, after a day or two, there would emerge the certainty that there had always existed separately a world in which masks were the real, everyday faces, faces with their own rules of expression, which knew and understand one another—a secret life of Masks. It was not quite the same as during Carnevale, when civilians were allowed to pretend to be members of the Mask-world, to borrow some of that hieratic distance, that deeper intimacy with the unexpressed dreams of Masks. At Carnevale, masks had suggested a privileged indifference to the world of flesh, which one was after all bidding farewell to. But here at Carnesalve, as in espionage, or some revolutionary project, the Mask's desire was to be invisible, unthreatening, transparent yet mercilessly deceptive, as beneath its authority danger ruled and all was transgressed. (*AtD* 987)

Carnesalve patently offers something quite different to the 'safety behind the cloaks and masks and thousand name mists of Venezia' that Hunter Penhallow is said to have sought; indeed, like the veils of the 'striking young vocalist and dancer' seen by Cyprian and Bevis in 'a former Austrian military brothel converted to more equivocal uses,' the mask at Carnesalve is 'meant more to be seen through than to protect' (*AtD* 648, 929–30). As well as providing one of *Against the Day's* most sustained confrontations with the mask, Carnesalve is yet another moment in which the novel explores the political ideology that

forms one of its central preoccupations: anarchism. For Graham Benton, the critic who has most thoroughly explored the significance of anarchism in Pynchon's writing, *Against the Day* is motivated by 'an anarchist perspective that interrogates order-making impulses on multiple discursive fronts' ('Daydreams' 191).<sup>2</sup> There is certainly evidence of this at Carnesalve where identities are released from the official leashes of the church or state. What is interesting, however, is that a certain kind of order emerges at Carnesalve: masks come to reveal rather conceal; they 'kn[o]w and understand one another' (*AtD* 987). (Order emerging from seeming disorder recurs throughout Pynchon's fiction, with the deaf-mute dance in *The Crying of Lot 49* another memorable instance (*CL49* 90–91).) Moreover, masks at Carnesalve have 'their own rules of expression,' unlike our own disciplined faces that are subject to custom, propriety, and manners. There is a sense in this passage, then, that the mask's capacity to release 'all hold on verbatim identities' might expose a 'secret life' underlying all our facial interactions, one not based not on the pretence of Carnevale but the 'deeper intimacy' of Carnesalve.<sup>3</sup> To put it another way, in more Deleuzo-Guattarian terms: the wearing of masks at Carnesalve could be seen as a dismantling of 'the face and facializations,' intimating the potential 'to become imperceptible, to become clandestine, ... by strange true becomings that get past the wall and get out of the black holes, that make *faciality traits* finally elude the organization of the face,' which Deleuze and Guattari maintain is our 'destiny,' if indeed we have one (*ATP* 171, original italics).

This is all well and good, on one level. Yet Pynchon prevents us from ever revelling in Deleuze and Guattari's 'entire becoming-clandestine' (*ATP* 188). We have to ask the question: does Carnesalve 'lead the people out of the existing world order and creat[e] a second life' (Bakhtin 9)? Is 'the old expected order of things [turned] all on its head' (*AtD* 985)? The answer is, resoundingly, no, not least because the palazzo where this 'fateful masked ball' takes place is not only 'slowly drowning,' but 'doomed' (*AtD* 964, 987–88). On an initially more positive note, the festivities bring Cyprian, Reef, and Yashmeen together into an 'erotic threesome' Jeffrey Severs suggests is 'uniquely tender in Pynchon' ('Abstractions' 217). Though Severs's view would seem to be countered by the fact that

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<sup>2</sup> Benton also provides 'An Anarchist Reading of *Gravity's Rainbow*.'

<sup>3</sup> We are reminded here too of a passage in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Tyrone Slothrop finds himself in a 'strafed and pitted lorry-park,' where faces become

fused into odd, brown *Saturday Evening Post* faces, except that they are not folksy so much as downright sinister . . . yes it's really the *Saturday Evening Post*, all right: they are the faces of the tricorned messengers coming in from out of the long pikes, down past the elms, Berkshire legends, travellers lost at the edge of the Evening. Come with a message. They unwrinkled, though, if you keep looking. They smooth out into timeless masks that speak their entire meaning, all of it right out on the surface. (*GR* 435)

Yashmeen tells Cyprian he is no more than a ‘wicked little *fellatrice*’—a ‘go-between’ passing the ‘great pungent flood’ of Reef’s ejaculate from his mouth to Yashmeen’s cunt, while Reef gives him a ‘vigorous seeing-to’ from behind—the narrative exposition nevertheless halts because ‘biomechanics is one thing but intimacy,’ the key word here, ‘quite another’ (*AtD* 990–91, original italics). Furthermore, Reef later proclaims that this is ‘Love, ol’ buddy’—the real ‘article, all right’—and between Yashmeen, Cyprian, and Reef there is unquestionably a level of affection rarely seen in Pynchon’s oeuvre (*AtD* 990–91). However, there is no longevity to this relationship. Despite the erotic intensity with which it begins, soon after experiencing Carnesalve’s ‘enthusiastic welcome to flesh in all its promise’ Cyprian starts to feel ‘a shift in [the] terms [of Desire], an apprehension that something was coming to an end,’ which culminates in his final ‘release from desire’ when he leaves Yashmeen and Reef to join a Bogomil monastery (*AtD* 999, 941). Cyprian’s ultimate ‘step to the side of the day’ bears little to no resemblance to that promised by Carnesalve (*AtD* 49). It is telling, too, that when Cyprian imagines the child Yashmeen is carrying to be not only hers and Reef’s but also, ‘in some auxiliary sense, (...) his own,’ the narrator dismisses this as a ‘masked fantasy,’ which has perhaps been the grounding of their relationship all along (*AtD* 1000).

The issues that transpire in the relationship between Yashmeen, Reef, and Cyprian serve to highlight the general problem with Carnesalve—‘as a reprieve it’s all temporary,’ to borrow out of context from *Bleeding Edge*—and it is casually dropped from the text, never to be mentioned again (*BE* 398). Even though ‘all was transgressed’ beneath the mask at Carnesalve, there is no lasting political transformation effected here, revealing Pynchon’s accordance with Peter Stallybrass and Allon White’s statement that ‘there is no a priori revolutionary vector to carnival and transgression’ (16). In contrast to Efrat Tseëlon’s claim that the mask always indicates ‘transformation not fixity’ (9), then, ‘the secret life of masks’ at Carnesalve cannot and does not alter the onward march of ‘the capitalist/Christer gridwork’ in *Against the Day* (*AtD* 987, 1208). Indeed, in comparison to Pynchon’s earlier works, Carnesalve’s ultimate failure may well reflect an ‘even deeper, more unfocused and overarching suspicion, as well as despondency’ in *Against the Day*, as Michael Jarvis has identified, signalling Pynchon’s ‘attitude of resignation towards the possibility of actualizing social reform/revolution’ tout court (8).

Certainly, this sense of despondency is furthered in *Bleeding Edge* when the novel’s dotcom capitalist villain—the ‘pioneer dickhead,’ Gabriel Ice—hosts a masquerade ball and the narrator laments: ‘Aah, God help us, how sleazy is it, and how has it come to this? a

rented palace, a denial of the passage of time, a mogul on the black-diamond slopes of the IT sector thinks he's a rock star' (*BE* 46, 311). As Justin and Lucas are able to 'instantly recognize Gabriel Ice' in his 'neon avocado suit,' identity is once again far from wholly mutable here (*BE* 361); indeed, Ice's masked ball's 'preserv[es] distance' and 'guard[s] status' just as much as Venetian Carnival did (J. H. Johnson xii). For all Pynchon's evident interest in disguise, we must also note how often and how easily it is thwarted in his oeuvre, too. In *Vineland*, for example, Zoyd runs 'smack into Hector, who ID'd him immediately, so much for disguises,' while in *Gravity's Rainbow* Stephen Dodsun-Truck makes 'perfectly accessible his disguise, if not his function in the conspiracy' (*VL* 360; *GR* 211). This last instance is a clear indication of Taussig's idea that a mask can be 'so manifestly a mask that is no mask at all' (*Defacement* 91).

Overall, Pynchon evidently does not fully invest in the mask's transformative possibilities. For one, the fact that Gabriel Ice puts on a masquerade ball suggests that potentially transgressive tools have been appropriated and arrogated by 'vulture capitalists,' by the 'permanent power establishment of admirals, generals and corporate CEO's, up against whom us average poor bastards are completely outclassed' (*BE* 149; 'Luddite'). Masked groups, furthermore, are frequently sinister in Pynchon's writing: there's the Viggies in *Inherent Vice*; the '[m]arauders, nameless, faceless, dressed in black,' who are '[p]robably hired by the federal government' in *The Crying of Lot 49* (*CL49* 65); the gang of men—each of whom wears 'a black hood, or an animal mask'—that rape Greta Erdmann in *Gravity's Rainbow*, a novel which also makes reference to a 'band of doctors in white masks that cover everything but eyes, bleak and grown-up eyes' (*GR* 461, 374); and so on. (One particularly notable exception, I concede, are the 'organized, masked, anonymous' Luddites Pynchon discusses in an article for *The New York Times* ('Luddite').) The mask as physical object can plainly be used for political suppression as much as liberation; as Cyprian's father bemoans, '[t]he enemy, sad to say, is too often found wearing the same uniform as we' (*AtD* 550).<sup>4</sup> Whilst Pynchon flirts with 'the unexpressed dreams of Masks,' he therefore never unambiguously allies these with the potential for change (*AtD* 987). Part of the problem lies precisely in the fact that when we are 'zipped up, mask hiding face,' we can feel 'safe, clownish-anonymous,' yet any attempt at close interpersonal relations or

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<sup>4</sup> Cyprian's father's observations need not be taken wholly negatively for they also open up the possibility of disguising oneself as 'the enemy,' calling to mind Michel de Certeau's notion of adopting 'la perruque'—literally, the wig—by which the 'worker's own work [can be] disguised as work for his [sic] employer' (de Certeau 25). Perhaps the most prominent expression of this idea in Pynchon's fiction is when Emory Bortz informs Oedipa of the Tristero's 'entire emphasis now towards silence, impersonation, opposition masquerading as allegiance' (*CL49* 120).

intimacy must rest on risk and uncertainty, as I will argue in my next chapter (GR 617).<sup>5</sup> There are more masks we need to consider first, however, the next one being the guarded mask of the face during social interaction. Bringing in the thought of Erving Goffman will help us to navigate this conceptual terrain.

ii) **‘a world in which masks [are] the real, everyday faces’** (*AtD* 987)

In *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, Goffman introduces the notion of ‘dramaturgical analysis’ to social interaction because ‘the issues dealt with by stage-craft and stage management are sometimes trivial but they are quite general; they seem to occur everywhere in social life, providing a clear-cut dimension for formal sociological analysis’ (26). *Gravity’s Rainbow* hauntingly opens with an evacuation which is ‘all theatre,’ but this is far from the only invocation of stage-craft in the novel; there are, indeed, ‘many moments of theatre’ in its labyrinthine pages (GR 3; Duyfhuizen 10). The text is suffused with dramaturgical language—Khachig Tölölyan points out, for instance, that the term ‘staging’ is used ‘a lot’ (63)—as evidenced in *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s memorable suggestion that the Second World War

was never political at all, the politics was all theatre, all just to keep the people distracted . . . secretly, it was being dictated instead by the needs of technology . . . by a conspiracy between human beings and techniques. (...) The real crises were crises of allocation and priority, not among firms—it was only staged to look that way—but among the different Technologies, Plastics, Electronics, Aircraft, and their needs which are understood only by the ruling elite . . . (GR 521)

Although numerous critical interventions have highlighted the theatrical aspects of the novel, the tendency has been to explore how ideas of staging function on a macro-level. While this is perfectly understandable in light of the previous quotation, as well as many other portions of the text, this focus has somewhat obscured the seemingly ‘trivial,’ yet in

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<sup>5</sup> One mask which might, however, be characterised by ‘the disruptive potential of playing with the relationship between appearance and identity’ is, indeed, the ‘face of the clown,’ which creates ‘a split identity that escapes social control to some extent’ (Bouissac 20). The most memorable moment of clowning in Pynchon’s writing comes in *Gravity’s Rainbow* when ‘two unemployed Augustes’—who we soon learn to be Roger Mexico and Seaman Bodine—‘leap out in whiteface and working-clothes, and commence belting each other with gigantic (7 or 8 feet long) foam rubber penises, cunningly detailed, all in natural color’ (GR 708). Yet Paul Bouissac points out that the behaviour of the clown is ‘performed . . . in a ritualistic manner and within a marked space meant to keep the antics of these outcasts from spreading beyond the borders of the circus world’ (11–12). Mexico and Bodine’s playfighting occurs ‘at a prearranged spot in a park’ (GR 708); their actions are thus just as circumscribed as the revelries at Venetian Carnival, particularly as the ensuing decades have seen the emergence of ‘the civil institution of clowning, through democratization and gentrification of the profession’ (Bouissac 16).

fact ‘quite general,’ micropolitics of social interaction in Pynchon’s work (Goffman, *Presentation* 26). Turning to Goffman, who is yet to be adequately addressed in Pynchon criticism, will help to uncover Pynchon’s exploration of ‘the minute social system of face-to-face interaction,’ not only in *Gravity’s Rainbow* but across his oeuvre (Goffman, *Presentation* 24).

The first chapter of Goffman’s *Interaction Ritual* is devoted to what he terms ‘face-work’ (5). Discussing various facial idioms of social interaction—losing face, saving face, and so on—Goffmann notes that at ‘such times the person’s face is clearly something that is not lodged in or on his body, but rather something that is diffusely located in the flow of events’; that is, face ‘is an image of self delineated in terms of approved social attributes—albeit an image that others may share’ (*Interaction* 7, 5). The term face here can also be understood as a kind of mask, a dramatic role being enacted, as Gershom alludes to in *Mason & Dixon* when he mentions ‘Kings who were not altogether real themselves. ’Twas [*sic*] a world of Masquing then’ (*Me&D* 282). Goffman argues that ‘in so far as this mask represents the conception we have formed of ourselves—the role we are striving to live up to—this mask is our truer self, the self we would like to be’ (*Presentation* 31). In *Gravity’s Rainbow*, for example, Franz Pökler is said to grow ‘into his new disguise—Prematurely Aged Adolescent Whiz’—a role he comes ‘not just to play (...) but to live,’ whilst Enzian is alleged to ‘have learned a thousand masks (...) and this, no doubt, this Suave Older Exotic is one of them’ (*GR* 417, 662). The key idea for our purposes is that owing to the fact that we are all, to a certain extent at least, playing a role in our social interaction, presenting ourselves the way we would like to be perceived, the way is opened ‘for a kind of information game—a potentially infinite cycle of concealment, discovery, false revelation, and rediscovery’ (Goffman, *Presentation* 20).

As one of the epigraph’s to this chapter indicates, Pynchon takes inspiration, like Goffman, from Jean-Paul Sartre—particularly his famous discussion of the waiter in *Being and Nothingness* (82-83)—and evokes numerous social masks throughout his corpus. For instance, as we saw in my previous chapter, Slothrop is able to trick Hilary Bounce with a feigned smile, and the ‘best part of all is not that Bounce appears fooled by the smile, but that Slothrop knows now that it will work for him again. . . .’ (*GR* 253). Slothrop’s control of his self-presentation is frequently an asset to him: ‘He has a trustworthy face, Slothrop does, people will tell him anything’ (*GR* 492). Another character able to use his face as a kind of mask, which is ‘as useful to him as he is to the Firm,’ is Pirate Prentice, who ‘bears his grin’—‘the exact mischievous grin your Dennis Morgan chap goes about cocking’—

'like a phalanx' (GR 32–33). Pynchon also commonly makes reference to the poker-face, especially in *Against the Day*. Grand Cohen Nicholas Nookshaft is said to have 'some deep talent (...) for putting on a poker face,' yet it is perhaps Reef Traverse who is its most notable exponent (*AtD* 770). Reef has been 'served (...) faithfully across so many gaming tables' by his 'patented tightlip look,' which is 'useful for throwing other players into paralyses of doubt, as well as making him look like a compassionate opponent who worried that he might win too much of the others' rent or baby-food money' (*AtD* 832). But Reef's self-presentation does not only serve him well in the casino: in addition to his 'all-purpose charming' and 'roguish smile that would apparently never fail him,' Reef is also able to 'look sicker than he was' when he pretends to be the wonderfully-named Thrapston Cheesely III (*AtD* 1089, 1094, 413). Both Doc Sportello and Maxine Tarnow are capable of presenting a sort of poker-face as well. Though Doc may 'only look like a[n] evil motherfucker,' he 'unnerve[s]' Pat Dubonnet by displaying 'the blank hippie stare that could mean anything,' which is echoed in *Bleeding Edge* when Maxine, in an attempt to '[p]lay dumb' with Nicholas Windust, 'makes with a Blank Stare she has learned from Shawn and often found useful' (*IV* 150, 48; *BE* 252). What is revealed in all the examples mentioned here—and many more besides in Pynchon's fiction—is that the very nakedness of the face can act as the ultimate form of covering; as one can 'hide in plain sight,' perhaps Reverend Moss is right that the 'Best disguise is no disguise' (*BE* 474; *AtD* 102).

The face's capacity to be a social mask means that we may find ourselves, like Doc, 'wonderin [*sic*] what's behind those masks,' or posing the same question that Maxine asks of Gabriel Ice's 'postmodern' house: 'What could lie behind a front like this, when it's front all the way through?' (*IV* 142; *BE* 191–92). (We might recall Jacques Lacan's observation that 'if one wishes to deceive a man [*sic*], what one presents to him is a painting of a veil, that is to say, something that incites him to ask what is behind it' (*Four* 112).) If characters are, like Stencil in *V.*, enable to enact a 'forcible dislocation of personality,' then the inability to pin down the other behind the construction can be a source of that well-established trope in Pynchon's fiction: paranoia (*V.* 51). For John Picton, this is one of the significant problems with Goffman's dramaturgical analysis of social interaction, which he argues is 'excessive, if not obsessive,' in his article 'What's in a Mask?' (181). Picton draws on another well-known sociologist, Anthony Giddens, who succinctly articulates the issues many have with Goffman's sociology of interaction:

If agents are only players on a stage, hiding their true selves behind the mask for the occasion, the social world would indeed be largely empty of substance. . . . Those who do



feel this way characteristically display modes of anxiety of an extreme kind. (qtd. in Picton 187)

The final sentence of the Giddens quotation calls to mind, instantly, the ‘ornamentally splendid splashes of paranoia’ so often found in Pynchon’s texts, where numerous characters—like the ‘gourmet of fear,’ Kurt Mondaugen—feast on a ‘menu of anxieties’ (GR 276; *V.* 258). Questions of masking and the ambiguity of appearance are frequent contributors to this sensation: ‘Everyone here seems to be at *least* a double agent,’ worries Pirate Prentice in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, whereas in *Against the Day* Lindsay Noseworth fears that his ‘fellow crewmen’ are in fact a ‘*ghost-Unit* (...) who had been painstakingly, intricately masked to *look like* chums of Chance’ (GR 543; *AtD* 488, both original italics). Reef Traverse even begins to suspect that Ruperta Chirpingdon-Groin’s dog, Moufette, is ‘a cat in disguise’ (*AtD* 900).

Some critics, most notably Thomas Schaub, have claimed that such moments of insecurity typify Pynchon’s writing: his is a ‘voice of ambiguity’ that displays how ‘uncertainty is a condition of our experience in the world’ (*Voice* 3). (‘Feedback, smile-to-smile, adjustments, waverings: what it damps out to is *we will never know each other*’ (GR 663, original italics).) This could be said to apply not only at the level of content, but form too. In his analysis of *Mason & Dixon*, for instance, Gary Thompson suggests that the ‘text wears a mask and thereby proclaims its fictionality,’ rightly drawing attention to ‘the various masks adopted in *Mason & Dixon*’s telling’ (175, 179). The dense narrative layers of Pynchon’s fiction, in addition to its polyvocal and even self-contradictory quality, make the interpretive process itself an uncertain one, even if some critics may still sense Pynchon’s ‘barely masked personal voice’ (Tölölyan 63).

Samuel Thomas, however, argues that Pynchon has too easily been characterised as ‘the high priest of uncertainty’ (10), as confirmed by Schaub’s regular undercutting of his own argument: he states, for example, that ‘[t]here is no question about Pynchon’s attitude towards the reduction of experience,’ indicating we are hardly in a state of irreducible ambiguity all of the time (*Voice* 63). This is something that both Picton and Giddens elide in their assessments of Goffman’s work, too. As Goffmann writes:

Ordinary social intercourse is itself put together as a scene is put together, by the exchange of dramatically inflated actions, counteractions, and terminating replies ... [L]ife itself is a dramatically enacted thing. *All the world is not, of course, a stage, but the crucial ways in which it isn’t are not easy to specify.* (*Presentation* 78, italics mine)

Goffman's essential point is that the face and mask are less preciously different than Picton would like to believe; he problematizes the very notion of 'true selves' entirely absolved from social roles, to recall Giddens's critique (qtd. in Picton 187). In this respect, Goffman is similar to Lacan, who comments that 'man [*sic*], in effect, knows how to play with the mask as that beyond which there is the gaze' (*Four* 107); which is to say, there is no quintessential notion of self wholly divorced from the social one.

Pynchon undoubtedly recognizes this. Take his consideration of the social mask of mass production. John Updike unforgettably remarked that 'celebrity is a mask that eats into the face' (266), but this does not only affect the celebrity him/herself in Pynchon's texts. Indeed, it is striking how often his characters adopt or identify with the guises of movie stars, particularly in *Gravity's Rainbow*. Pirate Prentice's aforementioned Dennis Morgan grin is one he has 'learned (...) at the films,' and further examples might include Jessica Swanlake's 'Fay Wray look,' or the moment where Slothrop puts 'together a Shirley Temple for himself' (*GR* 32, 246, 57). This trope has continued into Pynchon's most recent efforts too: Rocky Slagiatt fixes Maxine Tarnow with his 'Cary Grant beam' in *Bleeding Edge*, whilst Pat Dubonnet sports an 'Art Fleming look' in *Inherent Vice* (*BE* 65; *IV* 48). Even Burke's dog Addison has adopted a stylised appearance, performing an eyebrow raise reminiscent of 'George Sanders movies' (*IV* 311). In addition to the countless other examples I might have drawn on here, Pynchon not only shows the impact that star culture has had on our relationship to the face, but also how the face is often not a site of individual expressivity, rather a socio-culturally determined mask, particularly as so many of his characters bear a direct resemblance to movie stars: Takeshi 'looks just like a Jap Robert Redford'; Maxine resembles Rachel Weisz; her husband, Horst Loeffler, looks like Sterling Hayden; and so on (*VL* 381; *BE* 12, 144).

There is thus always a tension in Pynchon's exploration of social masks. On the one hand, when *Against the Day* notes that Cyprian's role with Derrick Theign is 'only the mask he has chosen,' we see evidence of the idea that 'roles enable as well as constrain' (*AtD* 973; Hollis 231). Yet on the other hand, the requirement to adopt a mask, or the inability to step out of one, can foster a sense of entrapment: Cyprian's 'career in sodomy' is dictated by the fact that 'if one wanted anything like a social life, it was simply the mask one put on' (*AtD* 787). While demonstrating how the fluid nature of appearance can give rise to 'merciless spores of paranoia,' Pynchon also reflects upon the difficulty of separating oneself from one's social role, or the necessity of playing one (*VL* 239). For instance, following the 'real shocker' of her makeover, which leaves her 'caught inside the image of

[Frenesi Gates, whom] she'd loved, been betrayed by,' DL Chastain finds herself 'slowly becoming her alias' (*VL* 140–41, 134). In *Inherent Vice*, too, we are informed that 'there was little to object to in the face [Art Tweedle] put on for company, except maybe for a slightly paralyzed look, as if it was a gear he didn't know how to shift out of' (*IV* 199). Pynchon, then, examines how the 'face-work' of social interaction can be both productive—in the cases of Slothrop, Prentice, and so on—and restrictive simultaneously (Goffman, *Interaction* 5). There is arguably no greater indicator of this latter point than Katje Borgesius in *Gravity's Rainbow*, to whom we shall now turn in order to continue the exploration of these ideas, as well as to uncover further masks invoked in Pynchon's fiction: cosmetics, the masquerade of feminine identity, and the death-mask.

iii) **'her face is somewhere else, painted on canvas'** (GR 106, italics mine)

Katje's face overhangs this whole chapter—even Pynchon's entire corpus, not to mention this thesis—and there are a number of reasons for this. Firstly, Katje is especially adroit at using her face as a performative mask throughout *Gravity's Rainbow*, as indicated when she is playing the role of Domina Nocturna for Brigadier Pudding and, 'eyes holding his, she smiles, the component of evil in it she has found he needs taking care of itself as usual' (GR 234). Secondly, she is frequently able to mask any emotion she might be feeling, a constant source of anxiety for the male characters in particular as 'there is no telling *what* is going on with this one' (GR 275, original italics). As such, in line with Joan Riviere's definition of 'das ewig Weibliche'—the eternal feminine—Pynchon's depictions of Katje evoke the 'conception of womanliness as a mask, behind which man suspects some hidden danger' (Riviere 43). Crucially, too, Katje's performances are almost meta-theatrical—she 'plays at playing'—while her proficient use of cosmetics aids the construction of her 'mask of no luck, no future—her face's rest state, preferred, easiest' (GR 97, 225). Ultimately, as the last quotation indicates, Katje's face comes to be seen more as a death-mask—'the terrible Face That Is No Face, gone too abstract, unreachable' (GR 222)—reflecting Deleuze and Guattari's idea of the 'inhumanity of the face' (*ATP* 181). Thus, by focussing on Katje's face from a more diverse range of angles than any previous critical intervention, I hope to unearth various facets of masking that apply not only to Katje and *Gravity's Rainbow*, but to Pynchon's oeuvre more generally.

Katje makes her first direct appearance in *Gravity's Rainbow* alongside Osbie Feel in a London kitchenette. Significantly, Katje is seen through the lens of a secret camera that

‘[i]n silence, hidden from her, (...) follows as she moves’ (GR 92). This establishes a focus on her exterior, a recurrent trope in the novel, as many critics have noted. Steven Weisenburger, for example, points out that ‘Pynchon gives close attention to Katje’s dresses throughout *Gravity’s Rainbow*’ (*Companion* 74), whilst Hanjo Berressem suggests that ‘in addition to clothes, makeup (which hides the “real face” in the same way that clothes hide the “real body”) is included in these celebrations of visual surfaces’ (*Poetics* 172). Although ‘celebrations’ is arguably not the right word here, Berressem is nevertheless correct to state that ‘Katje is *almost* always all surface and defined throughout by her outer appearance’ (*Poetics* 172, italics mine). The qualifier is essential: in spite of the predominant attention on Katje’s exterior, there are moments where the novel penetrates this outer surface. For instance, the narrative analepsis in which her time with Blicero is recounted is triggered by the note that at ‘the images she sees in the mirror Katje also feels a cameraman’s pleasure, but knows what he cannot: that inside herself, enclosed in the *soignée* surface of dear fabric and dead cells, she is corruption and ashes’ (GR 94, original italics).

As well as establishing a focus on Katje’s appearance, the first scene in which she is involved also raises the vital ‘questions of gender and reading in *Gravity’s Rainbow*’ which many critics, including Bernard Duyfhuizen, have highlighted (14). Katje is being filmed by a ‘secret cameraman,’ and this is thus a male, voyeuristic gaze that inscribes her ‘to-be-looked-at-ness,’ to borrow a term from the film critic Laura Mulvey, whose idea of the ‘Male Gaze’ Pynchon references directly in *Bleeding Edge* (GR 92, italics mine; BE 221). Arguing that woman is constructed as image, whereas man is the bearer of the look, Mulvey states:

In a world ordered by sexual imbalance, pleasure in looking has been split between active/male and passive/female. The determining male gaze projects its fantasy onto the female figure, which is styled accordingly. In their traditional exhibitionist role women are simultaneously looked at and displayed, with their appearance coded for strong visual and erotic impact so that they can be said to connote to-be-looked-at-ness. (Mulvey 2088)

Katje’s ‘to-be-looked-at-ness’—or, in the novel’s words, ‘Her old style: a girl about 16 who thinks everyone is staring at her’ (GR 662)—exposes how ‘femininity in modernity has become very much a question of hypervisibility,’ as Mary Ann Doane has claimed (*Femmes* 14). Although the narrator’s tone is slightly mocking here—it implies that Katje only thinks she is being stared at, rather than this actually being the case—she is nevertheless most commonly focalised through the eyes of the male characters: Slothrop, Prentice, Pointsman, Blicero, Gottfried, Enzian, and so on. What, then, do they see?

That Katje's 'face is somewhere else, painted on canvas' (GR 106). This quotation applies not only to Katje, however, but to many of the women in Pynchon's corpus. I will thus break it down into two parts to guide the rest of this chapter's discussion, taking first the question of cosmetics, before addressing the notion of "elsewhere-ness" in the final section. One of the key points to be explored in both these parts is that, as Efrat Tseëlon surmises, 'cultural reasons compel the woman to mask in order to be herself' (14). As she is 'looked at and displayed,' it is on the surface where a woman is directed to define herself, as demonstrated in the contrast between Blicero and Katje (Mulvey 2088). Blicero is 'so in love with language,' and his 'Mirror-metaphysics' is concerned with Rilkean pure words and 'bookish symmetries'—with a meaning below the surface—whereas Katje, at least in Blicero's eyes, chooses 'only trivially to revise what matters least, ornament and clothing,' disclosing a 'Mirror-metaphysics' merely of the surface kind (GR 101, 97). One crucial element in this surface construction, to commence a dialogue with my previous chapter's discussion of lipstick, is makeup, which can turn the face, like Toy's in *Against the Day*, into 'a painted porcelain mask' (AtD 414). The 'rougings, redefinings, emergences, and disguises' of cosmetics mean that they are an integral player in the 'potentially infinite cycle of concealment, discovery, false revelation, and rediscovery' played out repeatedly across Pynchon's oeuvre (AtD 1192; Goffman, *Presentation* 20).

In my previous chapter, I argued that *Gravity's Rainbow* demonstrates Pynchon's awareness of the significance of lipstick during the Second World War, yet owing to the novel's suggestion that it was worn by 'too often shallow girls,' we also saw how Pynchon continues a tradition in which 'a more complex World War II woman has been painted over' (GR 232; Delano 44). In addition to lipstick, however, eye makeup is frequently mentioned in Pynchon's writing. We hence have, like the 'quarter ton of makeup' wearing Aunt Reet in *Inherent Vice*, 'major liquid-liner issues to deal with here' (IV 7–8). In the same novel, we are even informed that 'Downstairs Eddie' is working on a doctoral dissertation entitled 'Deadpan to Demonic—Subtextual Uses of Eyeliner in the Cinema,' and has 'just in fact arrived at the moment in *Black Narcissus* where Kathleen Byron, as a demented nun, shows up in civilian gear, including eye makeup good for a year's worth of nightmares' (IV 115). Although most likely a jibe at postgraduate research, we can also take the title of Eddie's thesis as metafictional highlighting of the sinister subtext to eye makeup in Pynchon's work itself.

Eye makeup is nearly always accompanied by a sense of homogenisation in Pynchon's fiction. In *Inherent Vice*, for example, Sloane Wolfmann, who 'over[does] her eye

makeup like everybody else,’ informs Doc of her history as a Vegas showgirl and suggests that ‘onstage in those days, with the lights, the eyelashes, all the makeup, we did look fairly much alike’ (*IV* 57–8). Likewise in *V.*, Rachel Owlglass, arguably the most sympathetically portrayed woman in the text, turns up at the Rusty Spoon bar ‘with her hair hanging straight, dressed in black, no makeup except for mascara in sad raccoon-rings round her eyes, looking like all those young women and girls: camp followers’ (*V.* 381). Rather than being associated with experimentation or fluidity, cosmetics are evidently yet another way in which, as we have seen repeatedly over the course of this thesis, Pynchon implies difference is incorporated into the same, hence Doc Sportello’s ‘chronic problem of telling one Californian blonde from another’ (*IV* 36). In this sense, it could certainly be contended that Pynchon’s engagement with eye makeup is, to put it one way, overly black-and-white. That is, since women ultimately emerge as little more than ‘camp-followers’—a repeated phrase replete with historical resonance (*V.* 381; *CL49* 115)—Pynchon’s treatment of cosmetics can be just as violently homogenising as the processes his novels seek to critique.

The evocation of time in relation to cosmetics only adds to this impression: Katje is said to have ‘spent an hour at her vanity mirror’ when she is dressed as Domina Nocturna (*GR* 233); Oedipa passes ‘half an hour in front of her vanity mirror drawing and having to redraw dark lines along her eyelids that each time went ragged or wavered violently before she could take the brush away’ at the outset of *The Crying of Lot 49* (*CL49* 10); and in *Against the Day*, Madame Eskimoff offers Lew a piece of free advice—‘never look into a mirror when there’s a lamp next to you’:

‘Meaning one must rearrange one’s entire day, making sure one is finished dressing well before nightfall—not to mention hair and maquillage—all of which is sure to look different under gas or electric light anyway.’

‘Can’t believe it’d run you much more than a minute or two,’ Lew said.

(...) ‘Hours can be consumed,’ she pretended to lament, ‘by hatpin issues alone.’ (*AD* 261)

On one hand, if femininity is a question of ‘hypervisibility,’ we can view these instances as an exposure of the temporal demands upon women to construct the perfect face, which is commonly their ‘currency,’ as we saw with my discussion of Esther in this thesis’s second chapter (Doane, *Femmes* 14; Haiken 39). Although these pressures apply to some degree to men—Hector Zuñiga’s ‘abnormally sensitive mentality’ leads him to spend ‘twenty minutes a day of precious time’ on the ‘maintenance’ of the ‘microstructure’ of his moustache in *Vineland*, for example (*VL* 335, 302)—the need for a presentable, performative face, or mask, is shown to be far more incumbent upon women, hence ‘the promenading hierarchy

and their female attendants who have spent hours on eye adornment' in *Against the Day* (*AtD* 1038). On the other hand, despite revealing an implicitly male hierarchy in this latter quotation, these demands are willingly yielded to in Pynchon's texts: Madame Eskimoff only *pretends* to lament—indicating her complicity, as opposed to DL Chastain's 'radical conclusion that her body belonged to herself' (*VL* 128)—whilst Oedipa and Katje are looking into 'vanity mirror[s],' furthering the association of women with a 'Mirror-metaphysics' of surface, artifice, and appearance (*GR* 97).

Thus, though Kathy Peiss characterises the history of cosmetics in the twentieth-century by the societal impulsion to 'continually interrogate, experiment with, and renew ... looks' (252)—thereby intimating notions of mutability and variability—makeup rarely provides a complex interrogation of female identity at a facial level in Pynchon's writing. Instead, it is commonly seen as a well-lubricated cog of the homogenising faciality machine, especially as Brock Vond "'likes American girl, looking just this way, *always the same*," the little sixties outfits, the lurid *makeup of the time*' (*VL* 140, italics mine). But what is registered here, at least, is the cosmetic mask's sociohistorical engendering of desire—that is, 'the constructed spectacle of masquerade as a mechanism of power and fantasy ..., a role-playing game that masks and heightens desire'—particularly via the 'Big Eye look' of the 1950s and 60s (Peterson 337; Peiss 253). One moment in *Inherent Vice* is particularly instructive. Before we learn that Trillium Fortnight, yet another 'pure specimen of young California womanhood of the period,' is waiting for Doc Sportello in his office, the narrator notes that what Doc sees is

a disheveled girl in a tiny skirt, whose eyes after the style of the times were hugely made up not only with mascara but also with liquid liner and shadow almost the color of smoke from a faulty head gasket, suggesting to Doc as always a deep, unreachable innocence, all of which sent the throbbing idle of his lecherousness into overdrive. (*VL* 307; *IV* 216)

As so often in Pynchon's fiction, desire is allied here with the mechanical—'head gasket,' 'idle,' 'overdrive'—reflecting its territorialisation by the faciality machine. Cosmetics are essential to this: in *Gravity's Rainbow*, Katje feels a 'cameraman's pleasure' because she 'knows her hair and make-up are perfect,' whilst in her account of her transformation at the hands of some '*Maquilleuses*' in *Mason & Dixon*, S. Blondelle explains that they 'painted my face into a wanton Sister of itself, showing me, in a Hand-Mirror,—'twas a Woman I'd never seen before,—whom, upon the Instant, sinfully, I desir'd' (*GR* 94; *Me&D* 525, original italics).

Katje and S. Blondelle, in particular, demonstrate that ‘cultural reasons compel the woman to mask in order to be herself’ (Tseëlon 14). Their ‘to-be-looked-at-ness’ excludes them from the desiring function—‘the determining male gaze’—which establishes them as the to-be-desired (Mulvey 2088). They are not able to take the position of the desiring subject, merely a desired object, and their desire can therefore only be directed towards an idealised self; Katje can only obtain pleasure by knowing that she is pleasurable to look at. (Recall Schoenmaker’s promise to ‘bring out the true, perfect Esther which dwelled inside the perfect one. Her soul would be there on the outside, radiant, unutterably beautiful’ (*VL* 297).) So while women may generally do very little to resist wider societal pressures in Pynchon’s writing, he nevertheless implies that the socio-historical conditioning of desire through cosmetics constitutes Katje and S. Blondelle—and, by extension, women—at a distance from themselves. In addition to S. Blondelle’s face being made-up into a ‘wanton Sister of itself,’ this is made especially evident when Katje eventually watches herself in the film footage of the kitchenette, seeing ‘a face so strange that she has recognized the mediaeval rooms before she does herself,’ an event which is echoed in *Vineland* when DL’s makeover prior to the ‘Jap meat’ show leaves her confronted by ‘a painting of yet another face she could hardly recognize as one of hers’ (*Me&D* 525; *GR* 533; *VL* 135–36). Although Pynchon’s engagement with cosmetics might largely overwrite the potential to toy with, rather than just succumb to conventions, women are still shown to be in a constricted position, forced to wear a mask by the predominance of masculine desire.

Particular suspicion appears to be raised, however, by Prairie’s comment in *Vineland* that ‘everybody wore makeup that was supposed to look like you had no makeup on,’ and Shasta’s Fay’s outlining of ‘straight-chick uniform, makeup supposed to look like no makeup or whatever,’ in *Inherent Vice* (*VL* 71; *IV* 2). At these moments we have, as Peiss puts it, the ‘notion of a performance that disguise[s] its performance’ (247), which seems to imply, in Pynchon’s work, that the face is now so much a mask that the very act of masking is itself masked. To return to the quotation that has been guiding my analysis thus far, not only is the face ‘painted on canvas’ in such instances but, as a performance that attempts to disguise its own performance, it is also, to a certain extent, ‘somewhere else’ (*GR* 106).

iv) **‘her face is somewhere else, painted on canvas’** (*GR* 106, italics mine)

Over the course of this chapter, we have seen how Pynchon explores the potentials and limitations of the literal mask of facial disguise, the ramifications of our faces operating as



masks in social situations, and the significance of cosmetics to the construction of desire through masking. All of these masks—as well as the foci of this final section, the ideas of ‘womanliness as a mask’ and the death-mask—carry with them a notion of the “elsewhere-ness” of an absent-present, of a ‘face kept to itself, in shadow’ (Riviere 43; *VL* 161). Nearly all of Pynchon’s main characters, at one point or another, hide, veil, withhold, or disguise their face, such that it is ‘somewhere else’ and hence unreadable. This is undoubtedly true of many of the male characters in his novels, from the lettuce leaf that covers Benny Profane’s face early in *V.* through to Coy Harlingen’s ‘intermittently distinct,’ shades-covered face in *Inherent Vice* (*V.* 24; *IV* 86). Though one of the most affecting moments in *Vineland* is when Frenesi dreams that Jess Traverse is ‘denying her his face’ and ‘feel[s] the emptiness that came into’ it, in general the affective qualities of a withheld face are heightened when it comes to the female characters, which is itself a more common occurrence (*VL* 370). Most of the women in *Against the Day*, for instance, wear veils—Lake, Ruperta, Yashmeen, Dally—while Stray’s face is ‘veiled in its own penumbra’ (*AtD* 231). Furthermore, the faces of several female characters are often deliberately turned-aside: DL withholds her face during sex in *Vineland*; Lake’s face is ‘averted, a wraith’ in *Against the Day*; Ilse’s face is ‘stubbornly aside’ when she is with Pökler in *Gravity’s Rainbow*; and so forth (*VL* 161; *AtD* 356; *GR* 430). A woman’s ‘lowered face’ in Pynchon’s work is ‘a suspension forever at the hinge of doubt,’ as it ‘never quite looks for you, is always refracted away some set angle’ (*GR* 672, 735). It is here where the ‘questions of gender and reading’ mentioned earlier coalesce most forcefully, especially as one cannot shake the impression that female sexuality is ‘still veiled in an impenetrable obscurity’ for Pynchon, as it was for Freud before him (Duyfhuizen 14; Doane, *Femmes* 54). As Lacan points out, ‘the question—*What does a woman want?*—remained unanswered’ for Freud (*Four* 28), and with DL Chastain presenting ‘a compound look, flirtatious while at the same time pushing away,’ we might say that for Pynchon, too, the ‘pertinent question remains: what is behind the mask of womanliness?’ (*VL* 155; Heath 55). To explore these issues we return to Katje once again.

As well as her proficient use of cosmetics and ability to mask emotion that I have already discussed, Katje’s face is frequently ‘womanly averted, twisting the night-streaked yarn of her past’ (*GR* 209). Its consequent illegibility—‘a dark side, her ventral side, her face, that [Slothrop] can no longer see’—acts as a source of constant fear for the male characters in *Gravity’s Rainbow*. One prime indication of this is when Pointsman starts hallucinating while on a walk. Turning to look at Katje, Pointsman sees that she has ‘her

eyes far out to sea, and there is no telling *what* is going on with this one. In some dim way, Pointsman, though he can't see she has any leverage at all, is still afraid of her' (GR 196, 275, original italics). One 'allegorical figure of Paranoia' Pynchon invokes through Katje is the femme fatale, or, in *Gravity's Rainbow's* less salubrious terms, 'the true Golden Bitch' (GR 658, original capitalisation). In an instructive discussion of the femme fatale, Doane comments:

The femme fatale is the figure of a certain discursive unease, a potential epistemological trauma. For her striking characteristic, perhaps, is the fact that she never really is what she seems to be. She harbors [*sic*] a threat which is not entirely legible, predictable, or manageable ..., something which must be aggressively revealed, unmasked, discovered[. T]he figure is fully compatible with the epistemological drive of narrative, the hermeneutic structuration of the classical text. Sexuality becomes the site of questions about what can and cannot be known. (*Femmes* 1)

Doane's statement that the femme fatale 'never really is what she seems to be' applies to Katje on numerous occasions. In addition to Pointsman's anxiety mentioned above, Blicero suspects that Katje merely 'plays at playing,' whilst Slothrop is 'bewildered' when he 'peer[s] in at [Katje's] European darkness' (GR 97, 208). ('A-and you were so far away then . . . I couldn't reach you . . .' (GR 224).)

That the threat Katje harbours must therefore be 'aggressively revealed, unmasked, discovered,' is made explicit in one of a number of sex scenes involving Slothrop and Katje:

thinking she might be close to coming he reaches a hand into her hair, tries to still her head, *needing to see her face: this is suddenly a struggle, vicious and real—she will not surrender her face*—and out of nowhere she does begin to come, and so does Slothrop. (Doane, *Femmes* 1; GR 197, italics mine)

Slothrop's violent desire to see Katje's face is indicative of the drive for revelation, which Pynchon suggests is a particularly male, or masculine, construction. Slothrop attempts to unveil the 'Real Text'—which 'persist[s] *somewhere else*, in its darkness, our darkness'—by making Katje's face, and thus her threat, 'entirely legible, predictable, or manageable' (GR 520, italics mine; Doane, *Femmes* 1). Similar moments occur throughout Pynchon's fiction: Brock Vond grabs Frenesi's hair and forces her to look at him in *Vineland*, while in *V.* Stencil watches the Bad Priest's 'face closely, as if waiting for it to reveal itself. But she wore an elaborate hat and veil; and the face was as generalized as that of any graceful woman seen in the street' (*VL* 304; *V.* 486).

In many ways, both the faces of V. and Katje are of ‘a realm proper more to ceremonial masks than specific human faces’ (*AtD* 1112). Even when we are offered one of the few descriptions of what Katje actually looks like when Slothrop eventually sees her face—‘soft nose of a doe, eyes behind blonde lashes full of acid green. One of those thin-lipped European mouths’—we are presented with a face defined as much by its general European-ness as any idea of specificity (*GR* 187). A notion of generality accompanies Katje’s first appearance in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, in the kitchenette scene previously discussed in this chapter. Despite naming Osbie Feel immediately, the text does not initially reveal who this ‘she’ is, or why the camera is following ‘her’ (*GR* 92). Indeed, the object and third-person pronouns continue deep into the fourth paragraph, and it is only once we have turned the page, at least in the novel’s original pagination, that we learn that this ‘she’ is called Katje. From her very first textual impression, then, Katje is imbued with a sense of mystery—who is this ‘she’? Indeed, in all sections where Katje makes notable appearances, we are never given her name before the use of pronouns. The pronoun ‘she’ thus comes to define Katje, a textual inscription that goes some way towards corroborating Robert Hipkiss’s largely unsubstantiated claim that Katje is ‘the fullest emanation of eternal woman in all of Pynchon’ (19), as does the fact that *Gravity’s Rainbow* suggests Katje is ‘not of our moment, our time at all’ (*GR* 656).

With this in mind, we should notice that what follows Katje’s first appearance is a kind of freeze-frame shot—‘stopped and prolonged into just such a lengthwise moment of gold fresh and tarnished, innocence microscopically masked’—with Katje standing ‘immobile at the door’ while the ‘camera records no change in her face’ (*GR* 93). We must not fail to hear the echo of V. here:

[H]er face betrayed no emotion. It was as if she saw herself embodying a feminine principle, acting as complement to all this bursting, explosive male energy. Inviolable and calm, she watched the spasms of wounded bodies, the fair of violent death, framed and staged, it seemed, for her alone in that tiny square. From her hair the heads of five crucified also looked on, no more expressive than she. (*V.* 209)

In addition to another exploration of the idea of staging investigated earlier in this chapter—which here would expose woman, as Luce Irigaray has argued, as ‘the living support of all the staging/production of the world’ (*‘Veiled’* 118)—this passage makes clear that an inexpressive face often symbolises a feminine counterpoint to ‘bursting, explosive male energy’ in Pynchon’s fiction. It acts, therefore, as the ‘veritable formal correlative,’ in Doane’s terms, to ‘instrumentalised reason’ (*Femmes* 2). This impression is confirmed in

*Gravity's Rainbow*. Where the Rocket in the hands of Blicero comes to indicate a destructive, apocalyptic masculinity, Katje can be seen as 'the Rocket's purely feminine counterpart': she understands 'the great airless arc as a clear allusion to certain secret lusts that drive the planet and herself, and 'Those who use her—over its peak and down, plunging, burning, toward a terminal orgasm . . . ' (GR 223). Pynchon pointedly highlights these correlatives at a facial level once again—Katje finds 'her own studied mannequin's stare' to closely resemble Gottfried's 'ascending, tightening' face at the point of orgasm (GR 95)—almost as if to validate Lacan's claim that it 'is no doubt through the mediation of masks that the masculine and the feminine meet in the most acute, most intense way' (*Four* 107).

Jeffrey Severs has observed that Pynchon's 'corpus [is] teeming with cartoonish, hypersexualized and mythologised femininities' ('Abstractions' 217), which explains why McHoul and Wills see *Gravity's Rainbow* as a 'pretty blatantly sexist book' (24). Though we could counter this simply by saying that Pynchon's masculinities are just as cartoonish and hypersexualized, the fact that Katje and V. become symbols of a feminine turning-aside or indifference in the face of historical atrocity provides evidence of Pynchon's repeated 'mythologizing of the feminine and its degradation' (Severs, 'Abstractions' 217): woman is 'God under the aspect of Atropos, she who cannot be turned'—and thus mythologized—while she has been degraded into 'a blonde image of your mother dead: if you have ever seen her travestied in beaten gold, the cheeks curving too far, deformed, the eyebrows too dark and whites too white, some zero indifference that in the end is truly evil in the way 'They've distorted her face, then you know the look' (Severs 220; GR 643, 712).

Perhaps no face is more distorted or degraded in Pynchon's texts than Katje's—'even Goya,' renowned for his grotesque, monstrous faces, 'couldn't draw' her—which may well be why Enzian sees her story as 'the saddest of all' (GR 657, 661). For even though Katje is far from innocent in *Gravity's Rainbow*, especially as 'she's credited with smelling out at least three crypto-Jewish families,' she nevertheless has 'nothing in the way of usable power, not even a fantasy of it' (GR 97, 656). Her mask-like face is an attempt to grow 'all the protection she needs,' in the hope of finding, like Enzian, 'some way of making it bearable, just bearable, for just long enough, one day by one. . . .' (GR 545, 658). When we view Katje's shielded mask alongside, for example, Jessica Swanlake's Fay Wray number, which is a 'kind of protective paralysis,' or the fact that DL 'turns her head away (...) to get her through' in *Vineland*, what is revealed in Pynchon's work is 'the context of the masquerade as defence, defence in this system of male identities and consequent identifications' (GR 275; VL 180; Heath 46).

The picture that sticks of Katje consequently emerges in what Berressem rightly terms ‘a privileged moment’ at the Casino Hermann Goering (*Poetics* 172). Here, Katje has a fight with Slothrop which culminates, somewhat inevitably, in ‘her thighs squirming underneath him, his penis in terrific erection,’ and as Katje comes screaming into a pillow, the following description becomes emblematic of her mask-like face:

[Slothrop] lies on top of her, sweating, taking great breaths watching her face turned  $\frac{3}{4}$  away, not even a profile, but *the terrible Face That Is No Face, gone too abstract, unreachable*: the notch of eye socket, but never the labile eye, only the anonymous curve of cheek, convexity of mouth, a noseless mask of the Other Order of being, of Katje’s being—the lifeless non-face that is the only face of hers he really knows, or will ever remember. (GR 222)

This is an arresting, haunting depiction. Slavoj Žižek states in *A Pervert’s Guide to Cinema* that ‘when we see a face it is basically always the half of it,’ yet here there is not even a half, ‘not even a profile.’ There can be no more forthright indication of what Deleuze and Guattari see as ‘the inhumanity of the face’ (*ATP* 181), particularly as Katje’s ‘lifeless non-face,’ recalling Godolphin’s ‘mutilated face’ in *V*, is ‘fixed as any death-mask’ (GR 222; *V*. 488). Despite the hints of mutability explored through the mask as object of physical disguise earlier in this chapter, Katje’s ‘noseless mask of the Other Order of being’ carries with it an overwhelming sense of fixity, which would seem to indicate that ‘the mask’—perhaps even the death-mask—is now the face itself, the abstraction or operation of the face’ (GR 222; Deleuze and Guattari, *ATP* 181).

Yet, to usher in my final chapter, in spite of the predominance of the face as mask in Pynchon’s writing, ‘we must be prepared to see,’ as Goffman states, ‘that the impression of reality fostered by a performance is a delicate, fragile thing that can be shattered by very minor mishaps’ (*Presentation* 63). (As Aschenbach is informed in Luchino Visconti’s film adaptation of *Death in Venice*: ‘You are unmasked’ (Visconti).) Notwithstanding how comprehensive Katje’s mask appears to be—‘little more than a formal snapshot, the kind that might appear on a passport’ produced by the faciality machine (GR 224)—she is never able to fully discipline her face: in the kitchenette, for example, she ‘flashes [Osbie] a smile she means to be friendly but which to Osbie seems terribly worldly, sophisticated, wicked,’ whilst when she is with Slothrop the narrator notes that

now and then . . . too insubstantial to get a fix on, there’ll be in her face a look, something not in her control, that depresses [Slothrop], that he’s even dreamed about and so found amplified there to honest fright: the terrible chance that she might have been conned too. As much a victim as he is—an unlucky, an unaccountably *futureless* look. . . . (GR 93, 207–8, original italics)

Although Katje's '*futureless* look' is hardly a cue for fanfare, especially as it reinstates itself—'Something like pity comes into her face and goes again (...) Oh what is it she smiles here to [Slothrop], only for that second? already gone'—there are nevertheless brief, if poignantly 'insubstantial,' moments where her mask is shattered (GR 224).<sup>6</sup>

Though we cannot escape the suspicion that this all comes too late for Katje as it is only when she is in a Dantean hell with Pirate that she 'los[es] her surface,' enabling her to look 'really *at him*,' both Katje and Pirate nonetheless find themselves in a 'swarm of (...) dancing Preterition, and their faces, the dear, comical faces they have put on for this ball, fade, as innocence fades, grimly flirtatious, and striving to be kind' (GR 546, original italics, 548). To return one last time to Katje's first appearance in *Gravity's Rainbow*, where 'innocence [is] microscopically masked' in the freeze-frame shot, the text subsequently zooms in even closer onto Katje's face and it is suggested that 'in close-up her skin, though *nearly perfect*, is seen to be lightly powdered and rouged, the eyelashes a touch darkened, brows reshaped a matter of two or three empty follicles' (GR 93, italics mine). What we see here is that even though Katje's constructed face is 'nearly perfect'—both in the sense of ideal and total—it is still not quite complete. By paying such close attention, even at the micro-level of follicles, to not only Katje's face but the face in general in his work, Pynchon, as my subsequent chapter will now elaborate further, can be seen to employ 'literary means which are nocturnal and deal in disguise to deny the [faciality] machine' ('Luddite').

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<sup>6</sup> This moment invokes what Paul Ekman, perhaps the leading voice in facial expression studies, calls 'micro-expressions,' which he defines as 'very fast facial movements lasting less than one-fifth of a second, ... revealing an emotion a person is trying to conceal. A false expression can be betrayed in a number of ways: it is usually very slightly asymmetrical, and it lacks smoothness in the way it flows on and off the face' (qtd. in Kemp 62). (See also Ekman's *Unmasking the Face* and *What the Face Reveals*.) Pynchon frequently alludes to this sense of asymmetry as a sign of falsity. But two of countless examples: in *Inherent Vice*, Lourdes has 'a bright smile that was maybe a little higher on one side than the other,' while in *Vineland*, upon learning that she is talking to Frenesi's daughter Prairie, DL nods, 'faintly smiling, one side of the smile maybe a little higher than the other' (IV 82; VL 100).

## Pynchon's Faces

- [T]he history of the close-up ultimately extends to the nearly religious absorption in the mystery of the human countenance. (Gunning 25)
- This is the affection-image: it has as its limit the simple affect of fear and the effacement of faces in nothingness. But as its substance it has the compound affect of desire and of astonishment—which gives it life—and the turning of faces in the open, in the flesh. (Deleuze, *Cinema 1* 101)
- The *ba*-sic theory, is, that when given an *unstruc*-tured stimulus, some shape-less *blob* of *exper*-ience, the subject, will seek to impose, *struc*-ture *on* it. How, he goes *a-bout struc*-turing this blob, will reflect his *needs*, his hopes—will *provide*, us with *clues*, to his dreams, *fan*-tasies, the deepest *re*-geions [*sic*] of his mind. (GR 81, original italics)

Over the course of this thesis, we have dismantled the face into its component parts while also, in my last chapter, interrogating the relationship between the face and mask in Pynchon's writing. Given all the blank faces and masks with which we are confronted in his work, it would be tempting to ignore Barbara Johnson's claim that 'in many cases there *is* a difference between a mask and a face,' and fall instead into the fatalism of Charles Baxter, who argues that in Pynchon's fiction 'the face is so de-faced that analytical effort is just wasted' (B. Johnson 182, original italics; Baxter 35). Yet how are we to read a form that is so disfigured, dismantled, 'deformed past comfortable recognition' (*AtD* 1069)? 'How may unlettered Ishmael hope to read the awful Chaldee of the sperm whale's brow' (Melville 387)? Though the effort to do so is beset with potentially intractable difficulties—not least because, as Katalin Orbán observes, 'all reading, all ethics is doomed, at least to a certain extent, to failure' (147)—it is nonetheless necessary, just as Godolphin's face has 'to be rebuilt' in *V.* because '[l]ife for the young officer would be, otherwise, unthinkable' (*V.* 99). But if what I am to offer in this final chapter is in some senses a rebuilding, this must not be understood as wholly reparative; as I was at pains to point out in my introduction, the chapters of this thesis, the dismantled features of the face, co-exist in 'tension, not totality' (Rives 151). This final chapter is *not* a singling up of all lines, *not* a reassembly of the various facial fragments this thesis has investigated into some totalized *Gestalt* that re-instantiates the face as the comfortable home of the signifying subject, even though turning to "the face as a whole," for want of a better way of putting it, inevitably fosters this impression to some degree.

Nevertheless, as I began to intimate towards the end of my last chapter, the central argument here is that by subjecting the ‘wordlessly familiar (...) human face’ to rigorous and repeated close-up across his fiction, Pynchon attempts ‘to think non-identity in and through identity itself’ (*AtD* 1050; Dallmayr 38).<sup>1</sup> That is to say, by focussing so intently on the face in his work, a move that nonetheless risks upholding and sustaining the faciality machine as much as resisting and dismantling it, Pynchon seeks to convict the face, at least and insofar as it is understood under the rubric of faciality, ‘of non-identity with itself—of the non-identity it denies, according to its own concept’ (Adorno 147). Rather than being ‘nothing more than a signifying structure which has been hived off from the rest of the body as an outward label of subjectivity’ (Black 6), Pynchon constantly highlights the threat the face can pose to that very same subject via its radical alterity, its ceaseless exceeding of itself, its being ‘more than it is,’ its ‘identity against its identifications’ (Adorno 161). It is to these non-identitarian aspects of the face to which I shall turn over the course of this chapter as this thesis’s final attempt to address the ‘not-yet-come-to-terms-with-face’ in Pynchon’s writing (*VL* 374).

It is worth noting first, however, that it is here where we will see Pynchon’s most significant deviation from Deleuze and Guattari’s faciality plateau. Notwithstanding the affinities established across this thesis, Pynchon’s work, *pace* Deleuze and Guattari, does not conclude with the same cry: ‘*Face, my love, you have finally become a probe head. . .*’ (*ATP* 190, original italics). Because Pynchon recognizes that ‘in criticism we do not simply liquidate systems,’ he does not attempt to turn away entirely from the face or identity towards the Deleuzo-Guattarian notion of a probe-head, whatever that might be (Adorno 24). (‘Of course you don’t move past. But you do realise intellectually that’s how you *ought* to be moving’ (*GR* 85, original italics).) Instead, in accordance with Fred Dallmayr’s summary of Theodor Adorno’s thought, the non-identity of the face revealed in Pynchon’s texts is ‘not equivalent to a mere erasure of identity, to a leap into a radical negativity (or no-identity),’ yet neither, we must add, is it ‘simply a paean to particularity, to an immediately given singularity or counteridentity’ (Dallmayr 37–38). This is demonstrated most forcefully on the final page of *Gravity’s Rainbow*, to which we shall turn repeatedly throughout this chapter. As we await the arrival of Blicero’s Schwarzgerät in the Orpheus Theatre, we are informed that ‘in the darkening and awful expanse of screen something has kept on, a film we have not learned to see . . . it is now a closeup of the face, a face we all

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<sup>1</sup> It is worth reiterating the qualification in my introduction that close-up does not necessarily mean detailed facial descriptions, indeed, frequently the opposite. But it is worth remembering that for Deleuze and Guattari the face is ‘by nature a close-up’; it is ‘naturally a close-up and naturally inhuman’ (*ATP* 171, 190).



know—’ (GR 760). That this face has ‘kept on,’ even though the ‘film has broken, or a projector bulb has burned out,’ indicates that the potentially apocalyptic ending of *Gravity’s Rainbow* is not quite ‘a leap into a radical negativity,’ but nor is it an overwriting of ‘the face’ of faciality with ‘a face’ that is an ‘immediately given singularity’; the ‘last image’ is, after all, ‘too immediate for any eye to register’ (Dallmayr 37–38; GR 760). Although the text promises ‘a face we all know,’ moreover, we patently do not know this face: is it God’s at the Last Judgement? Does it belong to the ‘bright angel of death’ (GR 760)? Could it be Blicero’s face, as Shawn Smith claims (94); ‘the face of Gottfried encased in his Imipolex shroud,’ as Charles Clerc speculates (‘Film’ 104); or perhaps the ‘fantastic Medusa’s head,’ as Hanjo Berressem ventures (*Poetics* 199)? Does it belong to one of the many movie stars mentioned in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, such as Rudolf Klein-Rogge, whom Franz Pökler has earlier seen in close-up (GR 578)? Might it even be our own, ‘the mirrorface at the end’ of which *Against the Day*’s Miles Blundell speaks (*AtD* 1150)?

What all these questions indicate is how the concluding page of *Gravity’s Rainbow* ‘play[s] simultaneously with the desire for totalization and its impossibility,’ which is what Mary Ann Doane claims of the close-up in general (‘Close-Up’ 109). The face in close-up here is, like all faces, especially those in close-up, both ‘reassuringly familiar and disturbingly strange’ (Kemp 160); it is both ‘a face we all know,’ yet one which ‘overwhelms with the force of a feared or adored Other, or the imminence of its own disappearance’ (GR 760; Coates 143). It both invites attempts to read it yet remains forever resistant to these readings. We can thus see the comma between ‘the face, a face’ acting as a kind of dialectical hinge, modulating the face’s enduring suspension in Pynchon’s work between the general and the particular, the universal and the specific, the collective and the individual, the infinite and the finite. It is only in this suspension, in a locus that is simultaneously facing and defacing, effacing and re-facing, however, where it might be possible to make ‘a move beyond codification’ in order to resist the ‘overcoding’ initiated by the abstract machine of faciality (Doane, ‘Close-Up’ 96; Deleuze and Guattari, *ATP* 170). Richard Rushton asserts that ‘the face, more than anything, makes us approach the world anew’ (234), and Pynchon’s facial close-ups, I contend, in their unearthing of the face’s affective power, proffer a vision of a ‘possible world as it exists in a face that expresses it’ (Deleuze and Guattari, *WIP* 17). To account for the face’s particular affective force, and to qualify this chapter’s argument, we must first turn to an examination of the close-up, both in the context of Pynchon’s fiction and as it has been conceived in film theory.

i) **'a closeup of a face?'** (GR 578)

As Doane maintains, the close-up is 'one of, if not *the* most recognizable units of cinematic discourse' ('Close-Up' 90, original italics). To focus upon Pynchon's use of the close-up may therefore seem a little strange; it is, ultimately, a cinematic technique, whereas Pynchon quite patently writes novels. However, not only are there 'close-ups in novels,' as Deleuze and Guattari allege, but Pynchon's texts, not least *Gravity's Rainbow*, also have many cinematic qualities about them, as countless critics have noted (ATP 175). David Marriot, for instance, states that 'if there is such a thing as the novel educated by film, then *Gravity's Rainbow* has undoubtedly been to all the best schools' (50). Film functions on many levels in the text: it has a narrative role, as demonstrated by the Martín Fierro film directed by Gerhardt von Göll; several characters are involved in some form of film industry—von Göll, Greta Erdmann, and so on; and the text is replete with cinematic language—panning, framing, zooming, long shots, close-ups, and so forth. *Gravity's Rainbow* also makes reference to various film stars—Clark Gable, Oliver Hardy, Shirley Temple, and the like—as well as to numerous directors, in particular those associated with German Expressionist cinema—such as Fritz Lang, Ernst Lubitsch, F. W. Murnau, and Georg Wilhelm Pabst—whose influence is felt in the oscillation between the 'white and silent' and 'dark and silent' screen on the final page (GR 760). Much Pynchon criticism has quite understandably, not to say fruitfully, focussed on detailing and cataloguing these references. To invoke but two of this critical multitude, David Cowart gives an extended commentary on the role of *King Kong* in the novel (*Allusion* 40–48), whilst Sherill E. Grace addresses the various allusions to Fritz Lang.<sup>2</sup> In spite of the undoubted merits of such studies, the general emphasis on content, rather than form, has somewhat occluded the particular effects and implications of the cinematic techniques employed by Pynchon, not least the close-up.

Indeed, many accounts of *Gravity's Rainbow* altogether overlook the 'closeup of the face, a face we all know,' even when the closing pages of the novel are integral to the critic's discussion (GR 760). Marriott argues, for example, that the concluding scene 'effects a change of emphasis from content to form. What we are watching is no longer a feature film, but the celluloid film which is its true nature' (48). While Marriott's attention to the formal qualities of the filmic medium is to be welcomed, he nevertheless elides the significance of the facial close-up entirely. The same can be said of Richard Pearce, an

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<sup>2</sup> Further studies of film in *Gravity's Rainbow* can be found in, amongst others, Simmon; Moore; Berressem, *Pynchon's Poetics*; McHale, *Postmodernist Fiction*; and McHoul and Wills.

omission that is all the more conspicuous considering his specific concern with ‘Pynchon’s Endings.’ Even with as narrow a focus as Pearce’s article, then, the enduring ‘closeup of the face’ after the ‘projector bulb has burned out’ has frequently been erased in the critical literature: ‘we have’—almost literally, it seems—‘not learned to see’ it (GR 760).

It would be incorrect, however, to say that this is true of all critical interventions. Most notably, Charles Clerc, who has carried out the most comprehensive study of cinema in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, even centres his initial discussion of the novel on the ‘closeup of the face, a face we all know.’ Clerc makes many of the same speculations I have above as to what exactly this face is and to whom exactly it belongs, yet his conclusion—that ‘[w]e find the answer within ourselves, or not all’ (‘Film’ 104)—is wholly unsatisfactory, failing, above all, to address the particular affective power of the face in close-up. Despite the importance of Clerc’s study, the face remains ‘not-yet-come-to-terms-with’ in his account (VL 374). So as to redress this critical gap, I want to turn to some important theorisations of the cinematic close-up, including those of Walter Benjamin, Siegfried Kracauer, Béla Balázs, and, most extensively, Gilles Deleuze. To be clear, although I am engaging with film theory in order to approach *Gravity’s Rainbow*, I am not making the mistake of reading the novel as a film as such. As Brian McHale justly comments, ‘reading *Gravity’s Rainbow* as a movie, while it undoubtedly increases the intelligibility of the text, also reduces its *strangeness*; and it is its strangeness, after all, that we especially prize’ (*Constructing* 111, original italics). Rather than domesticating the oddness McHale identifies, an interrogation of the close-up instead serves to enhance it, as I will hope to show not only by investigating the close-ups in *Gravity Rainbow*, but also the close-up to which the face is subjected across Pynchon’s oeuvre.

From the earliest theorisations of film, a special place has been reserved for the camera close-up, with Doane even proposing that it ‘mark[s] the moment of the very emergence of film as a discourse’ (‘Close-Up’ 91). The close-up has often been seen as the most revolutionary aspect of cinema: Walter Benjamin, for instance, maintains that by ‘close-ups of the things around us, by focussing on hidden details of familiar objects, ... the film [came] and burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second’ (‘Work’ 229). Siegfried Kracauer’s conception of the close-up in *Theory of Film* is remarkably similar, even at a linguistic level: ‘Such images blow up our environment in a double sense: they enlarge it literally; and in doing so, they blast the prison of conventional reality’ (48). Although Benjamin and Kracauer’s views might be ‘inescapably hyperbolic’—much like the close-up itself—the first chapter of this thesis was concerned with Pynchon’s

engagement with ‘different kind[s] of seeing,’ and this is certainly what Benjamin and Kracauer see the close-up to proffer (Doane, ‘Close-Up’ 90; *AtD* 834). For Kracauer, it ‘opens up expanses which we have explored at best in dreams before’ (48), whereas Benjamin states:

With the close-up, space expands ... The enlargement of a snapshot does not simply render more precise what in any case was visible, though unclear: it reveals entirely new structural formations of the subject ... Evidently a different nature opens itself to the camera than opens to the naked eye ... The camera introduces us to unconscious optics as does psychoanalysis to unconscious impulses. (‘Work’ 229–230)

Though the close-up is by no means limited to the face, should the close-up have the potential to reveal ‘entirely new structural formations of the subject,’ then we might reasonably expect this to be felt most pertinently through the facial close-up.

The idea that a close-up of the face promises an ‘expanded cognition and recognition’ is articulated most forcefully by Béla Balázs, who viewed ‘film as a medium of facial revelation and the close-up as its prime agent’ (Doane, ‘Close-Up’ 107; Coates 46). ‘Faced with an isolated face,’ Balázs claims, ‘we do not perceive space. Our sensation of space is abolished. A dimension of another order is opened to us’ (qtd. in Deleuze, *Cinema 1* 96). Corresponding to Benjamin’s observations, Balázs suggests that ‘the camera close-up ... is able to photograph the subconscious’ by ‘aim[ing] at the uncontrolled small areas of the face’ (qtd. in Koch 173). The camera is thus a vehicle for what Balázs terms ‘microphysiognomy’: ‘It is the “microphysiognomics” of the close-up,’ he writes, ‘that have given us this subtle play of feature, almost imperceptible yet also so convincing. The invisible face behind the visible has made its appearance’ (*Early* 76). For Balázs, ‘this fundamentally new revelation of humanity’ is nothing short of revolutionary (*Early* 5). By exposing the invisible behind ‘visible man [*sic*]’—i.e. not ‘the face we wear, but our actual visual appearance’ (*Early* 5)—the close-up discloses, in Erica Carter’s parsing of Balázs thought, ‘the potential of the filmic body to overcome capitalist alienation’ (xxiv).

On the one hand, Pynchon certainly exploits the microphysiognomic potential of the close-up. Zooming in on Katje’s face, for example, as we saw in my previous chapter, her ‘brows’ are revealed to have been ‘reshaped a matter of two or three empty follicles,’ whilst the ‘almost imperceptible’ play of her features is divulged when Slothrop sees in ‘her face, a look, something not in her control,’ albeit one that is ‘too insubstantial to get a fix on’ (*GR* 93; Balázs, *Early* 76; *GR* 207). On the other hand, however, where ‘one can draw a line from Blake’s project to discover “cosmos in a grain of sand” to Balázs’s

microphysiognomy of the close-up,' as Gertrud Koch points out (176), Pynchon evidently does not view the close-up as romantically as Balázs. Indeed, he often plays with the revelatory qualities Balázs identifies. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, for example, a 'demoralizing (...) close-up of John Wayne' shows him to be Japanese, and in *Inherent Vice*, Sauncho Smilax has what Bigfoot Bjornsen would call an 'hippiphany' while watching a cartoon of Donald Duck 'adrift at sea': seeing '*whisker stubble*' 'in Donald's close-ups,' Sauncho opines, subverts the 'image' we have of Donald's 'normal life' as it demonstrates that he has 'to go in *every day* and *shave his beak*' (GR 256; IV 207, 28, original italics). It is significant that the close-up of Donald Duck occurs on television—'the most powerful symbol of American society's domestication of the audio-visual image,' as Philip Drummond puts it (28)—a medium primarily associated with a loss of potential in Pynchon's writing. This sense of dwindling possibility is emphasised by the fact that close-ups often do not reveal anything at all in Pynchon's work: though Doc sees some 'close-ups of the gunman who'd nailed Glen [Charlock],' for instance, 'none were readable. It could have been Art Tweedle under the Christmas-card ski mask, it could've been anybody' (IV 351).

The limitations of Balázs's views are most palpable in *Vineland*. In this novel, an 'old guerrilla movie outfit' called 24fps, of which both Frenesi Gates and DL Chastain are past members, attempts to light 'up things the networks never would' (VL 203). Crucially, 24fps reserve a central place for the close-up in their filmic practice:

They particularly believed in the ability of close-ups to reveal and devastate. When power corrupts, it keeps a log of its progress, written into that most sensitive memory device, the human face. Who could withstand the light? What viewer could believe in the war, the system, the countless lies about American freedom, looking into these mug shots of the bought and sold? Hearing the synchronized voices repeat the same formulas, evasive, affectless, cut off from whatever they had once been by promises of what they would never get to collect on? (VL 194–95)

This initially appears to be a full investment in the close-up's revelatory possibilities—'close-ups unmask every sign of fakery!'—its capacity to make the face say 'everything its subject [is] trying not to' (Balázs, *Early* 27–8; VL 199). Yet Pynchon ultimately prevents us from according with 24fps. Their eulogizing of the close-up, *Vineland* later observes, is merely 'a doomed attempt to live out the metaphor of movie camera as a weapon' because '[t]he minute the guns came out, all that art-of-the-cinema handjob was over' (VL 197, 259). 24fps's belief that 'Film equals sacrifice' is shown to be affected by 'so many of the same delusions' as the system they seek to question, 'just as hopelessly insulated, giving up what seemed already too much for something just as cheesy and worthless' (VL 202, 346).

Furthermore, as Brian McHale discerns, film in *Vineland* becomes ‘associated with’ not only ‘the revolutionary aspirations’—which are themselves subject to ‘a wide range of meaning’ (VL 117)—but also the ‘betrayals of the 1960s,’ too (*Constructing* 121). This is particularly true of Frenesi: when she elopes with Brock Vond, a ‘federal megacreep’ who burns all of 24fps’s film stock and is ‘everything [24fps] were supposed to be against,’ she becomes ‘listed as a species her parents had taught her to despise—a Cooperative Person’ (VL 189, 141, 280).

Frenesi embodies the problems *Vineland* highlights with regard to 24fps’s ‘movie sincerity’ (VL 244). Caught ‘inside some wraparound fantasy that she was offering her sacrifice at the altar of Art, and worse, believing that Art gave a shit,’ Frenesi is initially certain that she can ‘[n]ail [Brock] with [her] Scoopic, get up in his face with a radio mike, no mercy’ (VL 346, 236). Owing to the ‘24 frame-per-second truth she still believed in,’ she brings ‘in focus the image of the enemy’ in the hope of finding the “‘real” Brock,’ trusting in the ‘power’ of ‘love (...), that weightless, daylight commodity of the sixties to redeem even Brock, amiably, stupidly brutal, fascist Brock’ (VL 241, 250, 216–17). Yet Brock is so ‘photogenic’ that Frenesi cannot help ‘[z]ooming in a little on his face,’ with Brock able to ‘feel how she focused in on him, him alone—the lines of force’ (VL 189, 200). The camera close-up, then, becomes arrogated by the very system it was supposed to oppose, serving to supplement Brock’s ‘aura that everybody, winners and losers, picked up’ (VL 272). This appropriation is demonstrated further by the fact that Ditzah, another member of 24fps, films Weed Atman in close-up as he is dying after having been set up by Brock and Frenesi (VL 246). Thus, although Pynchon never quite abandons filmic potential entirely in *Vineland*—it is noted, for example, that watching 24fps’s ‘genius film editors [Ditzah and Zip] (...) at work was to enjoy unthinking exhibitions of grace’—the close-up is obviously not unambiguously aligned with revolutionary possibility, often quite the opposite (VL 196–97).

Indeed, there are uncanny echoes of Balázs’s ideas in *Gravity’s Rainbow* when we hear of the “Emulsion J” film stock invented by Lazslo Jamf, Tyrone Slothrop’s erstwhile hardon conditioner, ‘which somehow was able, even under ordinary daylight, to render the human skin transparent to a depth of a half a millimeter, revealing the face just beneath the surface’ (GR 387). Gerhardt von Göll—‘film director turned marketeer’—uses ‘IG outlet’ Spottbilligfilm AG ‘to get cut rates’ on Emulsion J, which was used ‘extensively’ in his ‘immortal *Alpdrücken*’ (GR 386–7). Through von Göll’s ‘ecstasy of megalomania,’ as well as his exploitation of the market, Pynchon satirises the supposed revolutionary aspirations of

the cinema: ‘I can take down your fences and your labyrinth walls,’ von Göll declares, ‘I can lead you back to the Garden you hardly remember. . . .’ (GR 388, original capitalisation). The association of von Göll and Jamf with IG Farben uncovers a further problem with film: its ‘dependence upon and exploitation of the face’ serves simultaneously to endow it with ‘power and (...) gravity,’ thereby potentially reinforcing, rather than subverting, power structures that rely upon the face (Kemp 154; GR 486). (We might recall, not for the first time, ‘the face of Big Brother, black-haired, black-moustachio’d, full of power and mysterious calm, and so vast that it almost filled up the screen’ in *Nineteen Eighty-Four* (Orwell, *Nineteen* 18–19).) That is, while the Death to the Pig Nihilist Film Kollektive hope to be the ‘architects of a just Hell for the fascist pig’ in *Vineland*—believing that ‘a camera is a gun, [a]n image taken is a death performed’—Pynchon indicates how cinema was put to use ‘to realize [the] fascist dream of the face,’ too (*VL* 197; Richter 100). Gerhard Richter outlines how Leni Riefenstahl’s *Triumph of the Will* was able to ‘reflect back to the *Volk* the simulacrum of its own visage’ (100), whilst Joseph Goebbels—who is in possession of *Alpdriicken*’s cutout gangrape scene in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, further tarnishing von Göll—spoke of ‘great technical projects ... which are to give the spirit of the times its vivid face’ (qtd. in Richter 97). Even Balázs’s thought is tinged with undeniably fascistic elements, as he once wrote that ‘the cinematograph is a machine that in its own way will create a living, concrete internationalism: *the unique, shared psyche of the white man*’ (*Early* xxxvii, original italics). (‘The face is not a universal. It is not even that of the white man; it is White Man himself’ (Deleuze and Guattari, *ATP* 176).) This yearning for the creation of a ‘single-faced crowd’ directly corresponds to Frenesi’s hopes to view ‘the people in a single presence,’ a prime example of identical, rather than non-identical, thinking (GR 351; *VL* 117). Where Balázs emphasizes the ‘microphysiognomic’ potentials of the close-up, then, this comes at the price of neglecting the way the close-up can make the face—like Greta Erdmann’s in *Alpdriicken*—‘so . . . monumental’ at the very same time (GR 387, 394).

By contrast, the cinema’s monumentalisation of the face is constantly highlighted in Pynchon’s writing: Metzger’s ‘suffering eyes [fill] the screen’ at the end of the *Cashiered* film in *The Crying of Lot 49*, for example, while Sloane Wolfmann, in *Inherent Vice*, comments on the ‘spiritual quality’ of Ida Lupino’s close-ups—‘those eyes!—and instead of hard-edged lamp reflections there’s this glow, this purity, almost as if it’s coming from inside’ (*CL49* 28; *IV* 58). Because the close-up’s monumentalisation of the face makes it ‘the vehicle of the star,’ it plays an essential role in the *méconnaissance* we see when Pynchon’s characters identify with the images of film stars, which, as I suggested in my previous chapter, is a

recurrent trope in his fiction (Doane, 'Close-Up' 90). What Pynchon consequently encourages us to recognize is the close-up's imbrication with the faciality machine: not only is 'the ordinary face of cinema,' as Jacques Aumont claims, 'that of Western democracy, that is to say, American and capitalist' (qtd. in Doane, 'Close-Up' 106), but the close-up also severs the face from the body and raises it to 'the state of Entity' in much the same way as Deleuze and Guattari characterise the functioning of the abstract machine of faciality (Deleuze, *Cinema 1* 96).

In addition to possibly strengthening, rather than questioning, the 'ideology of self-identity and reproducible community' which underpins the faciality machine (Richter 97), the close-up is a prime example of the 'desire of contemporary masses to bring things "closer" spatially and humanly, ... the urge ... to get hold of an object at very close range by way of its likeness, its reproduction' (Benjamin, 'Work' 217). This 'yearning to experience an immediate, concrete reality'—or 'an immediately given singularity'—seems as if it might be fulfilled on the final page of *Gravity's Rainbow* owing to the insistency of the text's present tense: 'it is now,' 'it is just here,' 'Now everybody—' (Balázs, *Early* 83; Dallmayr 38; *GR* 760). Marcus Smith and Khachig Tölölyan claim that the urgency of the 'now' in *Gravity's Rainbow* 'will perhaps restore us to ourselves and others' (181), yet it would be more correct to see the text's overplayed reiteration of this word as a demonstration that it is 'fictitious, one-dimensional' (Adorno 53). By allying 'now' with the facial close-up on the final page, moreover, Pynchon discloses cinema's 'aspiration to be the vehicle of presence,' which in turn enables us to see the main problem with Balázs's conception of the close-up: it is still 'enthralled by the idol of a pure present' (Doane, 'Close-Up' 93; Adorno 53). To put it in the terms of Deleuze and Guattari's faciality plateau, Balázs alleges that the close-up has the ability to 'dig beneath the skin' of the face's white wall and reveal the black hole of subjectivity underneath (*GR* 387). The emphasis he places upon subjective presence can thus be seen to uphold the structures of 'signifiante' and 'subjectification' which Deleuze and Guattari suggest are the very bedrocks, to invoke the Flintstonian idiom Pynchon seems to hold so dear, of the 'semiotic of capitalism' (*ATP* 182).

In this light, it might be difficult to see the close-up as an 'ideologically subversive tactic' in Pynchon's writing (Doane, 'Close-Up' 108). Although Balázs maintains that the 'intellectual climate of capitalist culture contradicts the nature of film' (*Early* 84), in Pynchon's texts the very inverse actually seems more accurate. Cinema in *Gravity's Rainbow* is principally associated with a repressive state apparatus, while the 'world of entertainment'



looks no less suppressive in *Vineland*, which mentions: early Hollywood's 'free ride on the backs of cheap labor'; a 'full size movie crew' in attendance at 'CAMP search-and-destroy missions'; and Hector Zuñiga's hopes 'to make a Film about all those long-ago political wars of the 1960s, whose ultimate message will be that the real threat to America, then and now, is from th' illegal abuse of narcotics' (*VL* 52, 289, 334, 51). There is an undeniable sense, too, that the potentials of the filmic medium have already been closed off, are 'already old videotape,' in our present '24 hour cornucopia of video' (*VL* 190, 171). In *Vineland*, for instance, Isaiah Two Four suggests that the 'Minute the Tube got hold of you folks, that was it, that whole alternative America, el deado meato,' while in *Bleeding Edge*, Reg Despard prophetically proclaims: 'Future of film (...)—someday, more bandwidth, more video files up on the Internet, everybody'll be shootin everything, way too much to look at, nothin will mean shit' (*VL* 373; *BE* 143). Even Balázs highlighted the passing of the mysterious quality of film in a section of *Theory of the Film* pertinently titled 'We Have Learned To See' (35). Yet even if it only displays Pynchon's 'nostalgic mood for silent cinema and early movies,' might there still not be potential in the 'closeup of the face' on the final page of *Gravity's Rainbow*, which is, after all, 'a film *we have not learned to see*' (Clerc, 'Film' 106; *GR* 760, italics mine)?

Notwithstanding the 'excessiveness and exuberance of the historical discourse of the close-up,' as well as the risk Pynchon runs of entrenching the faciality machine that much further by ceaselessly putting the face into close-up, there are nevertheless, I want to argue, 'things to hold on to' (Doane, 'Close-Up' 110; *GR* 663). Despite the hyperbole of Benjamin's claim that the film came and 'burst this prison-world asunder by the dynamite of the tenth of a second,' Pynchon's writing appears to have more sympathy with his statement that the close-up paves the way for 'new structural formations of the subject' ('Work' 229–230). For the close-up both 'underwrites a crisis in' and 'is one of the most potent techniques through which film "thinks" through the construction of the subject and the object (and the possibility of inter-subjectivities)' (Doane, 'Close-Up' 94; Beugnet 89). The same can be said of the close-up that Pynchon subjects the face to in his fiction: it becomes a key site at which he explores subject-object relations and, concurrently, intersubjectivity—or what we might call "interfaciality"—too. To put it another way, it is via his intensely close examination of the face that Pynchon most directly addresses the 'problem concerning the plurality of subjects, their relationship, and their reciprocal presentation' (Deleuze and Guattari, *WIP* 17). Turning to Deleuze's ruminations on the

close-up, before we bring Pynchon's texts themselves fully into focus, will help to open up this line of inquiry.

Deleuze's first book on cinema, *Cinema 1*, is an exploration of what he calls 'the movement-image' in film and is predominantly concerned, much like *Gravity's Rainbow*, with cinema in the pre-Second World War years, though Deleuze's discussion does extend into the 1970s. In this text, Deleuze provides one of the most extended reflections on both the face and the close-up and their equivalence in what he terms the 'affection-image,' which, in a characteristically counter-intuitive formulation, Deleuze defines thus:

*The affection-image is the close-up, and the close-up is the face ... As for the face itself, we will not say that the close-up deals with [traite] it or subjects it to some kind of treatment: there is no close-up of the face, the face is in itself close-up, the close-up is by itself face and both are affect, affection image. (Cinema 1 87–88, original italics)*

In order to clarify what Deleuze is getting at here, we need to turn to his notion of the face in *Cinema 1*, as it differs from, though is not wholly unrelated to, the concept of the face in *A Thousand Plateaus*. In *Cinema 1*, indeed, Deleuze's conception of the face is, initially at least, more conventionally recognisable. The face, he claims, '[o]rdinarily' has a 'triple function': 'it is individuating (it distinguishes or characterises each person); it is socialising (it manifests a social role); it is relational or communicating (it ensures not only communication between two people, but also, in a single person, the internal agreement between his [sic] character and his role)' (*Cinema 1* 99). Deleuze continues: '[n]ow the face which effectively presents these aspects in the cinema as elsewhere, loses all these in the case of the close-up,' such that—and this is the crux—'*the facial close-up is both the face and its effacement*' (*Cinema 1* 100, italics mine). Since the close-up 'destroy[s]' the face's 'triple function' and pushes it 'to those regions where the principle of individuation ceases to hold sway' (*Cinema 1* 100), it opens the way for the 'new structural formations of the subject' identified by Benjamin ('Work' 230). This is due to the fact that, as Therese Davis proposes in *The Face on the Screen*, the 'close-up generates the physical affect of non-identity' (18)—the very non-identity, in line with my suggestions earlier in this chapter, Pynchon thinks in and through identity, through the face, itself. Pynchon does this via three main channels: the terrifying threat of both the face and facelessness; the face of the Other Person, in Deleuze and Guattari's terms (*WIP* 17); and 'the face of things,' the latter of which will predominantly be considered in this thesis's concluding remarks (Balázs, *Early* 46). For now, our guide can be found in Deleuze's following statement:

This is the affection-image: it has as its limit the simple affect of fear and the effacement of faces in nothingness. But as its substance it has the compound affect of desire and of astonishment—which gives it life—and the turning of faces in the open, in the flesh.  
(*Cinema 1* 101)

Let's turn first to the limit in Pynchon's fiction, before considering the substance in the last section of this chapter.

ii) **'the simple affect of fear and the effacement of faces in nothingness'**  
(Deleuze, *Cinema 1* 101)

James Elkins writes that 'the absence of a face is intolerable,' while also stating that a 'face is a terrifying thing, perhaps *the* terrifying thing—the very idea of terror itself' (166, 170, original italics). Evidently, then, the opposing ends of the dialectic—the face and facelessness—can both engender an affect of fear. If only because Kracauer suggests that 'the face counts for nothing in film unless it includes the death's head' (vii), I want to take the pole of facelessness first. The particularly horrifying affect of facelessness, or an all but entirely deformed face, is one that has regularly been invoked in the arts—Gaston Leroux's *The Phantom of The Opera*, Georges Franju's *Eyes Without A Face*, and Kobo Abe's *The Face of Another* are but three prime examples.<sup>3</sup> The absence of a face is, moreover, what Ishmael finds particularly terrifying about Moby Dick:

you see no one point precisely; not one distinct feature is revealed; no nose, eyes, ears, or mouth; no face; he has none, proper; nothing but that one broad firmament of a forehead, pleated with riddles; dumbly lowering with the doom of boats, and ships, and men.  
(Melville 386)

Staring at the sperm whale in 'full frontal view' is, consequently, a 'sublime' experience for Ishmael, leaving him feeling 'the Deity and the dread powers more forcibly than in beholding any other object in living nature' (Melville 386). Previously in this thesis, we have seen how Pynchon explores the affect of fear that facelessness can provoke through Godolphin's 'mutilated face' in *V.* and Katje Borgesius's 'terrible Face That Is No Face' in

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<sup>3</sup> Rainer Maria Rilke, an important influence on Pynchon, as acknowledged in earlier chapters of this thesis, also powerfully evokes the affect of fear produced by facelessness in *The Notebooks of Malte Laurids Brigge*:

The woman sat up, frightened, she pulled out of herself too quickly, too violently, so that her face was in her two hands. I could see it lying there: its hollow form. It cost me an indescribable effort to stay with those two hands, not to look at what had been torn out of them. I shuddered to see a face from the inside, but I was much more afraid of that bare flayed head waiting there faceless.  
(*Notebooks* 7)

*Gravity's Rainbow* (V. 488; GR 522). These are far from the only evocations of facelessness in Pynchon's work, however. ('This is just how they want you, an animal, a bitch with swollen udders, lying in the dark, blank-faced, surrendered, reduced to this meat, these smells' (VL 287).) Elsewhere in *Gravity's Rainbow*, for example, Tchitcherine remembers the 'slowly carbonizing faces of men he thought he knew, men turning to coal,' whilst Oedipa is 'stopped' by the 'wrecked face' of the sailor in *The Crying of Lot 49* (GR 351; CL49 86). In *Against the Day*, too, a portrait of Constance Penhallow shows her face to be 'only just crescent, (...) turned toward an open shelf of hooks with no glass cover there arranged to throw back images of a face, only this dorsal finality,' while Scarsdale Vibe is confronted by a 'being's face appallingly corroded as if burned around the edges,' which brings him to 'levels of fear he knew he could not emerge from with his will undamaged' (AtD 142, 1126). Earlier in the novel, Vibe has also exploited the horrifying affect of a devastated face during the murder of Tancredi: 'Make sure you damage the face, fellows. *Batti! Batti la faccia*, yes? Destroy it. Give the little shitass's Mamma something to cry about' (AtD 834).

In *The Origin of German Tragic Drama*, Benjamin argues that 'everything about history that from the very beginning has been untimely, sorrowful, unsuccessful, is expressed in a face—or rather in a death's head' (166). In many senses this holds for Pynchon's fiction, too: the 'unavoidable face of the dead' Kaffir in Fleetwood Vibe's dreams, for instance, warns him that 'there [is] some grave imbalance in the structure of the world, which would have to be corrected' (AtD 190).<sup>4</sup> In *Gravity's Rainbow*, Franz Pökler foretells 24fps's notion that '[w]hen power corrupts, it keeps a log of its progress, written into that most sensitive memory device, the human face,' by coming to see 'how his own face might be plotted, not in light but in net forces acting upon it from the flow of Reich and coercion and love it moved through . . . and known that it must suffer the same degradation, as death will warp face to skull' (VL 195; GR 423). The death's head becomes a powerful source of affect in Pynchon's work as it turns 'the face into a phantom, and the book of phantoms' (Deleuze, *Cinema 1* 99). This affective force is felt by many characters: in V., for instance, Benny Profane is 'still fazed' by SHROUD because its 'face [is] a human skull,' which appears to grin at him while proclaiming 'Me and SHOCK are what you and everybody will be someday' (V. 286). Perhaps the most notable occurrence is in *Gravity's Rainbow*, however, when Pökler vomits and cries upon seeing the victims of the Dora concentration camp, 'each face so perfect, so individual, the lips stretched back into death-grins, a whole silent audience caught at the punchline of the joke' (GR 432). As Lacan remarks of the skull in

<sup>4</sup> As I outlined in my introduction, there is also in a sense in which the most powerful are faceless in Pynchon's fiction, a fact that always provides a counter-balance to the instances discussed here.

the foreground of Hans Holbein's *The Ambassadors*, moments like these foster the impression 'simply [of] the subject as annihilated'; Pynchon, that is, 'reflects our own nothingness, in the figure of the death's head' (*Four* 88, 92).

In addition to charting the human face's 'history of laceration and breakage' (*BE* 286), it is worth noting briefly that Pynchon also appears to hold to Deleuze and Guattari's sense of a 'face-landscape aggregate,' whereby '[a]ll faces envelop an unknown, unexplored landscape; all landscapes are populated by a loved or dreamed-of face, develop a face to come or already past' (*ATP* 174, 172–73). As such, Pynchon draws attention to the death's-head of the environment, to the destruction of "the face of the earth" (a 'living critter'), too (*GR* 590). For example, Tyrone Slothrop's ancestor, William, is said to have seen 'stones showing round-faced angels with the long noses of dogs, toothy and deep-socketed death's heads,' an event which significantly complicates an overly positive reading of the 'Soul in ev'ry stone' line of his hymn that concludes the novel (*GR* 27, 760). The most striking example, however, comes in a description of Peenemünde, where Blicero works on the construction of the Rocket:

It's a face. On the maps, it's a skull or corroded face in profile, facing southwest: a small marshy lake for the eye-socket, nose-and-mouth cavity cutting in at the entrance to the Peene, just below the power station . . . the draftmanship is a little like a Wilhelm Busch cartoon face, some old fool for mischievous boys to play tricks on. (*GR* 501)

Kracauer claims that 'any huge close-up reveals new and unsuspected formations of matter; skin textures are reminiscent of aerial photographs, eyes turn into lakes or volcanic craters' (48)—a view given support in *Inherent Vice* when Lourdes screams 'Photo courtesy of NASA!' when she has 'her nose to the mirror' (*IV* 78)—yet the depiction of Peenemünde indicates that the inverse can be true as well. I will explore the ramifications of this further when I turn to the 'face of things' in the concluding section of this thesis (Balázs, *Early* 46).

As I have outlined, an 'overwhelming massive *erasure* of the face' is clearly shown to be accompanied by an affect of fear in Pynchon's writing (Elkins 166, original italics). Many characters subsequently strive to fill this nothingness, to cover over this 'fetid unknown darkness,' with an image of a face (*GR* 64). ('If there is something comforting—religious, if you want—about paranoia, there is still also anti-paranoia, where nothing is connected to anything, a condition not many of us can bear for long' (*GR* 434).) In *Vineland*, when Weed Atman attempts to remember what was done to him at the College of the Surf, Dr. Elasmó's 'video image' is said to have 'pixeldanced in, to cover, mercifully, for something else,' whilst Pökler keeps 'waking to images' that he can 'make no sense of at all—a close-

up of a face?’—which eventually resolve into Rudolf Klein-Rugge (*VL* 226; *GR* 578). Though there is a certain comfort in seeing ‘a meaningless Darkness eddy at length into a Face,’ as if ‘all the day’s mean dismal losses could be rescued in the one look,’ it is remarkable how often the face itself—‘suddenly looming,’ perhaps, ‘in the roofless Sky’—is seen as a carrier of threat in Pynchon’s texts (*Me&D* 647, 590; *GR* 127). Part of this is due, as we have seen, to the face’s status as memento-mori. As Arturo Naunt—an ‘A.O.D.’ or ‘Angel of Death’ sculptor—observes in *Against the Day*: ‘Tradition has been to hide the face, I mean, it’s Death isn’t it. The best you’d expect is a skull, and depending how nightmare prone you are, it only gets worse from there’ (*AtD* 1003). This is why the ‘closeup of the face’ on the final page of *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s is so threatening, especially if we follow Therese Davis’s argument that ‘faces on the screen unmask the screen itself as a face, indeed, as Kracauer suggests, a face of death’ (3). The last closeup might, after all, belong to ‘the bright angel of death,’ or even God, who ‘always sez’: ‘Thou canst not see my face: for there shall no man see me, and live’ (*GR* 760; *SL* 25; *The Bible: Authorized King James Version*, Exodus 33:20).

No character in Pynchon’s fiction seems more aware of the potentially terrifying qualities of the face than Dr. Hilarius in *The Crying of Lot 49*. Hilarius is Oedipa Maas’s ‘shrink or psychotherapist’ prone to ‘delightful lapses from [the] orthodoxy’ of Freudian psychoanalysis, the most notable of which is how he makes faces at his patients (*CL49* 11). In order to realise the talking cure, Freud avoided facial contact with his patients to prevent the extra stimulus of the face from disrupting the unfolding of the unconscious: ‘It is not, after all, for nothing,’ Lacan states, ‘that analysis is not carried out face to face’ (*Four* 78). Just as Doane suggests that the close-up can be a ‘lurking danger, a potential semiotic threat,’ the face, itself a close-up, can be seen in much the same way (‘Close-Up’ 90). This is signalled towards the outset of *The Crying of Lot 49* when Hilarius calls Oedipa at three o’clock in the morning, sounding like ‘Pierce doing a Gestapo officer’ and attempting to recruit her for his ‘experiment (...) on [the] effects of LSD-25, mescaline, psilocybin, and related drugs on a large sample of suburban housewives’ (*CL49* 10). By saying ‘We want you,’ Hilarius triggers an ‘Uncle Sam hallucination’ for Oedipa, which is soon replaced in her mind by Hilarius’s ‘Fu-Manchu’ face—‘many of [his] faces,’ the narrator sardonically remarks, having ‘like German symphonies both a number and a nickname’—a face which ‘stay[s] with her for what was left of the hours before dawn’ (*CL49* 11). Hilarius’s ‘truly alarming’ Fu-Manchu face is here indicative of the ‘semiotic threat’ Oedipa will face in the novel as a whole (*CL49* 11; Doane, ‘Close-Up’ 90). We later find out that Hilarius worked

on a psychological programme at Buchenwald, once again drawing links between fascism and the face as Hilarius attempted to render Jews permanently and '[h]opelessly insane' via facial expressions (*CL49* 93). One of these, Hilarius alleges, when his own sanity is very much in question, sent a man named Zvi into 'vegetable ruin':

'There is a face,' Hilarius said, 'that I can make. One you haven't seen; no one in this country has. (...) [I]t has an effective radius of a hundred yards and drives anyone unlucky enough to see it down forever into the darkened oubliette, among the terrible shapes, and secures the hatch irrevocably above them.' (*CL49* 93–4)

While it is difficult to take Hilarius too seriously here, he nonetheless draws attention to the capacity of the face to act as a potentially destructive armament, to send one into 'the sure bones of fright' (*GR* 721). This is echoed in *Mason & Dixon* when Lambton is confronted by a serpent. Though the serpent's face has lost its 'youthful malevolence,' it is still 'purely a Weapon in the service of blood-lust, a serpent's gift for paralyzing its prey with a certain Gaze that the potential Luncheon, once returning it, is helpless to defy' (*Me&D* 591). Albeit in slightly hyperbolic fashion, through Hilarius and the Medusan echoes of the serpent, Pynchon alerts us to the fact that we can feel the 'dread powers' through the face just as much as via facelessness: 'so much fear at taking it in, the serpent face—at opening your arms and legs and letting it *enter* you, into your true face *it'll kill you if it—*' (Melville 386; *GR* 671, original italics).

The affect of fear engendered by the face is heightened in Pynchon's fiction by a recurrent trope: the turning face. In *Gravity's Rainbow*, for example, Slothrop enters the Frick Frack Club in Soho and sees Norma and Marjorie, two of the many 'young ladies' who are stars on his map of sexual conquests (*GR* 22). Slothrop was only expecting to 'meet one,' however, and starts to believe that 'some horrible secret plot' has 'lined [them] up in a row, the angle deliberately just for him . . . and then, paranoia flooding up, the two faces beginning to turn his way' (*GR* 22). This trope continues into *Against the Day*. Kit Traverse, for instance, has a nightmare and wakes 'to the single operatic image of [Scarsdale] Vibe turning to stare him mercilessly in the face,' while Fleetwood Vibe's diary recalls 'the Figure' he and the Chums of Chance saw through the 'Special Ray Generator' at 'Nunatak':

Though details were still difficult to make out, the Figure appeared to recline on its side, an odalisque of the snows (...) with as little agreement among us as to its 'facial' features, some describing them as 'Mongoloid,' others as 'serpent-like.' Its eyes, for the most part, if eyes be what they were, remained open, its gaze as yet undirected—though we were bound

in a common terror of that moment at which it might *become aware of our interest* and smoothly pivot its awful head to stare us full in the face. (*AtD* 837, 158, original italics)

Writing on *Gravity's Rainbow*, Raymond M. Olderman discerns that '[a]t the moment of some revelation in a character's life—or in the reader's comprehension—the narrator often describes the slow turning of some mysterious face' (210). 'The character sees that face,' Olderman continues, 'as belonging to some thing, being or concept that is clearly beyond the realm of his or her normal experience' (210). Undoubtedly, Olderman runs the risk of implying, in mistaken accordance with Ned Pointsman's dream in the novel, that 'the underlying structure is the turning face,' a statement which would domesticate *Gravity's Rainbow's* narrative far more comfortably than the text ever allows (*GR* 142). Nevertheless, he is right to highlight the significance of the face's relation to a sense of 'a realm behind [or beyond] the immediate,' which is something we see not only in this novel but throughout Pynchon's oeuvre (*VL* 186). But two of many examples: in *Bleeding Edge*, Maxine sees faces in the panels of a subway train and realises that they 'are precisely those out of all the city millions she must in the hour be paying most attention to, in particular those whose eyes actually meet her own—they are the day's messengers from whatever the Beyond has for a Third World' (*BE* 439); and in *Gravity's Rainbow*, the narrator proposes that in 'the trenches of the First World War, English men came to (...) find in the faces of other young men evidence of otherworldly visits, some poor hope that may have helped redeem even mud, shit, the decaying pieces of human meat. . . .' (*GR* 616). It is precisely this ethereal, almost 'otherworldly' quality of the face that can produce the 'affect of desire and of astonishment' Deleuze claims for the affection-image (*Cinema 1* 101). It is this affect—in spite of the affect of fear that we have seen to be produced by various faces, as well as facelessness tropes—that Pynchon's fiction suggests we should 'be paying most attention to,' as I will now argue in this chapter's final section (*BE* 439).

iii) **'the compound affect of desire and of astonishment ... and the turning of faces in the open, in the flesh'** (Deleuze, *Cinema 1* 101)

Before examining the face's potential to inspire desire or astonishment in Pynchon's texts, we need to pause and consider one of the most influential thinkers of the face, Emmanuel Levinas, who claimed that '[t]he dimension of the divine opens forth from the human face. . . . It is here that the Transcendent, infinitely other, solicits us and appeals to us' (*TI* 78). In one sense at least, Levinas's concept of the face bears some similarity with Balázs's notion



of the close-up: according to Levinas, Paul Davies writes, '[t]he face of another, turned and turning toward me, can draw my attention in such a fashion that all and any context subsides or recedes from consciousness' (253). That is to say, '[t]he face has turned to me—and this is its very nudity. It *is* by itself and not by reference to a system' (Levinas, *TI* 75, original italics). As this 'nakedness of the face is destituteness,' the face becomes, for Levinas, the "ground" of the ethical relation (*TI* 75). When 'confronted with this face out of context' (*GR* 106), 'my spontaneity' is 'call[ed] into question ... by the presence of the Other,' which Levinas maintains is the very definition of ethics (*TI* 43). But if Levinas is to be productive for our analysis of Pynchon's corpus, we need to address the vital question posed by Robert Bernasconi: 'How concrete is the face in Levinas?' ('Alterity' 85). In *Totality and Infinity*, Levinas writes:

The way in which the other presents himself [*sic*], exceeding *the idea of the other in me*, we here name face. This *mode* does not consist in figuring as a theme under my gaze, in spreading itself forth as a set of qualities forming an image. The face of the Other at each moment destroys and overflows the plastic image it leaves me. (*TI* 50–51, original italics)

Shawn's ruminations in *Bleeding Edge* are apposite here: 'I guess it happens sometimes. Ordinary unenlightened folks just like you, no special gifts or netheen [*sic*], will see through all the illusion, just as well as a master with, like, years of training? And what they're able to see is, is the real person, the "face before the face" we call it in Zen' (*BE* 200). Evidently, for Levinas, the face cannot be reduced to normal sensory experience; the face, he asserts, cannot be 'seen nor touched—for in visual or tactile sensation the identity of the I envelops the alterity of the object, which becomes precisely a content' (*TI* 194). Levinas is just as distrustful of vision as Pynchon—owing to its contribution, as I discussed in my first chapter, to the 'schema of objectification'—which is why he is so insistent that 'the relation with the face is not an object-cognition' (*TI* 189, 75). Levinas nevertheless still conceives of ethics as a 'spiritual optics,' here understood as 'a "vision" without image, bereft of the synoptic and totalizing objectifying virtues of vision, a relation or an intentionality of a wholly different type' (*TI* 78, 23). In this sense, we can see Levinas, as I earlier argued with regard to Pynchon, seeking to uncover a 'different kind of seeing' (*AtD* 834).

Davies neatly captures a problem here, however: it appears that the "face" both is and is not the actual face of the actual Other who looks at me; displacing "vision" it nonetheless seems to owe its philosophical and rhetorical impact to it' (261). As much as Levinas declares that the face exists 'over and beyond form' (*TI* 65), it is also 'no mere

metaphor transporting a figurative sense into a higher sphere, delivering it from its corporeal chains' (Waldenfels 65). The sense of the infinite, that is, comes *only by seeing* the other's literal face—'the eyes break through the mask,' Levinas states (*TI* 66)—even if it then exceeds, overflows it. Davies's proposal that we should therefore read Levinas 'under the heading of an "as if"' seems most constructive: 'the experience of another's face, the phenomenon of another's face, is so extraordinary it is as if it were neither experience nor phenomenon' (Davies 255). In so doing, we admittedly run slightly against the grain of Levinas's philosophy. Yet where Levinas seeks to unearth the relation with the face of 'the other absolutely other which I can not [*sic*] contain, the other in this sense infinite' (*TI* 197), Jacques Derrida points out that 'the expression "infinitely other" or "absolutely other" cannot be stated and thought simultaneously; ... the absolutely other cannot be absolutely exterior to the same without ceasing to be other; ... the other is absolutely other only if he [*sic*] is an ego, that is, in a certain way, if he is the same as I' ('Violence' 158–9). Rather than reading the face as the absolutely other, which Derrida shows is an impossible task as it necessitates always a reversion to the same, it seems more productive for us here to posit Levinas's thought in terms of the non-identical. On one hand, keeping in mind the facial close-up on the last page of *Gravity's Rainbow*, this enables us to resist 'relaxing helpless under some imminent unthinkable descent' (*VL* 144); which is to say, attempting to think the non-identical, instead of the absolutely other, avoids the pitfalls of 'capitulat[ing] before the utterly intangible,' which would prevent us from 'tackl[ing] what is different' (Adorno 161, Dallmayr's translation 37). On the other hand, it prevents us from performing an uncritical turn to 'those glum face-to-face encounters between signifying subjectivities,' a gross over-simplification of Levinas's philosophy because 'the face comes to me as the very limit of humanity, as humanity in and at the extreme, an extremity which denies me a reassuring humanism, that is, a humanism of the self' (Deleuze and Guattari, *ATP* 171; Davies 271).

For Adorno, 'objects do not go into their concepts without leaving a remainder': 'the concept does not exhaust the thing conceived,' he writes, '[w]hat is, is more than it is' (5, 161). This remainder is the nonidentical. It is vital to note, as Fred Dallmayr indicates, that 'nonidentity is not a separate realm juxtaposed to identity but, rather, the difference and self-transgression slumbering in every identity, the absence in every presence' (38). The key point for us here, then, is that there is an 'uncontainable excess' not only to the close-up, as Doane proclaims, but to the face itself, which is first and foremost an object, too ('Close-Up' 105). Levinas's assertion that the face is 'present in its refusal to be contained[,]'

... comprehended, that is, encompassed,' can now be seen in a more tangible light: '[t]he face, still a thing among things, breaks through the form that nevertheless delimits it. This means concretely: the face speaks to me' (*TI* 198). Because the face speaks—it is a 'veritable megaphone,' as Deleuze and Guattari state (*ATP* 179), or 'pure communicability,' in Giorgio Agamben's terms (96)—seeking to think nonidentity through the face

heralds not a retreat into indifferent vacuity but instead the encounter and contestation of distinct or differentiated identities, an encounter marked by a reciprocal transgression of self-enclosure. . . . Given their self-transgressive, nonessentialist character, the encounter of identities does not merely imply conflict but also a mutual learning process, a "struggle for recognition" in which contestants come to acknowledge each other both as different and as partner. (Dallmayr 38)

This sense of a learning process accords not only with my suggestions regarding Pynchon's endeavours to cultivate a 'cognizant eye' and nose in earlier chapters of this thesis (*VL* 367), but also with Levinas's claim that the 'relation with the Other ... is a teaching; it comes from the exterior and brings me more than I contain' (*TI* 50–51). This relation is, in Deleuze and Guattari's terms, 'an *absolute* deterritorialization,' even if it 'is not all at once' (*ATP* 172, original italics; Levinas, *TI* 54). We are now ready to examine the way in which Pynchon convicts the face of the faciality machine, which generalizes the face under its own concept, of non-identity with itself, a conviction that concurrently attempts to open up a space where 'the other appears as the expression of a possible ... as it exists in a face that expresses it and takes shape in a language that gives it a reality' (Deleuze and Guattari, *WIP* 17)

What is readily apparent in Pynchon's writing is how often the gaze of the other disturbs the sense his characters have of themselves, thereby putting 'the I in question' (Levinas, *TI* 195). Morituri's eyes are noted to be 'prying Slothrop away from his comfort' in *Gravity's Rainbow*, for instance, while Prairie's gaze makes Zoyd feel 'fraudulent and lost' in *Vineland* (*GR* 479; *VL* 54). This is, of course, a product of the potential threat a face can carry, as already discussed. Yet equally powerful in Pynchon's fiction is the sense that we 'hang on looks our lovers give' (*VL* 133): in *Gravity's Rainbow*, for example, Richard Hirsch 'tries to look away' from Leni Pökler's face 'but can't escape her eyes and finally he turns full into her own look, laughs out loud, a laugh of pure joy and reaches his hand, the palm of his dear hand, to hold her face' (*GR* 158); in *Vineland*, the look '*from someplace else*' that Zoyd receives from 'brand-new Prairie' is there for him 'more than once in years to come, to help him through those times when the Klingons are closing, and the helm won't answer, and the warp engine's out of control' (*VL* 285, original italics); and in *Against the*

*Day*, Frank and Stray have ‘a good long look at each other’s face,’ with Frank knowing ‘that in years to come, (...) the C chord in the day’s melody he could always return to would be (...) the look those eyes seemed for a minute there to be giving him’ (*AtD* 232). Pynchon is careful not to overly romanticize this interfacial moment: that Stray only *seems* to be giving Frank this look prevents ‘false reconciliation,’ which, as *Vineland* laments, is already ‘abounding’ (*VL* 211). Crucially, Frank additionally recognizes that he cannot ‘speak for [Stray],’ suggesting that he does not attempt to appropriate her, to ‘merg[e them] into a joint creature’ (*AtD* 232; *GR* 38). This is in sharp contrast to Roger Mexico in *Gravity’s Rainbow*. Roger is equally entranced by Jessica Swanlake’s face, ‘striking his faithful Zippo (...) in the dark, the many kinds of dark, just to see what’s happening with her face. Each new flame, a new face’ (*GR* 38). Yet his overly sentimentalized (‘It was what Hollywood likes to call a “cute meet”’) and ultimately failed relationship with Jessica indicates that we must not see the ‘face-to-face’ as ‘the feeling of actually being joined,’ as ‘real magic’ or data that cannot be argued away (*GR* 38). Instead, as ‘the face to face both announces society and permits the maintaining of a separate I,’ it is more correctly seen as an ‘*intensity* of indeterminacy that is marked as non-apathy and a turning’ towards the other, a turning which does not, however, overcome distance nor view the other as ‘an immediately given singularity’ (Levinas, *TI* 68; Orbán 145, original italics; Dallmayr 38).

Returning to Frank, he realises that there are aspects of Stray that are unknowable, and as ‘ethics is otherwise than knowledge’ in Levinasian thought—as ‘the end of certainty can be the beginning of trust,’ even ‘in a season when the word is invoked for quaintness or a minor laugh’—there are intimations here of a potentially constructive ethical relation (Critchley 11, 26; *GR* 127). Although Pynchon prevents us from fully investing in this possibility—especially as ‘life in psychedelic-sixties L.A. offered more cautionary arguments than you could wave a joint at against too much trust’—his fiction is nevertheless full of moments that complement the look between Frank and Stray (*IV* 70). Later in *Against the Day*, for example, when Frank and his mother Mayva both start to think that Webb (Frank’s father) may have been the ‘legendary Phantom Dynamiter of the San Juans,’ they have ‘themselves a good long silent look, not really uncomfortable, just itchy, as if it wouldn’t take much to break apart’ (*AtD* 528). Their faces say more than they can here, highlighting the face’s potential power despite, or indeed because of, the fragility with which Pynchon characterises the moment.

This sense of tenuousness is seen throughout his oeuvre. Notably, towards the beginning of *Mason & Dixon* we are informed that in ‘the crucial moments, neither Mason

nor Dixon had fail'd the other. Each had met the other's Gaze for a slight moment before Duty again claim'd them,' a statement which is echoed towards the end of the novel when it is suggested that '[n]either has ever denied the other his direct gaze' (*Me&D* 42, 763). This sense of intersubjective connection, however, is also continually problematized: "We must count upon becoming old Geezers together," Dixon proposes. They are looking directly at one another for the first time since either can remember' (*Me&D* 742). If Mason and Dixon have supposedly '[n]ever denied the other his direct gaze,' then surely they would remember a prior occasion to the one here? Pynchon appears to sap their mutual gazes of any significance at this point, an impression only furthered when we hear that '[a]t the moment of the Interdiction, when their Eyes at length meet, what they believe they once found aboard the *Seahorse* fails, this time, to appear' (*Me&D* 678). Mason and Dixon are patently unable to 'cross the perilous Boundaries between themselves'—just as we are unable to cross 'the perilous gulf between screen and face' on the final page of *Gravity's Rainbow* (*Me&D* 689; *BE* 429). But we must remember that the ethical relation 'does not undo "distance," does not result in the union of the knower and the known, does not issue in totality' (Levinas, *TI* 60). It is also, to reiterate, 'not all at once in any big transcendent moment' (*VL* 112): what Mason and Dixon 'believe they once found aboard the *Seahorse* fails, *this time*, to appear,' which nevertheless intimates there may still be a next time (*Me&D* 678, italics mine). Opportunities consistently arise in Pynchon's writing—it is just that they are often missed. *Vineland* notes, for example, that 'when it could still have made a difference, [Frenesi] said nothing at all' to Brock, whereas Franz Pöckler in *Gravity's Rainbow* has 'refrained from the only act that could have redeemed him. He should have throttled Weissmann where he sat' (*VL* 274; *GR* 428).

Though Pynchon consequently refuses us any unambiguous consolation, it is only in so doing that he does not foreclose possibility entirely. On one level, sure, as Levinas puts it, 'the radical impossibility of seeing oneself from the outside' (*TI* 53)—or, as Lacan writes, the fact that '*You never look at me from the place from which I see you*' (*Four* 103)—means that 'we're strangers at the films, condemned to separate rows, aisles, exits, homegoings' (*GR* 663). Nevertheless, on another level, the repeated stress on the specificity of certain faces in Pynchon's corpus—the demonstration of 'an intense obviousness: the face of the Other is different, different in a way to any other difference' (Davies 254)—indicates not only a resistance to the generalizing function of the faciality machine but also the 'impossibility of *forgetting* the intersubjective experience that leads to ... social experience

and endows it with meaning' (Levinas, *TI* 53, original italics). Thomas Moore has detected a similar working in Pynchon's fiction:

Compassion aches as it does for Pynchon because it is always in some measure impersonal; it must be defined as an eddy against the awesomely general currents in which the powerless are trapped, including *this* or *that* passing, once-glimpsed, excruciatingly specific face. (51, original italics)

Although Moore only has *Gravity's Rainbow* in mind, the notion that an 'all but unbearably distinct' face indicates 'the impossibility of totalization' is one we see throughout Pynchon's oeuvre (*AtD* 757; Levinas, *TI* 53). In *Against the Day*, for instance, Yashmeen Halfcourt dreams that she and her father are 'taken aloft, as if in mechanical rapture, to a great skyborne town' populated by 'a small band of serious young people, dedicated to resisting death and tyranny' (*AtD* 842). As well as understanding that these people are 'the Compassionate,' in an echo of Moore's words, Yashmeen notices that their faces are 'strangely *specific*, faces which could easily appear in the waking day here below, men and women [she] should recognize in the moment for who they were. . . .' (*AtD* 842, original italics). The further alignment of compassion and specificity here allies with Katalin Orbán's comments on *Gravity's Rainbow*, where, she argues, Pynchon attempts to portray a 'sensitivity to *singularity* that prevents generalization and commutation' (145, original italics). This is not without a certain, yet necessary, difficulty: Dally's face in *Against the Day* is 'too specific for prolonged viewing,' whilst Pan's in *Gravity's Rainbow* is 'too beautiful to bear' (*AtD* 1005). Though such faces in Pynchon's fiction seem to demand 'a willingness to see them, however anxiously denied by those of us who do,' without this sense of exertion he would be lapsing into a simple 'paean to particularity' (*AtD* 1005; Dallmayr 38). Since 'the living genetic chains prove even labyrinthine enough to preserve some human face down ten or twenty generations,' however, a particular face, Pynchon discloses, is always in some sense defined by and tied to the general, despite never being fully captured by it (*GR* 10).

An especially poignant moment that combines the issues of particularity and specificity with the generality of familial genetics comes when Mason looks into his children's faces, attempting to filter out the traces of his face in theirs in order to find the face of his dead wife, Rebekah:

He must often remind himself not to search the Boys' Faces too intently for Rebekah's. It makes them squirm, which gives him little Joy. Upon Days when he knows he will see them, he stares into his Mirror, memorizing his own face well enough to filter it out of Willy's and Doc's, leaving, if the Trick succeed, Rebekah's alone, her dear living Face,—tho' at about half the optickal Resolution, he guesses. When the time comes, he finds he

cannot remember what he looks like. Withal, their Faces are their own, unsortably,—and claim the Moment. (*Mc&D* 211)

Once again, we have a clear indication of the possible comfort a loved one's face can proffer, hence Mason's intent searching. There are two other important things here. The first is that, as I have suggested above, Mason is required to recognise a specific difference in the faces of his sons, a recognition that may well hold some potential for its ability to 'claim the Moment,' that small fraction of time in which hope continually resurfaces throughout Pynchon's writing, as George Levine observed in one of the earliest critical works on *Gravity's Rainbow* ('Risking'). Secondly, what this passage also indicates is that, as Daniel Black puts it, 'my face is in many ways more of a mystery to me than it is to other people' (6). Despite the time Mason spends trying to memorize his face, even his own face remains other to him when he comes to look at Willy and Doc. Not only, therefore, does Pynchon show that we are unable to completely contain and comprehend the face of the other, but that our own face 'resists possession, resists [our] powers,' too (Levinas, *TI* 197).

By ceaselessly emphasizing this across his oeuvre, Pynchon is able to expose the fallacy of total identification: 'I get a minute to look in the mirror,' Erlys states in *Against the Day*, 'it's like meeting somebody I almost know' (*AtD* 1176). Numerous characters experience shock upon viewing their reflection: Oedipa has a moment of 'pure terror' when looking into the broken bathroom mirror following the hairspray incident in Echo Courts, demonstrating an affective sense of subjective shattering (*CL49* 27); the lead singer of Spotted Dick in *Inherent Vice* changes 'his name legally to Asymmetric Bob, after his bathroom mirror revealed to him, three hours into a mushroom experiment, that there were actually two distinct sides to his face, expressing two violently different personalities' (*IV* 127); when Maxine appears to be 'turning into some version of herself she doesn't recognize' towards the end of *Bleeding Edge*, she sees 'her own unstable reflection (...), a blurred moving figure, maybe herself, likely something else' (*BE* 410–12); and so on. What all these moments, in addition to many others I might have called upon, point towards, is that rather than being the comfortable home of identity, there is always something *unheimlich*—that is, uncanny, unhomely—about the face, as Freud observed of his own ('Uncanny' 16–17). Pynchon's characters are unable to totally identify with the images they see in the mirrors, yet instead of this being down to a failure of recognition, it intimates how there is always something that escapes the purview of identitarian thought.

The character in whom we see these issues coalesce most strikingly is Prairie in *Vineland*. Prairie's face, the narrator notes, has 'always been half a mystery to her' (*VL* 99).

This is chiefly because her mother, Frenesi, abandoned her as a child, which leaves Prairie feeling like a ‘semiperson’ (*VL* 329). Throughout the novel, Prairie endeavours to see Frenesi’s ‘real face’ beyond the photos that her father, Zoyd, and grandmother, Sasha, have shown her, ‘shaking with the need to find out anything she could’ (*VL* 262, 122). Indeed, analogously to Mason’s attempts to uncover Rebekah’s face in his sons’ faces, Prairie tries to find Frenesi’s face in her own:

She stared into her reflection (...) It was easy to see Zoyd in her face—that turn of chin, slope of eyebrows—but she’d known for a long time how to filter these out, as a way to find the face of her mother in what was left (...) Mirrors made her nervous (...).

Prairie tried bringing her hair forward in long bangs, brushing the rest down in front of her shoulders, the surest way she knew, her eyes now burning so blue through the fringes and shadows, to creep herself out, no matter what time of the day or night, by imagining that what she saw was her mother’s ghost. (*VL* 99)

Prairie’s burning blue eyes clearly bear the genetic traces of Frenesi’s ‘fluorescent blue eyes,’ her most conspicuous feature, whilst this passage shows, once again, the potential for the face to produce an affect of fear (*VL* 141). Yet Prairie additionally displays an almost utopian yearning for consolation in the face (it is perhaps no small coincidence that she ‘happen[s] to like those old weird-necktie movies in black and white’), which is demonstrated not only by her desire to view Frenesi’s face, as though that would complete her as a person, but also in some 24fps footage involving Frenesi and DL Chastain in which Prairie appears to see ‘the unlined relaxation of faces that didn’t have to be put on for each other, liberated from their authorized versions for a free, everyday breath of air. Yeah, Prairie thought at them, go ahead, you guys. Go ahead. . . .’ (*VL* 115).

At this point, Prairie witnesses, albeit only momentarily, ‘the turning of faces in the open, in the flesh’ (Deleuze, *Cinema 1* 101). With Frenesi and DL’s faces released from the strictures of the faciality machine, Prairie has a vision of ‘a possible world as it exists in a face that expresses it’ (Deleuze and Guattari, *WIP* 17). It would, of course, be ‘[w]ay too sentimental’ to forget the opposing pole to the ‘affect of desire and astonishment’ Prairie experiences here (*IV* 147; Deleuze, *Cinema 1* 101). This ‘possible world,’ to follow Deleuze and Guattari, is also ‘the possibility of a frightening world’ (*WIP* 18). The ‘affect of fear’ discussed earlier in this chapter resurfaces constantly throughout *Vineland*, especially when Prairie watches the footage of Weed Atman’s murder, and during her later confrontation with Brock. In the first instance, Prairie sees Frenesi standing ‘like the Statue of Liberty, bringer of light,’ over ‘the dead body of a man who had loved her’—and it is ‘this hard frightening light, this white outpouring,’ that finally shows Prairie ‘most accurately, least



mercifully, her mother's real face' (*VL* 261–62). In the second, Prairie stares into Brock's 'dim face, backlit by the helicopter lights,' and although '[f]or a second it seem[s] he might hold her in some serpent hypnosis,' Prairie comes 'full awake and yell[s] in his face, "Get the fuck out of here"' (*VL* 375–76). Even though there is undeniably an element of resistance in this action—recalling *Gravity's Rainbow's* memorable expostulation: 'They are in love. Fuck the war'—*Vineland* still beamons that Brock 'had left too suddenly. There should have been more' (*GR* 42; *VL* 384).

Is the face ever enough? On one hand, certainly, the 'hard frightening light' of Frenesi's face does come with a positive inflection: it encourages Prairie to turn back to Zoyd, whose love for her—in an echo of McClintic Sphere's renowned 'Keep cool but care' maxim (*V*. 366)—is like 'a 'night-light' that burns 'cool and low, but all night long' (*VL* 42). At the 'Traverse-Becker get-together,' indeed, Prairie has 'a long look at [Zoyd], and after having just spent hours with Frenesi's face, f[inds] it easier now to make out, past the quaquaversal beard and smudged eyeglass lenses, as clearly as she ever would in Zoyd, her own not-yet-come-to-terms-with-face' (*VL* 361, 374). This turn to her father is a moment in which, above all, Prairie can be seen to recognize that '*another person* [is not] necessarily second in relation to a self' (Deleuze and Guattari, *WIP* 17, original italics). Once again, moreover, we see how the face is forever 'lingering just this side of thematization,' and is ultimately resistant to identitarian thought (Davies 260): Prairie's not-yet- and likely never-to-be-come-to-terms-with face bears the traces of her parents, yet still eludes her grasp. As against its capture by the faciality machine, the 'closeup of the face' throughout Pynchon's oeuvre attempts to establish it as a locus of ethical potential and political possibility (*GR* 760). In addition to Prairie's turn to Zoyd, the final chapter of *Vineland* alone relays how DL has been thrown 'off-balance' and is 'watching Takeshi now with newly cleansed attention,' as well as how when Frenesi and Prairie do eventually come face-to-face, it is 'an instant off the scale, from which neither woman would return to the world she had left' (*VL* 381, 362). The face is not enough in itself—to borrow words from Michael Taussig, it 'limp[s] one step behind its promise, beautiful in its status as the all-time loser we still believe in' (*Defacement* 221); but in Pynchon's fiction, the face, 'the vicinity of the words for which it is already the megaphone,' remains so often the site for the expression, if nothing else, of 'a need so hopeless, so shameless, that nothing nobody can say means shit' (Deleuze and Guattari, *WIP* 19; *IV* 249).

## Conclusion

- I wonder if you people aren't a bit too—well, strong on the virtue of analysis. I mean, once you've taken it all apart, fine, I'll be the first to applaud your industry. But other than a lot of bits and pieces lying about, what have *you* said? (GR 88–89, original italics)
  
- I try to make myself clear  
 In front of a face that's nearer  
 Than it's ever been before  
 Not this close before(-ore-ore-ore). (Talking Heads, *New*)
  
- How close is that, you're already up side my face here. (IV 243)

'After all the smiles and all the tears,' one way in which we might characterise the experience of reading Pynchon is that it leaves you feeling 'like the basketball after a Lakers game—alive, resilient, still pressurized with spirit yet with a distinct memory of having been, for a few hours, expertly bounced' (VL 11, 261). By the same token, however, it is also possible to feel 'darkly exhausted, unhopeful,' as if we are caught in 'The Endless Bummer. (...) Bummer, man. Bumm. Er' (VL 229; IV 47, 95). Over the course of this thesis, we have seen how this dialectic of resilience and exhaustion, of vivacious hope and weary despondency, applies equally to Pynchon's engagement with the face.

My first chapter on eyes endeavoured to show how Pynchon registers both the calamitous consequences of Cartesian perspectivalism's ascendancy and a widespread 'failure of vision,' as well as how he intimates that crying, visionary experiences, and an attempted widening of the spatio-temporal perceptual field might facilitate a questioning of this hegemonic 'scopic regime' (GR 426; Jay, 'Scopic'). When it came to the nose, I suggested that Pynchon unearths aesthetic surgery's contribution to the dehumanizing function of the faciality machine; that cocaine in his writing becomes one of many signifiers of how desire can be territorialized into complicity with political power; and that olfaction, via its mnemonic obstinacy, obtains a particular political potency in Pynchon's fiction for its ability to punctuate, both spatially and temporally, the linearity of the 'capitalist/Christer gridwork' (AtD 1208). With regard to the mouth, I claimed that in addition to furthering Pynchon's exploration of territorialized desire via fellatio, lipstick, and chewing gum, Tyrone Slothrop's gustatory discomfort with Mrs. Quoad's sweets is where *Gravity's Rainbow* most directly confronts the horrifying events that occurred within

Nazi concentration camp gas chambers. Furthermore, I attributed the recurrent odontophobia of Pynchon's writing to an awareness of the dentist's position in disciplinary power structures, while also arguing that both white teeth and smiles in Pynchon's work are, in general, masks for what he sees as the corrosive functioning of capitalism.

My final two chapters took a more holistic approach, interrogating ideas of both the mask and the face respectively. On one hand, the mask, when used as a physical disguise, seems to proffer the potential for the mutability and transformation of identity, a way of eluding the ensnaring grasp of the faciality machine; on the other, however, Pynchon also recognises the more restrictive role of masks, implying they can be by turns repressive, as well as liberatory. I then examined the various ways the face can act as a social mask, attempting to tease out Pynchon's ambiguous relationship to the necessarily performative aspects of identity, particularly via the character of Katje Borgesius, as it is her face, above all others in Pynchon's fiction, that corroborates Deleuze and Guattari's notion that 'the mask is now the face itself' (*ATP* 181). My final chapter argued that Pynchon strives to release the face from the entrapment of the faciality machine by repeatedly convicting it of non-identity with itself. This, in turn, permits the emergence of the affects of fear, desire, and astonishment that Deleuze contends are produced by the cinematic close-up (Deleuze, *Cinema 1* 101). As such, the 'face of the Other Person' in Pynchon's work becomes allied with 'a possible world as it exists in a face that expresses it' (Deleuze and Guattari, *WIP* 17); the face, that is, despite, or indeed because of, the various processes of dismantling to which it is subjected, is a key site at which Pynchon suggests we might locate ethical and political potential.

We may, however, want to object that 'this sounds like . . . wishful thinkin', don't it?' (*VL* 171). Though I made much of the case of Prairie and her turn back to Zoyd in *Vineland*, as well as other significant interfacial moments in Pynchon's fiction, Pynchon always gives with one hand, and takes with the other. Consider the following:

Every hundred feet or so, just off the shoulder, was a slender pole holding a medallion about the size of a party-size pizza, with a face on it, not something generalized to represent, say, the Ordinary American, but a particular human face, looking directly at the viewer with a strangely personal expression, as if just about to speak. (...)

[E]ach of these folks' images had been given eyes designed to follow whoever was driving past, so the Nomad's progress was observed, perhaps appraised, by silent miles of oversize faces, set a little higher than the average passenger vehicle stood. Had they been meant somehow for the long jammed and crawling hours of flight from the City, something inspirational to look at, to assure them all in a way not immediately clear *it is not the end, or there is still hope . . . ?* (*VL* 251–2, original italics)

In my last chapter, I submitted that it is via Pynchon's attention to the specificity and particularity of certain faces where we see his resistance to the generalizing function of the faciality machine. Yet in this passage, we have the suggestion that this is just as 'cheesy and worthless' as 24fps's belief in the cinematic close-up's revolutionary possibilities; any promise of 'wild and unreasonable hope' is undercut by a further sense of 'false reconciliation abounding' (*VL* 346, 179, 211). ('Used to think I was climbing, step by step, right? toward a resolution (...) but that's when it begins to go dark, and that door at the top I thought I saw isn't there anymore, because the light behind it just went off too' (*VL* 367).)

Nevertheless, it is worth noting that for Deleuze and Guattari the 'creation of a concept of the Other Person ... will entail the creation of a new concept of perceptual space' (*WIP* 17). There is, then, one more apparently simple question to pose before bringing this study to a close: if a 'possible world ... exists in a face that expresses it,' what even is a face (Deleuze and Guattari, *WIP* 17)? This question is a vital one for not only does it underlie the entire content of this thesis—'Salvation, see, I've got my own hangups with that'—but also because the last face mentioned in *Gravity's Rainbow* is not the 'closeup of the face' on the screen in the Orpheus Theatre, in spite of the impression fostered by my final chapter, rather the 'face on ev'ry mountainside' in William Slothrop's hymn (*IV* 247; *GR* 760). How would we—and what would it mean—to "see" this face?

i) **'a face we all know'?** (*GR* 760)

One of the major criticisms we could make of Levinas's thought, as Brian Schroeder points out, is that it is inescapably 'anthropocentric' (261): 'One cannot entirely refuse the face of an animal,' Levinas states, '[i]t is via the face that one understands, for example, a dog. Yet the priority here is not found in the animal, but in the human face' ('Paradox' 169; qtd. in Schroeder 261, note 37). Pynchon, however, often seems to disagree. Desmond, Prairie's dog in *Vineland*, for example, is one of the few characters in Pynchon's writing able to smile 'out of his eyes' (*VL* 385). Indeed, many of the facial issues explored in my final chapter are seen to have their animal counterpart: *Against the Day* makes note of 'insane squirrels who made a point of coming right up to the lens [of Merle Rideout's camera] and making faces' (*AtD* 72); in *Bleeding Edge*, the dogs in Nicholas Windust's apartment gaze 'at Maxine with—not a canine look really, Shawn if he were here could certainly confirm—the face before the face' (*BE* 409); and in *Mason & Dixon* we hear of the faces of Bison that

‘upon close approach grow more human, unbearably so, as if just about to speak’ (*Me&D* 677). Non-human animals are frequently subjectified in Pynchon’s texts—two of the most pertinent examples being the Learned English Dog and Pugnax in *Mason & Dixon* and *Against the Day* respectively—which serves to foreground the ‘perilous boundaries’ between the human and the animal (*Me&D* 689). Animals thus call for an ethical relation as much as the Other Person in Pynchon’s writing, particularly as their faces also resist the faciality machine’s technology of capture: ‘some part of Ursula,’ Ludwig’s lemming, ‘is always blurred, too quick for the shutter’ (*GR* 556).

What is even more remarkable in Pynchon’s fiction, though, is just how often faces emerge in an array of objects: from stones to landscapes, as I mentioned in my final chapter; from tea leaves to snowdrops; from ‘grass blade[s] in extreme close-up being seen to have a face and little mouth,’ to a cantaloupe melon in which ‘a face is indeed emerging, the face of a captive woman with eyes cast downward, lids above as smooth as Persian ceilings’; and so on (*GR* 27, 501, 718, 446; *VL* 47; *GR* 270). For Balázs this would be no surprise. As well as sharing Deleuze and Guattari’s notion of a ‘face-landscape aggregate’ (*ATP* 174)—a landscape, Balázs writes, is ‘a physiognomy, a face that all at once, at a particular spot, gazes out at us, as if emerging from the chaotic lines of a picture puzzle’ (*Early* 53)—Balázs also suggests that ‘[e]very child knows that things have a face,’ owing to ‘*the living physiognomy that all things possess*’ (*Early* 46, original italics). Elaborating further, Balázs declares that ‘all objects make a physiognomical impression upon us. All and always ... [T]he physiognomical attaches to every phenomenon. It is a necessary category of our perception’ (*Early* 56). As Gertrud Koch explains, Balázs’s ‘anthropomorphic visualization of objects, of inanimate things, permits transforming the whole world of dead matter into an animistic cosmos, rendering it as pure expression’ (168). This is undoubtedly, Koch continues, ‘a Romantic concept, a concept indebted to *Lebensphilosophie*’ (170). Some critics have seen this as the thrust of Pynchon’s fiction, too. His response to the ‘assault on the inanimate’ produced by ‘the coming of humans and the disappearance of trees’ (*VL* 146, 223), is, John McClure asserts, to seek a ‘wholesomely magical reanimation of the world’ (20). There is certainly plenty of evidence one could call on to make this case: in *Gravity’s Rainbow*, for example, the earth is said to be a ‘Living Stone’ with a ‘mineral consciousness,’ while Slothrop comes to understand ‘that each tree is a creature (...) aware of what’s happening around it, not just some hunk of wood to be cut down’ (*GR* 587, 552–53, 612); in *Against the Day*, there is the suggestion that silver may well be ‘alive’ (*AtD* 91); whilst *Vineland* intimates that all the ‘rocks in the [Seventh River], boulders on the banks, groves

and single trees with their own names, springs, pools, meadows, [are] alive, each with its own spirit' and functioning as the home to '*woge*, creatures like humans but smaller' (*VL* 186, original italics). To recognise this sense of animation, we could then argue, would enable the 'assimilation with the earth' William Slothrop is seen to strive for in *Gravity's Rainbow* (*GR* 27).

Although there is scope to read Pynchon this way, returning to the cantaloupe melon will indicate the problem with McClure's assessment. While the melon in which 'a face is indeed emerging, the face of a captive woman with eyes cast downward,' is first mentioned in *Gravity's Rainbow*, it resurfaces in a dream of Sasha Gates, Frenesi's mother, in *Vineland*. In this dream, Sasha imagines Frenesi, 'perhaps under a sorcerer's spell,' to be 'living in a melon patch, as a melon, a smooth golden ellipsoid, on which images of her eyes, dimly, could just be made out' (*VL* 362). Frenesi's chance to be 'rescued' depends on the fact that at 'a certain time each month, just at the full moon, she [is] able, by the terms of the spell, to open her eyes and see the moon, the light, the world (...) Her only hope was for Sasha to find her at the exact moment she opened her eyes, and kiss her' (*VL* 362). Yet owing to 'some unexplained despair,' every full moon Frenesi 'only cast[s] her gaze down and to the side, away, and close[s] her eyes again' (*VL* 362). As I suggested in my final chapter, there is always the promise of a next time in Pynchon's fiction, however, 'and so, after a wait in the fragrant moonlight, it came about, a long, passionate kiss of freedom, a grandmother on her knees in a melon patch, kissing a young pale melon, under a golden pregnant lollapalooza of a moon' (*VL* 362). Though it might be tempting to view this as a moment of reconciliation, the sheer, absurd hyperbole and fraught over-romanticization of Pynchon's language here, whilst undoubtedly demonstrating a yearning for such moments, ultimately undercuts and problematizes the notion, held by '[i]dealistic flower children,' of living in uncomplicated 'harmony with the earth' (*VL* 319).

We need to read Pynchon's exploration of the 'face of things' differently to an idea of 'assimilation with the earth,' then (Balázs, *Early* 46; *GR* 27). Doug Haynes proposes that what 'Byron [the Bulb]'s story does, and this is a gesture repeated throughout *Gravity's Rainbow*—and, we might add, Pynchon's entire corpus—is invert the relationships between things and people that commodity society generates' ('Gravity' 321). Identity thinking, as Haynes indicates, sees objects only in relation to their use-value, the backbone of capitalism. Identity thinking, moreover, necessarily ignores the non-identity of the object with its concept in order to try and take 'control of nature' (Adorno 11). For Levinas, however, the 'perception of individual things is the fact that they are not entirely absorbed

in their form; they then stand out in themselves, breaking through, rending their forms, are not resolved into the relations that link them up to the totality' (*TI* 74). In the sense that individual things 'are not entirely absorbed in their form,' we could say that they have a face—or, to remember Davies's suggestion to read Levinas under the 'heading of an "as if"' (255), it is as if they have a face—a face which is hidden, Balázs claims, 'behind a veil. The veil of our traditional, abstract way of seeing' (*Early* 46).

Throughout this thesis, I have argued that Pynchon puts the face, 'the site of the most nuanced looking of which I am capable,' into close-up in his fiction to question this 'traditional, abstract way of seeing' (Elkins 176; Balázs, *Early* 46). As we have seen, this close-up releases the affects of fear, desire and astonishment that Deleuze identifies in the affection-image. Yet there is one more vital thing we need to take from Deleuze. This is his contention that '[t]here are affects of things,' affects which can be released by the 'affection-image,' too (*Cinema 1* 97). In order to see how this happens for Deleuze, we need to look at the face again. Though the face, owing to its generally fixed features, has clearly 'had to sacrifice most of its motoricity,' as Deleuze outlines, it is still able to effect 'movements or micro-movements which are capable of entering into intensive series, for a single organ or from one organ to the other' (*Cinema 1* 89–90). Put another way, in Giorgio Agamben's terms, the face is 'formed by a passive background on which the expressive traits emerge' (98). The face is therefore never simply captured by the conformation of its features; it is rather—as Therese Davis, paraphrasing Georg Simmel, puts it—an 'amazing dialectical form that is simultaneously constant and a configuration of endless changes in movements of its parts' (31), which is why 'each new flame' of Roger Mexico's Zippo shows 'a new face' of Jessica Swanlake (*GR* 38). With 'several changes' ceaselessly 'flow[ing] across its features'—hence Reef Traverse's experience of having 'at least two expressions struggling for space on his face'—the face is a multiplicity, 'the *simultas*, the being-together of the manifold visages constituting it' (*GR* 148; *AtD* 991; Agamben 99). It is in this manner, in particular, that the face forever eludes the faciality machine's attempts at totalization.

With regard to 'affects of things,' Deleuze maintains, drawing on Henri Bergson, that the affect is precisely 'a series of micro-movements on an immobilised plate of nerve,' which makes the affect equivalent to the face (*Cinema 1* 87). It is worth quoting Deleuze on the face and affect in full:

It is this combination of a reflecting, immobile unity and of intensive expressive movements which constitutes the affect. But is this not the same as a Face [*vis*] itself? The

face is this organ-carrying plate of nerves which has sacrificed most of its global mobility and which gathers or expresses in a free way all kinds of tiny local movements which the rest of the body usually keeps hidden. Each time we discover these two poles in something—reflecting surface and intensive micro-movements—we can say that this thing has been treated as a face [*visage*]: it has been ‘envisaged’ or rather ‘faceified’ [*visagéifié*], and in turn it stares at us [*dévisage*], it looks at us . . . even if it does not resemble a face. (*Cinema* 1 87-88, original ellipsis)

Certainly, as Paul Coates observes, Deleuze is in danger of making ‘face’ a ‘slippery, over-capacious term’ here (24). Nevertheless, the idea that objects have the ‘ability to look at us in return’ resonates with Lacan’s famous claims of a sardine can: ‘It was looking at me at the point of light, the point at which everything that looks at me is situated—and I am not speaking metaphorically’ (Benjamin, ‘On Some’ 184; Lacan, *Four* 95). For Lacan, ‘in our relation to things, in so far as this relation is constituted by the way of vision, and ordered in the figures of representation, something slips, passes, is transmitted, from stage to stage, and is always to some degree eluded in it—that is what we call the gaze’ (*Four* 73). The importance of the gaze to Lacan is that it forces us to recognize that ‘what determines me, at the most profound level, in the visible, is the gaze that is outside’; ‘Things look at me, and yet I see them’ (*Four* 106, 109). This comes, unquestionably, with a high level of threat: Deleuze’s use of ‘*dévisage*’ can be taken not only to mean ‘stares at’ but also “defaces.” Yet as the last face mentioned in *Gravity’s Rainbow* is the ‘face on ev’ry mountainside’ in William Slothrop’s hymn, we can see that the affective gaze of things is integral to Pynchon’s attempt to think the non-identical through the face (*GR* 760).

For Lacan, the ‘world is all-seeing, but it is not exhibitionistic—it does not provoke our gaze. When it begins to provoke it, the feeling of strangeness begins too’ (*Four* 76). *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s final hymn does not therefore promise ‘assimilation with the earth’ or the ‘deterritorialized world,’ but acknowledges an irrevocable distance, an insurmountable strangeness, an acknowledgement which nonetheless strives to ‘open the road to the multiplicity of different things and strip dialectics of its power over them’ (*GR* 27; Deleuze and Guattari, *ATP* 172; Adorno 6).<sup>1</sup> To see a ‘face on ev’ry mountainside’ might then be a ‘particular encounter’ in which I am forced to recognize myself as an object determined by and as open to exploitation and expropriation as that which looks at me; ‘If I am anything in the picture, it is always in the form of the screen,’ the screen on which the face, itself a close-up, appears (*GR* 760; Orbán 131; Lacan, *Four* 97). It is not about finding in the thing ‘a reassurance of self-agency,’ as tourists seek to discern in a statue’s face in *V.*, rather an

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<sup>1</sup> We would do well to remember Brian McHale’s comment that it is *Gravity’s Rainbow*’s ‘strangeness, after all, that we especially prize’ (*Constructing* 111).



experience more akin to Frank Traverse's encounter with a statue of an Angel, whose face he sees in close-up through a telescope lens, in *Against the Day*:

Frank went to squint through the eyepiece and found the field entirely occupied by the face of the Angel—looking directly at Frank, a face of beaten gold, taken into a realm proper more to ceremonial masks than specific human faces, and yet it was *a face he recognized* (...) The blank gold face looked into his deeply, and though its lips didn't move, he heard it speak in urgent Spanish ringing and distorted by tons of metal, the only words he could recognize being '*máquina loca*,' '*muerte*' and '*tú*.' (V. 66; *AtD* 1112)

There is certainly no reassurance for Frank here: his own life is clearly under threat. Yet there is nevertheless a sense of 'expanded cognition and recognition,' the latter being the key term in this passage, as Frank not only recognizes the Angel's face, but allows it to look into and speak to him (Doane, 'Close-Up' 107).

Since Levinas avers that 'the relations that the separated being maintains with what transcends it are not produced on the ground of totality, do not crystallize into a system,' we are certainly not provided here with anything like a programmatic ethics or politics (*TI* 80). Indeed, despite Pynchon's accordance, at least in part, with Richard Rushton's declaration that 'the face, more than anything, makes us approach the world anew' (234), he never unambiguously invests in the face's transformative possibility. In *Against the Day*, for instance, Dally Rideout looks 'in mirrors to see what might have happened, but found only the same American mask with the same American eyes looking through—the change must lie elsewhere' (*AtD* 818). Moreover, 'let's face it,' a 'face on ev'ry mountainside' might only be a reminder of Mount Rushmore, like a t-shirt with Frank Zappa's face on is for Zoyd, thereby reaffirming power structures that rely upon the face (*VL* 63, 39). Even so, given that Pynchon is, like Levinas, more concerned with 'the possibility of ethics rather than with the generation of a specific ethics,' he still imbues the face with potential (Bernasconi, 'Alterity' 75). For if we recognize that insofar as another person is 'a subject that presents itself as an Object ... it is now only the other subject as it appears to me; and if we identify it with subject, it is me who is the other person?'—as we see in *Gravity's Rainbow* when Leni Pökler looks into Richard Hirsch's face and knows 'immediately that her face had never looked more vulnerable' (*GR* 157)—then

[t]he Other Person appears here as neither subject nor object but as something that is very different: a possible world, the possibility of a frightening world. This possible world is not real, or not yet, but it exists nonetheless: it is an expressed that exists only in its expression—the face or an equivalent of the face. (Deleuze and Guattari, *WIP* 17)

Though lurking ‘still this side of the Unimagined,’ the face in Pynchon’s writing repeatedly intimates ‘a world sprung new, not even defined yet, worth the loss of nearly everything in this one’ (*VL* 255, 117). Perhaps, then, we can learn from Miklos Thanatz in *Gravity’s Rainbow*: upon discovering ‘that he is exempt from nothing,’ Thanatz is confronted by ‘an honesty he can’t avoid, can’t shrug off . . . finally, finally he has to face, literally with his own real *face*, the transparency, the real light of . . .’ (*GR* 669–670, original italics).

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